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Four days in the fall

An investigation into the National Guard service of George Walker Bush

By Martin Heldt

September 3, 2000—Nearly two hundred manila wrapped pages of George Walker Bush's service records came to me like some sort of giant banana flip stuffed into my mailbox.

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 as had been reported by the Boston Globe. [1] So it was natural that one of the first pages I examined was a chronological listing of Bush's service. [Document 10]

This document charted active duty days served since his enlistment. For his first year, with extensive training, young Bush was credited with 226 days. In his second year in the Guard, 2nd Lt Bush was shown to have logged a total of 313 days. After Bush got his wings in June 1970 until May '71, he is credited with a total of 46 days of active duty. From May '71 to May '72, 22 days of active duty.

Then something happened and, from 15 May '72 to 1 Oct '73, there are no days shown.

I decided to check to see just how many days that Bush should have served in that time span. A National Guardsman at that time would have been responsible for a two-week long active duty "encampment." They would also have been required to do the standard one weekend per month drill. This would add up to about 36 days that Bush would have had as his obligation to the National Guard for the May 1, 1972-April 30, 1973 evaluation period. Plus there would be the obligation for the annual "active duty" training and for the period from May till when Bush was released to attend college in October of '73. This would have meant an additional obligation of about 28 days for the '73 period.

And I found out that for the first four months of this time period that Lt. George Walker Bush did not have orders to be at any unit in Alabama where he was working on the Senate campaign of Winton Blount.

On 24 May, Bush had applied for a transfer to a unit in Montgomery Alabama. [Document 7] This was to allow him to work on the Senate campaign of William Blount, a political friend of George W's then congressman father.

The commanding officer of the 9921st, Lt Colonel Reese R. Bricken accepted Bush's request to do temporary duty in his outfit. [Document 6] Lt Colonel Bricken also reiterated Bush's points that the 9921st was a minimal duty unit. This unit was known as a postal unit and met one weeknight per month with no other training and "no pay" involved.

But on May 31st the Headquarters Air Reserve Personnel Center in Denver Colorado disallowed Lt Bush's request for a transfer to Alabama. [Document 5] The Director of Personnel Resources, S.L. Dallin, noted that Lt Bush had a "Military Service Obligation until 26 May 1974." As an obligated reservist, Bush was ineligible to serve his time in what amounted to a paper unit with few responsibilities.

After his transfer request was rejected Bush choose to stay in Alabama working on the Senate campaign. We know that Lt Bush did not report back to the Texas Air National Guard (TxANG) for his required drills because we have his annual evaluation from the 111th Ftr Intcp Sq at Ellington Air Force Base near Houston. On an AF 77 annual evaluation report, Lt Bush's evaluating officers marked him down as "Not

Observed" to all questions. [Document 4] In the "comments" part of that annual evaluation [Document 9], Lt Colonel William Harris noted that Bush had "not been observed at this unit during the period of report."

But Lt Colonel Harris gave an explanation that Bush had "cleared this base on 15 May 1972, and has been performing equivalent training in a non flying role with the 187th Tac Recon Gp at Dannelly ANG Base, Alabama."

This wasn't correct. Lt Bush had not even made a request for the 187th until 5 September, four months after he had ceased attending Guard drills with the 111th at Ellington. [Document 2] And, when headquarters authorized Bush's request, a copy of his orders was sent to his unit at Ellington [Document 11] and to the Texas Adjutant General.

The letter approving his duty with the 187th at Dannelly clearly directed Bush to report to Lt Colonel William Turnipseed on the dates of "7-8 October 0730-1600, and 4-5 November 0730-1600." But both Lt General Turnipseed ret. and his former administration officer, Lt Colonel Kenneth Lott, say that Bush never showed up at their unit.

Adding to those charges is a story in the July 22, 2000 New York Times with a statement by the Bush campaign to the effect that they had a record that Bush had served a day with the 187th on November 29, '72.

If this is so it means that for a period of six weeks Lt Bush ignored direct orders to report for duty. But it looks even worse for Lt Bush if the memory of Turnipseed and Lott is correct and Bush never reported at all.

Bush's orders for temporary assignment in Alabama were only good through November 1972. After the election was over, he was to have returned to Texas and the 111th at Ellington. And Lt. Bush did return to Houston, where, he says, he worked for an inner-city youth organization, Project P.U.L.L. But his '72-'73 annual evaluation report, completed on April 30, 1973, states that he had not been observed at his unit. This means that there were another five months, after he left Alabama, during which Bush did not fulfill any of his obligations as a Guardsman. In fact, for this period of time, neither Bush nor his aides have ever tried to claim attendance at any Guard activities.

I pointed out earlier that there were no dates of service mentioned in the "Chronological Service Listing" [Document 10] for 1973. There is also a very interesting letter from the National Guard Bureau headquarters stating that George W. Bush "should have been reassigned in May 1972 since he is no longer in training in his AFSC or with his unit of assignment." [Document 12]

This is important because Bush's unit of assignment at this time was the 111th at Ellington AFB TX. [Document 14] Plus, this gives even more weight to recent statements by Bush's former Texas CO, 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." [July 28 Boston Globe and July 28, Boston Globe].

Bush's long absence from the records came to an end a week after Bush failed to comply with an order to attend "Annual Active Duty Training" starting 22 May '73. [Document 17]

There is a lone computer generated document which lists 35 points for Bush in '73. [Document 16] Unlike the other records I obtained, this document has no information as to who filed it, a date filed or for which unit it was filed.

These points are marked down as three days in May, three days in June and 29 days in July. But they are not broken down as in other listings of points. And, they are not enough points to make up for both the missing year and the last year of Bush's active service.

Bush and his campaign have made numerous statements to the effect that Bush made-up and fulfilled all of his Guard obligations. They point to Bush's honorable discharge as proof of this.

But in these old documents there is a clue as to how Bush finally fulfilled his obligations and made up for those missed drill days. In my first request for information on Bush's National Guard service I had been sent a small three-page reply containing the "Military Biography Of George Walker Bush" from the Headquarters Air Reserve Personnel center in Denver Colorado. [Document 14]

In these documents I found the final separation date for Lt Bush to be 21 November 1974, a half year later than the anticipated separation dates of 26 May 1974 which was recorded on Bush's enlistment record and on all documents as late as October 2, 1973. [Document 10]

It would appear that the way Bush fulfilled his duty was not by attending the obligated number of drills, but by having his name added to the roster of a paper unit at the ARPC (ORS) Denver Colorado for an extra six months.

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