Space Soldiers meet president

By MAJ Laura Kenney

FORT CARSON, Colo. — The wait was long — five or six hours — the majority of that time spent standing, shifting from foot to foot. The crowd was tightly packed into the hangar. Music ranging from rock to country to patriotic alleviated the discomfort somewhat. Any and all concept of inconvenience, however, disappeared the instant the silver haired gentleman in an Army flight jacket sporting Fort Carson patches stepped to the podium.

Waves of sound erupted, American flags waved frantically, as Soldiers, family members and civilians stood on tiptoe to view the President of the United States.

In the crowd, and on the podium behind George W. Bush, were Soldiers wearing the U.S. Space and Missile Defense Command patch on their left shoulder. Ten SMDC-Colorado Springs Soldiers attended an earlier luncheon in his honor.

Bush came to address post Soldiers and others from the many local bases November 24, 2003. He also spent two hours afterward with family members of Soldiers who had lost their lives in Iraq, one hour more than scheduled.

At the luncheon, two Space Soldiers — SFC Robert Miller and MSG Tammy Coon — sat at the head table with the president. The others sat at surrounding tables.

"I would have to honestly say that, except for getting married, meeting the President of the United States was one of the greatest things to ever happen to me," said Miller.

"I sat right across the table from him, and the man was remarkable. Whenever he talked to you, you were his sole purpose. He looked you straight in the eye, and never broke contact. He shook hands with every single person in that room, from the people who served the food to every Soldier."

Miller had more than just a handshake. When the President came to him, Miller had something special to give and say.

"Sir, I have something for you," Miller said as he pulled out the coin he had earned on his second deployment to the Middle East.

"I told him that the coin was special for two reasons, and that I wanted him to have it. The first reason was that I'd earned it while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the second was that it had his own words on it. At that, I handed him the coin. He pulled out his glasses to read the words," said Miller.

The words were "Bring them to justice or we'll bring justice to them."

After the President read that sentence, said Miller, the smile he'd been wearing disappeared. With a solemn look, Bush said, "We'll get them, Sergeant Miller, we'll get every last one of them," and pocketed the coin.

With a last handshake, Bush thanked Miller for the coin, and for his courage.

Arriving at the packed hangar to talk to the estimated 5,000 Soldiers and civilians who'd waited, some since early morning, Bush acknowledged the cheers with a big grin and a waving hand. Then he became serious.

"This war began more than two years ago, on September the 11th, 2001, when America was attacked, and thousands of our fellow citizens were murdered. The events of that morning changed our nation. We awakened to new dangers and we accepted new responsibilities. That day we saw the harm that our enemies intend for us. Today America, Britain and all responsible nations are united in a great cause: We will not rest until we bring these committed killers to justice."

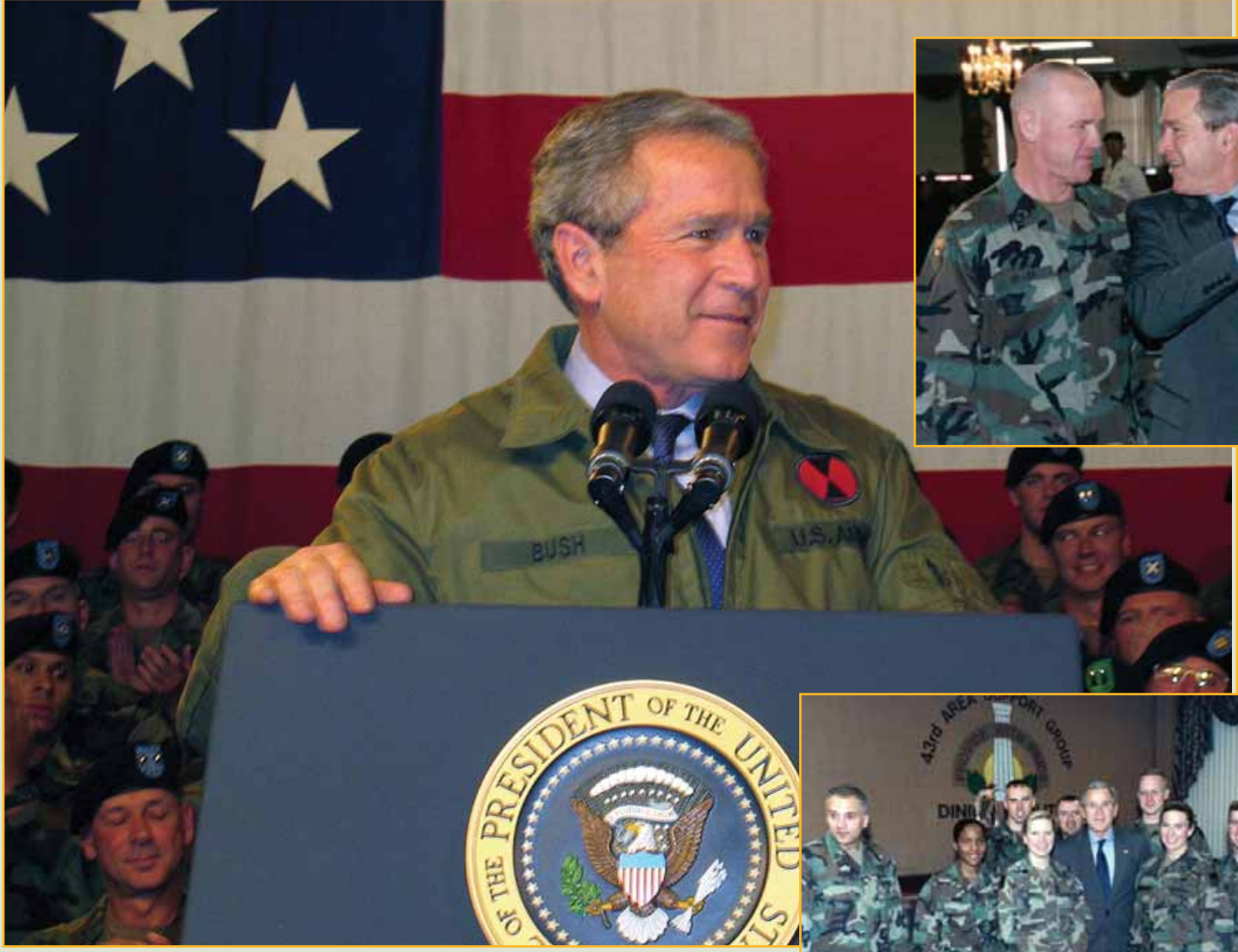
Affirming hooahs responded.

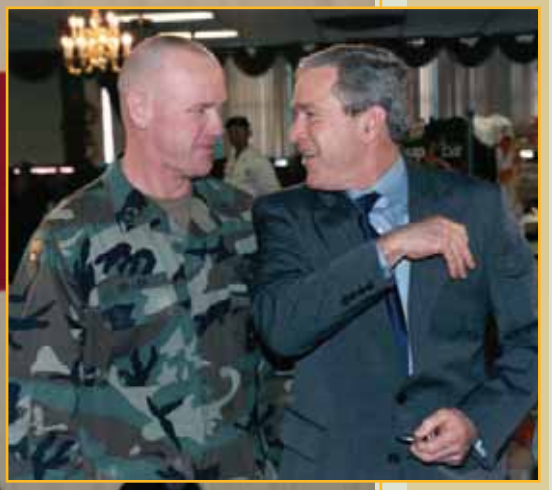
"In Iraq, where a dictator defied the world, cultivated ties to terror, armed with deadly weapons, America led a mission to make the world safer, and to liberate the Iraqi people. And that brutal dictator's regime is no more. Thanks to our great military, Iraqi citizens do not have to fear the dictator's secret police or ending up in a mass grave. Thanks to our military, the torture chambers are closed and the prison cells for children are empty. Thanks to our military, we have captured many members of the former regime, and the rest of them have a lot to worry about.

"America's military is fighting to help democracy peace and justice rise in a troubled and violent region. And because we're fighting terrorist enemies thousands of miles away, in the heart and center of their power, we are making the United States of America more secure.

"Today, American forces in Iraq are joined by about 24,000 troops from 32 other countries. Together, we're helping the Iraqi people move steadily toward a free and democratic society. As Iraq joins — rejoins the world, it will demonstrate the power of freedom and hope to overcome resentment and hatred. And this transformation will help make America more secure.

"The work we are in is not easy, yet it is essential. The failure of democracy in Iraq would provide new bases for the terrorist network and embolden terrorists and their allies around the world. The failure of democracy in those countries would convince terrorists that America backs down under attack. Yet democracy will succeed in Iraq, because





Above, President George W. Bush addresses troops at Fort Carson, Colo., in November 2003. *Photo by MAJ Paul Madsen*; top right, SFC Robert Miller presents a coin he received during his last deployment in Iraq to President Bush; right, Soldiers from SMDC/ARSTRAT and Fort Carson have their picture taken with President Bush. *White House photos*

our will is firm and our word is good. Democracy will succeed because every month, more and more Iraqis are fighting for their own country. People we have liberated will not surrender their freedom.

The President paused for a long, pregnant moment. His next comment came with great force and increasing volume.

"Democracy will succeed because the United States of America will not be intimidated by a bunch of thugs!"

Cheers greeting that defiant promise echoed loud and long. Bush praised all present and said public words of comfort for the losses the post had suffered, promising private ones with family members later.

The President then waded into the crowd, trailed closely by ubiquitous Secret Service men, shaking hands with all he came in contact with. His passage was marked by thunderous "U.S.A.s!" and more quiet "God bless you, Mr. Presidents."

SGT Jennifer Meadows, a Space operations NCO, was one of those chosen to sit on the podium behind the President.

"It was quite an honor. I've never met a President before. And at the end, when he was shaking hands with the crowd it looked like he wouldn't get to us and the group of people I was with started yelling "Mr. President, Mr. President!" He looked around, saw us, smiled and headed in our direction. People were so eager to shake his hand I almost got knocked over. He saw it, and said, "Whoa, let's not get anybody hurt!" and made sure to shake my hand. The whole experience, especially his speech, was very, very motivating," said Meadows.

The crowd filing out proved her point — pumped, motivated … and proud to serve.

MAJ Laura Kenney is a mobilized reservist serving in the SMDC/ARSTRAT Colorado Springs public affairs office in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. She served five years active duty as an enlisted journalist with Air Defense Command in Germany. As a commissioned Reserve officer, she performed in public affairs in the Gulf War theater, and served as deputy public affairs officer for the American sector in Bosnia-Hercegovinia in 2001.