

STATE VISIT

PRESIDENT HELPS NGAUS UNVEIL BRONZE BUST OF 20TH GUARD CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BY JOHN GOHEEN

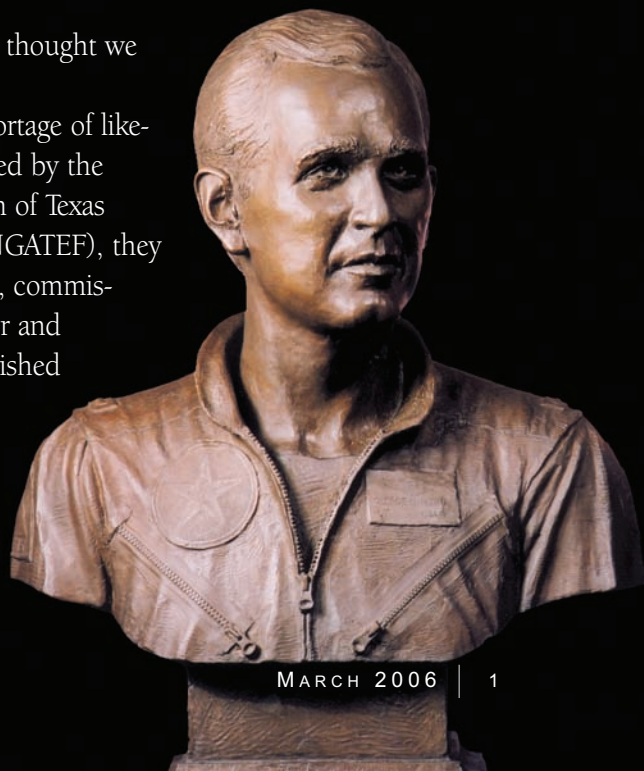
It started with a casual observation nearly five years ago: A former Texas National Guardsman was in the White House, yet no organized effort was underway to add his bronze likeness to the busts of other Guard presidents at The National Guard Memorial.

That was motivation enough for retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Lewis King, who's been in or around the Texas Guard since the Korean War. He considers "like family" every current and former member of the organization—from privates to the president.

"It was just something I thought we ought to do," he says.

Chief King found no shortage of like-minded people. Coordinated by the National Guard Association of Texas Educational Foundation (NGATEF), they raised thousands of dollars, commissioned a renowned sculptor and arranged delivery of the finished bust.

They and NGAUS officials then waited months to secure time on the president's schedule for a formal unveiling.



Persistence finally paid off Feb. 9 when President Bush visited the Guard Memorial to help unveil the bust and deliver a speech on the global war on terror that was televised live around the world on CNN and MSNBC.

Scheduling an event with the president—even one in Washington, D.C.—is rather difficult.

White House staffers say they can honor only a tiny fraction of invitations received. And it can take several attempts and many months just to pierce the bureaucratic layers to get an event considered.

Other portions of the effort took considerably less time. It took only 12 months for the NGATEF to raise more than the required \$75,000, says Chief King. In all, the foundation collected about \$150,000. Most of the remaining balance went to college scholarships for Texas Guardsmen and their families.

The finished bust (*Inset photo, page 35*) depicts Lieutenant Bush in his Texas Air Guard flight suit. It sits on a green marble pedestal inscribed, “George W. Bush, First Lieutenant, 111th Fighter Squadron, 147th Fighter Group, Texas National Guard, 1968-1973, Presented by the National Guard Association of Texas.”

Charles Parks of Wilmington, Del., who has produced more than 500 works over a 50-year career, sculpted the bust from photographs. The shoulder patches are the only parts not hand crafted. They are actual unit patches coated with a thin layer of bronze.

On stage Feb. 9, the president joked: “Charles caught me before my hair turned gray.” He devoted most of his remarks, however, to more serious themes, such as Guard contributions to the war on terror.

“America is grateful,” Mr. Bush told about 150 invited guests—including Chief King and other bust contributors—in the Guard Memorial’s Walsh-Reckord Hall of States. “From your First Muster in 1636 to today’s global war on terror, Americans have counted on the Guard to protect our land and defend our way of life.”

Some 290,000 people have joined the Guard since Sept. 11, 2001, the president said. And more than 350,000 have re-enlisted. “These brave Americans saw the future the terrorists intend for us, and they said, ‘Not on my watch,’” he said to a round of applause.

Mr. Bush also mentioned that more than 260,000 Guardsman have been mobilized since 9/11.

“Our country owes them something in return,” he said.

The president listed several improvements for the Guard already implemented or that are coming: better call-up processes, more mobilization predictability, expanded health care and education benefits, and tripled re-enlistment bonuses.

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And he didn’t avoid the controversy of his 2007 budget request to fund only 332,900 Army Guard soldiers—well below the Army Guard’s end strength of 350,000 or even its actual personnel strength of more than 335,000.

“As the Guard recruits above [332,900 personnel],” Mr. Bush said, “we’ll make certain that there is funding in place for every citizen who steps forward to wear the uniform.”

He also used the venue to disclose new details of a foiled al-Qaida plot to fly a plane into the West Coast’s tallest building not long after 9/11.

The target was a 73-story Los Angeles office building, then called the Library Tower. It was renamed U.S.

Bank Tower in 2003. The scheme involved terrorists using shoe bombs to hijack an aircraft and then fly it into the skyscraper.

The plot was thwarted in early 2002, the president said, when a Southeast Asian nation arrested a key al-Qaida operative who was in on the plan.

“Subsequent debriefings and other intelligence operations made clear the intended target and how al-Qaida hoped to execute it,” he said.

The president said the ringleader of the West Coast plot was Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks who was captured in Pakistan in 2003. He planned to use Southeast Asian men rather than Arabs so as not to arouse as much suspicion.

Mr. Bush is the 20th president with Guard service. He entered office as the 19th Guard president; however, subsequent research by National Guard Bureau historians discovered that James Monroe served briefly in the Virginia militia, pushing the current commander in chief to number 20.

The busts of 10 presidents are now on display in the Statuary Gallery of the Guard Memorial. Nine are U.S. presidents, including such stalwarts as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Harry S. Truman. The 10th is Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America who served in the Mississippi militia.

All 10 busts were presented by their home states, undoubtedly spurred on by their own versions of Chief King. 