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You can't just walk away

By Martin Heldt

June 2, 2000—The Vietnam War had been over for a couple of years and the U.S. was at peace when I graduated from high school. When I told my parents that I was going to go into the service my mother was a little upset. My dad though, was very supportive with just one warning, "once you sign, once you join up, you can't just walk away. You have to follow orders."

I thought about that a lot recently when I first heard the story of how GW Bush had seemingly just walked away from at least a year's service in the National Guard. He had, it now appears, deserted his post. A charge so serious that I could not believe that a presidential candidate could get away with it.

But a quick glance at Bush's military service tells why Bush felt he could walk away from his duty without fear of recriminations. It was because GW Bush had been treated special since before he signed up. The rumors had circulated for years that GW had gotten into the Guard because of his prominent father. The senior Bush denied such rumors, including a specific rumor mentioning President Bush's friend, Houston businessman Sid Adger, as the one who had gotten G W into the guard, saying he "was almost positive"[1] that he had not talked with Adger about the Guard.

One who was even more positive that GW Bush had gotten into the Guard on his own was Col. Walter B. "Buck" Staudt, the then commander of the Texas Air National Guard. Colonel Staudt told the LA Times last July 4 that "Nobody did anything for him. There was no goddamn influence on his behalf. Neither his daddy nor anybody else got him into the Guard." [2]

That seemed to be the line that the Junior Bush's spokesman David Beckwith took when he declared that GW Bush's special commission and treatment in the Guard were "routine." "Our information is there was absolutely no special deal." [2]

That somebody had influenced GW Bush's admittance into the Guard became clear when Bush's entrance test results were released, which showed he had scored the bare minimum, 25 percent, on one of the exams and that he was chosen over several hundred others who sought entrance to the Texas guard. [3]

Then came the crushing news that the former Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives had testified under oath that he had been contacted by Houston businessman Sid Adger, who "...asked [me] to recommend George W. Bush for a pilot position with the Air National Guard," and that he called General James Rose and "did so." [1]

This testimony was brought about by a lawsuit alleging that The State of Texas had allowed GTECH to keep its lucrative lottery contract in exchange for former Texas Lt. Gov. Ben Barnes' silence about helping Mr. Bush get into the Texas Air National Guard. Not long after Barnes gave his testimony the case was settled out of court. [4]

So, despite all claims to the contrary, Bush had in fact received aid in getting into the Texas Guard. Young GW Bush was sworn in on the very day he applied, complete with a ceremony for the press included. He was then sent to basic training and given a special commission instantly making him a second lieutenant.

That fall, while some of the heaviest fighting of the Vietnam War raged, young Bush was allowed to take a leave of absence to go work on the Florida senatorial campaign of Edward Gurney. He also took time of

from the guard in 1970 for his dad's congressional campaign and then from May to November 1972 when Bush went to Alabama to work on a Republican US Senate campaign.

Bush was required to attend drills with the Alabama National Guard. But there is no evidence in Guard files that he even bothered to show up. General William Turnipseed and his aide Kenneth Lott both flatly deny that Bush ever appeared for duty in Alabama.[5]

When Bush went back to Texas after his electioneering break he didn't bother with showing up for his Guard duties. In fact seven months rolled round 'til Bush's two superior officers at Ellington Air Force Base, Lieutenant Colonel William D. Harris Jr. and Lieutenant Colonel Jerry B. Killian, effectively declared Bush missing from duty because they could not perform his annual evaluation covering the year from May 1, 1972 to April 30, 1973. They stated in their filing that "Lt. Bush has not been observed at this unit during the period of this report."

Within days of being reported missing Bush shows up again in the Texas Guard records as doing duty. His drinking buddy at the time [6], Al Lloyd, now speculates that Bush's superiors noticed and that "I'll bet someone called him up and said, 'George, you're in a pickle. Get your ass down here and perform some duty.'" Lloyd was an administrative officer with the Texas Guard until his retirement in 1995 as personnel director of the Texas Air Guard and he is a self professed Bush supporter.

Bush only served for 36 days after that and he was given an honorable discharge 8 months early. The early release wasn't unusual and the honorable discharge was just what Bush had always known he would get. After all, he had been shown privileges and granted a wide-ranging leeway that included letting him disappear from the service for a full year. Not to mention allowing a pilot who had had expensive training to work as a campaign aide for three different legislative races.

There is an indication that someone higher up was trying to find out why G W was missing for so long. Shortly before he was given his honorable discharge a request from National Guard headquarters was placed for Bush's annual evaluation for that year. The national headquarters was told by the administrative officer at Bush's base, "Report for this period not available for administrative reasons." [5]

It looks like Bush got into the Guard with a cover-up and then got out with a cover-up. In the meantime it looks like Bush got away with the one thing my father told me, "You can't just walk away."

Sources (These links may no longer be active.):

[1] [Dallas Morning News](#), 9/28/99

[2] [The Los Angeles Times](#), 7/4/99

[3] [The Age](#) (Australian Press), 9/30/99

[4] [The Dallas Morning News](#), 10/30/99

[5] [The Boston Globe](#), 5/23/99

[6] [US News](#), 11/1/99
<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/991101/lost.htm>