

Here is what we know. First, John Kerry volunteered to go to Vietnam as a soldier. He won a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, and three Purple Hearts. Here's more of what we know. George W. Bush did not go to Vietnam. He enlisted in the National Guard and remained stateside. From 1970 to 1972, Bush flew F-102s while based in Ellington Air Force Base in Houston, TX. He missed a required physical in 1972 and was stripped of his flying status. John Kerry's military record has been commended and honored by Democrats and Republicans and even a number of current Swift Boat Veterans (before they became "for Truth). The same cannot be said for George W. Bush.

I do not denounce Bush for remaining stateside. War heroes do not guarantee great presidents. Just compare George H. Bush and Bill Clinton. This issue in this debate is honesty. After ten years of investigative reporting by a myriad of journalists, Bush has been unable to fully explain gaps in his military record. Conversely, no document has surfaced to refute John Kerry's service. You say there are hundreds of eye witnesses who refute whether John Kerry deserved his five medals? Prominent eye witness and Swift Boat Veteran Larry Raymond Thurlow won a Bronze Star for "receiving enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire from the river banks." That engagement was the exact same engagement that he and the Swift Boat Vets claim John Kerry has lied about. Though Thurlow says he forgot why he received his medal, other eye witness and Swift Boat Vet George Elliot signed a recommendation for Thurlow's Bronze Star. That recommendation said "all the boats came under small arms and automatic weapons fire from the river banks."

I am not going to prove every truth in Kerry's service and every questioning remaining in Bush's. I am interested in why an election surrounded by chaos in Iraq, ideological polarization, and an economic recession the media concentrates on a war that occurred a generation ago. More specifically, why is investigating George W. Bush's service record rehashing old attacks while investigating John Kerry's record requires nightly round table discussions all month long?

The best example of the media bias in handling these candidates's service record is the current Dan Rather/forged memo controversy. Dan Rather reported that he received memos written by the deceased Lt. Col. Jerry Killian, Bush's commanding officer, that said Bush received preferential treatment because of his political connections. Numerous sources have claimed these documents are forgeries. Why did the Swift Boat Veterans dominate the news for the month of August without so much as a post-it to confirm their claim while the instant these memos hit the airwaves, the media decides to start fact checking?

Marian Carr Knox, secretary to Killian, had a recent interview with Rather where she said she did not write these memos. That you've probably seen. Here's something you haven't seen on your nightly "rip Rather" session. This is an excerpt from Rather's interview with Knox on September 15th, 2004.

RATHER: So with these memos, you know that you didn't type them.

KNOX: I know that I didn't type them. However, the information in those is correct.

RATHER: Few, if any, things that I ask you about will be more important than this point: You say you definitely didn't type these memos.

KNOX: Not these particular ones.

RATHER: Did you type ones like this?

KNOX: Yes.

RATHER: Containing the same or identical information?

KNOX: The same information, yes.

Knox goes on to verify numerous questions about Bush's service include the fact that he refused a direct order from Killian to take a physical, Bush missed numerous drills, and that soldiers on the base gossiped about how much Bush got away with. She said that she wrote the content found in Rather's memo in "personal journals" for Killian not intended for public viewing.

RATHER: These memos were not memos that you typed and you don't think they came directly out of his files?

KNOX: The information, yes. It seems that somebody did see those memos, and then tried to reproduce and maybe changed them enough so that he wouldn't get in trouble over it.

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd has spent most of her career following the Bush family. In her September 16th column, she commented on Democratic fears that Bush's senior advisor, Karl Rove, created the documents and funneled them to Rather. Though the information is correct, the media has seized on analyzing these documents alone thus putting into question questions about Bush's service. Though there is no evidence linking Rove to the documents, Rove is not above such devious acts. While running Bill Clements's campaign for Texas governor, Rove found a bug in his office and blamed the Democrats. Though the FBI investigation was inclusive, they clear the Democrats. The battery life on the bug was less than a day. Regardless, during the debates, Clements's Democratic challenger could do nothing but answer questions about the bug.

Whether these memos were created as part of an evil mastermind plot or a high school prank or truly to cover Killian's behind, almost no major media outlet has reported

their content. Nevertheless, their affect is showing. Media critic Howard Kurtz of the Washington Post notes “The only topic of conversation in the media world remains whether CBS's National Guard documents are real or fake. ... The controversy over the 60 Minutes documents has now overshadowed the questions they purport to raise about George W. Bush's military service.” On the September 14th edition of CNN’s Judy Woodruff’s Inside Politics, Woodruff addressed the validity of the documents without addressing the undisputed comments in the memos. Further, she relayed a Republican National Convention allegation that the Democrats provided CBS with the memos. She relayed this allegation without saying there is no evidence to support the claim (I again point out that there is *no evidence* that Karl Rove masterminded this whole ordeal). The New York Times, after quoting Democratic criticism of Bush’s military service, went on for five paragraphs about the CBS memos. If this is part of the liberal media, then the Democrats need to find better allies.

Reporters can’t pick and choose what to fact check. Letting someone talk isn’t fair and balanced if what they’re saying is lies and distortions. Verify, debunk, and report. Let the viewers decide once they know the facts.