

Dupes And Skeptics

by Digby

Not that it matters, because the echo chamber seems to have made a decision, but there are a couple of interesting articles today in the *SF Gate* (“Authenticity backed on Bush documents”) and the *Boston Globe* (“Some skeptics now say IBM typewriter could have been used”) about the premature conclusions reached by the so-called experts in typewriter-gate. There are some who are sticking to their guns but at least two of them are questionable themselves.

I would like to see someone do a thorough forensic investigation on how the skepticism on the memos made its way so quickly into the mainstream. This is a good start. What it says is that once again, the Mighty Wurlitzer played the press for chumps. And, I suppose it won’t be the last time because press feels no shame or guilt about falling for GOP super-spin time after time.

Today, we hear the startling news that General Hodges now says he was misled into believing that the memos were handwritten, which for some reason is supposed to make a difference. He claims that he said, “well if he wrote them, that’s what he felt.”

According to the *Washington Post*, the conversation went like this:

A senior CBS official, who asked not to be named because CBS managers did not want to go beyond their official statement, named one of the network’s sources as retired Maj. Gen. Bobby W. Hodges, the immediate superior of the documents’ alleged author, Lt. Col. Jerry B. Killian. He said a CBS reporter read the documents to Hodges over the phone, and Hodges replied that “these are the things that Killian had expressed to me at the time.”

Now, it’s possible that CBS is just lying outright on a story that was guaranteed to put the entire Republican establishment into a frenzy. Or, perhaps they were terribly sloppy. If you believe Hodges today that is what you have to assume because whether or not these memos were handwritten is irrelevant if they were simply read to Hodges over the phone. And the quote from CBS is entirely different from the one that Hodges claims he gave them.

I will take the big leap here and say that the likely scenario is that when Hodges heard that they had these memos he figured he might as well tell the truth, which was that they reflected Killian’s feelings as he remembered them. After the memos were called into question he lied about what he told CBS. (I would say that he’d better be sure they didn’t have it on tape, but then the tape will be called a forgery and we’d be back on the merry-go-round.) Logic says that CBS, being a professional news organization, knew that this was an explosive story and was extremely careful with its quotes.

None of the hysterical forensic evidence produced so far has held up. The *Boston Globe* article pretty well establishes that the “experts” who were contacted by the *Post* and others in the first cycle had their heads up their asses about what was and wasn’t in use during the period. Nobody, as far as I know, has done the basic forensic task of comparing Killian’s other memos of the period with these, which would probably shed real light on the subject.

Meanwhile, Killian’s wife and son, who if you believe them must have spent many Thanksgivings and Christmases engaged in fond recollections of that fine first Lieutenant George W. Bush, say that they know their husband/father wouldn’t have written those memos. And according to the *LA Times* this influenced Hodges on the issue:

On Friday night, retired Maj. Gen. Hodges, Killian’s former supervisor, said in an interview that he also now believes the documents are not real—in part because of the statements of Killian’s relatives.

Certainly it is very common for wives to have intimate knowledge of the work memo stylings of their husbands and can vouch for their reliability 30 years after the fact. One should always believe them over a man like Robert Strong, a friend and colleague of Killian who ran the TANG *administrative office* in the Vietnam era, and who said on camera:

“They are compatible with the way business was done at the time. They are compatible with the man that I remember Jerry Killian being,” says Strong. “I don’t see anything in the documents that is discordant with what were the times, what was the situation and what were the people involved.”

His testimony was very interesting and nobody gives a damn. What he said was that the TANG of the period was completely corrupt. That the kind of favors being granted to rich little chickenhawks like George W. Bush were commonplace. I know that it doesn’t speak directly to whether the documents are real but it’s a helluva lot more relevant than whether Mrs Killian thinks that Lil’ Georgie Bush was a nice boy.

Interestingly, in the *LA Times* Hodges seemed to walk back a little bit on what he said to ABC:

He also said that he could not recall any conversations in which Killian had complained about Bush’s performance or about the fact that Bush failed in August 1972 to take a physical exam, removing him from flight status

“I have no recollection of anything like that happening,” said Hodges. “It’s possible we did talk about the physical not happening, because we would have to ground him.”

In other words, after he’d shot his mouth off, Hodges remembered that he signed off on the grounding. It goes on:

The retired Guard general, who favors the president’s reelection, called Bush “a truly outstanding pilot.” He called Killian “a good guy” who “ran a tight ship” and might have had concerns about Bush’s service.

“But he was maybe a little bit too conscientious, because he wanted his pilots to do everything perfect,” Hodges said. “Pilots, like everyone else, are not perfect. [Killian] was conscientious to a fault.”

So, if the memos do turn out to be real, it was Killian’s fault because he was a tight ass perfectionist about pilots being qualified to fly million dollar airplanes.

(Still think this guy didn’t tell CBS what they say he told them?)

(As for Bush being an outstanding pilot, this brings up some new questions on that.)

Perhaps we will never know what the truth is, but we do know three very important things.

First, contrary to the malarkey that the Wurlitzer began circulating almost immediately, every single so-called anomaly in the documents that made them questionable could have been produced by typewriters in use at the time. The press jumped the gun and the “experts” were wrong.

Second, CBS had every reason to be extremely careful with its quotes on this story. Hodges, the Bush supporter, has every reason to lie about what he told CBS now that the documents have been called into question. His babbling about handwritten vs type-written makes no sense. He admits that Killian had very high standards and didn’t hold with pilots not meeting them. Therefore, it’s not reasonable to assume that Hodges saying that he told CBS “if he wrote it, it must be true” is more credible than CBS’s original quote. Indeed, it is ridiculous.

Third, the statements of Killian’s family are irrelevant compared to the statement of Strong who handled Killian’s work documents and others like it at the time. Unless you

believe that spouses and children have better direct knowledge of workplace events than co-workers, that is the only conclusion to which you can come.

But, that is not going to be the story. From this point forward it will be who in John Kerry's campaign (Clinton??) forged the documents:

McClellan made this clear:

Q: Scott, on the National Guard documents, do you have any suspicions about their authenticity?

Mr. McClellan: We don't know whether the documents were fabricated or are authentic. You know, the media has talked to independent experts who have raised questions about the documents. CBS has not disclosed where the documents came from. But, regardless, it does not—the documents do not change the facts. The President met his obligations and was honorably discharged. And the one thing that is clear is the timing and the coordination going on here. There is an orchestrated effort by Democrats and the Kerry campaign to tear down the President because of the direction the polls are moving. And it's not surprising that we're seeing the same old recycled attacks. The Democrats are determined to throw the kitchen sink at us, and I suspect this is just the beginning.

Q: When you use the word "coordination," it seems to suggest in a legal sense that the Kerry campaign is illegally coordinating with the 527—

Mr. McClellan: It's clear. I mean, look at the media reports, they've documented the coordinated efforts by Democrats to tear down the President here, because they're falling behind in the polls. You look at the—The Washington Post had a story about it today, talking about the multi-front effort by the Democratic National Committee, other Democrats. You have outrageous comments being made by Senator Harkin. You have the Democratic National Committee using the term "Operation Fortunate Son." "Fortunate Son" was the name of a book by an ex-convict that was widely discredited in the 2000 campaign.

This whole pushback by the right, from the blogosphere to the Wurlitzer to the Whitehouse, is absolutely masterful. And, it should give everyone pause if they think there is even a snowball's chance in hell that any member of the Bush administration will ever get justice for the crimes they have committed while in office. Clearly, the press and much of the public are so willing to be used that it is hopeless. This entire episode is nothing but a pathetic reminder of how easily they manipulate perceptions.

We'd better be content to congratulate ourselves for having integrity because it's clear that we do not get any public credit for it. Indeed, we are perceived as being just as bad as they are. If that's the case, does it even matter that we aren't?