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# POLITICS

## AMERICA VOTES 2004 SPECIAL REPORT

### Bush releases his Vietnam-era military files

#### Retired Guardsman recalls president's service in Alabama

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**WASHINGTON (CNN) --** Hundreds of pages of President Bush's Vietnam-era military files were released to the media Friday amid questions about whether he completed his required service in the Air National Guard.

About 400 pages of what officials have been able to find of his military records -- from 1968 to 1973 -- were released early in the evening.

Bush's military service was an issue briefly during the 2000 presidential election, and Democrats have raised the issue anew this election year, focusing on the year that Bush worked in Alabama.

The documents released contained only one statement related to his service between May 1972 and May 1973, after Bush asked for a transfer from Texas to Alabama so he could work on the Senate campaign of family friend Winton Blount.

The statement from a Texas Air National Guard official about Bush's transfer to Alabama was dated May 2, 1973.

"Lt. Bush has not been observed at this unit during the period of report (5/1/72 - 4/30/73). A civilian occupation made it necessary for him to move to Montgomery, Ala. He cleared this base 15 May 1972 and has been performing equivalent training ... [at] Dannelly ANG Base, Alabama," wrote Lt. Col. William Harris Jr.

Reporters were also allowed to review Bush's medical records from 1968 to 1971 but not to remove them from the Roosevelt Room.

The White House said those records show Bush reported for duty in Texas and Alabama, and was discharged honorably, and that he was in good health and fit to fly. The medical reports were from Texas, Alabama and Georgia.

George W. Bush is shown during his time in the Texas Air National Guard in this undated photo.

George W. Bush is shown during his time in the Texas Air National Guard in this undated photo.

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The other documents are organized into three files: Bush's Texas Air National Guard performance report; a summary on his service that was compiled in 2000; and another summary compiled this year.

Much of the material is repetitive. Personal information — such as Social Security numbers and medical information about family members — was blacked out.

Bush decided Friday afternoon to release the papers, the White House said.

Democratic presidential hopeful John Kerry's campaign said the release has been long in coming.

"It's good to see that after 10 years of stonewalling, George W. Bush is finally releasing his National Guard records," a campaign statement said. "Does this mean he's now ready to come clean with the American people and release the White House documents on pre-September 11th intelligence? Will he start telling the truth about Iraq and weapons of mass destruction and the rush to war?"

### Guardsman remembers

On Friday, a retired officer with the Alabama Air National Guard told CNN that he witnessed Bush serving his weekend duty in 1972 -- an account that could be significant given the persistent Democratic questions.

Speaking Friday from Daytona Beach, Florida, John B. "Bill" Calhoun said he commanded Bush and that Bush attended four to six weekend drills at Dannelly Field in Montgomery. He said Bush was with the 187th Tactical Reconnaissance Group in Alabama in 1972.

The drills consisted of eight-hour shifts Saturdays and Sundays, Calhoun said.

"We didn't have the planes that he could fly," Calhoun said. "But he studied his manuals, he read flying safety regulations, accident reports — things pilots do quite often when they are not getting ready to fly or if they don't have other duties."

When Bush first arrived, he said he was living in Montgomery and working on the Senate campaign, Calhoun said.

Calhoun said he learned from another person that Bush was the son of George H.W. Bush, who at the time was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Calhoun said he asked the younger Bush if he planned to pursue a political career, and he said, "I don't know, probably."

The retired general said he is not surprised that more servicemen haven't come forward to talk about Bush's time at the base because they're a lot older and may have died, or retired and "gone on with their lives."

Calhoun said he does not have any photographs or documents to prove Bush showed up for duty, but his ex-wife, Patsy Burks, said she remembered Calhoun's account.

"Bill did come home [from the base] and told me that Bush was there," she said "I think what stuck in my head was that he was helping on the Senate campaign.

"What I do know about Bill is that whatever he says is the truth," she added. "This issue came up in the 2000 election. ... Bill did mention in 2000 that he contacted someone and said, 'If you need me to come forward, I will.' And they said, 'We're hoping that won't be necessary.'"

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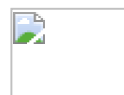
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Questions about Bush's Guard service have intensified in recent weeks after Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe charged that Bush was absent without leave from his Guard service from May 1972 to May 1973, after he asked for the transfer.

Retired Lt. Col. Bill Burkett told CNN that in 1997, he overheard Joe Allbaugh, Bush's chief of staff while Bush was Texas governor, tell the adjutant general of the Texas National Guard to gather Bush's files and "make sure there wasn't anything there that would embarrass the governor." About 10 days later, Burkett said, he saw many of Bush's files in a trash can. ([Guardsmen says he saw Bush's Guard records in trash](#))

Allbaugh reacted angrily to Burkett's charges, calling them "hogwash" and "absolute garbage." Allbaugh, who also served as the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said he doesn't even know who the "goober" is, referring to Burkett.

Burkett's allegations were posted on Web sites just before the 2000 presidential election but were largely unreported by conventional media, according to USA Today.

But questions have lingered since that year's presidential campaign, after the Boston Globe uncovered a May 1973 evaluation by Bush's commander stating that the first lieutenant had not been seen during the previous year.

*CNN's Suzanne Malveaux and Justine Redman contributed to this report.*

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