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Burkett says he wasn't pointing a finger, but trying to get Bush to release the pertinent documents in his military records

By Bev Conover

November 5, 2000—Texas National Guard Lt. Colonel (retired) Bill Burkett, in providing clarifications to published reports, says he was not pointing fingers but raising the question of whether Gov. George W. Bush, his aides, and other Guard officers were merely incompetent in their handling of Bush's military records and trying to get Bush to order the release of the pertinent records: his payroll and retirement records, which would settle the question of whether he fulfilled his military obligation.

"Within the morning press reports in the London Sunday Times and other publications, I am stated to have alleged that the staff of George W. Bush 'doctored' -- the key term -- the military files of George W. Bush in whatever attempt to cover his military record," said Burkett.

What follows is a series of questions and answers.

Question: Was this politically motivated and coordinated with the Gore campaign?

Burkett: No. Not whatsoever. In no way did any member of the Gore campaign or any election official, Republican or Democrat know my comments. My observations were responses to questions of how the file was developed; disseminated under the Freedom of information Act (FOIA) and what was missing within the files which would resolve the question of satisfactory participation. These were my personal responses to the asked questions that were not sanctioned by anyone, nor shared with anyone. They were made on the basis of my 28-year career, my working experience within the senior staff at the Texas National Guard headquarters and my knowledge of the operational procedures of the US military including the subject of personnel files of retired or discharged soldiers and airmen.

Question: Why, do you believe, you were contacted?

Burkett: [I] will background how this occurred, which should be self-explanatory. The context of the DUI story indicated the mishandling or failure to fully disclose a past criminal record of Governor Bush. I believe that the military record and the irregularities that point to a possible extended period of nonperformance and early release may have also indicated a pattern of lack of full disclosure by the Governor and his campaign. This issue of military records had been highly visible on at least two previous occasions within the campaign, however, Senator Kerrey, as an honored and decorated [Navy] SEAL, most recently focused on this issue within the last 10 days. I would guess that within the eleventh hour and following the revelation of the DUI story, the media and voters were waiting for the next shoe to drop. This issue may have been viewed as the "next shoe."

In June of 1998 and with the full and personal knowledge of Dan Bartlett and the Governor, I reported problems of force structure, readiness operational efficiency personnel and procedures within the Texas National Guard. At that time, and periodically thereafter, I have been in contact with various [audio, video and print] news writers and publishers. In 1998, I provided sufficient detailed information including documentation of severe irregularities within the Governor's own chain of command in an effort to correct those deficiencies which I believe undermined the Texas National Guard and in some cases broke the law.

Question: How did your reference in this story develop?

Burkette: I contacted a website that outlined the Governor's personal military career irregularities and suggested that there were two official documents that would resolve the issue of satisfactory and honorable service. Suddenly on Friday afternoon, my telephone became barraged with media calls and messages, including those who had known of my previous whistle blowing but had failed to report it. I explained my background and personal observations to each of them in minute detail, often repeating the entire process for clarity. I was extremely careful not to point an accusing finger, but rather shape a question which could resolve this allegation of integrity that had clouded the Bush campaign since June of 1999 -- the issue of his personal military service.

Question: Did you allege that the governor's staff "doctored" the records?

Burkette: No, instead I stated that the way this had been handled by the Bush staff, including knowledgeable military officials at the Texas National Guard, that it left the implication that the Bush staff had first incompetently provided an incomplete military file for the Governor which was consistent with his autobiography. I further observed that they probably did not anticipate that the file would be scrutinized to the level that it was. Whenever someone determined holes in service "big enough to drive a Mack truck through," additional information -- all of which was unofficial and some in pencil notations -- were then submitted to the press to answer questions. I further observed that this "trust me, I'm the Governor" approach had worked throughout Texas for George W. Bush within his tenure and the media had given the Governor a free pass, without the same scrutiny as the vice president [was given], until the eleventh hour revelation of the DUI. But this still left the basic question: Why didn't Governor Bush simply release his military pay files and retirement points accounting records, which are the only *official* records that will show that he satisfactorily and honorably completed his service commitment?

Question: Were there other issues that you discussed?

Burkett: Yes. In each call, I, in essence scolded media representatives for not doing their homework and reviewing this information before the eleventh hour. When asked if I would go on record, I said, "yes, I have nothing to hide," even though I knew that the mention of my name with the Bush campaign would immediately strike a personal response because of my whistle blowing in 1998.

Question: Again, was this a "Democratic ploy" as stated by Karen Hughes of the Bush staff?

Burkett: No. Absolutely not.

Karen Hughes has again skirted the real issue and question. Dan Bartlett and the Governor have also refused to answer the basic question and furnish the *official* files that will resolve this issue. I am in no way linked to the Democratic Party. I am simply an energized citizen and retired soldier who would like to have the issues of each possible commander-in-chief resolved prior to the election, in order that we can escape holding another American presidency hostage to actions and allegations by the opposing party in Congress. We have suffered from this partisanship for the past eight years. George W. Bush says that he is the only candidate who can bridge this impasse. This is his opportunity to start that process. This is what I believe other Americans share with me -- a sincere belief that they have the right and capacity to make educated decisions; but that candidates have the responsibility for full and complete disclosure.