

EXHIBIT 9L

CBS NEWS-60 MINUTES WEEKNIGHT

"BUSH GUARD"

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT STRONG

CORRESPONDENT: DAN RATHER

PRODUCER: MAPES

TAPE #1

01:01:25:10

(OFF MIC CONVERSATION)

DAN RATHER:

20:04:04:09

Well, first of all, thanks for doing this.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:02:09:24

Glad to be here.

DAN RATHER:

20:04:04:09

How long were you in the Texas Air National Guard?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:02:12:18

I was in the Air Guard from 1968 to-- from February of 1968 to, actually, I was in the Guard until October of '72. I was a full-time employee of the Air National Guard-- Texas Air National Guard from February of '68 to March of 1972.

DAN RATHER:

01:02:30:25 So, it's fair to say, you were in it from
1968 to 1972.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:02:32:28 Yeah. Right.

DAN RATHER:

01:02:34:25 And what did you do? What was your
position?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:02:36:19 Well, I held several different positions. I
worked originally for the Air National Guard
full-time. And then I transferred to the
Adjutant General's department-- Budget &
Fiscal office.

01:02:48:28 And then, in early 1971, I transferred back
over to the Air National Guard State
Headquarters or Air National Guard Division,
and I was the Administrative Officer in--
the Air Operations Office. I oversaw the
Air Operations Office.

DAN RATHER:

01:03:04:04

You oversaw the Air Operations Office.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:03:06:28

Right.

DAN RATHER:

01:03:08:10

Help me for just a moment. You had been in the service before, active duty, had you?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:03:11:22

Yes. I was in the Army from-- 1961, September of 1961 to August of 1964.

DAN RATHER:

01:03:20:00

And you went off of active duty, you went into the National Guard or not right away?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:03:21:14

No, I went back to school, the University of Texas and-- I left University of Texas in-- early 1968. And, in seeking employment, I accepted a-- a-- job with the-- Air National Guard. And one of the requirements of the job was, if you were eligible to be in the Air Guard, they wanted you in the Air Guard.

DAN RATHER:

20:02:04:09

And so you were.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:03:43:03

So I-- I re-entered the-- our Guard at, yes.
At that time.

DAN RATHER:

01:03:48:04

And your position again was?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:03:51:07

For part of the time I worked in the Budget
& Fiscal Office-- but I worked in Air
Operations in-- the-- in 1968. And I worked
in Air Operations again in 1971 and '72.

DAN RATHER:

01:04:03:01

Air Operations. Now, the Vietnam War is not
only on, but in many ways, was in it's most
active period. Certainly beginning 1968,
'69. So '68. '72, the Vietnam War was on.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:04:20:22

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

DAN RATHER:

01:04:23:08

People were being drafted.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:04:24:24

Right.

DAN RATHER:

10:02:02:09

Now did you, did you not find the Texas Air National Guard fairly politicized?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:04:33:18

Very politicized.

DAN RATHER:

01:04:34:23

Very politicized.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:04:36:11

Very.

DAN RATHER:

01:04:36:21

Now what does that mean?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:04:37:28

Well, essentially-- particularly the State-- Headquarters Detachment, which was located in Austin-- our roster considered-- consisted primarily of two categories of people; career Air Guardsmen, primarily enlisted personnel. And most of the rest of 'em were kind of a list of the 'who's who' of the rich and powerful in Texas. In Texas

politics.

01:05:04:08

We had everyone from the Governor's son to H. L. Hunt's grandson, to the-- Lt. Governor's Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Texas Senate. We had a number of other people who were politically connected. It was not only the Air Guard, but there were a number of people in the Army Guard State Headquarters who were also well-- connected politically.

01:05:33:29

We had Senator Ralph Yarborough's Administrative Assistant who was in the Army Guard. And I'm-- you know these are people I'm just-- this has been 35 years. These are people I'm pulling off the top of my head. The--

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

01:05:43:27

But you're pretty sure they were in the Guard?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:05:45:17

Oh, I know they were in the Guard. And we had-- we had one Dallas Cowboy in the State Headquarters unit. I know there were several other Dallas Cowboy football players who were in the Dallas-- Air Refueling-- Group. And I think there were also-- may have been a couple of professional football players in the Houston 14th-- Fighter Group.

DAN RATHER:

01:06:08:05

So many listeners and viewers were not even alive during the Vietnam War. And many more have no-- they weren't of 'memory' age. What's the significance of what you're telling me here?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:06:21:19

Well, (SIGHS) the entry or entry into the National Guard was supposed to be on a first-come-first--available waiting list slot. You-- you-- you would have to get on a waiting list to get in the Guard Unit. The waiting list were quite lengthy.

01:06:41:17

I think--

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

01:06:42:15

Because people-- if-- excuse me. The draft was on.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:06:45:21

The draft was on. People--

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

01:06:46:07

And if you didn't do anything, you didn't get in the National Guard, didn't get one of these available quote 'slots'.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:06:52:03

Or if you didn't get a deferment, you were gonna get drafted.

DAN RATHER:

01:06:55:26

And if you got drafted, you were likely not to be in the Air Force.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:06:58:28

The Air Force didn't draft. I don't think any draftees went in the Air Force. I think the only people-- that-- the-- the only

branch of service that took draftees was the US Army. The Marines and the Navy, the Air Corps did not-- did not take draftees at that particular time.

DAN RATHER:

01:07:16:17

Maybe the Marines took 'em for a while. But I'm not even sure of that. But let's just set it aside. Point here being-- that-- that we had the draft; universal military service.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:07:27:05

Hmmm.

DAN RATHER:

01:07:27:25

And if you were physically qualified you were registered in the Draft and you might have to go to Vietnam. But if you got in a National Guard Unit then you weren't in the Draft. Is that correct?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:07:41:28

That's correct.

DAN RATHER:

01:07:43:19

Now you said there were some 'slots'. And

you lined up, that is you had to get in line
for those--

(OVER TALK)

ROBERT STRONG:

01:07:48:14

There had to be a vacancy.

DAN RATHER:

01:07:50:09

There had to be a vacancy.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:07:50:17

There had to be a vacancy.

DAN RATHER:

01:07:52:01

Well, boil it down; and you tell me; fair or
unfair to say that the Air National Guard
was basic-- basically a political
institution.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:08:02:07

Well, it was a very, very political
institution. I mean you-- you-- the Guard,
historically, has always been a very
political institution. It's always been a
place where the well-connected got slots in--
- even in peace time. It was considered--
politically beneficial to be in the Guard.

01:08:24:25

The Guard, historically, has always been a very political place. But at this particular time, it became very critical-- because it meant you-- if you were in the Guard. I mean, everyone from-- as I said, even Lyndon Johnson's son-in-law-- was in the Air National Guard. And it meant you weren't gonna get drafted and you weren't gonna go to Vietnam.

DAN RATHER:

01:08:47:16

Well, there is the theory that some people tried mightily to get into the National Guard-- we're talking generally now. And some people used political connections to get in the National Guard to avoid service in Vietnam. Now is that a fact or just some post-war illusion.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:09:02:29

No, I think it was-- I think it was a reality of the time. I think all you had to do was look at-- for instance, the Texas-- Air National Guard State Headquarters Unit,

where you had-- this-- this litany of-- of politically-connected people.

01:09:21:04

You had the Governor's son-- you had H. L. Hunt's grandson. You had-- one of the, I think, grandsons of a very powerful Congressman down in Laredo. One of the Cassion boys. You had NFL football players. They made up-- a third to half of the unit.

DAN RATHER:

01:09:41:29

Did you suspect that they had help getting in the unit?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:09:46:28

Was-- yes, I had suspected they got-- they had help getting in.

DAN RATHER:

01:09:50:16

Well, you smile when you say that. Is that to say that--

ROBERT STRONG:

01:09:53:19

I can't prove it. But you-- when you have-- when you have the Governor's son, when you have the Lt. Governor's Administrative

Assistant, when you have the Secretary of the Senate. When you have these people all being able to get into this very small unit, the-- the State Headquarters, I think the total compliment of the State Headquarters was maybe 50 people or less. Enlisted and officers.

01:10:18:08

And many of those slots were senior-- staff officers like a Major General, Chief of Staff, a-- a Brigadier General-- Deputy Chief of Staff and a whole range of full Colonels, (UNINTEL) Colonels, who oversaw various operation areas. And these were 'weekend warriors'. These were people who were not full-time people. But who were there for Guard duty or for Guard service. And-- you-- you had this huge continent of politically connected people.

DAN RATHER:

01:10:53:05

Well, do you or do you not believe that there was a system of political favors--

(OVER TALK)

ROBERT STRONG:

01:10:57:15 I believe--

DAN RATHER:

01:10:57:29 -- that allowed people to get in the Guard.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:10:59:15 Yes, I do. I believe that system existed.

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

01:11:00:07 In-- in order to avoid service in Vietnam.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:11:03:01 I don't know what their motives were, but I believe there was a politically-- there was political favoritism in the allocation of the Air Guard slots.

DAN RATHER:

01:11:10:17 And was the political favoritism, in your judgment, based on your experience, in choosing in some cases what slots you got? As opposed to Tank Commander and a Flier?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:11:23:21 Mmmm. Could have been. I don't know.

Slots to flying-- training and slots to Officer Training School were very-- they were only like a couple a year.

DAN RATHER:

01:11:39:05

They were premium slots.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:11:39:23

They were premium slots. And-- so getting a slot to go to Pilot training or getting a slot to go to Officer Candidate School was a-- was a-- it was a special thing, Okay?

DAN RATHER:

01:11:54:19

Ben Burns was Lt. Governor or Speaker of the House during this time?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:11:58:08

I-- think in 1972 he was the Lt. Governor. I believe, I'm trying to remember. When I first went in, in '68, whether he had already become Lt. Governor or not. He may have still been Speaker of the House in '68.

01:12:13:10

(OFF MIC CONVERSATION)

DAN RATHER:

01:12:15:00

I think he was Speaker of the House.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:12:16:16

In 68?

DAN RATHER:

01:12:16:26

At the time, he says, Ben Barnes says, when he was Speaker of the House, he's now saying that politically he did help George W. Bush get into the Texas Air National Guard. Do you believe 'em?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:12:30:04

It was the worst kept secret of the time.

DAN RATHER:

01:12:32:09

What do you mean?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:12:32:29

Well, everybody knew he was getting people in. He had his own Administrative Assistant in. Ev-- everybody-- everybody that what was associated with the State Headquarters of the Air National Guard-- knew that Lt. Governor Barnes and his staff were helping people get the available slots. All you had to do was look at the available slots to-- to-- and-- and you can draw the lines back

to him.

01:12:56:27

General Rose, who was the Assistant Adjutant General for Air was-- politically very close to Governor Barnes. Actually, Governor Barnes ultimately became his 'protector' when Governor Preston Smith tried to-- change the ad-- the Adjutant General and tried to oust Rose from the Assistant Adjutant General Air job.

DAN RATHER:

01:13:20:19

This will be very hard for a lot of people to understand. Cause one; Ben Barnes at the time was a young on-the-rise, Texas political power. For part of the Vietnam War he was House Speaker. For part of it, he was Lt. Governor.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:13:32:18

That's correct.

DAN RATHER:

01:13:33:12

Now you said to me; it was the worst kept secret at the time. That he was helping

people get in, for example, the Texas Air National Guard. You think a lot of people knew about it at the time.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:13:43:09

I-- I really do. Yes, I do.

DAN RATHER:

01:13:45:01

Now he did that because he had connections with this General Rose?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:13:51:02

Yes.

DAN RATHER:

01:13:52:16

He, in effect, commanded General Rose.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:13:53:28

Now he didn't command-- he wasn't on a command line of authority. It was all-- it was all about politics. It was all about politics and political power. It's not some chain of command thing. Technically the Adjutant General of the State of Texas is-- reports to the Governor. The Governor is the Commander-in-Chief of the State military forces.

01:14:16:28

During-- the time in which-- Ben Barnes was the Speaker of the House, John Connelly was the Governor. So-- General Rose's boss would have been the Adjutant General who was, at that time, Tom Bishop. And Tom Bishop's boss would have been Governor Connelly. It wasn't chain-of-command sort of stuff. It was-- it was political influence.

DAN RATHER:

01:14:40:04

Political favors done for people?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:14:41:14

Political flavors (SIC) favors, yes.

DAN RATHER:

01:14:44:24

Some people say, well that's-- that's outright corruption.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:14:49:24

(CHUCKLES) Well, I may be a bit old and jaundiced to-- yes, you could-- you could be-- you could interpret it as being corruption. It was the way the world worked at that particular time. And in some

regards the-- the Guard-- the-- the-- the Guard had always worked that way. It was always a place of political influence.

DAN RATHER:

01:15:12:01

But-- but you worked in the Air National Guard. You said you-- worked with aviation in the Texas Air National Guard. Did it ever occur to you, did the thought ever run through your head; and I'll put this in quotation marks, if you will. These are politically well-connected, rich boy, men. They don't have to go to that green jungle hell. But a lot of other people do. Or did it ever occur to you?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:15:41:05

I (SIGHS) I don't know what occurred to me at the time. You have to understand, Dan, I had already completed my active duty military-- ob-- obligation. So I wasn't particularly-- I wasn't staring the draft in the face, Okay?

01:15:54:02

I'm not sure I thought about it. I was-- 26 to 29 years old to 30 years old. I was doing the job. It was a full-time job for me. This was what I did. I worked for the Adjutant General's department. I worked for the I worked for the ex- Air National Guard.

DAN RATHER:

01:16:09:29

Excuse me. Was it a full-time job for the people who flew in the Texas Air National Guard?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:16:14:17

Only for the-- only for what we call the technicians. People who were actually federal, they were a type of federal civil service. People like the Group Commander at the Air-- at the-- at the different flying groups. We had a certain number of what we called technicians that were federal civil ser-- federal civil service.

DAN RATHER:

01:16:32:11

But for most of those in the Air National

Guard they did what?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:16:34:26

They were weekend-- what we call 'Weekend Warriors.' They came out and they did-- one weekend a month, two days of duty, and then they had to do-- 14 days of-- of-- annual-- I believe it was 14 days of annual training.

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

01:16:52:21

Two weeks of summer work or something.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:16:55:00

Yeah, right.

DAN RATHER:

01:16:55:20

Uh-huh (AFFIRM).

ROBERT STRONG:

01:16:56:11

And it had to be done in the-- (SNIFFS) in the-- in the Army Guard you tended to go to Summer active duty training with the unit. So the whole unit went for the whole time period. In the Air National Guard, what we tended to do was we tended to do it on an individual basis. So that if a person

wanted to do their active duty time a week at a time, we would bring them in for a week. If they wanted to do it two or three days at a time, usually to accommodate their civilian work.

DAN RATHER:

01:17:25:10

You know, I want to move on to the documents in a minute. But let me read you something that was in the newspaper-- very recently. (PAUSE) Frank Rich of *The New York Times* says that in the book 'A Charge To Keep', President Bush's 1999 campaign biography, crafted by Karen Hughes.

01:17:53:26

Says, quote: Mr. Bush implies but this-- he just happened to slide on his own into one of quote several openings for Pilots in the Air National Guard in 1968. Now did anybody just happen to slide into one of quote several openings during that time?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:18:12:08

No.

DAN RATHER:

01:18:12:22

Is that credible?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:18:13:29

No, that's not credible. Because-- there-- probably were between two and four slots for Pilot training in any given year. There would have been a lot of competition for them. Ultimately the gr-- the unit commander would be-- be making the decision among the qualified people who were gonna get those slots. So, no, you didn't just slide into anything in-- in the Texas Air National Guard during that period.

01:18:45:18

I'm not saying that they didn't take qualified people. I'm just saying that it didn't make any difference whether it was Pilot training or whether it was Officer Candidate School-- you just didn't slide into it.

DAN RATHER:

01:18:57:14

Well, now, Frank Rich, the author of this

article says, that this is a fantasy, quote-unquote that he, George W. Bush, happened to slide on his own into one of the quote several openings.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:19:14:15

I would totally agree with his characterization of it being a fantasy.

DAN RATHER:

01:19:17:16

I'm gonna ask you to pause for a second. Don't think that's too strong?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:19:19:24

I do not think that's too strong. (CHUCKLES) I think it's a perfect characterization.

DAN RATHER:

01:19:25:04

(PAUSE) Let's move on to the documents.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:19:27:14

Okay.

DAN RATHER:

01:19:30:02

You've taken a look at these documents.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:19:31:09

I have.

DAN RATHER:

01:19:33:07

Fair to say you've studied 'em?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:19:34:21

For a few minutes, yes.

DAN RATHER:

01:19:36:10

Okay. Take a look at the documents and what's the story you see unfolding here based on your experience in the Texas Air National Guard at the time.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:19:45:18

Well, I see several things. First of all I see-- several career officers trying to do their jobs and do the right thing and having a very difficult time doing their jobs because of-- influence from-- above. And concerns about political liabilities-- in-- involved with the individual.

DAN RATHER:

01:20:16:16

Well, these particular documents are all written by Lt. Colonel Jerry Killian. Did you know Lt. Colonel Killian?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:20:24:13

Fairly well. Yes.

DAN RATHER:

01:20:25:21

Tell me about 'em.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:20:27:18

Well, he was the Commander of the 111th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at-- at the 147th Fighter Group at Ellington Air Force Base. I worked with Colonel Killian quite a bit because, as I was running air operations-- their air operations office at the State headquarters, if I had something that had to be dealt with, with the 147th-- since he ran flight operations, that was usually the person that I talked to, or I talked to someone directly below him.

01:20:58:28

I knew him quite-- quite well personally. Actually, I flew in the back seat of his T-33 a couple of times going back and forth to-- to-- Houston. Between Austin and Houston on official business.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:10:14

You were in Austin.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:11:15 Yes.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:12:25 Overseeing air operations.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:15:00 Right.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:15:09 For the Texas Air National Guard.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:17:04 Administratively.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:18:02 Administratively. I understand. And Jerry Killian, Colonel Killian was in Houston at Ellington Air Force Base.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:25:01 That's correct.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:27:01 By the way, did you ever hear it called 'The Champagne Squadron'?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:29:21 (LAUGHS) Oh, yes. That was-- yes, I did hear it called that.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:36:19

That's not something someone made up after the fact.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:37:23

No, that's not somebody (SIC) made up after the fact.

DAN RATHER:

01:21:39:12

Was it fairly commonly called that?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:21:42:22

Well, depend-- it depended on who was around. You didn't call it that if General Stout was around. Or you didn't call it that if General Rose was around. But if the guys were just 'jawing'-- yeah. You-- you would hear it pop up.

01:21:54:16

But this was particularly true among the career air guardsmen. Men who had, particularly among the enlisted men, who had been in the guard since-- some of them had been in the guard since the end of World War II. And-- they were-- they were career--

career guardsmen. They worked their way up, primarily through the enlisted rank. And you know they-- they knew what was going on. They saw what was going on.

DAN RATHER:

01:22:18:21

And that's the reason they called it 'The Champagne Squad.'

ROBERT STRONG:

01:22:20:08

Yeah. Sure.

DAN RATHER:

01:22:21:21

Well, what-- what did that mean? Champagne Squad?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:22:23:08

Well-- when you have the-- the different-- politically connected and wealthy people who managed to get these very hard to get guard slots, that's what you kinda refer to it as. I wouldn't-- I wouldn't-- I wouldn't want someone to think that the 147th was not an efficient-- actually, it was one of the most efficient flying groups in the-- in the country. Won several-- awards for it's--

it's-- it's-- performance.

01:22:56:12

But it was had-- it had to do with the nature of some of the people. And I really wanna be careful here. I don't want to bring discredit on the 147th. Because the 147th contained a lot of good-- military people. People who-- some of them who were career people.

01:23:16:13

But we had-- we had a Congressman's son. We had a Senator's son. We had several NFL football players who were in the unit. The unit was commanded by a man who was one of the most political creatures I've ever met in my life.

DAN RATHER:

01:23:31:23

Who was that?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:23:32:26

That was-- well, he was then Colonel Walter B. Stout. 'Buck' Stout.

DAN RATHER:

01:23:38:18

Well, I want to talk about what became
General Buck Stout.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:23:42:04

General Buck Stout.

DAN RATHER:

01:23:43:13

But let me come back to Jerry Killian.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:23:45:13

Okay.

DAN RATHER:

01:23:47:06

When you read through these documents, is
there any doubt in your mind that these are
genuine?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:23:53:02

Well, they are compatible with the way
business was done at that time. They are
compatible with the man that I remember
Jerry Killian being. I don't see anything
in the documents that are discordant with
what were the times, what were the
situation, and what were the people that
were involved.

DAN RATHER:

01:24:14:15

What was he trying to do with these?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:24:17:19

Well, I think he was trying to do two things; I think, first of all, he was trying to get-- duty perform that was supposed to be performed. And I think he was also trying to protect himself because of the political environment in which he found himself, dealing with the different individuals involved.

DAN RATHER:

01:24:39:17

Well, for example; showing up for a physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:24:44:27

Well, I read the document in which-- Colonel Killian said he ordered-- Lt. Bush to report at a particular date for his annual flight physical.

DAN RATHER:

01:24:55:19

Which-- for which he did not show up, so far as we know.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:24:58:06

So far as we know, he did not show up. As far as I can see, that's a direct order. And when-- I mean, Dan you're an ex-Marine, Okay. I'm an ex-Army 'grunt'. And when we were given orders to do something, as best I recall, we did them.

DAN RATHER:

01:25:14:20

Well, let-- the record clearly shows that I wasn't much of a Marine. I wasn't one for very long. But it is true, that in the military, up and down, an order is an order. The whole pride of the US military particularly is you obey orders and you have a discipline. So now to the point; here Colonel Killian orders then Lt. Bush to have a physical. Correct?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:25:42:20

Correct. That's the way I read the document.

DAN RATHER:

01:25:44:08

He didn't have the physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:25:46:00

Well, I don't know that. But I-- based on the subsequent correspondence-- following this order to get a physical, it's spelled out clearly over the course of the summer, from May '72 to-- through August '72 that he had never gotten his physical. So between that time, the documents seem to indicate that no, he had not taken a physical.

DAN RATHER:

01:26:11:08

Well, what happened? There's a war on. What happened to people that didn't obey orders?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:26:17:07

Well-- obviously, in this particular case, nothing.

DAN RATHER:

01:26:24:14

Well, how can that be? Let's just stop right there. How can that be? His superior officer says; I order you to do this and you don't do it. How can that be?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:26:32:00

Well, if-- if someone up the chain of command-- is essentially overriding this order in the sense of not backing up Colonel Killian in his order, it doesn't have to happen.

DAN RATHER:

01:26:48:11

But you know and I know that plenty of Privates, Corporals and Sergeants, if they don't obey an order, they're bustin' rock for at least six months or they may get some kind of unsatisferry (SIC) factory dis-- discharge.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:27:01:28

Correct. I can't explain it. I have no explanation. I-- it would have never occurred to me-- to me, one, not to follow an order that I was given. Two, that if I didn't follow the order that I-- there was gonna be some consequence for not following that order.

DAN RATHER:

01:27:21:04

Let me get back to Colonel Killian. Was he, in your judgment, a straight shooter? Is he a straight shooter?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:27:26:07

He was a straight arrow guy. He really was. I-- I-- I was very fond of him, liked him personally. Very professional man. A career-- pilot. Took his-- took his responsibilities very, very seriously.

DAN RATHER:

01:27:42:03

Political ideologue?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:27:42:21

No. I don't know anything about his politics.

DAN RATHER:

01:27:44:23

Did he strike you as a political activist?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:27:48:07

I don't know-- have no knowledge of him being a political activist.

DAN RATHER:

01:27:50:25

Well, draw for me, a quick profile of 'em at

the time.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:27:55:25

He was--

DAN RATHER:

01:27:55:22

By-the-book military man or what?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:27:57:18

He was a Lt. Colonel, commander of the 111th Fighter Squadron. Very professional. A-- a-- a fun guy. Fun guy to talk to. We always kind of looked forward to it when he came to the State headquarters. He had a lot of friends in the State headquarters. People who liked him personally. But he was-- he was-- he was a man who got the job done. So I-- I don't know how else to characterize 'em.

DAN RATHER:

01:28:24:08

Now tell me about General Buck Stout. General Stout was Killian's superior?

ROBERT STRONG:

01:28:29:11

Well-- in '72, General Stout had come to Austin as the full-time-- Chief-of-Staff for

the-- Air National Guard.

DAN RATHER:

01:28:39:16

While Killian was at Ellington Air Force base in effect running the squadron.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:28:43:21

Well, in the squadron. But there was, in the chain of command, there was a person in-between General Stout and-- Colonel Killian. And that was Colonel Bobby Hodges. When General Stout-- when Colonel Stout was brought to Austin and promoted to Brigadier General and made Chief of Staff, Colonel Hodges, who was, at that time, a little-- a Lt. Colonel, assumed command of the 147th Fighter Group.

01:29:08:27

Subsequently, he was promoted to full Colonel and Colonel-- Killian, I believe, took Colonel Hodges place as the-- commander of the 11th Fighter Squadron.

DAN RATHER:

01:29:22:20

I want to understand the chain of command

here.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:29:23:17

Right.

DAN RATHER:

01:29:25:02

The Governor, at least ostensibly, commands the National Guard.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:29:30:02

The military forces of Texas. That's correct.

DAN RATHER:

01:29:31:03

Right. So it went from Buck Stout to Hodges to Killian in the chain of command.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:29:38:09

That is correct.

DAN RATHER:

01:29:39:12

Okay.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:29:39:25

Now the-- the Adjutant General would have been in there-- the Adjutant General of the State of Texas who controlled both the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard and the-- the Adjutant General had two

assistants; one for Army and one for Air.

DAN RATHER:

01:29:56:24

Right.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:29:57:20

So they were supposedly in there. But General Stout's-- the creation of this full-time position of Chief of Staff. That had been a 'weekend warrior' position up to that point. Was necessitated primarily by the fact that Governor Smith and his Adjutant General, Ross Ayers, were unable to oust Brigadier General James Rose from the Assistant Adjutant General's position.

DAN RATHER:

01:30:23:03

So they were bringing in their own man.

ROBERT STRONG:

01:30:24:09

And so they brought in Stout to Austin to basically offset General Rose. And they attempted to isolate General Rose politically and in terms of power. So that, basically, General Ayres gave the order that everything had to go through General Stout,

not General Rose. Even though it really--
it didn't really-- the-- the structure
didn't work. To say the least.

DAN RATHER:

01:30:48:16

Let's hold it right there cause we're
running out of tape. We're just gonna
change tapes. That's all we need.

01:30:52:12

* * * END OF TAPE SIDE A * * *

* * * SIDE B IS BLANK * * *

* * * END OF TRANSCRIPT * * *

CBS NEWS-60 MINUTES WEEKNIGHT

"BUSH GUARD"

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT STRONG

CORRESPONDENT: DAN RATHER

PRODUCER: MAPES

TAPE #2

DAN RATHER:

02:01:22:10

Well, we had to break for the tape. But I
wanna move on here. But you were talking
about; Well, how Governor Preston Smith, who
succeeded Governor John Connelly, right?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:01:32:08

Right.

DAN RATHER:

02:01:33:25

Wanted to get his own man in charge of this
National Guard stuff. It-- it sounds, for
all the world like a honeycombed political
influence situation. Now was that what it
was? Or just business as usual? What was
it?

(OVER TALK)

ROBERT STRONG:

02:01:46:07

Oh it was business as usual for the guard. It was not uncommon for-- for new Governors to change Adjutant Generals. Tom Bishop had been the Adjutant General for a number of years, for several different governors. But-- Preston Smith-- wanted-- or appointed his old college buddy, Ross Ayers who was-- had-- had at that time I believe was the Commanding General of the 36th Airborne Brigade.

02:02:15:19

And he-- put him in as his-- as his Adjutant General. And it-- it-- the Adjutant General serves at 'the pleasure of the governor.'

DAN RATHER:

02:02:24:12

Got I.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:02:26:08

They would have been fine. The Assistant Adjutant General for Army was replaced, and they, of course, planned on replacing-- General Rose. And I-- I think the

'scuttlebutt' was that they had promised Buck Stout that they would make him Assistant Adjutant General for Air.

02:02:44:13

Well, except when they tried to oust Rose-- Lt. Governor Barnes stepped in and basically, the story goes, told Governor Smith you will get none of your appointments confirmed by the Texas Senate if you-- oust General Rose.

DAN RATHER:

02:03:02:07

Keeping in mind the Lt. Governor controls the agenda--

ROBERT STRONG:

02:03:05:20

The Texas Senate. Correct.

DAN RATHER:

02:03:05:01

-- the Texas Senate. So--

ROBERT STRONG:

02:03:07:27

He's the presiding officer of the Texas Senate.

DAN RATHER:

02:03:09:07

So Buck Stout moves up. Buck Stout does

business with Ben Barnes?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:03:14:11

No. No. He didn't do any business with Ben Barnes. Ben Barnes and Jim Rose were a team. They had been a team for many years.

DAN RATHER:

02:03:23:03

So it was Ben Barnes and Rose--

ROBERT STRONG:

02:03:25:00

Rose--

DAN RATHER:

02:03:25:28

Okay.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:03:26:08

That were a team.

DAN RATHER:

02:03:27:00

Well, what about Buck Stout? What kind of person is he? What kind of person was he?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:03:31:10

(CHUCKLES) Well, he was a cigar-chomping, the epitome of the macho-- 'fighter jockey.' He brought a whole new meaning to the term 'swagger.' He was a-- a-- a fairly physically imposing man. And he had a

manner about 'em, he was something of a 'Bear' of man.

02:03:58:07

He physically intimidated people. Not-- I mean just his physical presence intimidated people. He was very gruff. Very, very abrasive in the way he approached people. I-- you know seen 'em call a Senior Officer in and say; Colonel, is there something that you want to tell me? And just have this Lt. Colonel or Major shaking in their boots trying to figure out what it is that Stout had found out they didn't want 'em to find out. But it was just a technique he used to bully people. He was something of a bully.

DAN RATHER:

02:04:28:19

Well where does he fit in to this very complex puzzle of Colonel Killian and these documents and what you say is the reality--

ROBERT STRONG:

02:04:40:11

Well--

DAN RATHER:

02:04:40:03

-- of this flying squadron.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:04:41:20

-- the reality was that even after-- Stout came to Austin as Chief of Staff, and Bobby Hodges took over the group, nobody at the 147th would-- do much of anything without making sure it was Okay with Stout. Nothing-- no important decision was gonna be made at the 147th Fighter Group without making sure it was cleared with Stout.

02:05:07:13

Because it was still General Stout's unit. None of us in Austin or any place else in the Texas Air National Guard had any doubt that the 147th was still his unit. He would take off from the office and fly down to Houston so he could-- you know fly.

02:05:23:06

Now, of course, he had to maintain his ratings. But-- until Stout left the guard-- Bobby Hodges, in my view, was the *de facto*

commander of the 147th. So even though Bobby Hodges was in the chain of command, and-- and actually, when Stout was the commander of the 147th Fighter Group, Bobby Hodges would still have been in the chain of command through Killian down-- on down to the actual pilots.

DAN RATHER:

02:05:48:22

Well, here's what I want to make sure I understand. Bobby Hodges was Jerry Killian's boss.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:05:55:18

Yes, that's correct.

DAN RATHER:

02:05:56:28

And Bobby Hodges answered to, eventually, General Buck Stout.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:06:01:29

That's correct.

DAN RATHER:

02:06:03:12

Stout and Hodges were politically aligned?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:06:08:25

Well, they'd served together for many, many

years. I-- I don't want to beat up on-- he subsequently was General himself. But you know as long as-- as long as Buck Stout was around, everybody at the 147th stood in his shadow.

02:06:25:02

I think after-- I worked quite a bit with-- with Colonel Hodges when he was a Lt. Colonel and when he was full Colonel. And-- I liked 'em, I-- I respected 'em. But all of those-- all of those guys down there were-- they were petrified of-- of Buck Stout. We had a lot of Colonels in the State headquarters that were petrified of Buck Stout. He was a--

DAN RATHER:

02:06:49:05

What you have-- Buck Stout the General at headquarters in Austin. You have Bobby Hodges his pal. And in this particular chain of command, second to Stout.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:07:03:07

He was.

DAN RATHER:

02:07:04:20

So put Killian's memos into context for me, with that in mind.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:07:15:19

Well, I think I would go on the assumption that they were not going to do anything about any politically sensitive individual without Buck Stout's clearance. Now you need to understand that while General Rose controlled a lot of who got into the Air Guard from the Austin standpoint. Who got into the 147th Fighter Group was controlled by General Stout. The-- the group commander, Okay.

02:07:43:06

There had been an ongoing quote 'power struggle' between Rose and Stout long before Stout came to Austin. And so that unit down there was pretty much Stout's unit. So whoever was in his unit, he got 'em in his unit. And if he didn't want 'em in his unit, they wouldn't have been there.

02:08:02:27

Now he may have done some trading, some bargaining and bartering with General Rose to get different people into the unit. I suspect that the Dallas Cowboy players that were in the 147th were probably a-- a mutually advantageous deal that was done between Rose and Stout.

DAN RATHER:

02:08:21:29

Let me stop you right there if I may. Why would these men do this? If it is as you say it was clear that the sons of certain very influential and powerful people were getting these premium slots in places like this Air National Guard unit, I mean, didn't conscience come into play somewhere here?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:08:46:19

Well, (SIGHS) conscious (SIC) conscious (LAUGHS) I'm sorry.

DAN RATHER:

02:08:51:19

Conscience.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:08:53:00

Conscience comes into play. But conscience

is a very individual thing. This is the way power works. I mean what you saw is the way power works. Power begets power. Power goes to power to get more power. If you have a little bit of power and someone offers you an opportunity to-- to gain more power by doing power a favor, they-- these-- this is what power does.

02:09:18:02

It-- it trades on itself. It feeds on itself. This is what-- this is the way the system worked. This is the way State government worked. This is the way the Guard worked.

DAN RATHER:

02:09:27:28

But particularly with the military, it's supposed to be a meritocracy.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:09:32:18

(DEEP SIGH) Ah.

DAN RATHER:

02:09:32:13

Military prides itself on being a meritocracy. You-- you get up the ladder by

merit, not by political connections or who your father is or how much money you've got.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:09:44:14

Well, that is more true in the active duty military than it is in the reserves. Particularly in the Guard. Because of the unique status of the guard as being a dual federal-state unit. When the-- a guard unit is not in federal service, it's under the control of the State. It's under the control of the Governor and the Adjutant General.

02:10:06:22

The State officers pretty much control who gets the slots, who gets promoted, who goes to Pilot training, who goes to Officers Candidate School. In the active duty, I mean I have to be honest with you, Dan. When I was on active duty in the Army, I saw politics in the Army.

02:10:26:03

I-- I know of cases of people who weren't

promoted because-- in a particular-- on a particular base that they-- they didn't belong to a particular social group, Okay? I know of-- of cases of individuals who were-- politically punished during one particular Presidential administrative and subsequently po-- promoted in a-- a subsequent political administration.

02:10:53:21

But it wasn't nearly as rampant and wide spread (SIC) spread and pervasive and-- I'm trying to avoid using the word 'corrupt' as it was in the Air National Guard. It-- it-- it verged on outright corruption in terms of the-- the favors that were done, the power that was traded. And it was unconscionable. From a moral and ethical standpoint it was unconscionable.

02:11:22:14

You know and I-- I guess like Lt. Governor Barnes, as I reflect on my time there, I-- I am somewhat a little bit ashamed of myself

that I wasn't more outraged at the time. But I had a job and I needed that job. And it didn't serve my interests. So to preserve my own power there was-- I don't know what I could have done about it anyway.

DAN RATHER:

02:11:47:13

One question occurs to me; almost all of the State government at the time this was happening; it was in the hands of Democrats. Why would they be doing any favors for the son of a prominent Republican?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:12:02:03

Well, a Congressman's a Congressman. Whether he's a Democrat or a Republican.

DAN RATHER:

02:12:07:03

And President George-- later President George Bush, whom we now call 'George I' was a Congressman in those days.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:12:12:26

He was a Congressman in the late 60's and early 70's I believe he became an Ambassador. But yes, in the-- in the late

60s he was a Congressman from a district in Houston. He was a Republican Congressman from a district in Houston.

DAN RATHER:

02:12:27:08

So he had some power of his own?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:12:29:04

Oh, yes. Every Congressman has power. It doesn't make any difference what your party is.

DAN RATHER:

02:12:33:19

So when you say they were trading political influence, I believe that's-- did I misquote you about that? Trading political influence?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:12:38:21

Yeah, you can use that expression.

DAN RATHER:

02:12:40:28

Alright. If they were trading political influence, then Republican Congressman George Bush, from a big city, large county district, he'd have some political power that A. Ben Barnes, a Democrat, Lt.

Governor, Speaker of the House, might need something from him.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:12:59:17

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I mean as I under-- as I understand the way power works in political systems, absolutely. You know and-- you know I-- I've always been fascinated with the fact that Colonel Stout was careful to have a Republican Congressman's son and a Democratic Senator's son in his unit. Doesn't get much better than that in terms of-- of you know politics. The power of politics.

DAN RATHER:

02:13:27:22

I wanna come back to that in a minute. But let's back off what we call on television the 'wide shot.'

ROBERT STRONG:

02:13:33:18

(LAUGHS) Okay.

DAN RATHER:

02:13:35:16

In your judgment, based on your experience in the Air National Guard as a civilian

working in the Guard. Were you? That's unclear to me.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:13:44:09

I was-- I was a-- at different times I was a State employee and at other times I was, what was called, a-- a Guard Technician.

DAN RATHER:

02:13:53:14

I got it.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:13:53:28

I was on a federal civil service payroll. The-- the guard technicians were a special class of civil service. We were not in the normal civil service. We had the same grades, but we had a little bit different set up.

DAN RATHER:

02:14:04:22

I got it.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:14:06:23

But all the time that I was working for the Adjutant General's department, whether for the department or the Air Guard State headquarters, I was a member of the Texas

Air National Guard. First as an enlisted man, later as a-- as a Lieutenant. As a commissioned officer.

DAN RATHER:

02:14:21:10

Right. Well, based on your experience with the Air National Guard at the time when this was happening, what is the single most important thing for Americans to know about now President George W. Bush's service in the Texas Air National Guard?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:14:38:25

Well, (SIGHS) it does not appear that it was successfully completed, based on what I've-- what I've seen in these documents. That concerns me because-- as I told you in an earlier interview-- I was-- you know the man did go to Pilot training. He did get behind a-- an F-102 Fighter Interceptor which is a very powerful piece of equipment.

02:15:07:14

And any man who piloted one of these instruments put himself at-risk. But I'm--

I am at, the very least, disappointed in Lt. Bush's refusal to follow orders. And I'm kind of perplexed as to why he-- was unwilling or uninterested in completing his tour of duty successfully.

DAN RATHER:

02:15:32:12

Was it usual in your experience for these pilots not to take their physicals?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:15:38:13

Well, it should have been impossible.

DAN RATHER:

02:15:41:18

What do you mean?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:15:42:08

Well, the-- I mean a physical is required. Every-- every-- every member of the military has to take an annual physical. And the flight physical is a more-- advanced form of physical because of the requirements of-- of-- of flying a-- an aircraft. And if you do not pass your physical, then you can't fly.

02:16:04:18

It-- it's relatively simple. It's just black and white, cut and dry.

DAN RATHER:

02:16:08:16

Well, walk with me in young George W. Bush's shoes, Lieutenant. Why would he not take a physical?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:16:14:14

I don't know. I really-- I can't answer that. I-- I'm sorry Dan, I can't walk in-- in-- in Lt. Bush's shoes.

DAN RATHER:

02:16:21:03

Well, what we do know on the basis of these documents that Colonel Killian, Lt. Colonel Killian ordered him to take his physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:16:32:16

That's what I saw in the documents.

DAN RATHER:

02:16:34:06

And there's no evidence that you know of anywhere that he took the physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:16:38:28

No, I haven't--

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

02:16:39:24

As far as I know he doesn't claim that he took the physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:16:43:08

I don't know one way or the other.

DAN RATHER:

02:16:43:23

Well, I don't want to belabor this point but it's a very important point. Explain to me how a young Lieutenant could not follow a direct order. Especially a direct order to have a physical to fly a fairly high performance aircraft.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:17:02:12

I cannot give you an explanation. I-- I don't know how you don't follow a direct order. I-- I just don't. I-- I would guess that it has to do with the fact that because of who his father was-- that-- he didn't think that he had to, or he needed to. And the people who were his superior officers didn't feel like they should or could compel 'em to do so.

DAN RATHER:

02:17:35:09

Anything else in these documents that caught your eye, particularly, by the way?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:17:38:12

Well, I was particularly impressed with what I saw as Colonel Killian's efforts to try to do the right thing here. I saw in these documents a-- an effort on his part to-- to do the right thing. He was trying to deal with a volatile political situation, in dealing with the son of an Ambassador and former Congressman.

02:18:05:06

He was trying to deal with a su-- a-- a-- a pair or superior officers. Or at least one superior officer; General Stout, who was closely connected-- to the Houston political establishment. And-- I just saw 'em in a-- in an impossible situation. I felt very, very sorry.

02:18:23:29

You know I-- I-- I had left full-time

employment with the Air National Guard in March of '72. I stayed in the Guard for another six months or so. And I really hadn't had any contact with-- with-- with them after that. After the fall of '72.

02:18:41:21

But I really kind of felt sorry (CHUCKLES) for Colonel Killian. Because he was between a rock and a hard place.

DAN RATHER:

02:18:47:05

That rock being-- he was dealing with the son of a Congressman.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:18:52:03

Yeah.

DAN RATHER:

02:18:52:26

Ambassador. Former Congressman.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:18:53:14

Right.

DAN RATHER:

02:18:54:28

And the hard place being that the General in charge of all of this was, I think you said, well in with the Houston political

establishment.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:19:05:24

Oh, yes. He was very, very--

DAN RATHER:

02:19:07:06

That would be General Stout.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:19:07:17

-- and at that time he was very connected with the State-- political establishment because he had been appointed to his job for Ross Ayers, the new Adjutant General under the new Governor Preston Smith.

DAN RATHER:

02:19:22:22

So Colonel Killian, what he's looking up to, is Bobby Hodges, whom you described as a good man. But a friend and under General Stout.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:19:34:22

Yes. That would be a fair assessment. I-- I don't-- I-- I'm not sure any of these men were ca-- were, at that particular point, they certainly weren't willing if they were capable of bucking Buck Stout. Okay. You

didn't buck Buck Stout.

DAN RATHER:

02:19:53:07

And Buck Stout was well connected with the Bushes?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:19:54:09

He was well connected with the Bushes and he was well connected with the Houston political establishment and he was well connected with the Governor's office. His appointment as Chief of Staff came at the behest of the new Democratic Governor, Preston Smith.

DAN RATHER:

02:20:08:19

Well, President Bush said he served honorably during the Vietnam War. On the basis of your experience, what you know, do you think he did?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:20:20:25

Based on these new documents I-- I question that assertion. Up to this point, until I'd seen these documents about the flight physical-- I was willing to give 'em the

benefit of the doubt. But now I-- I have serious questions about his unwillingness to satisfactory-- you know the government spent a lot of money training George W. Bush to be a Pilot. He had a military obligation, Okay?

02:20:50:16

To do what the government, what the Air Force and what the Texas Air National Ca-- Guard needed him to do during this time. However he got into the Guard, for whatever reasons he got into the Guard-- he had an obligation that he should have fulfilled.

02:21:10:06

I fulfill (SIC) my military obligation-- for the entire time. I'm-- I'm really kind of perplexed as to why he-- couldn't finish his time. I mean, you know, I'd one time considered becoming a Pilot. Actually I had asked for and had initially received a flight training slot. And because of family circumstances-- decided not to take it.

02:21:37:20

I had a new wife and a new child and I just decided I couldn't go on Pilot training. But that's a serious commitment. And-- he did not, in my view, keep the commitment.

DAN RATHER:

02:21:50:05

Now you based that statement; he did not, in your view, keep the commitment on what?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:21:55:14

On the fact that he-- he make-- he essentially entered into a contract with the Air Force and with the Texas Air National Guard-- to be a pilot. Okay? And unless he had some medical reason-- or some diminishment of capacity that kept him from being able to be a pilot, I don't understand why he walked away from it.

02:22:21:15

Because it appears, based on these documents, that he: 1. Refused to take his physical. His flight physical which meant he couldn't fly. And based on what Colonel Killian reports in these documents, he

appears to want out of flying. He wanted to be transferred to some non-flying unit.

02:22:42:10

And I guess it's Okay to decide that you don't wanna fly anymore. But-- you know that wasn't-- that wasn't the contract he made. That wasn't the commitment he made.

DAN RATHER:

02:22:50:20

The country was still at war, right?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:22:52:12

The country was still at war. Yes. We-- we hear a lot about war. Yes, the country was at war.

DAN RATHER:

02:22:58:04

I-- I-- I'm puzzled by all this. Do you have any reasonable explanation of what happened? You were there-- you-- you knew all the players. I mean help me, help the viewer understand; what the hell is this about?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:23:14:17

Well, it's first and foremost, is about

power. Okay. I don't know that I understand all the intricacies of it. You know I've never been powerful enough or associated with enough power that I could pick up the phone and get political favors done for me. So you know I don't-- I don't have any first-hand experience with that.

02:23:34:27

I-- I-- I can't explain it. I really don't know how to explain it. It's-- (SIGHS) the-- the-- the whole environment of all of these people being allowed-- being showed favoritism in getting into the Guard, which essentially protected them from being drafted, which protected them from being sent to Vietnam.

02:24:01:27

It-- it's-- in-- in many ways unconscionable, Okay. The system ought not to work like that. It ought to be-- have done on the basis of first-come-first-served and-- and merit, Okay. Not on who your

father was, or who your grandfather was.
How well-- how much money they had or how
well politically connected they were.

02:24:23:08

But I-- I'm sorry. I can't get in the mind
of-- of George W. Bush about why he did what
he did. I don't know. And from a military
standpoint, I can't explain why there were
no consequences for what he did.

02:24:41:11

Based on the fact that ultimately the Texas
Air National Guard and the 147th simply
chose to release 'em from his obligation to
go back to school, I think they wanted to be
rid of 'em. (PAUSE) That's the only
reasonable explanation I can come up with.

DAN RATHER:

02:24:58:07

An awful lot of people have stayed very
silent about all of this for a very long
time. Why is that?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:25:08:21

Money and power. I don't know. Again,

you're asking me to get in other people's heads. I don't know about other people's heads.

DAN RATHER:

02:25:17:00

You know it took us four and a half almost five years to get these documents. A lot of people are staying-- are staying very quiet.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:25:27:02

Well, a lot of people may have a lot to lose if they were-- involved in-- some of these acts and-- some of these political favors. So they may. Other people may-- politically may be in such a place that they don't wanna be involved in it. I don't-- I don't know.

DAN RATHER:

02:25:50:14

Well, you know the reporters rule; there are no bad questions.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:25:54:11

(CHUCKLES)

DAN RATHER:

02:25:55:08

What are the chances somebody got paid off?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:26:01:03

I'm not a gambling man-- man, I-- I'm not going there. (CHUCKLES) I don't know. I mean, what-- what do you mean by a pay off? Do you mean that somebody was actually given money? I don't know you know. I know that one person who was very active in-- trying to get the quote truth out four or five years ago, now supposedly is working for-- the President's campaign. You know, I don't know.

DAN RATHER:

02:26:29:12

Who might that be?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:26:29:12

Did they pay him off?

DAN RATHER:

02:26:30:00

Whose that?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:26:30:26

I understand that Colonel Lloyd who-- Colonel Allen Lloyd who was-- I know four or five years ago was involved in-- some of these same kind of interviews and

discussions. I understand now he's working for the Bush presidential campaign. So I-- is that a payoff? Did-- I don't know why Al changed his mind and doesn't want to talk about this anymore.

DAN RATHER:

02:26:53:26

Well, anything else you want to say about all of this? Particularly after reading the documents. Anything that you are saying to yourself; I-- I wanna make sure people understand this.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:27:08:14

Well, hmmm. I-- I would-- I'm not sure any of us will ever know all the truth about what happened 35 years ago, which is basically what we're talking about. You know everybody sees truth from their own perspective. So-- I-- I admire what you're doing. I think the more information we can find out, the more documents that can be uncovered.

02:27:35:26

I'm distressed about the fact that supposedly the American public was presented with a complete military record for President Bush, which it turns out, is not a complete military record. That, you know-- I-- I'm-- I'm still-- I would be very interested to know where his Officer Efficiency Reports are for this-- this last year.

02:28:00:10

Every officer in the-- in the Air Guard and in the Air Force has an annual Officer Efficiency Report. I know I had mine. I assume that mine are in my-- in my records. I-- no, I-- where is his-- where does this show up in his official records. I mean these documents are all essentially memorandum for records. Or they're memorandum that were sent up from Colonel Killian up to Colonel Hodges up to the Group Commander.

02:28:29:13

And those memos may or may not have been in-- in-- in Lt. Bush's official record. But they were in somebody's records. And somewhere there's an Officer Efficiency Report for Lt. Bush for that last year he was on active duty. Has anybody seen that Officer Efficiency-- who-- who signed that Officer Efficiency report? And what was-- how was he rated that last year.

02:28:53:11

We've-- we've been hearing a lot of talk in the current political season about the other candidate's military performance. You know these-- these documents tell me something about Lt. Bush's military performance in 1972. And it's not, in my view, a very pretty picture.

02:29:18:14

What does it tell you?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:29:20:04

Well, I-- I've already said this; I-- I don't feel like that he was living up to his

commitment. He didn't have that far to go to simply finish out his regular-- commitment. As a pilot and as a member of the Air Guard.

DAN RATHER:

02:29:35:27

One question I didn't ask you that I should have; What in fact did they do, these Air National Guard Pilots. Did they patrol the coastline?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:29:44:16

Yeah. They patrolled the coastline. Two-- two-- F-1-- F102 Fighter Interceptors were kept on ready alert in-- in what they called the sheds. And-- they were-- they flew routine missions up and down the-- the-- the Gulf Coast. I've been on Galveston Island and-- just on the beach and had 102's fly overhead.

02:30:05:28

And they-- they-- the-- the obstential (SIC) essential mission of the unit was to protect the Gulf Coast from-- any kind of southern

attack. Of course, in those days, it was-- there was still the issue of Cuba. But that-- that-- that's what they were. They were-- they were fighter interceptors. So--

DAN RATHER:

02:30:30:14

That was their mission?

ROBERT STRONG:

02:30:30:17

That was their-- that was their--

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

02:30:32:02

You raised a good point. I started to say, it was highly unlikely that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were gonna attack the Texas Gulf Course. But you say, well, there was a little concern Cuba might do something.

ROBERT STRONG:

02:30:45:05

Well, yeah. I think there was some real concern. I'm not-- you know the mission of the 147th and the 149th in San Antonio was a very real mission. You know this was-- this was 35 years ago. We-- we-- we-- it was the

'cold war.' There was a communist state supported by the Soviet Union-- just a few miles off the Florida coast.

02:31:06:16

There were these fighter interceptor groups all around the Gulf Coast. They performed a-- a-- a critical mission. I don't think there's any question that the mission that they performed was critical (SIC) was-- was a critical mission. Just like the 136 Air Refueling-- group in-- in Dallas flew refueling missions for the regular Air Force.

DAN RATHER:

02:31:28:26

I think we're there. We just ran out of tape.

02:31:34:21

(OFF MIC CONVERSATION)

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CBS NEWS-60 MINUTES WEEKNIGHT

"BUSH GUARD"

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT STRONG

CORRESPONDENT: DAN RATHER

PRODUCER: MAPES

TAPE #3

DAN RATHER:

03:01:04:13

You said there was one thing you wanted to come back to.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:01:08:00

Well, when you had asked me a question about my response to all of this. And I-- I think contextualizing and in terms of the current situation. Now we-- we-- we-- we keep talking about being at war and being-- you know he's a war President and all this sort of stuff.

03:01:21:04

Well, you know we were at war in 1972. We were in the middle of the Vietnam War. And I-- I just have a problem with his inclination to walk away from his

obligation-- in the Texas Air National Guard.

DAN RATHER:

03:01:39:22

But if-- if he walked away from his obligation, I mean how many people in the service get to walk away from an obligation. Just walk off.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:01:49:12

Well, apparently from what I've been able to see he did, because he-- he refused to take his physical. Which-- which meant he was not gonna be on flying status. And ultimately they released 'em to go back to school.

03:02:02:24

Now I'm sure there's a regulation somewhere that says, you know, I think he did what five out of his six years or something like that? But we were at war! If war is really what it's about, then we all have a social obligation to do our part.

DAN RATHER:

03:02:20:06

But you can't sign on for a three year hitch or a five year hitch and say at the end of a portion of it; I've had it. I'm gone. You can't do that in the service.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:02:33:05

Not-- you're not supposed to be able to.

DAN RATHER:

03:02:36:21

Is that what you think happened in this case?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:02:39:07

That's what appears to have happened.

DAN RATHER:

03:02:41:20

Well, on the basis of this documents, it would be-- I have some of the documents here. I know you've read them over. But this is from Colonel Killian. This is the 1st of August 1972. I'm gonna read you this. He said; On this date I ordered the first Lt. Bush be suspended from flight status due to failure to perform to US Air Force and Texas Air National Guard

standards. And failure to meet annual physical examination. Flight examination as ordered. 03:03:18:13 When you first heard that and first read that, what was your reaction?

ROBERT STRONG:

20:04:04:09

Well-- that's-- it's kind of damning in the sense that if-- Lt. Bush had some legitimate reason for no longer being able to perform as a Pilot.

DAN RATHER:

03:03:35:19

Says here; failure to perform.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:03:38:05

But there are--

DAN RATHER:

03:03:38:14

-- standards.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:03:38:26

There are-- there were then mechanisms available for a Pilot who no longer felt himself-- able to fly-- that he could put forth a case of why he was no longer able to fly, and shouldn't be on flying status. To

simply fail to maintain his status, and particularly to fail to-- to take his flight physical is just to 'blow it off.'

03:04:04:28

Okay. If he had a legitimate reason for no longer being able to fly or if he had a legitimate reason for no longer wanting to fly, why couldn't he say so? Why couldn't he say; I don't wanna fly any more. I'm not capable of flying anymore. But just to refuse to take his flight physical and to-- to do what he was required to do by regulation I-- I'm incredulous. I don't know quite how to react to it.

03:04:32:02

Because I don't think very many other 1st Lieutenant's would have been able to get away with that without it having shown up adversely in his military record and reflected poorly on his military service.

DAN RATHER:

03:04:48:03

Well, it says flatly here that he was

ordered to take the physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:04:51:14

There's an earlier document going back to May in which Colonel Killian tells his Commander that he ordered-- Lt. Bush to take a physical by a given date.

DAN RATHER:

03:05:05:17

Well, let me read from-- again from this document which was 1st of August, 1972. He's talking about-- he says in Point III: Colonel Killian says; I recommended transfer of this Officer to the 99 21st Air Reserve Squadron in May and forwarded the Air Force form to the 147th. He says; The transfer was not allowed. Period. Officer has made no attempt to meet his training certification or flight physical.

03:05:42:11

Officer has made no attempt to meet his training certification or flight physical. First of all, what does that mean and are you surprised that he wouldn't have done

that?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:05:50:27

Well, I think it means what it says. If Colonel-- if Colonel Killian said he made no attempt, then I would assume that he made no attempt. Which means he didn't. He simply didn't attempt to do it. He didn't try to do it. 03:06:01:29 He didn't attempt to comply with orders. He didn't attempt to comply with-- with the regulations.

DAN RATHER:

03:06:09:09

Were you surprised?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:06:10:06

Yeah, I am kinda surprised. I really am. I-- I'm-- I'm-- I think in some ways I'm kinda surprised that his father let it get-- let 'em get away with it. I'm just really kind of surprised that-- that George H. W. Bush, given his own combat record, and given his own public service record-- would if-- I'm not sure he would have even known.

03:06:34:27

Because I-- I think he would not have been-- proud of his son-- for this kind of lack of performance of duty.

DAN RATHER:

03:06:47:12

You think the father may not have known what was happening with his son?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:06:51:08

I-- I would suspect as much. I would really be surprised if-- if-- if Bush, Sr. Knew what was going on here. Maybe he did. Then I'm-- I'm disappointed in him.

DAN RATHER:

03:07:06:18

Well, let me move on. Now 13th of May, 1972. Colonel Killian again. I advised him, George W. Bush, of our investment in him and his commitment. (PAUSE) What does that mean?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:07:25:11

Well, that's what I was referring to earlier when I said that he knew when he got into the Air National Guard and the Air Force. And when you're in the Air National Guard,

you're in the Air Force. It's a branch of the Air Force. It's part of the Air Force.

03:07:37:15

He knew that when he-- when he signed up to go to Pilot training that he was making a commitment. It costs-- hundreds of thousands of dollars to train a-- a military fighter pilot. And I, as a citizen and as a taxpayer, I'm entitled to a return on my investment.

03:07:59:21

And I think that's probably one of the things that-- that Jerry Killian was so upset about was the fact that the-- the Air Force had invested a lot of money in-- in Lt. Bush. And the Air Force and the United States government was not gonna get a return on it's investment.

DAN RATHER:

03:08:15:27

Well, when someone agrees to do Pilot training, that's a commitment is it not?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:08:21:05

Absolutely is a commitment.

DAN RATHER:

03:08:22:27

A contract.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:08:24:02

I would-- yes. I called it a contract earlier.

DAN RATHER:

03:08:27:00

Certainly your word.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:08:28:05

I-- I-- well, one of the reasons I did not accept a Pilot training slot that I had, was because I judged that I would be unable to fulfill my commitment, and so I simply-- declined the-- the-- the opportunity. Because in assessing my life situation, I realized that it was going to be an unconscionable burden on my-- my new wife and step-son.

DAN RATHER:

03:08:52:20

True or untrue, fact or not, that even in the National Guard you were expected to meet

your full service commitment. Or was it the kind of outfit where people kind of came and went as they pretty much pleased.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:09:08:23

No. I don't think it was a place where people pretty much came and went as they pleased. My-- as far as my personal knowledge is concerned, most of the rest of these other politically connected-- Air Guardsmen, all satisfactorily completed their entire tours with the Air National Guard.

03:09:30:26

John Connelly, Scott Caven were both outstanding young officers. Did their full-- did their full commitment. H. L. Hunt's grandson, Al Hill, did his full commitment. All of these other guys, as far as I know, they did their full-- they did their full time.

DAN RATHER:

03:09:45:12

Including taking their physicals.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:09:46:25

Taking-- well, yeah. Taking their-- if they didn't take their-- I mean it was a violation of regulation not to take your physical. You just-- just can't not take your physical.

DAN RATHER:

03:09:58:20

Well, this document in which Colonel Killian says; Phone call from Bush. Meaning George W. Bush. Discuss options to how Bush can get out of coming to drill from now through November. This is May of 1972. And he says he wants to transfer to Alabama to any unit he can get into. Says he's working on another campaign for his dad. Then, in the next #2, Colonel Killian says; Physical. We talked about him getting his flight physical situation fixed.

03:10:32:25

He says he'll do that in Alabama if he stays in flight status and it goes on. But now, at the end, Colonel Killian says he told

George W. Bush; I told him I had to have written acceptance before you'd be transferred. That is transferred to Alabama. But think he's also talking to someone upstairs. Unquote. (PAUSE) What am I to make of that?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:10:58:14

Well, I think-- I think Colonel Killian thought he was talking to somebody, either in-- the-- headquarters of the Air National Guard or higher up than that. I really don't know. I mean 'upstairs' is one of those general terms. But that means anybody more powerful than you is what it means. You know it-- it-- I--

(OVER TALK)

DAN RATHER:

03:11:20:13

It means he's going around Colonel Killian.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:11:22:01

Of course. Yeah. I mean-- I mean I have no fir-- first hand knowledge of who was being talked to, but clearly Colonel Killian

thought that-- that Lt. Bush was going over his head and talking to someone-- above-- Colonel Killian and the chain of command.

DAN RATHER:

03:11:39:10

I want to come back to one thing that you said. I want to pursue it a little bit. You said that every year an officer is supposed to get an Efficiency Report.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:11:47:18

Uh-huh (AFFIRM). It's OER. The abbreviation was OER. Officer's Efficiency Reports. An annual report that's done on every Officer in the military. I don't know what it's called now, but that's what it was called then.

DAN RATHER:

03:11:59:22

So there would have been somewhere, an Efficiency Report on Lt. George W. Bush's last year.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:12:09:00

There should have been.

DAN RATHER:

03:12:11:06

The-- what I'll call without prejudice either way. The mystery here of what he did or did not do when he was in Alabama. There should be an Efficiency Report somewhere.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:12:19:14

There should be an Efficiency Report someplace. And-- and I-- I would be-- I would be really disturbed if his Officer Efficiency Report for this time period did not include the information that's in these documents. For him to have failed to take his flight physical. For him to have failed to complete mandatory training, should have reflected negatively in his Officers Efficiency Report.

03:12:49:17

And his Officers Efficiency Report should be a part of his permanent official record. I'll bet ya it's a permanent part of mine and I bet it's a permanent part of yours. And so I-- I-- if-- if this lack of

performance or refusal to perform by Lt. Bush during his last year in the Texas Air National Guard is not reflected in his Officer Efficiency Report, then there's some-- there's another big hole here. That means-- you know I-- I've never even heard about whether there is an Officer Efficiency Report.

DAN RATHER:

03:13:27:01

I know of none.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:13:27:25

For that particular year. But if there is, it would be very interesting to see what's on that Officer Efficiency Report because I can't imagine how an Officer Efficiency Report, an honest Officer Efficiency Report for this period could have been written without including the information that's-- contained in Colonel Killian's documents.

DAN RATHER:

03:13:48:04

One that he didn't follow orders. He never-- he-- he didn't show up for the physical.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:13:53:09

Right.

DAN RATHER:

03:13:55:10

And also that he was-- he was ordered Lt. Bush to be suspended from flight status due to failure to perform up to standards. And failure to get his annual physical examination. The Army says-- the Defense Department says that some of these records are missing now. They were lost and this is a common occurrence. Is it?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:14:22:01

Well, yeah. But it's also a common excuse, Okay. I mean, yeah, my-- my active duty Army records were destroyed in a-- in a fire at the-- at the St. Louis Records Center. When I got my Air Force Commission I had to personally reconstruct my own Army records. Fortunately, I had copies of everything.

03:14:40:28

Yeah, records go missing. And-- and I can't say that they didn't go missing. But I--

I'm sorry, when a-- when a man enters political life, and particular when he chooses to run for the highest office in the land, I-- I think he has an obligation to the American public to be able to provide those records.

03:15:06:23

You know all of this stuff about-- about John Kerry's service in Vietnam, there is a complete set of military records that tell an official story. Now I understand that there are the Swift Boat ve-- Swift boat veterans out there who have another take on it. They have another 'spin' on it. But there-- there's a complete official set of documents about John Kerry's service and about most military people's service.

DAN RATHER:

03:15:33:06

Now for George W. Bush, member of the Texas Air National Guard while you were involved, is there a complete set of records?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:15:41:08

Apparently not. And you know given the political nature of the Texas Air National Guard, and the political circumstances involving tube ability of George W. Bush and other politically powerful and wealthy individuals to get into the air-- Texas Air National Guard, I can't say that I'm particularly surprised that the records have gone missing.

03:16:09:09

It's politically very expedient. I-- I'm disappointed in the Air Force. I'm disappointed in the Texas Air National Guard, but I'm not surprised.

DAN RATHER:

03:16:19:20

Do you think somewhere, somebody has a copy of some of these records that are now quote; missing?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:16:26:09

Probably.

DAN RATHER:

03:16:28:15

Like an Efficiency Report for that last

year. That the kind of thing somebody might have squirreled away?

ROBERT STRONG:

03:16:33:08

Could be. It's possible. Obviously somebody squirreled these away.

DAN RATHER:

03:16:37:14

Well, if you find somebody that has that, call me collect.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:16:38:19

Oh (LAUGHS) Okay I will. I don't think they're gonna be volunteering it to me, Dan.
(LAUGHS)

DAN RATHER:

03:16:46:03

Well, so far they didn't volunteer it to me. I think we're there.

03:16:49:23

(OFF MIC CONVERSATION)

ROBERT STRONG:

03:16:55:24

Okay. I-- I did ask Mary something and I'm gonna-- I want to put it to you, personally.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:00:07

Sure.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:16:59:25

I do not want my university in any way associated with me.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:04:25

It will not be. Mary-- it was the first-- well not the first thing. The first thing Mary told me is that you--

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:09:01

We're a private school.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:10:02

I understand.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:11:03

And it could be-- you know they didn't have anything to do with it. The other thing is; if ya'll are really going to air this Wednesday night.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:18:22

That's our plan.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:19:22

Okay. I would appreciate knowing. Because I do need to advise my Dean that this is going to happen.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:24:25

Well, two things; we have two things here.

1. We're not good at everything but both Mary and I feel very strongly; we will do what we say we will do and we will not do what we say we will not do.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:36:23

Okay.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:38:14

And I've got you loud and clear. Mary told me the whole arrangement about the university.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:41:12

I'm really concerned about it.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:42:03

We're not even gonna-- refer to you as a professor.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:45:23

Okay.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:47:17

You know just have your name.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:17:48:07

Right.

DAN RATHER:

03:17:49:20

But certainly not with the university. 2. While I am in the 90 percentile certainty that we're gonna air this Wednesday night, I'm not absolutely certain. We have two missing pieces which we'd like to have. Neither one is mandatory, but we'd like to have it. I will have Mary and I'll take the responsibility; when we're absolutely certain--

ROBERT STRONG:

03:18:08:00

When it's gonna air.

DAN RATHER:

03:18:09:05

No need for you to talk to your Dean if--

ROBERT STRONG:

03:18:10:05

No.

DAN RATHER:

03:18:11:28

Then we will call you immediately when we're absolutely certain. I think that call will probably come tomorrow.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:18:15:29

Okay. Whether-- whether it's this Wednesday or next Wednesday, I don't want to go-- I don't want to go say anything to anybody until it's a reality.

DAN RATHER:

03:18:22:00

I understand.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:18:24:22

But-- but I need-- I need 24 hours to go in and talk to my Dean.

DAN RATHER:

03:18:27:13

I understand.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:18:28:02

She needs to know that it's coming.

DAN RATHER:

03:18:29:22

Right.

ROBERT STRONG:

03:18:30:06

And she can decide what she wants to do about it.

* * * END OF INTERVIEW * * *

* * * END OF TRANSCRIPT * * *