

Anti-Kerry ad by vets loses credibility

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W&N Editor

The recent release of military records of a prominent member of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, a public advocacy group of Vietnam veterans who opposed Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's anti-war activism, has cast doubt over the group's anti-Kerry television advertisements, which began airing earlier this month.

Larry Thurlow commanded a Navy Swift boat with Kerry during the Vietnam War. Both men were awarded Bronze Stars for actions taken March 13, 1969, when Viet Cong forces on the banks of the Bay Hap fired on their boat after a mine explosion hit another U.S. craft. Kerry received his Bronze Star for rescuing Lt. James Rassmann, a Special Forces officer who went overboard after a second explosion hit his boat, while Kerry himself was injured and still under fire. Thurlow was awarded the Bronze Star for aiding a disabled Swift boat while he was also under fire.

Thurlow swore in an affidavit last month and has said in several interviews and in John O'Neill's new book *Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry* that his and Kerry's boat was never under fire. "My personal feeling was always that I got the award for coming to the rescue of the boat that was mined," Thurlow, a registered Republican, said in a telephone interview with *The Washington Post*.

The Post, however, obtained Thurlow's military records, including a Bronze Star recommendation that says his actions "took place under constant enemy small arms fire which LTJG THURLOW completely ignored in providing immediate assistance" to the disabled Swift boat and its crew. Lt. Cmdr. George M. Elliott, who supports Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, signed Kerry's and Thurlow's Bronze Star recommendations after receiving after-action reports at his base in the Gulf of Thailand (Thurlow has accused Kerry of having undue influence over those reports).

Jack Chenoweth and Richard Pees, two other Swift boat skippers who were with Kerry and Thurlow, have disputed the documented "enemy fire" on the Bay Hap.

Commander Don Droz, a fourth witness to the events of March 13, died

in April 1969 in Vietnam.

Rassmann, who appeared alongside Kerry during the Democratic National Convention in Boston, has affirmed that he was under fire after he went overboard and as Kerry rescued him.

On Aug. 22, Kerry's campaign began airing a television advertisement of its own accusing President George W. Bush of supporting the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth advertisements. Stephanie Cutter, the communications director of Kerry's campaign, told *The New York Times* that the ad would air in the same states as Swift Boats for Truth's advertisement: Ohio, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

The ad's narrator reads, "Bush smeared John McCain four years ago. Now, he's doing it to John Kerry. George Bush: Denounce the smear. Get back to the issues. America deserves better" (the ad refers to Arizona Senator John McCain's loss in the 2000 South Carolina Republican primary after Bush supporters aired advertisements accusing McCain of ignoring veterans).

The Bush campaign has denied any link to Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, a "527 group" which, per federal election law, may raise funds and air advertisements attacking candidates, but is prohibited from aligning with a presidential campaign. However, several high-profile Bush supporters have reportedly financed the group, which has received over \$450,000 in donations since it began airing the anti-Kerry ads.

According to *The Dallas Morning News*, Houston developer Bob Perry, a supporter of President George W. Bush's gubernatorial and presidential campaigns whom Bush's chief political aide Karl Rove describes as a friend, sent two checks for \$100,000 each.

The New York Times reported that Texas businessman Harlan Crow, another Bush backer, has also donated funds. Retired colonel Kenneth Cordier, a former member of Bush's veterans advisory panel, appeared in a Swift Boat Veterans for Truth advertisement (according to members of the Bush campaign, he participated in the advertisement without their knowledge; Cordier resigned from the veterans advisory panel last weekend).

On Aug. 23, Bush spoke to reporters from his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and criticized the advertisements of "527 groups," calling them "bad for the system." He did not, however, directly ask



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Kerry, top row center, with fellow soldiers in Vietnam.

the group to stop airing the anti-Kerry advertisement.

President of the campus chapter of College Democrats, sophomore Adam Waxman, is also critical of the ads, and of the controversy over Kerry's military record.

"I just think that it's a way for Bush to distract debate from issues we need to be talking about, like the failing economy and the war in Iraq," he said.

Jerry Joplin, an associate professor of justice and policy studies who served in Vietnam 1968 - 69, agrees.

"To me, the ads themselves seem to be purely politically motivated," he said. "These guys that want to say something now - why didn't they say this when it happened? They've waited until a few months before the general

election to make these comments."

Joplin accused both campaigns of resorting to "attack ads."

"In a way, (the MoveOn PAC) is doing the same things against Bush," he said. "I may find that less objectionable, but it's just not a healthy campaign, and that's my big objection to it. Who needs this stuff? Nobody."

The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth advertisement in question accuses Kerry of lying about his actions in Vietnam for which he received a Bronze Star, a Silver Star, and three Purple Hearts. ☼

This article is the first in a weekly series covering the upcoming presidential election.

THE GUILFORDIAN Corrections

In the August 20 issue of *The Guilfordian*, Adrienne Craig's name was misspelled as "Andrienne Craig" in the "Staff positions filled" box on page 3. Also, the main extension for Campus Life was misreported as x2101 on page 8. The correct number is x2186. *The Guilfordian* would like to apologize for these errors.

The Guilfordian strives to maintain accuracy and balance in our reporting. If you should discover any factual error printed in this edition, please leave a detailed message for Editor-in-Chief Taleisha Bowen in *The Guilfordian* office, x2306, or e-mail the paper at: guilfordian@guilford.edu including the word "correction" in the subject line.