

October 11, 2004

TELEVISION

TV Group to Show Anti- Kerry Film on 62 Stations

By JIM RUTENBERG

Up to 62 television stations owned or managed by the Sinclair Broadcasting Group - many of them in swing states - will show a documentary highly critical of [Senator John Kerry's](#) antiwar activities 30 years ago within the next two weeks, Sinclair officials said yesterday.

Those officials said the documentary would pre-empt regular night programming, including prime time, on its stations, which include affiliates for all six of the major broadcast networks in the swing states of Florida, Ohio, Wisconsin, Nevada and Pennsylvania.

Called "Stolen Honor: Wounds That Never Heal," the documentary features Vietnam veterans who say their Vietnamese captors used Mr. Kerry's 1971 Senate testimony, in which he recounted stories of American atrocities, prolonging their torture and betraying and demoralizing them. Similar claims were made by prisoners of war in a commercial that ran during the summer from an anti-Kerry veterans group, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

Two of the former prisoners who appeared in the Swift Boat advertisement were interviewed for the movie, including Ken Cordier, who had to resign as a volunteer in the Bush campaign after the advertisement came out.

Sinclair's plan to show the documentary was first made public by The Los Angeles Times on Saturday.

Mark Hyman, Sinclair's vice president for corporate relations, who doubles as a conservative commentator on its news stations, said the film would be shown because Sinclair deemed it newsworthy.

"Clearly John Kerry has made his Vietnam service the foundation of his presidential run; this is an issue that is certainly topical," he said. Asked what defined something as newsworthy, Mr. Hyman said, "In that it hasn't been out in the marketplace, and the news marketplace."

Because Sinclair is defining the documentary - which will run commercial free - as news, it is unclear if it will be required by federal regulations to provide Mr. Kerry's campaign with equal time to respond.

But acknowledging that news standards call for fairness, Mr. Hyman said an invitation has been extended to Mr. Kerry to respond after the documentary is shown. "There are certainly serious allegations that are leveled; we would very much like to get his response," he said.

Asked if Sinclair would consider running a documentary of similar length either lauding Mr. Kerry, responding to the charges in "Stolen Honor" or criticizing Mr. Bush, Mr. Hyman said, "We'd just have to take a look at it."

Aides to Mr. Kerry said he would not accept Sinclair's invitation.

"It's hard to take an offer seriously from a group that is hellbent on doing anything to help elect [President Bush](#) even if that means violating basic journalism standards," said Chad Clanton, a Kerry spokesman.

Sinclair's plans put Mr. Kerry's campaign in an awkward position similar to the one in which it found itself in August, when the Swift Boat group first began running commercials against him containing unsubstantiated charges that he lied to get his war medals. Mr. Kerry's aides at first held back from responding, so as not to give the group and its charges more attention - a decision that some Kerry aides now acknowledge cost him in public opinion polls.

Mr. Clanton said Mr. Kerry's campaign would call on supporters to stage advertiser boycotts and demonstrations against Sinclair's stations.

A group of Democratic senators, including Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts and Dianne Feinstein of California, readied a letter calling for the Federal Communications Commission to investigate the move, arguing that the documentary was not news but a prolonged political advertisement from Mr. Bush and, as such, violated fairness rules.

Andrew Jay Schwartzman, president of the Media Access Project, an advocacy group promoting greater media regulation, said he did not think the film would qualify for a news exemption. And, he said, even if it did fall under equal time provisions, those are based on candidate appearances and in this case, since it is Mr. Kerry who appears, "albeit disparagingly," stations would be required to show Mr. Bush or possibly the independent candidate [Ralph Nader](#), if they requested it.

Sinclair was already a galvanizing force for Democrats. The political donations of its executives have gone overwhelmingly to Republicans, according to a review of donations on [Politicalmoneyline.com](#). In April Sinclair refused to run an episode of "Nightline" on its stations in which the anchor Ted Koppel spent the entire program reading the names of American soldiers killed in Iraq.

"Stolen Honor" was produced by Carlton Sherwood, formerly a reporter with The Washington Times. His Web site says he received no money from any political party or campaign but got initial funding from Pennsylvania veterans.

The documentary has been distributed by mail order and via streaming Internet connections. Mr. Hyman said Sinclair was not paying for the right to broadcast it.