

Bush and Vietnam: The unreported pay-off

By Greg Palast
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In 1968, former Congressman George Herbert Walker Bush of Texas, fresh from voting to send other men's sons to Vietnam, enlisted his own son in a very special affirmative action program, the 'champagne' unit of the Texas Air National Guard. There, Top Gun fighter pilot George Dubya was assigned the dangerous job of protecting Houston from Vietcong air attack.

This week, former Lt. Governor Ben Barnes of Texas 'fessed up to pulling the strings to keep Little George out of the jungle. "I got a young man named George W. Bush into the Texas Air Guard – and I'm ashamed."

That's far from the end of the story.

In 1994, George W. Bush was elected governor of Texas by a whisker. By that time, Barnes had left office to become a big time corporate lobbyist. To an influence peddler like Barnes, having damning information on a sitting governor is worth its weight in gold – or, more precisely, there's a value in keeping the info secret.

Barnes appears to have made lucrative use of his knowledge of our President's slithering out of the draft as a lever to protect a multi-billion dollar contract for a client. That's the information in a confidential letter buried deep in the files of the US Justice Department that fell into my hands at BBC television.

Here's what happened. Just after Bush's election, Barnes' client GTech Corp., due to allegations of corruption, was about to lose its license to print money: its contract to run the Texas state lottery. Barnes, says the Justice Department document, made a call to the newly elected governor's office and saved GTech's state contract.

The letter said, "Governor Bush ... made a deal with Ben Barnes not to rebid [the GTech lottery contract] because Barnes could confirm that Bush had lied during the '94 campaign."

In that close race, Bush denied the fix was in to keep him out of 'Nam, and the US media stopped asking questions. What did the victorious Governor Bush's office do for Barnes? According to the tipster, "Barnes agreed never to confirm the story [of the draft dodging] and the governor talked to the chair of the lottery two days later and she then agreed to

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support letting GTech keep the contract without a bid.”

And so it came to pass that the governor’s commission reversed itself and gave GTech the billion dollar deal without a bid.

The happy client paid Barnes, the keeper of Governor Bush’s secret, a fee of more than \$23 million. Barnes, not surprisingly, denies that Bush took care of his client in return for Barnes’s silence. However, confronted with the evidence, the former Lt. Governor now admits to helping the young George stay out of Vietnam.

Take a look at the letter yourself – with information we confirmed with other sources - at <http://www.gregpalast.com/ulf/documents/draftdodgeblanked.jpg>).

Frankly, I don’t care if President Bush cowered and ran from Vietnam. I sure as hell didn’t volunteer ... but then, my daddy didn’t send someone else in my place. And I don’t march around aircraft carriers with parachute clips around my gonads talking about war and sacrifice.

More important, I haven’t made any pay-offs to silence those who could change my image from war hero to war zero.

By the way: I first reported this story, including the evidence of payback, in The Observer of London, in 1999. US media closed its eyes. Then I put the story on British television last year in the one-hour report, “Bush Family Fortunes.” American networks turned down BBC’s offer to run it in the USA. “Wonderful film,” one executive told me, “but Time Warner is not going to let us put this on the air.” However, US networks will take cash for advertisements calling Kerry a Vietnam a coward.

The good news is, until Patriot Act 3 kicks in, they can’t stop us selling the film to you directly. The updated version of “Bush Family Fortunes,” with the full story you still can’t see on your boob tube, will be released next month in DVD. See a preview at <http://www.gregpalast.com/bff-dvd.htm>

For more on our president’s war years and the \$23 million payment, read this excerpt from the New York Times bestseller, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy. <http://www.gregpalast.com/detail.cfm?artid=233&row=1>