

September 15, 2004 60 Minutes Wednesday Broadcast

Rather: Last week on this broadcast, we heard for the first time the full story from the Texas politician who says he helped George Bush avoid military service in Vietnam. Former Texas House Speaker Ben Barnes said he helped Bush get a highly coveted place in the National Guard. We also presented documents for the first time which indicated that once Mr. Bush was accepted into the Guard, he failed to live up to the requirements of his service, including following an order. We reported that the documents were written by Lieutenant Bush's National Guard squad commander, the late Colonel Jerry Killian, who passed away in 1984. In the past week, those documents have been subjected to extraordinary scrutiny and criticism. Tonight, another voice, a credible voice, has entered the debate. The woman who describes herself as Colonel Killian's right hand during much of the 1970s, Marian Carr Knox, Colonel Killian's secretary flew to New York this afternoon to tell us she believes the documents we obtained are not authentic, but there's yet another confusing twist to this story. She told us she believes what the documents actually say is exactly as we reported.

Rather: Marian Carr Knox is 86 years old and completely comfortable in the eye of a storm. She spent more than two decades keeping pilots and officers in line at Ellington Airfield in Houston. Now she wants to set the record straight about the memos CBS obtained. But there's a twist –

Rather: You've seen the memos that we broadcasted – these memos that we got?

Marian Carr Knox: I did not type those memos.

Rather: You didn't type these memos?

Marian Carr Knox: No. And it's not the form that I would have used. And there are words in there that belong to the Army, not to the Air Guard. We never used those terms.

Rather: So – with these memos – you know that you didn't type them?

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

Rather: Few, of any things that I ask you about, would be more important than this point. You say you didn't type these memos; definitely that you didn't type these memos?

Marian Carr Knox: Not these particular ones.

Rather: Did you type ones like this?

Marian Carr Knox: Yes.

Rather: Containing the same or identical information?

Marian Carr Knox: The same information. Yes.

Rather: Mrs. Knox says the information in the four memos CBS obtained is very familiar but she doesn't believe the memos are authentic. She does remember her boss, Colonel Jerry Killian, being upset over Mr. Bush's failure to follow orders to take a physical.

Rather: Did or did not Lieutenant Bush take a physical as ordered by Colonel Killian?

Marian Carr Knox: That last time, no he didn't.

Rather: To your knowledge, was he ordered to do so?

Marian Carr Knox: Yes.

Rather: This is important, I think you'll agree, that when then Lieutenant Bush was in the military, Lieutenant Colonel Killian was his immediate military commander, correct, his squadron commander?

Marian Carr Knox: Right.

Rather: Uh, the country's at war. It's very unusual for a military officer, particularly a flying officer, not to obey a direct order from his superior. If not, tell me.

Marian Carr Knox: It was a big no-no to not follow orders. And – I can't remember anyone refusing to – now, for instance, with the uh, physical, every officer knew that at his birthday he was supposed to have that flying physical. But, once in a while, they might be late but there would be a good excuse for it and you would let the commander know and try to set up a date for a make-up. But if they did not take that physical, they were off of flying status until they did.

Rather: Did you ever hear Lieutenant Colonel Killian talk about this, or did he write memos about this? What was his feeling if Lieutenant Bush did not take the physical as ordered?

Marian Carr Knox: He was upset about it. And that was one of the reasons why he – well he wrote a memo directing him to go take the physical.

Rather: I don't understand it.

Marian Carr Knox: I'm gonna say this – it seems to me that Bush felt that he was above reproach.

Rather: Marian Carr Knox remembers Lieutenant Bush well, seeing him often as he showed up for weekend training in 1971 and 72.

Marian Carr Knox: He was always gentlemanly and he called me by the name of his father's secretary, and he was always apologizing about that. He couldn't remember my name. But he was very – uh – gentlemanly. And I felt that his parents must have been wonderful to have produced somebody as nice as that.

Rather: Among the contentions, among the questions raised: (1) Did or did not George W. Bush get into the National Guard on the basis of preferential treatment?

Marian Carr Knox: I'm gonna say that he did. I feel that he did. Because there were a lot of other boys in there the same way.

Rather: Accurate or inaccurate to say that this unit was filled with people who had Republican and Democratic connections who got in on the basis of preference?

Marian Carr Knox: At that time, yes.

Rather: And you observed Lieutenant Bush yourself?

Marian Carr Knox: Mmm hmmm.

Rather: Tell me about him, what kind of officer was he?

Marian Carr Knox: Now Bush seemed to be having a good time and didn't seem to be having any problem with the other pilots, let me say that. But, his time there – it seemed that the other fellows were – I'm gonna say this – sort of resentful of his attitude.

Rather: And what was his attitude?

Marian Carr Knox: Well, that he didn't really have to go by the rules.

Rather: He didn't really have to go by the rules?

Marian Carr Knox: It seemed that way to me.

Rather: Knox says that her boss, Colonel Jerry Killian, started what she calls a "cover your back" file. A personal file where she stored the memos about the problems with Mr. Bush's performance and his failure to take a physical and the pressure Killian felt from upstairs. She addressed this memo and a reference to retired General Staudt pushing for a positive officer training report on Lieutenant Bush.

Rather: And Staudt is pushing to "sugar coat" it. Does that sound like Colonel Killian? Is that the way he felt?

Marian Carr Knox: That's absolutely the way he felt about that.

Rather: And she talked about this memo. She doesn't believe the memo is authentic but she says the facts behind it are very real.

Rather: And he did write a memo like this?

Marian Carr Knox: Yes.

Rather: So he did write a memo like this?

Marian Carr Knox: Yeah.

Rather: Not this one as you can tell, but one like it.

Marian Carr Knox: This is like a personal journal. When you write things down.

Rather: Is that what he was keeping, more or less a personal journal?

Marian Carr Knox: It was more or less that. Yes.

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

Marian Carr Knox: The information, yes. It seems that somebody did see those memos and then tried to reproduce – and maybe changed them enough so that they wouldn't get in trouble over it, could deny it.

Rather: I understand. I understand.

Marian Carr Knox: But that's all supposition.

Rather: I understand.

Rather: Mrs. Knox says the fact that then Lieutenant Bush was repeatedly missing drills was not lost on his fellow pilots.

Rather: Was it common knowledge or not that Lieutenant Bush had not attended some drills?

Marian Carr Knox: Well they missed him. It was sort of gossip around there but – and they snicker and so forth about what he was getting away with.

Rather: What Lieutenant Bush was getting away with?

Marian Carr Knox: Yeah.

Rather: There was snickering about that?

Marian Carr Knox: Well the other officers, and I guess there was even a resentment.

Rather: She told us again and again she believed then Lieutenant Bush refused a direct order to take a physical.

Rather: Colonel Killian's son, with whom I have no argument and I respect the Killian family tremendously for the sacrifice that they've made when their husband and father was serving in our military, Colonel Killian's son says that this isn't true.

Marian Carr Knox: He has no way of knowing whether it's true or not.

Rather: Ms. Knox says that for young George Bush in 1972 working in a Senate campaign became more important than flying for the Guard.

Rather: Back up for a moment and just take a breath. And think a little and have you tell me what you believe the story here is.

Marian Carr Knox: I think it's plain and simple. Bush didn't think that he had to go by the rules that others did. And he had this campaign to take care of and that's what he was gonna do and that's what he did do.

Rather: A few personal thoughts on this story we've reported tonight. We shall continue to aggressively investigate the story of President Bush's service in the National Guard and the story of the documents and memos in Colonel Killian's file. Are those documents authentic, as experts consulted by CBS News continue to maintain? Or were they forgeries or recreations as Marian Carr Knox and others believe? We will keep an open mind and we will continue to report credible evidence and responsible points of view as we try to answer the questions raised about the authenticity of the documents. Having said that, we do feel it's important to underscore this point: Those who have criticized aspects of our story have never criticized the heart of it, the major thrust of our report, that George Bush received preferential treatment to get into the National Guard and once accepted, failed to satisfy the requirements of his service. If we uncover any information to the contrary, rest assured, we shall report that also.

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