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Bush Military Info

Flawed investigation into *60 Minutes* and the 'documents' If they can't get the small facts right, how can you trust the rest?

By Bev Conover

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January 11, 2005—Former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh and former Associated Press Chief Executive Officer Louis Boccardi, appointed by CBS to investigate the authenticity of documents used in a Sept. 8, 2004, *60 Minutes* segment on George W. Bush's military service, didn't let the facts get in the way of their 234-page report—facts they could have easily checked.

Call it small potatoes, but on page 59 of their long awaited report, they wrote: "On Monday, August 23, [CBS Producer Mary] Mapes learned that Lieutenant Colonel Burkett was rumored to have important documents regarding the President's TexANG service. Paul Lukasiak, who operates a website on which he posts disparaging analyses of President Bush's TexANG service, told Mapes that another blogger, Linda Starr, had seen new TexANG documents regarding President Bush. Starr hosts a website that recently contained the slogan, 'Bush lied, Americans died,' and is the editor of *Online Journal*, an online newsletter often critical of President Bush."

First wrong fact: Linda L. Starr is an Online Journal assistant editor whose work mainly involves research, compiling the news alerts sent to the Online Journal Mailing List and appearing as a guest on various radio and webcast programs. A minor point perhaps, but Starr doesn't receive any pay for her efforts on behalf of Online Journal. Yes, Starr has her own blog, which has nothing to do with Online Journal. Moreover, yours truly is the editor and publisher of *Online Journal*, and I am a journalist and former newspaper editor.

Second wrong fact: Online Journal is not "an online newsletter," but a globally read online publication—or zine, if you wish.

Now, if a former US attorney general and the former head of the AP could get those relatively minor facts wrong, you have to ask what else they got wrong.

Despite the barely concealed gloating of the corporate media and the right-wing media who yesterday breathlessly reported the results of Thornburgh and Boccardi's "investigation," the bottom line is that they could reach not any "definitive conclusion as to whether the Killian documents are authentic . . . it may never be possible for anyone to authenticate or discredit the documents." (page 134); documents seemingly written and signed by Bush's commanding officer, Colonel Jerry Killian, that Burkett turned over to *60 Minutes*. In a follow-up to the original *60 Minutes* segment, the late Killian's former secretary, Marian Carr Knox, told Dan Rather that while she didn't type the documents, "but the information is correct."

What they have managed to do, however, is get producer Mary Mapes fired, along with the forced resignations of Senior Vice President Betsy West, who supervised CBS' prime-time news shows; John Howard, the executive producer of *60 Minutes Wednesday*; and Howard's deputy, Mary Murphy. Heyward, who approved the Sept. 8 segment before it aired, escaped the ax, as did Rather who has announced he will retire in March.

Ironically, Rupert Murdoch's Weekly Standard, edited by neoconservatives William Kristol and Fred Barnes, today in an [op-ed by Jonathan B. Last](#) is highly critical of the report and the treatment of Mapes.

He wrote, "Mary Mapes is right. In a response to her firing from CBS News, the former star producer accuses CBS of 'scape-goating' her and says that her dismissal is the result of 'corporate and political considerations.'"

Last was especially critical that the report did not answer three questions: 1) "Where did the documents come from?" 2) "Were the documents legitimate?" 3) "Why did CBS run with the story?" Yet, Last believes there is "abundant evidence" that the documents were forgeries and, thus, the report is a whitewash

Mapes, who stands by the authenticity of the Killian documents, said in a statement she issued late Monday, "I am shocked by the vitriolic scapegoating in Les Moonves' statement." She said, "I am very concerned that his actions are motivated by corporate and political considerations — ratings rather than journalism."

The [Daily Kos](#) has it mostly right about what went wrong at CBS and that it has nothing to do with Rather, Mapes or the others shown the door, or even the not-so-independent panel of two that "investigated" the *60 Minutes* segment. We suspect something we have seen before: the hand of Karl Rove and another of his Machiavellian plots.

Some readers may recall how Rove set up J.H. Hatfield by directly giving him damning information about George W. Bush—information that caused Hatfield to write an afterword for his book, "Fortunate Son," when his first publisher, St. Martin's Press, refused to give him additional time to incorporate it into the body of the book. Rove undoubtedly knew that Hatfield was a convicted felon, a fact Hatfield had not disclosed to St. Martin's, and used it to discredit him and the book.

This time, it would seem that Rove used an intermediary to do his dirty work—the mysterious Lucy Ramirez (mentioned on pages 35 and 200 of the report), whom no one can find and was said to have left the country—armed her with authentic documents and sicced her on Burkett. Thinking he had to protect her identity, Burkett initially lied to Mapes about the source of the documents, telling her he had received them from Chief Warrant Officer George Conn, another former Texas National Guardsman (page 18 of the report). It worked like a charm: Burkett, *60 Minutes*, Rather, Mapes, Howard, West, Murphy and, above all, the documents were discredited.

Too speculative, especially since we can't prove it? Perhaps, but think about it. This is Rove's long-standing modus operandi.

In addition, Rove and CBS' chosen panel of Thornburgh and Boccardi are seeking to discredit *Online Journal*, which had no part in the *60 Minutes* segment and no knowledge of the documents Burkett delivered, and all journalists laboring on the web to do what the corporate media won't: tell the American people the truth of what is going on. In that endeavor, though, they have cut their own throats by embracing right-wing bloggers and online publications that are pro-Bush, denigrating those of us who are anti-Bush—and anti both Democrats and Republicans who are going along with illegal wars, torture and the destruction of our freedoms. Nothing like trying to have it both ways, eh?

Face it, good people, we scare the daylights out of them and the corporate media.

The New York Times that still employs Judith Miller, who helped Bush's plan to wage an illegal war on Iraq by dutifully reporting every lie the now discredited Ahmed Chalabi told her about Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction, piled on in an [analysis piece by Bill Carter](#), who wrote, "CBS News suffered a crushing blow to its credibility yesterday because of a broadcast that has now been labeled as both factually discredited and unprofessionally produced."

Factually discredited? By whom? Certainly not Thornburgh and Boccardi in their report.

Investigative journalist Greg Palast in his article, [CBS' Cowardice and Conflicts Behind the Purge](#), took the network to task for its behavior, pointing out that major focus of the *60 Minutes* segment was the well-documented fact that the Bushes used their influence to get George W. in the Texas Air National Guard (TANG) and that after US taxpayers spent a million dollars to train him as a fighter pilot, he was subsequently grounded.

"So CBS inquisitors took this minor error and used it to discredit the story and ruin careers of reporters who allowed themselves an unguarded moment of courage. And, crucial to the network's real agenda, this nonsensical distraction allowed the White House to resurrect the fake reputation of George Bush as Vietnam-era top gun," Palast wrote.

Palast noted that Viacom, the parent company of CBS, "needs the White House to bless its voracious and avaricious need to bust current ownership and trade rules to add to its global media monopoly. Placing the severed heads of reporters who would question the Bush mythology on the White House doorstep will certainly ease the way for Viacom's ambitions."

What all the corporate media are forgetting while getting their jollies over what many have dubbed as "Rathergate" is the number of times the White House and Bush claimed to have released *all* his service records, only to have discovered more records. These are the same corporate media who bought into every utterance of the Swift Boat Veterans without batting an eye or checking the validity of their allegations about John Kerry's Vietnam service.

As of today, George W. Bush has yet to personally deny the accuracy of the information in the Killian documents. Instead, he uses third parties and subterfuge to misdirect away from the content and accuracy of the documents. Is this because Bush and his underlings fear that a two-page disciplinary report by Killian, deeming Bush "unreliable" and grounding him under the Nuclear Weapons Human Reliability Program actually exists, and the release would shatter the carefully crafted public image of the cocky fighter pilot anxious to serve his country in Vietnam, even though [he checked the "do not volunteer" for overseas duty box](#) on his TANG application form?

That is the document that Starr told Mapes that she understood Burkett had, even though she had never seen it, either.

While Starr and I have had numerous contacts with Burkett over the years, neither she nor I or anyone else connected with *Online Journal* saw the Killian documents or had any knowledge of or input into what he told *60 Minutes*, because if we had, we would have counseled Burkett that you never lie to the press, even to protect a source; that you protect a source by refusing to disclose his or her identity and if that is unacceptable to a reporter, editor or producer, then that information or documents provided by that source is omitted from the interview.