



P22860-20A Having just cut the ribbon dedicating the Fisher House at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, President Bush hands the scissors to Rear Admiral David M Lichtman, Commander National Naval Medical Center, as the Fishers, Mrs. Bush, and Secretary of the Navy Lawrence Garrett III look on. 24 June 1991 Photo Credit: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum

A NAVY NURSE REMEMBERS PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH



P30321-30A President Bush greets naval personnel during his visit to Bethesda Naval Hospital for his annual physical. 26 March 1992 Photo Credit: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum

By Capt. Joan Huber (Ret.), Nurse Corps, USN

Editor's note: President George H.W. Bush's passing on November 30, 2018, gives us a reason to a pause and look back at the life and legacy of a leader who served with honor, kindness, and integrity. President Bush was a former naval aviator and combat veteran who never forgot his ties to the service. For Capt. Joan Huber, a retired Navy nurse who served in the White House Medical Unit (WHMU) during the Reagan and Bush administrations, George H.W. Bush was a tireless and dedicated public servant who always had time for a kind gesture. In the following lightly edited excerpt of a 2014 oral history, Huber shares some of her recollections of the former president.



Then-Cmdr. Joan Huber. (U.S. Navy photo from the BUMED Archives)

I reported to the White House in April of 1986, and was there until December 31 of 1989. I was there for President Reagan and Vice President Bush, and then President Bush and Vice President Quayle. Our job, the quick and dirty, is that the 25th Amendment says that if at any time the president can't do his job, his responsibilities pass to the next person in succession. Somebody has to be with him to be doing what amounts to a continuous real-time fitness for duty exam. Wherever he goes, there's a medical person with him and the same thing for the vice president. So the 12 of us...split up the duties. Each day you would be assigned to a different principal. One day you'd be with the president, the next day you might be with the vice president or you might be with the first lady.

Wherever they went, you went and whatever they did you went along whether it was a meeting, luncheon, or special event. So, when you went in the morning there might be meetings, and in the afternoon he goes to a luncheon, and then later that night he goes to a dinner, and you would have to keep changing to be in equivalent type of clothes. You would get a schedule, usually the day before, telling you that you need business attire for this event or special dress for that event.

If you were assigned to a principal, you were assigned to them for the entire day — from the time they got up in the morning until the time they went to bed at night. And that could be a short day or a long day.

President Bush was a really early riser. He liked to be up and out by five, and whereas President Reagan exercised in the gym, President Bush liked to run. We would go over to Fort Myer [in Arlington, Va.] each morning; they could close the gate and he would run. If you had him that day, you'd have a Jeep and would ride 100 yards behind him equipped with splints and Ace wraps and ice bags in case anything

happened. He would probably be in the office no later than 6:30 each morning. President Bush bounced around a lot. He would come back then go out and do an event and then come back, and then go out and do an event and come back. And he would go all night; he was like the Energizer Bunny.

President Bush was also very personable. I remember one time I accompanied him to a national math competition when he was vice president and he was going to be the person who asked the final round of questions. So I was the medic assigned to him that day and we went over and sat behind the curtain while he asked these questions and it was along the lines of "What is the first prime integer after the square root of... ." And these kids knew all the answers. As we were leaving Vice President Bush leaned over and said to me, "Joanie, could you have answered any of those questions?"

I said, "Sir, I didn't even understand all those questions!" He was just a real personable guy.

[When I was in the WHMU] he promoted me from lieutenant commander to commander in the Oval Office. He gave me a choice of where I wanted to stand and do the ceremony. He had a model of the USS *Constitution* in his office, so I said, "I'd like to do it by the *Constitution* model."

And he said, "For two old Navy hands doing a ceremony in front of the *Constitution* sounds perfect."

I loved him for the way he treated my parents. When I was getting ready to transfer, you get a "good-bye ceremony" with the president and the first lady. So when I was getting ready to leave, he invited my parents to come down that day. And, of course, my mother and father were just agog. They went out and bought new clothes and got to take part in the ceremony. I got a letter of appreciation and an award while standing in the Oval Office with my mother standing there proud as punch and my dad just beaming. President and Mrs. Bush talked about what a nice person I was and how they enjoyed me and how helpful I had been. And then when the ceremony was over and as we were leaving the Oval Office, President Bush catches my dad's arm and pulls him back into the room and he said, "Dad to dad, father to father, you have a really good kid." And the Secret Service agent who witnessed this said you could watch my father's chest just puff up; he was just so proud, and I just thought that was the most thoughtful, genuine, lovely thing he could have done for my parents.

[i] Huber, Joan, CAPT, NC, USN. Oral History, 14 February 2014 (Conducted by A.B. Sobocinski). BUMED Oral History Archives.