

# Fact-checking Bush, Kerry shows both play with truth

By George E. Curry  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

With so much political mudslinging going on in this year's presidential campaign, it is difficult to know who is telling the truth and who isn't. Fortunately, [www.FactCheck.org](http://www.FactCheck.org), a non-partisan Web site, has been established by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania to help us determine the veracity of the charges and counter-charges.

Supporters of both Bush and Kerry have been untruthful in some of their political ads, according to [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org).

The attack on John Kerry's military service in Vietnam is a classic example of distorting the truth. A group calling itself Swift Boat Veterans for Truth held a news conference and ran paid television advertising claiming that Kerry is "not being honest" and accusing him of "lying about his record."

In one ad, George Elliott, says: "John Kerry has not been honest about what happened in Vietnam." According to [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org): "Elliott is the retired Navy captain who had recommended Kerry for his highest decoration for valor, the Silver Star, which was awarded for events of Feb. 29, 1969, when Kerry beached his boat in the face of an enemy ambush and then pursued and killed an enemy soldier on the shore. Elliott, who had been Kerry's commanding officer, was quoted by the Boston Globe Aug. 6 as saying that he had made a 'terrible mistake' in signing the affidavit against Kerry, in which Elliott suggested Kerry hadn't told him the truth about how he killed the enemy soldier."

"Later Elliott signed a second affidavit saying he still stands by the words in the TV ad. But Elliott also made what he called an 'immaterial clarification' — saying he has no first-hand information that Kerry was less than forthright about what he did to win the Silver Star."

In 1996, Elliott supported Kerry's account of the incident and traveled to Boston to endorse his senate campaign. As recently as June of last year, he said Kerry's Silver Star was "well deserved" and that Kerry had been "courageous" in his actions.

The most serious allegation in the TV ad was that Kerry received the Bronze Star and his third Purple Heart under false pretenses.

## Gangs

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the late 1970s.

"Drug culture contributed to gangs breaking up. People went to jail for selling drugs or got strung out on them," said Malik Aziz, head of Safer Streets, Safer Communities and a Men United member.

Now, you need a fear factor in the neighborhoods, and that's where the gangs come in. They're urban terrorists, but they're respected because they're in a gang. A lot of them just want to belong to something, and they think, 'Whatever goes down, I go down with them.'

Aziz said this kind of "ride or die" mentality is common in music and urban culture.

In 2001, "Crip-walkin'," derived from the Los Angeles-based Crip gang, became a popular dance. That same year, "Put Yo Hood Up," by Lil' Jon & the Eastside Boyz, urged listeners to represent their respective neighborhoods through hand signs, a common symbol of gang affiliation. Rap group G-Unit portrayed itself as a gang earlier this year in its video, "Poppin' Them Things."

Aziz, who mentors youth in Philadelphia public schools, said young men don't have to be violent to be in a gang.

"I don't try to break a group up," he said. "I try to use their strengths as a team for something positive."

Van O'Dell, a former Navy enlisted man, said in the ad that he was "a few yards away" from Kerry when the future Massachusetts senator rescued Jim Rassmann, an Army Special Forces lieutenant, from the water. He said, "I did not hear any shots, nor did any hostile fire hit any boats."

Writing in the Wall Street Journal, Rassmann gave a different and chilling account of what transpired.

"...The second blast blew me off John's swift boat, PCF-94, throwing me into the river. Fearing that the other boats would run me over, I swam to the bottom of the river and stayed there as long as I could hold my breath."

"When I surfaced, all the swift boats had left, and I was alone taking fire from both banks. To avoid the incoming fire, I repeatedly swam under water as long as I could hold my breath, attempting to make it to the north bank of the river. I thought I would die right there. The odds were against me avoiding incoming fire and, even if I made it out of the river, I thought I'd be captured and executed."

"Kerry must have seen me in the water and directed his driver, Del Sandusky, to turn the boat around. Kerry's boat ran up to me in the water, bow on, and I was able to climb up a cargo net to the lip of the deck. But, because I was nearly upside down, I couldn't make it over the edge of the deck. This left me hanging out in the open, a perfect target. John, already wounded by the explosion that threw me off his boat, came out onto the bow, exposing himself to the fire directed at us from the jungle, and pulled me aboard."

Rassmann noted, "I am a Republican, and for more than 30 years I have largely voted for Republicans." However, this year he's voting for Kerry, he said, because he "will be a great commander in chief."

According to public filings, the anti-Kerry group has been funded by Bob R. Perry, a major Republican donor who gave \$100,000 of the group's first \$158,750.

After investigating the charges, [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org) concluded: "None of those in the attack ad by the Swift Boat group actually served on Kerry's boat. And their statements are contrary to the accounts of Kerry and those who served under him."

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Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry has the same goal. In his speech to the National Urban League last month, the Massachusetts senator pledged \$400 million to be used in programs that would curb gang activity. The money would be spent over the next 10 years and target 20 communities.

Harrell said the proposal would be a start, but it's up to the people in the neighborhoods to put a stop to gangs.

"We know government can't eradicate all of society's ills, but we can't be afraid of our own children," he said. "I'm a firm believer in 'there's a light at the end of the tunnel.' We will succeed in this fight."

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