

WEBB AND MCCAIN'S ATTACKS AND THE GI BILL

A number of people have noted that McCain is now trying to give Jim Webb the same treatment he has given General Clark.

If you didn't think this was a coordinated attack on John McCain's credentials before, it's clear now that it is. Barack Obama's surrogates are telling the McCain campaign to "calm down" about attacks on his military record? Seriously? Now somehow Wes Clark's attacks are John McCain's fault? It's absurd. If Barack Obama can't control his own surrogate operation, how can he be trusted to run the country?

I would respond to McCain's baseless attack on Webb by noting that someone in McCain's camp must be making a panicked effort to inoculate himself against any questions that getting shot out of an airplane doesn't automatically qualify you to be President.

But it's more than that, isn't it?

This attack on Webb (and Clark, for that matter) comes right on the heels of one of McCain's most cynical moves—out of many cynical moves—thus far this campaign season. After opposing Jim Webb's GI Bill (mostly because he thought it was generous enough that it might make it harder to keep people in the military because they don't have better options and because they can't get an education), Bush and McCain have been claiming credit for Webb's GI Bill.

Yesterday, House leaders in both parties struck a deal on a war supplemental bill that includes expanded college benefits for veterans. The GI Bill is Sen. Jim Webb's (D-VA) version, as well as a

provision allowing troops to transfer the benefits to family members. President Bush has promised to sign the legislation.

Now, however, Bush and Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) – the two most vocal opponents of Webb’s bill – are trying to take credit for it. They are claiming that they always supported the generous benefits – their main concern was just ensuring the benefits’ transferability:

At a time when (if we were really good at our jobs) we would be attacking McCain for opposing veteran benefits, he has, instead, turned and starting attacking Webb. Presumably, at least in part, to prevent any attacks on him for his cynical stance on the GI Bill.

Me, I’ve never served. I respect all three men—Clark, Webb, and McCain—for having done so. Like John Cole, I think not every fighter pilot would make a good President.

But even as a DFH civilian, I feel qualified to make one judgment. John McCain was wrong—badly wrong—when he opposed a good GI Bill for the men and women who are serving in Bush’s wars.

And that’s what we ought to be talking about.

Update: working on changing my phrasing—help welcome.