

Former National Guard officer says Bush aide scrubbed military records

By Linda L. Starr and Bev Conover

November 4, 2000—Here comes the other shoe to the denials and cries of “desperation” from the George W. Bush camp: A former officer in the Texas National Guard says an aide to George W. Bush scrubbed Bush’s military records to get rid of the disparities between those files and an account of Bush’s military service in his official biography.

Bill Burkett, a former lieutenant colonel in the Guard, said, “As the State Plans Officer for the Texas National Guard, I was on full-time duty at Camp Mabry when [Bush aide] Dan Bartlett was cleansing the George W Bush file prior to G.W.'s presidential announcement. For most soldiers at Camp Mabry, this was a generally known event. The archives were closely scrutinized to make sure that the Bush autobiography plans and the record did not directly contradict each other. In essence it was the script of the autobiography which Dan Bartlett and his small team used to scrub a file to be released. This effort was further involved by General Daniel James and Chief of Staff William W. Goodwin at Camp Mabry.”

Burkett stated, “I knew one person who worked within the records scrub who commented to me, while at the smoke area, that the Bush files really showed some problems with his ‘blue-blood service record.’”

He maintains the question of whether Bush completed his military obligations can be easily verified. “In fact, I have been disturbed by the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) material published that the two critical elements to answer [the] questions were not included.”

Burkett contends, “The review of military personnel files is very basic. Within the review and audit of a file, however, certain critical documents become the spine upon which all else hangs.

Alluding to the questions raised by Senators Bob Kerrey and Daniel Inouye at a press conference last Thursday, Burkett said, “In answer to Senator Kerrey's comments, finding the answer to this issue is very simple. The Bush campaign staff can simply provide the pay records and detailed retirement points records for Lieutenant Bush. Until that is done, everything else is purely speculation as to when and where George W. Bush was during his obligation period. A unit technician's personal notes about duty performance is not official. Handwritten and scribbled notations are also not official. The pay records, however, simply specify without a doubt and officially, when Lt. Bush performed ordered duty and that the US Air Force paid him for it.”

Said Burkett, “Mr. Dan Bartlett was responsible for assembling the military files for the media's review. He is also the point man to the questions on this issue. Why has Mr. Bartlett not compiled and shared these critical pieces of the Governor's military service record? Was it an omission of the Freedom of Information Act file or does it not exist? I am sure that the Pentagon would be happy to quickly access the Air Force Reserve personnel files in order to clarify this issue for the American public. It would be a disaster to withhold this basic information until after an election and then again hold the American presidency hostage with lawsuits, investigations and inquiries for his [Bush's] term.

As for what the obligations of a Guardsman are and the punishments that may be meted out if those obligations aren't met, Burke said:

“Readiness is both a personal and unit responsibility. The Texas Code of Military Justice [a State Statute and a version of the US Code of Military Justice] defines the attendance requirements of each soldier.

Within this statute, there are also other charges that directly apply whenever a soldier does not show up for a scheduled drill, active duty training or other special training as ordered.

“The most basic of those punishable acts is failure to obey a lawful order.

“The military operates upon three basic tenets. First is duty. Duty is based upon individual conviction, discipline, and character. It follows that when ordered to duty of any type, the individual soldier will have prepared him or herself with training and logistical preparedness.

“The second tenet is honor. Within this tenet lie the personal characteristics of telling the exact and whole truth, sharing of factual information and refraining from dishonest and distracting actions such as rumors, innuendo and supposition.

“Finally the tenet of country. This tenet captures the selflessness of soldiering and leadership. It places the symbolic flag of the nation and its needs above the needs of oneself. Therefore individuals are expected to care for their military mission and soldiers, sailors and airmen before themselves. It places teamwork above individual accomplishment, and nation building above career building.

Not following a lawful order is a court martial offense. Absent without leave is a court martial offense. But it also a court martial offense for supervisors and commanders to knowingly and fraudulently provide pay (either cash or retirement points) to non-performing individuals.”