

BROTHERS IN ARMS

A Film by Paul Alexander

68 Minutes, Color & B&W, Digital Video, 2004



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Brothers in Arms

The Story of the Crew of Patrol Craft Fast 94

In 2003, before John Kerry was the Democratic presidential candidate, acclaimed author and first-time filmmaker Paul Alexander began filming *Brothers in Arms*, which would tell the story of the unique relationship that was formed between six men who endured the horrors of Vietnam together. In the early months of 1969, six men met on a swift boat on the Mekong Delta during some of the worst fighting of the Vietnam War. Five of the men were crewmates --Tommy, Mike, Gene, David, Del -- and they came from across America, from Boston to Northern California, from South Carolina to Iowa. Their commander was a young Yale graduate named John Kerry. The experiences they shared would change their lives forever. The six men have remained close for the last 35 years.

Interviews, photographs and archival footage of the war not only captures the dramatic and true story of what happened to these six brave men in the Mekong Delta, but also recounts what happened after the war and delves into the way each dealt with the experience of fighting in, as David puts it, “a war I discovered we didn’t intend to win.”

In 2002, when Paul Alexander published *Man of the People*, he interviewed some of the men with whom McCain had been imprisoned in the Hanoi Hilton during the Vietnam War. Alexander discovered that McCain and the other POWs shared a bond that was as palpable now as it was more than three decades ago. At the same time he was working on an article about John Kerry in *Rolling Stone*. While researching the piece, he came across the story of Kerry and the crew of PCF 94 and realized they shared the same sort of bond that existed among McCain and his fellow inmates. Kerry has called it “a special, unbreakable bond,” formed by men who lived through life-and-death situations on a daily basis, each looking out for the welfare of the other. They are, as they themselves say, “brothers in arms.”

“There was never a crew of guys who loved their country and fought for each other more than they did. They are still the best of brothers, and the best of America.”

- Senator John Kerry

"Brothers in Arms reveals the courage, the conviction and the pain of those Americans who fight our wars."

- Senator Max Cleland

Credits

Brothers in Arms

Directed by **Paul Alexander**

Produced by **Iris G. Rossi**

Music composed by **Michael Bacon**

Director of Photography/Editor: **Elisabeth Haviland James**

with

David Alston

John Kerry

Mike Medeiros

Del Sandusky

Gene Thorson

Paul Alexander **DIRECTOR**

Paul Alexander makes his directorial debut with *Brothers in Arms*. He is the author of two plays, *Strangers in the Land of Canaan* and *Edge*. *Edge*, the critically acclaimed one-woman show about Sylvia Plath starring Angelica Torn, which he also directed, was developed at the Actors Studio and played Off-Broadway in 2003. He co-hosted "Batchelor and Alexander," syndicated nationally by the ABC Radio Network. He is also the editor of *Ariel Ascending: Writings About Sylvia Plath* and the author of *Rough Magic*, a biography of Plath; *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*, a biography of James Dean; *Death and Disaster*, about Andy Warhol; *Salinger*, a biography of J.D. Salinger; *Man of the People: The Life of John McCain*; and *The Candidate: Behind John Kerry's Remarkable Run for the White House*. His nonfiction has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *The Village Voice*, *Worth*, *The New York Observer*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Interview*, *ARTnews*, *George*, *Mirabella*, *Premiere*, *Out*, *The Advocate*, *Travel and Leisure*, *Mirabella*, *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, *Rolling Stone* and *The Guardian*. He is a graduate of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa and a member of the Authors Guild, PEN America Center, and the Playwrights and Directors Unit of the Actors Studio. He was a Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in the fall of 2002.

IRIS G. ROSSI **PRODUCER**

A veteran of the campaigns of Nelson Rockefeller, Robert Dole, and Ronald Reagan, Iris G. Rossi served on the White House Preservation Board during the Reagan Administration and secured Western art for the White House. She has been a member of the National Women's Republican Club, the State Department Reception Committee, and the advisory boards of the Center for Security Policy and the Center for Marine Conservation. She has worked in the field of public relations and will co-produce *Edge* in London next year.

Elisabeth Haviland James**DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY, EDITOR**

Elisabeth Haviland James is a recent graduate of the M.A. Program in Documentary Film and Video at Stanford University, where she produced and directed four short documentaries. She was awarded an Enersen Foundation grant to create her thesis film *Net Loss*, a portrait of a small Northern California fishing village facing economic crisis and transition. Her other recent films include *Flaunt*, a portrait of a fat liberation activist turned Hip-Hop dancer; *Worms at Work*, a quirky look at the world of worm composting, geared to audiences of all ages; a *Precipice*, a visual essay concerning the future of the human body co-directed with Elizabeth Witham, which was nominated for an Academy Award in the Student Documentary in 2002. While at Stanford she also won the Nicholas Roosevelt Award for Environmental Journalism. Prior to her career in filmmaking, she traveled the world extensively as a tour director for art museums and botanic gardens. She is a graduate of the School of Foreign Service in Georgetown University.

Michael Bacon**COMPOSER**

Michael Bacon's recent projects include the original score for *Berga: Soldiers of Another War* by Charles Guggenheim; *Red Betsy*, an independent feature; *King Gimp*, the Academy Award Winner in the Short Documentary category; *Secret Life of the Brain*, the current Emmy winner; the critically acclaimed five hour documentary on PBS, *Ernest Shackleton-Voyage of Endurance*, *The Hamptons*, a four hour show directed by Barbara Kopple broadcast on ABC; the four hour Emmy Award winning *Truma*, shown on PBS. Other recent PBS shows include *Chicago: City of the Century* (aired in 2003), *TR, Reagan, Young Dr. Freud* (Emmy nominee for music), *America 1900*, *The Wright Stuff*, *Carnegie and MacArthur*, as well as numerous other shows on all major networks. Bacon won an Emmy for his score for *The Kennedys*, an Ace Award nomination for his score for *The Man Who Loved Sharks*, the BMI Television Music Award, and The Chicago International Film Festival Gold Plaque Award for music in *LBJ*. Shows he has scored have won numerous Emmy Awards and three Academy Awards (*The Johnstown Flood*, *A Time For Justice*, *King Gimp*). Jerry Lee Lewis, Carlene Carter, Peter Yarrow and Claude Francois are just a few artists that have recorded songs written by Bacon. He and his brother, Kevin perform music live as The Bacon Brothers. They have appeared on the *Tonight Show*, *Rosie O'Donnell*, *The Early Show*, *The View*, *Vibe*, *Prime Time Country*, *Conan O'Brian*, *Donny and Marie*, *The Howard Stern Show*, *Bravo on Broadway* and *The Today Show*. Their third C.D., *Can't Complain*, was released in the summer 2001. A new live DVD will be released this fall. Bacon has a degree in music from Lehman College where he studied composition and orchestration with John Corigliano. He lives in New York City with his wife, Betsy, and son, Neil, and enjoys playing squash and ice hockey.

THE CREW OF PATROL CRAFT FAST 94

DAVID ALSTON

David Alston was born and raised in South Carolina. He volunteered for the Navy at age 17 and was sent to Vietnam upon high school graduation. He is currently an ordained minister in the Baptist Church and the father of two sons.

TOMMY BELODEAU

Tommy Belodeau was the youngest member of the crew of PCF 94 and a native of Chelmsford, Massachusetts. After Vietnam, he remained in close contact with John Kerry. He passed away in 1997. The boat crew attended his funeral, and Kerry delivered his eulogy.

JOHN KERRY

John Kerry enlisted in the Navy after graduating from Yale University. Upon returning from Vietnam, he helped organize Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He has served as Lieutenant Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and he is currently serving his fourth term as Senator. At present, he is running for President.

MIKE MEDEIROS

Mike Medeiros has made a career out of his Navy and military experience. Before going to Vietnam, he served on a submarine. Today he continues his service as a reservist in California, where he was born and raised.

DEL SANDUSKY

Del Sandusky has spent most of his life as a resident of Illinois. He was the senior enlisted member of the crew of PCF 94 and the leading petty officer. Currently, he splits his time between Illinois and Florida, where he enjoys his retirement.

GENE THORSON

Gene Thorson lives in Ames, Iowa with his wife Betty, with whom he raised four children. Trained as an engineman in Vietnam, Gene continues to use his skills as a mechanic in Ames.

Director's Statement

August 19, 2004

Just this week, a group of men who did not serve directly with John Kerry in Vietnam published a book maligning Kerry's military service. Over the last eighteen months, I have talked to and interviewed the veterans who actually did serve directly with Kerry in Vietnam. I use those interviews as the basis for my documentary film, **BROTHERS IN ARMS**. I decided to focus on the crew of Patrol Craft Fast 94, the last swift boat Kerry commanded. **BROTHERS IN ARMS** is a recounting of the lives of the crew of the 94 before, during, and after Vietnam. While the man behind this recent book never even met Kerry in Vietnam, the crew of the 94 -- Del, Mike, David, and Gene-- lived with Kerry day in and day out on the Mekong Delta in early 1969. If anyone knows the truth of what happened to John Kerry in Vietnam, they do. **BROTHERS IN ARMS** is their story.

-Paul Alexander
Director, **Brothers in Arms**

Documentary Focuses on Kerry in Vietnam

By Calvin Woodward
Associated Press Writer

6:05 PM PDT, August 23, 2004

WASHINGTON — John Kerry's former crew mates vouch for his Vietnam war heroics in a documentary being released in the midst of a campaign debate about his actions as a swift boat skipper.

"Brothers in Arms," a first film by journalist Paul Alexander, features Kerry and four men who served with him on Patrol Craft 94, the last of three boats he commanded during the war and the one from which he won the Silver Star for chasing down and killing a combatant who threatened his crew with a rocket.

With testimony from crew mates who have campaigned by Kerry's side as a Senate candidate and now Democratic presidential nominee, the film is not the definitive word on what happened in the Mekong Delta. Kerry's critics are not interviewed in it.

A campaign ad sponsored by a group of swift boat veterans who did not serve directly under Kerry asserted his wartime injuries and combat actions had been exaggerated and that he did not deserve his Purple Hearts or Bronze and Silver stars.

President Bush, speaking after the ad that caused a great stir stopped running, said Monday that Kerry "served admirably and he ought to be proud of his record."

In "Brothers in Arms," opening at a New York theater on Friday just days before the Republican National Convention starts in the city, Kerry's mates relate the familiar story of their commander fearlessly ordering their boat to be beached in the thick of an enemy outpost, and hunting down a man who intended to fire a rocket at them. They also recount an ambush during which Kerry and his crew rescued survivors of another patrol boat that hit a mine.

Alexander's previous work includes a behind-the-scenes account of Kerry's run for the White House and biographies of Sen. John McCain and cultural icons James Dean and Sylvia Plath. He said he interviewed the crew over the last 18 months, beginning the project well before Kerry was a sure bet to become the presidential nominee.

In the film, Kerry and crew mates David Alston, Mike Medeiros, Del Sandusky and Gene Thorson talk about the bond they formed under fire and their lives since the war. "If anyone knows the truth of what happened to John Kerry in Vietnam, they do," he said. "Brothers in Arms" is their story."

The Washington Post

Kerry Team Lines Up Vietnam Witnesses Bush Again Declines To Condemn Attack Ad

By Lois Romano and Dana Milbank
Washington Post Staff Writers
Tuesday, August 24, 2004
Page A01

The Kerry campaign ratcheted up its defense of the Democrat's military record yesterday, producing three veterans to attest to John F. Kerry's valor in Vietnam while pointing reporters to other veterans who expressed disgust at the attacks on the presidential nominee.

In a conference call with reporters arranged by the campaign, three Navy Swift boat officers who served with Kerry 35 years ago but who said they have not been in touch with him for years defended his service and his bravery. Rich McCann, Jim Russell and Rich Baker said Kerry served honorably and took issue with questions raised by the group Swift Boat Veterans for Truth about his commendations.

"He was the most aggressive officer in charge of Swift boats," Baker said. "With no disrespect to anyone out there, the whole Swift boat operation took courage and guts every time you stepped on those boats. But John Kerry was one step above the rest of us."

The conference call was part of a Kerry offensive aimed at regaining control of an issue that has been the centerpiece of his presidential bid -- his Vietnam service. The campaign has been roiled by an ad that questions Kerry's valor and accuses him of misrepresenting the facts that led to some of his commendations.

President Bush yesterday repeated his condemnation of unregulated money that he said was "pouring" into the political process. But he stopped short of denouncing the ad by Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, which is being aired in three battleground states and is funded largely by Republicans.

Bush praised Kerry's military service in Vietnam. "I think Senator Kerry served admirably, and he ought to be proud of his record," he said.

But, pressed several times by reporters at his ranch in Crawford, Tex., about whether he would specifically condemn the ad, Bush would only say: "That means that ad and every other ad. I'm denouncing all the stuff."

In Oshkosh, Wis., Kerry's running mate, John Edwards, blasted Bush for not being more critical of the ad and the claims by the group. "Today, George Bush faced his moment of

truth and he failed," said Edwards, who has repeatedly called on the president to denounce the veterans group's ad. "He failed to condemn the specific attacks on John Kerry's military record. We didn't need to hear a politician's answer, but unfortunately that's what we got."

Adm. Roy Hoffmann, a founder of the anti-Kerry group, issued a statement in response to Bush's comment: "It would make no difference if John Kerry were a Republican, Democrat or an Independent, Swift Boat Veterans would still be speaking the truth concerning John Kerry's military service record in Vietnam, his actions after returning home and his lack of qualifications to be the next Commander in Chief."

While getting off to a slow start in responding to the ad, Kerry's campaign is frantically trying to mobilize veterans to speak out. Former senator Max Cleland (D-Ga.), who lost three limbs in Vietnam, spent the weekend in Wisconsin denouncing the Swift boat ads and attacks, and Kerry's crewmates have been fanning out across the country to defend him.

In Pennsylvania, crewmate Del Sandusky said at a news conference that he witnessed the combat missions for which Kerry received Silver and Bronze stars and two of his three Purple Hearts. "He deserved every one of his medals," Sandusky said.

William L. Sweidel, a decorated Korean War veteran who appeared with Sandusky, said later that he voted for both Bushes for president but will support Kerry because of these attacks. "I called the campaign to express outrage. I was disappointed. I was diminished," Sweidel said. "Nobody was talking about how it was hurting all veterans to have them criticize Kerry's medals. The whole system is now suspect based on what these people are saying. It's pernicious."

Phil Butler, who spent eight years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, took issue with suggestions by Swift Boat Veterans for Truth that Kerry's antiwar protests caused the POWs to be treated badly. "I lived with two of the POWs who are now in that group -- Mr. [Ken] Courdier and Mr. [Paul] Gallanti -- and I am telling you, they are full of it. We never heard a blooming thing about John Kerry while we were there," said Butler, who contacted the campaign months ago to support Kerry and only recently heard back from Kerry's veterans coordinator, John Hurley.

Butler said that while he was tortured and mistreated until 1969, by the time Kerry was protesting the war and speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1971, the POWs were better treated.

On Friday, a company called First Run Features is slated to debut a documentary about Kerry and his Swift boat crewmates, "Brothers in Arms," in a New York theater. Director Paul Alexander, who calls it "a very sympathetic portrait," said that no one was interested when he finished it last Christmas but that the recent controversy has given it a boost. He said the film will be sold as a DVD and could reach theaters around the country.

In the conference call, Baker said he thought that former senator Robert J. Dole's critical comments Sunday about Kerry's medals were inappropriate and that Dole had no "business" judging the injuries for which Kerry received three Purple Hearts. "John Kerry is lucky to be alive today," Baker said. "The fourth Purple Heart could have been an AK-47 through his heart."

McCann said that he tried to stay out of politics but that when he saw that the Swift boat group had identified him on its Web site as being "neutral" on Kerry without asking him, he was furious. Kerry's commendation record "has stood for 35 years and suddenly you've got people coming forward saying, 'Well, I've had second thoughts about this,' " McCann said. "That is dishonoring not only John Kerry, it is dishonoring all veterans."

In anticipation of the airing of the group's ad attacking Kerry's antiwar efforts, the Kerry campaign has launched a new ad, calling the Swift boat commercials "smears and lies" and accusing the Bush operation of using the same tactic it used against Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) in the 2000 GOP primaries.

In response, the Bush campaign yesterday sent letters to 27 television stations in 11 cities in the battleground states of Ohio, Wisconsin and West Virginia that called the Kerry campaign ad "false and libelous" for its contention that Bush was illegally coordinating with the Swift boat group. The letter did not ask the stations to ban the ad.

Rick Lipps, general manager of WNWO-TV, the NBC affiliate in Toledo, said TV stations were caught in the crossfire between the campaigns. Although he had not seen the Bush campaign's complaint as of late yesterday, Lipps said his station "tries to do its homework" by asking all political advertisers to verify advertising claims. "There isn't much way to take it further than that," he said.

The president's comments yesterday were similar to those he made on CNN's "Larry King Live" on Aug. 12, when King asked him if he would denounce the anti-Kerry ad. "Well, I haven't seen the ad, but what I do condemn is these unregulated soft-money expenditures by very wealthy people," Bush said.

Privately, Bush aides said they felt under no pressure to change their position on the Swift boat ads because the controversy seems to be hurting Kerry more than Bush. But they are irritated that the media have been taking seriously the Kerry complaint to the Federal Election Commission. The complaint, filed yesterday, accuses the Bush campaign of breaking election law by coordinating the ads with the independent group. The Bush aides are determined not to give Kerry an opening by criticizing Swift Boat Veterans for Truth directly.

Questioned after Bush's remarks, White House press secretary Scott McClellan repeatedly declined to criticize the content of the Swift boat ads. "Senator Kerry wants to have it both ways," by selectively calling on Bush to condemn one group's ads, McClellan said. "Senator Kerry can help put an end to all of this by joining us in calling for a stop to all of these ads."

Dole yesterday went back on CNN, where he had made his critical remarks the previous day, to say that he had received a call from Kerry. "I said, 'John, I didn't mean to offend you,' " Dole said. "But I said, 'You know, when you continue to attack George Bush . . . you know, George Bush is my guy.' . . . The final words were 'John, I wish you good luck up to a point.' "

Milbank reported from Crawford, Tex. Staff writers Paul Farhi and Howard Kurtz in Washington contributed to this report.



CBS News Transcripts

The Early Show (7:00 AM ET) - CBS

Tuesday, August 24, 2004

John O'Neill and Paul Alexander discuss John Kerry's Vietnam swift boat experiences

HARRY SMITH, co-host:

All right. Thanks, Audrey.

Senator John Kerry's service during the Vietnam War has become a campaign focal point. For the first time, President Bush went on the record in an attempt to distance himself from a series of privately sponsored attack ads that calls Kerry's war record into question. Two men with opposite views on the subject are John O'Neill, who wrote the book "Unfit For Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry," and Paul Alexander, the director of a new documentary called "Brothers in Arms," that includes interviews with veterans who served alongside Kerry.

Good morning, gentlemen.

Mr. JOHN O'NEILL (Author, "Unfit For Command"): Good morning, Harry.

Mr. PAUL ALEXANDER (Director, "Brothers In Arms"): Good morning, Harry.

SMITH: Mr. O'Neill, let me start with you. Basically your contention in this book is John Kerry did not deserve the medals he was awarded and he was not fit as a commander. Is that not true?

Mr. O'NEILL: Harry, 17 of the 23 officers that served directly with John Kerry at Antoy have joined our organization--the entire chain of command; most of the sailors there. And our conclusion is, first, he wildly exaggerated his record in Vietnam and, second, more important to us, he lied about our record in Vietnam and our unit's record.

SMITH: All right. I'm going to get to that contention in a second.

Paul Alexander, you've done this documentary. You actually interviewed the people who served with John Kerry on the boat he commanded. What do they have to say?

Mr. ALEXANDER: Yeah. Well, Mr. O'Neill says that these officers served directly with John Kerry, and I would dispute that. I interviewed the men who served directly on the 94th swift boat with John Kerry. That was the last swift boat that he commanded. These are his crew members, Del, Mike--I mean, we're coming to know their names now-- David, and they give a completely different account of what is included in this book. And, to me, if you're looking at the story as an objective journalist, the people that you would believe are the ones who did serve directly with him and that would have been the crew of the 94. And their story is completely different than what Mr. O'Neill and his colleagues are saying.

SMITH: Mr. O'Neill, isn't there some credibility to this from the standpoint that the people that you interviewed for your book were at least secondarily, even tertiarily, removed from the exact combat in question here?

Mr. O'NEILL: Not at all. There are more than 60 people who are direct eyewitnesses. This contention that only people in the same boat know what's going on when you have boats that are within 10 yards of each other is being laughed at, Harry, by Navy guys all over the United States. The people interviewed...

SMITH: All right. Mr. O'Neill, OK, a couple of people who have laid low over the last couple of weeks and even months and years have come out. One commander, Rich Baker, who was in a boat apparently right next to Mr. Kerry's, in The Washington Post this morning says, 'He was the most aggressive officer in charge of swift boats.' He goes on to say, 'John Kerry was one step above the rest of us.' That doesn't sound like it squares up with what your guys are saying.

Mr. O'NEILL: That's right. He's got four officers, including Rich Baker, out of 23, Harry. There are 17 that have condemned him. In other words, in the unit that he served in, along with the people who served right alongside him like Rich Baker, four of them, Harry, support him, 17 have condemned him, Harry. Their names are right on swiftvets.com, our Web site, and in the book "Unfit For Command." And they've condemned him because they were right alongside of him to watch the incidents involved.

SMITH: Mr. Alexander, what do the people you've interviewed have to say about this campaign that's aimed at Senator Kerry?

Mr. ALEXANDER: Well, they all believe it's politically motivated. And, Harry, this is really fundamental. If we're to believe O'Neill and his colleagues, on March 13th what's now known as the Bronze Star incident, 'cause it's the incident where Senator Kerry got his Bronze Star, we're supposed to believe there was no enemy combat fire, no combat fire coming from the enemy. Like I said, I interviewed the entire crew of the 94. It's in my documentary, "Brothers In Arms" that's opening on Friday. You can go see what they have to say. Three of them describe extensive armed fire. And not only do they describe the armed fire, they give you the specific machine guns that they could hear firing at

them. This is fundamental, Harry. Who do we believe? Do we believe someone who wasn't on the boat with Kerry, or do we believe the men who were there, who describe what happened to them in detail and remarkably accurately?

SMITH: Mr. O'Neill, you know...

Mr. O'NEILL: Never promised to...

SMITH: ...people are saying you've got an axe to grind that goes all the way back to the Vietnam War and that your real problem with all of this is that you don't like what John Kerry had to say after the war.

Mr. O'NEILL: That's not--it is correct, I don't like what he had to say afterwards, but that's not--there are 254 of us, Harry. The people in my book include all the guys on the other boats. The most important point on May the 13th...

SMITH: It's not all the guys on the other boats and hang on a second.

Mr. O'NEILL: Just a second. It inclu...

SMITH: No, no, no, you listen for a second because here's the guy from the Chicago Tribune...

Mr. O'NEILL: That's not fair.

SMITH: ...yesterday who says, 'Armed with stories I know not to be true.'

Mr. O'NEILL: You can sit, Harry, and compare Mr. Rudd's account with the book and you'll find that it's virtually word for word the same as the book except...

SMITH: Yeah.

Mr. O'NEILL: ...that Mr. Rudd claims that the Viet Cong who was chased by John Kerry was an adult male in black pajamas. My account followed exactly the one of Michael Kranish, his other biographer. In addition...

Mr. ALEXANDER: But, Harry, he wasn't there that day.

SMITH: All right.

Mr. ALEXANDER: Michael Kranish wasn't there that day.

Mr. O'NEILL: Yeah, but Larry Lee was there that day on Rudd's boat and he cited right in my book and so does Doug Ree.

Mr. ALEXANDER: But if you talk to Mike McGara who was on the boat with him, it's a whole different story.

SMITH: And you know what? And this conversation and this debate is going to continue...

Mr. O'NEILL: That's not true. The story's the same. The judgements are different.

SMITH: ...but at least for now, not on this program. John O'Neill and Paul Alexander, we appreciate your time this morning.

Mr. ALEXANDER: Thanks, Harry.

Mr. O'NEILL: Thank you very much.

SMITH: You're watching THE EARLY SHOW on CBS.

CNN

INSIDE POLITICS

THE MORNING GRIND



>> Brought to you every weekday by CNN's Political Unit

DAYAHEAD/Buckeye Bullseye

From John Mercurio
CNN Political Editor
(john.mercurio@cnn.com)

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- President Bush went further yesterday in condemning the Swift Boat ad, only to be drawn back by his spokesman. Nevertheless, no one in the first family has gone as far as Barney, the tiny black Scottie who joined Bush for his Crawford gaggle yesterday. While the president spoke against 527s and "that ad," Barney squatted on a nearby patch of lawn and, we hear, expressed his views even more bluntly.

If there's tape, look for it to surface tonight when John Kerry makes his debut appearance on Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show."

And with that, we try to move today past Swift Boat. Not just because we want to, but because both Bush-Cheney and Kerry-Edwards appear aching to do so as well. Yes, even Bush-Cheney. "We've got a convention next week, we don't need this to be the headline every day," one Bush-Cheney aide told the Grind. "We've got plenty of things we'd rather be talking about."

But perhaps we're ahead of our time. Later this week, after all, Kerry backers hit back at the truth-seeking vets with "Brothers in Arms," a first film by journalist Paul Alexander. The film, opening in New York, features Kerry and four men who served with him on Patrol Craft 94, the last of three boats he commanded during the war and the one from which he won the Silver Star.

The AP reports that Kerry's mates relate the familiar story of their commander ordering their boat to be beached in an enemy outpost, and hunting down a man who intended to fire a rocket at them. They also recount an ambush during which Kerry and his crew rescued survivors of another patrol boat that hit a mine. Kerry and crew mates David Alston, Mike Medeiros, Del Sandusky and Gene Thorson talk in the film about the bond they formed under fire and their lives since the war.

Washington Wrap

WASHINGTON, August 24, 2004

Dotty Lynch, Beth Lester, and Clothilde Ewing of the CBS News Political Unit have the latest from the nation's capital.

Swift Boat Veterans for Truth: Day 21: On Day 21 of the controversy (Matt Drudge started telegraphing the story on August 4 and the first SBVfT ad began airing August 5), John Kerry tried to turn the page during remarks at Cooper Union in New York City. The Democratic nominee tried to simultaneously change the subject and tie the Bush-Cheney campaign to the SBVfT saying, "The Bush campaign and its allies have turned to the tactics of fear and smear because they can't talk about jobs, health care, energy independence, and rebuilding our alliances — the real issues that matter to the American people. They have no plans, no positive vision and no understanding of an urgent and undeniable truth — a stronger America begins at home."

Even as Kerry tries to change the subject (sort of), there are other developments sure to keep the story on the front pages. The Dallas Morning News reports that, "Houston home builder Bob Perry, a key bankroller for Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, is listed as the co-host of a New York City fund-raiser next week for the Harris County GOP, whose guest list includes President Bush's top political adviser." Perry tells the News that he did not authorize the use of his name but the revelation does add fuel for those who believe Bush-Cheney is behind the attacks. The Bush-Cheney camp released a statement from Gov. Mark Racicot saying, "We call on John Kerry to join us in condemning all political activity by 527 groups."

The SBVfT themselves say they are only going to widen their attacks on Kerry. As the Boston Globe reports, one of the group's leaders, John O'Neill (who once debated Kerry on the Dick Cavett show as a representative from President Nixon), says, "Our media strategy is to follow him." Sean McCabe, a spokesman for the group (which started with \$200,000 from Perry), tells **CBS News** that it now has more than 25,000 individual donors and has raised more than \$1.5 million.

On the upside for Kerry, a new, sympathetic film by Paul Alexander called "Brothers in Arms," that features several of Kerry's crewmates will debut Friday in New York. According to a statement from Alexander, "A group of men who did not serve directly with John Kerry in Vietnam recently published a book maligning Kerry's military service. Over the last eighteen months, I have talked to and interviewed the veterans who actually did serve directly with Kerry in Vietnam ... If anyone knows the truth of what happened to John Kerry in Vietnam, they do. Brothers in Arms is their story."

John McCain, who called the original ad "dishonorable" and "dishonest" and called on the Bush-Cheney campaign to condemn it, has been in Europe for the past few weeks and unavailable for comment. He returns to DC, and possibly to the SBVfT fray, on Tuesday night.

The Washington Times

Diary refutes Kerry claim

By Stephen Dinan and Charles Hurt, The Washington Times
Wednesday, August 25, 2004

Pg. 1

John Kerry's own wartime journal is raising questions about whether he deserved the first of three Purple Hearts, which permitted him to go home after 4½ months of combat.

The re-examination of Mr. Kerry's military record, prompted by commercials paid for by Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and the book "Unfit for Command: Swift Boat Veterans Speak Out Against John Kerry" by two of the group's members, continued even as Mr. Kerry stated that voters should judge his character based on his anti-war activities upon returning from Vietnam.

A primary claim against Mr. Kerry by the Swift Boat Veterans is that Mr. Kerry's first Purple Heart -- awarded for action on Dec. 2, 1968 -- did not involve the enemy and that Mr. Kerry's wounds that day were unintentionally self-inflicted.

They charge that in the confusion involving unarmed, fleeing Viet Cong, Mr. Kerry fired a grenade, which detonated nearby and splattered his arm with hot metal.

Mr. Kerry has claimed that he faced his "first intense combat" that day, returned fire, and received his "first combat related injury."

A journal entry Mr. Kerry wrote Dec. 11, however, raises questions about what really happened nine days earlier.

"A cocky feeling of invincibility accompanied us up the Long Tau shipping channel because we hadn't been shot at yet, and Americans at war who haven't been shot at are allowed to be cocky," wrote Mr. Kerry, according to the book "Tour of Duty" by friendly biographer Douglas Brinkley.

If enemy fire was not involved in that or any other incident, according to the Military Order of the Purple Heart, no medal should be awarded.

"The Purple Heart is awarded to members of the armed forces of the U.S. who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy," according to the organization chartered by Congress. According to regulations set by the Department of Defense, an enemy must be involved to warrant a Purple Heart.

Altogether, Mr. Kerry earned three Purple Hearts, a Bronze Star and a Silver Star.

A Kerry campaign official, speaking on background, told The Washington Times yesterday that the "we" in the passage from Mr. Kerry's journal refers to "the crew on Kerry's first swift boat, operating as a crew" rather than Mr. Kerry himself.

"John Kerry didn't yet have his own boat or crew on December 2," according to the aide. "Other members of the crew had been in Vietnam for some time and had been shot at and Kerry knew that at the time. However, the crew had not yet been fired on while they served together on PCF 44 under Lieutenant Kerry."

Mr. Kerry's campaign could not say definitively whether he did receive enemy fire that day.

The newly exhumed passages were first reported by Fox News Channel in a televised interview with John Hurley, national leader of Veterans for Kerry.

"Is it possible that Kerry's first Purple Heart was the result of an unintentionally self-inflicted wound?" asked reporter Major Garrett.

"Anything is possible," Mr. Hurley replied.

The Swift Boat Veterans say that means Mr. Kerry is now backing off of his first Purple Heart claim, just as he has apparently changed his claim that he spent Christmas 1968 on an operation in Cambodia.

"It's a house of cards," said Van Odell, one of the veterans. "What he wrote in 'Tour of Duty' and how he used that is nothing but a house of cards, and it's exposed."

At a fund-raiser last night in Philadelphia, Mr. Kerry defended his anti-war activism upon his return from Vietnam, which also has come under attack by the Swift Boat Veterans, as "an act of conscience."

"You can judge my character, incidentally, by that," he said.

"Because when the time for moral crisis existed in this country, I wasn't taking care of myself, I was taking care of public policy," Mr. Kerry told his audience. "I was taking care of things that made a difference to the life of this nation. You may not have agreed with me, but I stood up and was counted, and that's the kind of president I'm going to be."

The Swift Boat Veterans' claims and the political storm that surrounds them has dominated the presidential campaign for the last two weeks.

The Center for Media and Public Affairs said that from Aug. 9 to 15, the first week after the group's ads were released, there were 92 mentions in major papers and 221 mentions in all news reports. By last week, Aug. 16 to 22, there were 221 mentions in major papers and 696 mentions in all news reports the center tracks.

"The Swift Boat veterans commercial is the 'Blair Witch Project' of campaign ads -- an enormous return on a small investment," said Matthew T. Felling, media director for the center. "Everyone is talking about it, and no one can agree on where the line between fact and fiction exists."

He said the commercial has become "a national player in its own right," nearly equaling Vice President Dick Cheney's 733 mentions in all news reports last week.

Mr. Kerry himself is making personal phone calls trying to stamp out the controversy.

On Monday morning, a day after former Sen. Bob Dole questioned Mr. Kerry's Purple Hearts on CNN, Mr. Kerry called the former Republican presidential candidate.

"There's respect there. We were in the Senate together," Mr. Dole told interviewer Wolf Blitzer on Monday. "But we're talking about the presidential race, and I tweaked him a little on the Purple Hearts."

And on Sunday, Mr. Kerry called Robert Brant, one of the members of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

A source associated with the veterans group and familiar with the 10-minute conversation said Mr. Kerry asked whether Mr. Brant knew about the group. When Mr. Brant said he was part of it, there was "kind of a silence" on the line before Mr. Kerry continued the conversation.

The source said Swift Boat Veterans is considering sending a cease-and-desist letter to Mr. Kerry asking him not to contact their members anymore because it might be a violation of campaign-finance laws.

In a speech at the Cooper Union school in New York yesterday, Mr. Kerry said the "Bush campaign and its allies have turned to the tactics of fear and smear."

Asked by reporters about the Swift Boat furor later yesterday, Mr. Kerry said he's trying to focus on "the economy, jobs, health care -- the things that matter to Americans."

Asked specifically if he has been calling Swift Boat veterans, Mr. Kerry said, "I am talking about the things that are important to Americans -- jobs, health care, how we are going to fix our schools."

In last night's Philadelphia speech, even while defending his activities with Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Mr. Kerry called the criticism of his service "so petty it's almost pathetic in a way."

But the issue is not likely to go away, in part because Mr. Kerry's defenders want their full say.

A new documentary, "Brothers in Arms," will be released in a theater in New York and on DVD everywhere on Friday that highlights Mr. Kerry and the veterans who served with him, and filmmaker Paul Alexander said he found the veterans' stories very convincing.

"What's remarkable to me is when you see the interviews in the movie, how consistent they are on what happened," said Mr. Alexander, who said he interviewed all the men who served on PCF 94, and interviewed them several times over several months. Mr. Alexander previously wrote "Man of the People: The Life of John McCain."

He said the movie particularly sheds light on the incident for which Mr. Kerry earned his Bronze Star, for rescuing a Special Forces officer from the water under what he and his crew said was enemy fire.

The Swift Boat Veterans, including Mr. Odell, say there was no enemy fire, but Mr. Alexander said after making the movie and talking with crewmates Mike Medeiros, Del Sandusky and David Alston, he believes there was enemy fire.

"Mike described the mortar rounds that were going over the top of the 94, and David and Del described the sound effects -- specifically down to what kind of machine gun it was -- the AK-47," Mr. Alexander said. "Their description is so specific they're not mistaken."

- This article is based in part on wire-service reports.

Reliable Source

Richard Leiby



The Reliable Source

By Richard Leiby

Thursday, August 26, 2004; Page C03

Swift Boat Flick Opens in Enemy-Held Territory

• A rising tide lifts all boats: Director **Paul Alexander** tried unsuccessfully for months to find a distributor for his documentary "Brothers in Arms," featuring interviews with **John Kerry** and four crewmates on his Navy Swift boat in Vietnam. Thanks to the flap over Kerry's service, the movie is finally being released, hitting New York first. It opens tomorrow at an independent film house just a 10-minute walk from the Republican National Convention.

"If delegates get bored at the convention, they should come over and see my movie," Alexander told us. "My film is told from the point of view of the men who actually did serve directly with John Kerry," he said, listing **Del Sandusky, Mike Medeiros, Gene Thorson** and **David Alston**, who were on Patrol Craft Fast 94. "They were the ones being shot at when John Kerry was. It was the crew that served under Kerry when he was awarded both the Bronze and Silver Stars." Alexander said he finished the movie last Christmas and has made no changes. "It's a classic GI movie. The crew represents a cross-section of America. The added advantage is that this is a true story."

The Washington Post



HANNITY & COLMES

Interview With Paul Alexander

August 24, 2004

9:00 PM East

[BROADCAST EXCERPT]

COLMES: Welcome back to HANNITY & COLMES. I'm Alan Colmes.

Still to come, Scott Peterson's sister-in-law lashed out after court today. What did she say about Scott that may hurt the prosecution's case?

First a new documentary film, "Brothers in Arms," is telling John Kerry's story of service in Vietnam through the voices of men who served directly under Kerry.

Senator Kerry also participated in the film, giving his thoughts on his time in Vietnam.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

SEN. JOHN KERRY (D-MA), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: Vietnam taught me a great deal. I mean, it taught me about governments that don't tell the truth. It taught me about responsibilities of government to citizen, of each of us to each other.

What motivated me to oppose the war was just my sense of how wrong it was, how clear it was that this was going to a very bad place unless we changed what was happening.

And the loss of lives, of friends and others, measured against what we were accomplishing and where it was going brought me to the very firm belief that it was wrong and we needed to speak out. I felt morally compelled, ultimately, to speak out.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

COLMES: Joining us now, the director of "Brothers in Arms" and author of the recently released book, "The Candidate: Behind John Kerry's Remarkable Run for the White House," Paul Alexander.

Paul, good to have you here. Thanks so much for being here tonight.

PAUL ALEXANDER, DIRECTOR, "BROTHERS IN ARMS": Thank you, Alan. Thanks.

COLMES: What -- what do you make of the swift boat vets? You didn't serve in Vietnam. You just spent a lot of time with John Kerry. And what's he really thinking about all this? And he's made so much of his Vietnam service.

ALEXANDER: I know. I think it has to be troubling to the senator in many ways, because I'm not sure that he saw this coming to the extent that it -- that it's happened. I can't say that I'm surprised, because I've seen this sort of thing happen before in politics.

COLMES: Is it fair to criticize him for making too much of his Vietnam service and wrapping himself around that as part of his presidential campaign?

ALEXANDER: I don't think it was. I mean, here's a man in 1968, he could have decided not to go into the Navy. He volunteered for the Navy. He volunteered for Vietnam. He volunteered for active combat duty. He wanted to be out there where he was.

And so I think he's very proud of his service. He has been very proud of his service. But that doesn't -- that doesn't take away from the fact that once he got over there, he realized this is a war that we didn't intend to win. And when he came back, he felt compelled to speak out against it.

COLMES: What's the difference between the proximity of those writing the swift boat book and those who actually were in his boat?

ALEXANDER: Well, my film actually deals with the crew of the 94. It was the last crew that he commanded. They saw him the most active in vicious combat.

And I chose to focus on them, because you could tell a story that way. And it's Vietnam - - it's the crew of the 94 before, during and after Vietnam. These are the men who actually served directly under him.

COLMES: And what does that -- and what does that say about John Kerry's behavior under fire and in service?

ALEXANDER: Well, when you listen to these men, who actually were being shot at along with Senator Kerry, their description of what happened is significantly different from the veterans who were behind this book. And so in my opinion, I would rather go with the eyewitnesses.

COLMES: You did a McCain bio, as well?

ALEXANDER: Yes, I did.

COLMES: And did you ever talk to John McCain about the POWs' view of those like John Kerry who came back and spoke out against the war?

ALEXANDER: Well, as you know, Alan, when -- for a long time, when Senators McCain and Kerry were both in the Senate, they were not friendly at all.

It wasn't until 1991 on a long trip over to the Persian Gulf when they were on a plane together that they sort of had a chance to talk and compare notes, and they mended fences. And after that, they became very close friends.

But this is -- this is a difficult subject for Vietnam veterans to deal with, even 30 years later.

HANNITY: Senator McCain -- Senator McCain said that that was some of the worst propaganda.

ALEXANDER: Hi, Sean.

HANNITY: By the way, Paul, good to see you.

ALEXANDER: Good seeing you, Sean.

(CROSSTALK)

HANNITY: You're voting for Kerry. We need to get that out.

ALEXANDER: Sean, I'm a Democrat. You know that. You're a Republican.

HANNITY: I am.

ALEXANDER: You're a conservative, a proud conservative.

HANNITY: I've got to Hannitize you. I've got to fix you. But you're...

ALEXANDER: I'm a conservative Democrat.

HANNITY: Is this an objective movie or is it biased?

ALEXANDER: It's a movie that tells the story of the lives of these men. And in fact, if you look at it, probably Senator Kerry is in the movie the least amount of time, compared to the other crewmembers, describing what happened over there.

HANNITY: A lot of the 64 guys in "Unfit for Command," they were eyewitnesses to what they saw Kerry do. Are you concerned...

ALEXANDER: They didn't serve under him directly. And that is the key.

HANNITY: Some were serving with him, and they're describing eyewitness accounts of what they saw with Senator Kerry.

ALEXANDER: I...

HANNITY: Have you read the book?

ALEXANDER: Yes, I have, actually. And some of the stuff jumps out -- you've published two books. And you're reading along, and things will jump out.

Like, there's a sentence that really got me, "Since the beginning of his tour, he -- Kerry had a habit of wildly exaggerating his experiences in his journals." How would they know that?

HANNITY: They're comparing it to "Tour of Duty."

ALEXANDER: But how did -- how can they get into the head of the personal who's writing the journals?

HANNITY: We just found out there's a big conflict today, about he says he got shot and it wasn't a self-inflicted wound. But then he says in his own diary that, you know, he hadn't been fired on nine days after the day he supposedly was shot.

ALEXANDER: Well, if you go back and look at "Tour of Duty," that incident is described. And it -- when you're in a fog of war situation like that, sometimes it's not absolutely clear what happened to you.

HANNITY: He got the Purple Heart for that, and then nine days later he said, "I'd never been fired upon." But look, I don't want to go down that road. Let me ask you this.

ALEXANDER: But he was wounded. He was wounded.

HANNITY: Can you -- because you've now researched this, and you had time with him...

ALEXANDER: Right.

HANNITY: ... which I'll never get, ever...

ALEXANDER: I spent a lot of time with him.

(CROSSTALK)

HANNITY: ... did you ever get him to tell us -- tell you what atrocities he committed?

ALEXANDER: Yes. And...

HANNITY: And the villages he burned?

ALEXANDER: Let me make the point, Sean, because we're playing that clip over and over. It's the basis of the new ad from the swift boat guys. What he's quoting, if you go back...

HANNITY: That's the Genghis Khan one. This is a different one. He said, "I, too, committed atrocities."

ALEXANDER: If you go back and look at that -- at that 1971 testimony, what he's doing is he's quoting from the Winter Soldier investigation. That's what he's quoting from.

HANNITY: No, he -- no, that's not true. Because he says, "I was at the meeting and these guys told me stories about how they raped..."

ALEXANDER: No. He was at the meeting, though. There was a whole group of veterans. They went to Detroit from all over the country.

HANNITY: But quickly...

(CROSSTALK)

ALEXANDER: That's where the testimony came from.

HANNITY: No, not in the testimony. On another occasion, on Dick Cavett, he admitted he committed atrocities. And he said he burned down villages. Did you ever deal with that with him?

ALEXANDER: They describe it in my movie, actually. Absolutely. It's in my film.

HANNITY: That's worth seeing.

COLMES: Thank you for being here.

HANNITY: I want to hear it. Finally, I get an answer.

ALEXANDER: Thank you, Sean. Thank you.

COLMES: We'll cover that in part two.



SCARBOROUGH COUNTRY

August 24, 2004
10:00 PM East

[BROADCAST EXCERPT]

ANNOUNCER: From the press room, to the courtroom, to the halls of Congress, Joe Scarborough has seen it all. Welcome back to SCARBOROUGH COUNTRY.

SCARBOROUGH: Welcome back.

As you know, we've been talking about the swift boat vets' ad. It's a matter of he said/he said. So let's look at the political ramifications and see how both campaigns are using this controversy.

We're joined right now by political analyst Jack Burkman and Flavia Colgan.

Flavia, let's start with you.

You and I have talked about this. John Kerry may not have responded as quickly as he should have the first couple of weeks of this controversy, but how is he doing right now and is he doing enough to turn this controversy around and actually possibly have it backfire on the anti-Kerry forces who are trying to damage his presidential campaign?

FLAVIA COLGAN, MSNBC POLITICAL ANALYST: Joe, I think that the campaign was caught a little flat-footed on this, but I think that they're doing a great job, one, on the local level.

Although we might not see it on cable news, in my home state of Pennsylvania, a battleground, they had Del, one of his swift boat mates, and local veterans and local politicians who served in Vietnam out on the steps of the Capitol in four or five different areas doing a series of press conferences, getting a lot of great local news coverage. So we have got to think about how this is playing in the battleground states. I think he's doing a great job there.

I do think that they have to start tying this a little bit more to Bush. The whole Ginsberg incident that happened today is a potential boon for them.

(CROSSTALK)

SCARBOROUGH: Talk about that.

COLGAN: Ginsberg, of course, is, as you know, Joe, a lawyer for President Bush in his reelection campaign.

And he just admitted today that he has been advising the swift boat campaign. Now, legal ethics aside, that combined with Cordier, which of course is not quite as strong as Ginsberg -- he was on the steering committee vets Bush reelection campaign. So I think they have to tie it back to Bush.

I also think that they have to begin reminding voters that this is sort of a play from the same playbook looking back to 2000 at John McCain and what he did to Max Cleland.

SCARBOROUGH: Right.

COLGAN: So I think they have to show a pattern and also show the difference between how Kerry has handled this situation when it's happened to him. When the MoveOn ad came out that he didn't think was appropriate, he came out immediately and denounced it.

When McCain asked him to come out against the ad that MoveOn had about the National Guard service, where there is legitimate questions, he also came out and condemned it, whereas Bush has been sort of taking his time.

(CROSSTALK)

SCARBOROUGH: All right, Flavia, we have got to go on to Jack.

Jack Burkman, there's a real possibility that this ad either now or down the road could backfire and actually hurt the Bush campaign. At what point do you think that could happen?

JACK BURKMAN, REPUBLICAN STRATEGIST: Well, it's hard to say.

You have to remember, see this in a broader context. I think John Kerry has suffered and will continue to suffer. I mean, the polls don't reflect it yet, but cable news is running with it. There's a reason for that. The issue is rating. That means the public has an interest in it. I think it will continue.

John Kerry has set the table, Joe. He chose to run a campaign on national security issues, which I thought was stupid. And then at the convention, he chose...

SCARBOROUGH: Why was that stupid? Why was that stupid? We're in the post-9/11 era, Jack.

(CROSSTALK)

BURKMAN: But he can't beat Republicans on their home turf. It's the most audacious gamble by a Democratic candidate in 30 years or more. He's trying to beat the Republicans. It's like trying to beat the Yankees in Yankee Stadium. It's hard to do.

In some sense, it's a high mountain. I almost admire him for trying. But then at his convention, he doubled down. It's like he's at the blackjack table and drew an 11. He said, I'll double that. I want to talk only about my Vietnam service.

SCARBOROUGH: But, Jack, hold on a second now, Jack.

BURKMAN: Yes.

SCARBOROUGH: You and I both know, though, that the public is fickle. If people in swing states like Flavia was talking about in Pennsylvania, in West Virginia, in Ohio, think that the Bush campaign was behind this ad, and that's what the Kerry camp is trying to do, they're trying to connect the dots, then all of a sudden, they're going to make John Kerry, who is not the most sympathetic figure, look like a victim. And that, as you and I both know, could end up hurting George Bush.

BURKMAN: Well, it depends on how the average person comes to view these swift boat veterans.

I think by and large, they have advanced the debate in a credible way. Look, their recollections aren't perfect. Nobody's recollection after 35 years is perfect. I frankly see no reason the president should -- politics aside -- politically, yes, I think he's wise to distance himself. Morally, philosophically, I see no reason he should distance himself. John Kerry has opened the door in so direct, in so flamboyant a way. This is a very legitimate part of the national debate. I think the public wants to hear it and hear more of it.

SCARBOROUGH: All right.

Flavia, earlier tonight, I asked a man who's releasing a documentary about John Kerry about the men who actually served with Kerry and if the new swift vet ads reflected the attitudes of the men he interviewed. This is what he said.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PAUL ALEXANDER, DIRECTOR, "BROTHERS IN ARMS": No, Joe. And it also doesn't sound at all like the veterans who served with Kerry directly in Vietnam.

And I mean, the crew of the 94, for example, my film really focuses on the 94 swift boat, which was the last swift boat that Kerry commanded while he was in Vietnam in early 1969. And I've interviewed the entire crew. I've interviewed Kerry. And this was done well before this controversy erupted. The film was done around the end of last year. And

so the portrait that they paint to a man is significantly different than the portrait that the O'Neill swift boat group is describing now.

So -- and it's very fundamental, Joe. They're down to whether or not there was enemy fire that was being exchanged that they were enduring on the March 23 incident. This is really basic stuff that we're dealing with. Who's telling the truth?

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SCARBOROUGH: You know, Flavia, what's so fascinating about this political situation is, I think it's dangerous for Republicans to attack John Kerry, a Vietnam vet, highly decorated Vietnam vet, just like I think it may be dangerous for John Kerry to attack these 260 Vietnam vets, a lot of them prisoner of war people.

How do you go after POWs, how do you go after Vietnam vets and not risk offending a large segment of the veteran population itself?

COLGAN: Well, Joe, I think that you bring up a good point and one thing that I think the Bush campaign should be leery of.

And that is that every time the Vietnam issue does come up, a picture is shown of John Kerry with a chestful of medals. And regardless of he said/he said, which, contrary to -- I disagree with Jack in that he feels that these people are credible. Every day that goes by, there are Naval records, citations, eyewitness accounts, that really go in contrary to their testimonials.

But I think that it brings up questions about where was George Bush and where was he getting his dental examinations or not. And so I think that it plays to one of Kerry's strengths. And Jack did bring up a great point in terms of Kerry has put a tremendous amount of his campaign on this issue. And I think that's that's what's scaring the Republicans.

(CROSSTALK)

SCARBOROUGH: And you think he did that purposefully?

COLGAN: Absolutely.

SCARBOROUGH: So you think he did it purposefully?

COLGAN: In a post-9/11 era...

SCARBOROUGH: Right.

COLGAN: In a post-9/11 era, with what we're facing, I think it's important for the American public to know that John Kerry could be a commander in chief that they could be proud of.

(CROSSTALK)

SCARBOROUGH: Final question, Flavia. Do you believe when people go to the voting booths the first Tuesday in November, they're going to give a hoot, I will say, about what John Kerry did in Vietnam or what George W. Bush did in the National Guard in Alabama? Do you think that's going to change a single vote this fall?

COLGAN: Polls don't reflect that, Joe. And that's why I think it's important for the Kerry campaign to also keep emphasizing the rising health care costs and the lack of job creation, because I think, when you look at Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, those are the bread-and-butter issues that people are worrying about. And that's what's affecting families all across this nation, so I don't think it will be.

SCARBOROUGH: I agree with you. I agree with you, Flavia.

And I've been saying health care is the single issue that matters the most to middle-class workers in Ohio, in West Virginia, in Pennsylvania. And those states are going to swing this election. It ain't Iraq and I don't think it's what happened in Vietnam 30 years ago either.

Well, Flavia, Jack, thanks a lot for being with us. We greatly appreciate it.