

Bush Military Info

Clear the air, Mr. Bush

By James C. Moore

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February 11, 2004—There are a number of steps George W. Bush can take to clear up questions about his service in the Texas and Alabama Air National Guard. Unfortunately, he has elected to ignore all avenues available for correcting the record.

First, and simplest, is for Mr. Bush to authorize for release, over his signature, all of his National Guard files at the Air Reserve Personnel Center in Denver. Although he claimed on “Meet the Press” to have released all records, he was either misinformed or misleading. There is no signature for release on file in Denver. The president [sic] released his retained hard copy records in Austin. Clearly, those are incomplete because they lack retirement points documents, as well as an Officer Effectiveness Rating from his commanders for his last year, and his pay stubs. However, on his date of discharge, Mr. Bush’s entire file was committed to microfiche and then sent, as are the files of all servicemen or women in the Air National Guard, to Denver. If the president’s [sic] records were purged of anything incriminating in the retained files kept in Austin, it could still be on file in Denver. A partial release will not be sufficient. Presidents, and those who wish to hold the office, ought to be willing to share the entire file. All of those who have preceded Mr. Bush have met this standard. Reporters ought to begin filing FOIAs with the Denver office asking for the full file on microfiche.

Why is this critical? On Monday, Charles Pelligrini, Chief of the Management Systems Staff at the National Personnel Records Center, responded to a FOIA about the president’s [sic] permanent file. According Pelligrini, the microfiche file has no record of ever being altered. If it was, or there were ever any requests to clarify or make changes, it would have been recorded. Pelligrini told researcher Martin Heldt, who filed the FOIA, that there are protocols and forms necessary to ask for changes. This means Mr. Bush’s file, at least what was in it in 1974 when he was discharged, is complete. Reporters need to be demanding access to this record.

There are also a bundle of questions about why the president [sic] has not sought to have his record in the guard corrected or clarified. He has known there are gaps in the released files out of Austin. If he wanted to set his record straight, Mr. Bush need only to file a request with the Air Force Board of Personnel Records Corrections. This panel will consider the merits of claims made by any service member. The president [sic] could submit his W-2s or tax records from 1968 till he was discharged in 1974, indicating how much money he earned, and the board would begin to reconstruct his time served. Mr. Bush has never made such a request. It is easier for the president [sic] to simply say that records are missing than to actually conduct an effort to have them corrected.

The most efficient route to the truth, however, is probably through the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Colorado. This is a department of defense office that maintains all pay records of people who have spent time in the U.S. Armed Services. They have a record of every payment made to young Lt. Bush in the Texas Air National Guard or when he was in Alabama. If the president [sic] were to authorize the release of these records, they would prove payment for every day served, and there would be dates to corroborate his claims. Those records need to be released, as does the microfiche in Denver, without the White House first reviewing what is included in the file. This is the best way to assure their credibility.

Unfortunately, for everyone involved in the national discourse, the White House has been able to effectively confuse this issue. When the president [sic] tells the country on national television that his records were released in 2000, Americans are inclined to first trust him. But Mr. Bush has a credibility problem after the war in Iraq. And journalists find this a complicated, confounding story to write and make clear. However, they should not relent. This story is about character and privilege, both critical judgments Americans are called upon to make when voting. Isn't it sufficiently curious that from 1972 – 1974, when Mr. Bush said he was still serving, there isn't a soul in Alabama or Houston who has yet stepped forward to recall, "Sure, I remember serving with the guy who was to become president [sic] of the United States?"

The Texas Air National Guard file may be the president's [sic] first case of cooked intelligence.

James C. Moore is co-author of "Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush Presidential." Moore's new book, "Bush's War for Reelection: Iraq, the White House, and the People," that includes material on Bush's Air National Guard record is scheduled to be published this spring.

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