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George W. Bush's records raise more questions than they answer

By Martin Heldt

August 1, 2000—A timely packet arrived at my door just as the GOP convention opened in Philadelphia. It was some of George W. Bush's records that were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act.

I had been seeking more information on just what may have happened to him to account for the fact that his discharge papers show no record that he performed any duty or drills for the last 18 months of his service.

For that I received no answers.

I had also hoped to find out more about Bush's missed drug tests and whether there had been any discipline imposed upon him for his failure to appear for the required exam.

I received nothing to address that issue.

Looking at Bush's records leaves one with more questions than answers. I find that disquieting.

Even more disquieting is what we know.

We know now that there were certified Air Force flight surgeons assigned to Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery at the time when Bush was living in Montgomery, Alabama, where Maxwell is located. This means that Bush lied to us when he claimed that he could not take the drug test in Alabama because his personal doctor was in Houston – only certified flight surgeons were qualified to administer the test.

Bush says that he quit flying because his group was phasing out the F-102 when he returned to Ellington after the political campaign in Alabama. But we know now that Bush's excuse for his abandoning flying the F-102 was false, that his group was still flying F-102's for a year after he left the service. We learned from his commander, Major General Bobby W. Hodges, that "If [Bush] had come back to Houston, I would have kept him flying the 102 until he got out. But I don't recall him coming back at all."

And there are the haunting voices of the late Lieutenant Colonel William D. Harris Jr. and Lieutenant Colonel Jerry B. Killian, whose reports state that they could not fill out Bush's annual evaluation because, "Lt. Bush has not been observed at this unit during the period of report."

Bush's superior officers had believed that Bush was still in Alabama, but we now know that Bush had temporary orders to be in Alabama only for the months of September, October and November of 1972. And again, we have the word of retired General William Turnipseed who stepped forward to say "Had he reported in, I would have had some recall, and I do not. I had been in Texas, done my flight training there. If we had had a first lieutenant from Texas, I would have remembered."

Like I said, disquieting.

I have here, beside me, the "Military Biography of George Walker Bush." It contains a listing of his past duty assignments and locations and his entry and separation dates. Like everything else about his record, examining it leaves more questions.

Bush should have had a six-year commitment to the guard. When he was released early from the guard to attend college the time remaining on his commitment would have been placed on the inactive reserves at the Air Reserve Personnel Center.

For some reason there is an extra five months and twenty-four days tacked onto to Bush's normal six-year commitment. As we have come to expect when dealing with Bush's records, there is no explanation given for the discrepancy.

To surmise those answers we need only to look at what we do know of Bush's record of special privilege. We know that the former lieutenant governor and speaker of the Texas House of Representatives testified under oath that he helped Bush get a special slot in the Texas Air National Guard. We know that Bush had none of the normal experience to be a pilot and that his test scores were minimal. We know that Bush was commissioned 1st lieutenant straight out of boot camp without the normal officers training school or ROTC history. We have seen how he was able to take time off from the guard to work in a friend of his father's political campaign.

It's one thing that George W. Bush's records clearly show: he had been granted exceptional privilege above and beyond what could have reasonably been expected for the son of a congressman.

So what was that extra time tacked onto Bush's commitment for? Was it because Bush missed so much drill time that even his protectors couldn't cover him anymore and a deal was done, "We'll tack your lost drill time onto your commitment and call it good?"

Bush has admitted that his attendance in the guard "was spotty." One place his attendance won't be spotty is at the festival his party is holding for him now in Philadelphia, home of the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall.

Just to the west a short distance is where George Washington and the men of the Continental Army spent a winter freezing and hungry. Their dedication to duty in the face of hardship contrasts sharply with George W's lack of dedication in the face of exceptional privileges. I doubt if the convention planners considered that Valley Forge casts an evening shadow over Philadelphia.