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Isikoff manages to make gone with 9 of the 12 months G.W. Bush was missing from Air Guard duty

By Martin Heldt

July 13, 2000—I often see conservative rants about a "liberal-biased media." They are right of course, the media are often biased against liberals. I saw that bias quite clearly in the current issue of Newsweek.

It was the sub-headline line of Michael Isikoff's July 9 Newsweek piece that tore at me, " The three missing months of W's National Guard service."

Bush isn't missing just three months in his National Guard service; he is missing a full year.

The title is just as bad, "A Bush Mystery in Alabama." It sounds as though all of Bush's missed time is confined to Alabama. But that is not the case either.

Let's look at this missing year. And let's begin with the report that ended the missing year. Here are the words of Lieutenant Colonel William D. Harris, Jr., and Lieutenant Colonel Jerry B. Killian in their May 2, 1973 annual efficiency report for George W. Bush: "Lt. Bush has not been observed at this unit during the period of report. A civilian occupation made it necessary for him to move to Montgomery, Alabama. He cleared this base on 15 May 1972 and has been performing equivalent training in a non-flying status with the 187 Tac Recon Gp, Dannelly ANG Base, Alabama."

The officers writing this report knew that Bush had put in a request to go to Alabama. But they did not know that headquarters had turned down Bush's first request to serve his temporary duty at the 9921st Air Reserve Squadron at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. It was not until September 15th that Bush received orders for the 187th at Dannelly.

This is a period of five months for which Bush did not report for duty in the Guard. We can be certain of that because Bush had no orders authorizing him for duty anywhere other than his Texas Air National Guard unit at Ellington AFB near Houston, and his superiors there report that he was absent throughout the evaluation period (May 1972 to May 1973.)

Next we add to those missing five months the three-month time period which Isikoff calls the "mystery in Alabama." This is the period when Bush had orders to do temporary duty at the 187th in Montgomery, Alabama for September, October and November.

The only problem is that the commanding officer and the unit's administration officer steadfastly maintain that Bush did not show up.

Even worse for Bush is that there is no record that shows he turned up for any duty there, either.

Isikoff points to an old girlfriend of Bush's in Alabama, Emily Marks, as a quasi alibi. Isikoff states that she can vouch for GW's time in Alabama, because she allegedly recalls Bush saying that he would have to come back to Alabama to make up some reserve requirements.

But Emily Marks cannot substantiate Bush's claim, as his spokesman Dan Bartlett claims. In fact, the best Emily can do is "although I never actually drove him to Guard duty, he told me that he went..."

George W's old girlfriend claims that Bush told her he had to go back to Montgomery after the election to make up some reserve duty. This substantiates the claims of Turnipseed and his administrations officer that Bush had not been reporting for duty.

Isikoff then concludes his piece by saying that it seems "that Bush's damage-control team had gotten matters under control again."

Wait a minute, we still have the months of December 1972 through May 1973 with no Bush duty accounted for. Again, we know that Bush did not return to his unit in Texas because of the evaluation report mentioned earlier. We also know that Bush was back in Texas from December 1972 onward, because he admits working at Operation PULL in Houston from Christmas through the following summer.

Not long after that failed May 2 evaluation report, Bush shows back up in the records as performing guard duty, thus drawing to a close Bush's "missing year" in the Guard.

There were a few things "missing" from Michael Isikoff's piece. Things that a veteran reporter shouldn't have missed or neglected to report, as they are material to his credibility.

The first thing that was missing was that Isikoff neglected to mention the other nine months -- months in which George W can show no records of any service for.

The second thing is also something that no honorable reporter would have left out. Isikoff missed mentioning that Emily Marks had met George W. Bush while he was working on the Republican Senate campaign of Winton Blount. Marks was there working, too, as a paid Republican aide. This information is essential in determining the merit of Emily Marks' statement.

It is hard for me to believe that any competent reporter would have failed to note such crucial points. That Isikoff omitted them destroys his credibility.