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Harriet Miers was the fixer for Bush's National Guard Records Purge

Posted on Monday, October 03 @ 08:53:08 EDT by [drew](#)



Aides to Texas Governor George W. Bush visited the Air National Guard archives at Camp Mabry in 1997 and possibly altered Bush's military service records to conceal Bush's grounding from flight in 1972 and subsequent missed duty, according to a former senior official of the Texas National Guard.

Bill Burkett, a Lt. Colonel who was the State Plans Officer of the Texas National Guard at the time, said Bush operative Dan Bartlett headed a high-level operation to "scrub" Bush's Air National Guard record, to make sure it was in synch with the biography that the campaign was preparing.

The book, "A Charge to Keep," was authored by Bush and his principal spokeswoman, Karen Hughes. Hughes was recently exposed during the DUI sidebar involving reporter Wayne Slater as the person who strictly controls what Bush is allowed to say.

At the time, Bartlett was Governor Bush's liaison to the Texas National Guard. Bartlett is now the campaign spokesman who has provided misleading information to the press on several occasions about Bush's military service.

In "A Charge to Keep," Bush briefly mentioned his National Guard service. After completing flight training in June 1970, Bush wrote, "I continued flying with my unit for the next several years."

In fact, according to reports by the Boston Globe, Democrats.com and TomPaine.com, Bush stopped flying only 22 months later in April 1972. He was subsequently grounded from flight on August 1, 1972 because he "failed to accomplish his annual physical."

There is no mention of the grounding in Bush's biography, which falsely implies that Bush continued flying until he left the National Guard.

When questioned by the press, Bush spokesman Dan Bartlett has offered several different reasons for this grounding. Initially Bartlett said that Bush could not get to Houston for his physical, but this was proved wrong when it was shown that Bush could have visited flight surgeons stationed in Alabama. Bartlett then said the F-102 fighter that Bush was trained to fly was removed from service, but this was proved wrong when it was shown that the F-102 remained in service in Bush's unit for two more years.

Democrats.com has speculated that Bush skipped his annual physical in 1972 because the Pentagon that year imposed random drug testing for the first time, and Bush feared he would fail the exam. Bush has admitted drinking heavily at the time, and has refused to deny using cocaine before 1974.

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Democrats.com has stressed the significance of Bush's grounding. Bush's pilot training cost the government nearly \$1 million, and this was a huge investment that the Pentagon would not lightly abandon with two years remaining of a pilot's obligation. Moreover, pilots were badly needed at the time because of the war in Vietnam.

According to Democrats.com, Bush's grounding would normally have been reviewed by a Flight Inquiry Board of three senior officers, but there is no record that such a board was convened in Bush's case. Democrats.com has called for Bush to reveal his full military records, to put these and other charges to rest.

Moreover, Democrats.com and TomPaine.com have revealed that Bush did not report for duty for at least a year after he stopped flying, and possibly two years. Bush's official record shows no duty after April 1972, and his superior officers in both Alabama and Texas say they never saw him after that.

An official report issued on April 30, 1973 says "Lt. Bush has not been observed at this unit during the period of this report," from May 1 1972 to April 30, 1973. Rewards for proof that Bush reported for duty have been offered in Alabama and Texas and on the Internet, but no one has claimed the rewards.

During the campaign, Bush has attempted to fend off charges that he did not report for duty. When charges were raised about the time he spent in Alabama in the fall of 1972, Bush insisted that he reported for duty. "I can't remember what I did. I just - I fulfilled my obligation," he said. Bush has specifically disputed the recollection of ret. Brig. Gen. William Turnipseed, who says he is "dead-certain" that Bush did not report for duty in Alabama. "I read the comments from the guy who said he doesn't remember me being there, but I remember being there," Bush said.

Internet activists led by Iowa farmer Martin Heldt and retired Air National Guard pilot Bob Rogers have been campaigning to expose Bush's failure to report for duty since May 23, 2000, when the Boston Globe first reported on a "one-year gap" in Bush's military duty. Heldt created a discussion board at Salon Magazine charging that Bush was "AWOL", which spurred an explosion of grassroots Internet activism.

Heldt and Rogers filed a Freedom of Information Act request for Bush's military records, which provided overwhelming evidence of Bush's missed duty, and served as the basis of the articles in Democrats.com and TomPaine.com.

On Thursday, Congressional Medal of Honor recipients Bob Kerrey and Daniel Inouye brought these charges to the attention of the national media, which has almost entirely ignored the work of Heldt and Rogers. "The question is where were you, Governor Bush?," said Inouye. "During my service, if I missed training for two years, at the least, I would have been court-martialed. I would have been placed in prison," he said.

To rebut this charge, the Bush campaign has relied on two mysterious documents. The documents are neither dated nor signed, which makes their legitimacy entirely questionable. Moreover, the document that the campaign claims covers the year from May 1972 to May 1973 is badly torn and can only be linked to Lt. George W. Bush by the letter "W". Finally, these documents are directly contradicted by Bush's official record, several signed memoranda, and the testimony of several witnesses.

Still, both the New York Times and George Magazine have used these mysterious documents as the basis for dismissing all of the other documents and witnesses which overwhelmingly show that Bush did not report for duty.

Thus, the assertion by Bill Burkett that Dan Bartlett and his operatives may have modified Bush's Air National Guard records takes on exceptional significance. Bartlett's "scrubbing" operation in 1997 could have inserted these mysterious documents, or removed significant information from the torn document. In addition, Bartlett's operation could have removed or altered other revealing documents.

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Indeed, there is corroborating evidence that Bush campaign operatives have devoted considerable effort to "scrubbing" public records to conceal other evidence of Bush's wrongdoing. For example, Bush got a new driver's license after he was elected Governor, which appears to be completely unprecedented. This prevented reporters from discovering Bush's DUI arrest in Maine in 1976.

This new license may also be concealing a prior DUI or drug arrest in 1972 or 1973, when Bush went to work with an inner-city community service group in Houston called Project PULL. There has been considerable speculation that Bush performed this work as a form of alternative sentencing for a DUI or drug arrest, but reporters have been stymied by the fact that Bush's 1995 driver's license contains no prior information.

Moreover, Newsweek reported on July 9, 2000 that the Bush campaign "launched a secretive research operation designed to scour all records relating to his Vietnam-era service" during preparation for Bush's 1998 re-election campaign. They paid "hard-nosed Dallas lawyer named Harriet Miers" \$19,000 to review the records. According to Newsweek, one result of her work was to deflect charges that former Texas House Speaker Ben Barnes helped Bush get into the Texas Air National Guard despite low qualifications and a long waiting list. Barnes was later forced to testify under oath that he helped Bush.

The same Newsweek article also discusses the absence of evidence that Bush fulfilled his orders to report for duty in Alabama in the fall of 1972. According to the article, "Dan Bartlett conceded that the records 'were either lost or misplaced... we are not sure.'" If Burkett's charges are true, Bartlett may have had a hand in losing or misplacing these records.

Burkett stops short of directly accusing Bartlett of "doctoring" Bush's records. Instead, Burkett faults the Bush campaign and senior officials of the Texas National Guard for incompetence in failing to release two key documents that would answer questions about Bush's absence from duty - but not his grounding from flight.

Burkett boils it down to a simple 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?"

The simple answer may be that these records would prove the opposite - that Bush never reported for duty after April 1972, and was simply "given" the points he needed for discharge by senior officers who wanted to preserve his "political viability" then - and now.

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