

# At Easter Sunday service, Bush prays for soldiers' well-being

By NEDRA PICKLER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**FORT HOOD, Texas** — President Bush attended an Easter service Sunday at Fort Hood where he offered prayers for peace and the well-being of American soldiers and their families.

For a third straight year, the president made the 50-mile helicopter flight from his ranch in Crawford to mark Christianity's highest holiday at the largest active-duty armored post in the military and one that has contributed thousands of troops to U.S. forces in Iraq.

"I want to wish all the fellow citizens and their families a happy Easter," Bush told reporters after the service. "We prayed for peace, we prayed for our soldiers and their families. It's an honor to be here at Fort Hood to celebrate Easter with those who wear the nation's uniform."

Bush and his family worshipped at the 4th Infantry Division Memorial Chapel along with several hundred other worshippers, some of whom wore Army fatigues and other uniforms. The first family occupied the entire right front pew. Joining them were Bush's parents, his wife and his

twin daughters.

There was no fanfare for the first family during the service, other than a brief recognition at the beginning. One of the pastors thanked the president's mother for getting him out of bed early for Easter service and said it was a good habit. "He may go somewhere one of these days," the pastor said to laughter from the congregation.

The president and his family then returned to the ranch for the day. Their Easter dinner menu included Texas grapefruit; homemade mozzarella salad; glazed ham; green chili cheese grits soufflé; roasted asparagus with lemon dressing; chive biscuits; fresh fruit; coconut cake; and blueberry pie.

Bush was returning to Washington on Monday, but did not plan to be back at the White House in time for Monday's traditional Easter egg roll on the South Lawn. His plans for the week include a speech on freedom and democracy Tuesday in the Rose Garden and a trip to Iowa Wednesday to promote personal accounts for Social Security.

Earlier Sunday, the top U.S. military officer in the Mideast spoke of hopeful developments in

Iraq and their effect on the number of U.S. troops in the country.

"I think that we've gone from a primarily military environment, to a primarily political one. And that's a very encouraging sign," said Army Gen. John Abizaid, the commander of U.S. Central Command.

"Obviously, the longer we have a delay in the formation of the Iraqi government, the more uncertainty there will be. The more uncertainty, the greater chance for escalated violence," he told CNN's "Late Edition."

"American forces provide the shield by which the political process can take place. And American forces also have got to develop the Iraqi security forces. When politics move forward and Iraqi security forces move forward, you will start to see not only a big change in the prospects for peace and prosperity in the region, but an opportunity for a pretty substantial drawdown of our own forces," Abizaid said.

Military leaders have said that the extra 15,000 or so U.S. troops added during the run-up to Iraq's elections in January would be gone by the end of March. That would leave the U.S. force at about 138,000 troops.



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Bush talks to reporters following Easter worship services at Ft. Hood, Texas, about 50 miles from their ranch in Crawford. Bush said, "We prayed for peace, we prayed for our soldiers and their families. It's an honor to be here at Fort Hood to celebrate Easter with those who wear the nation's uniform."

## MIDDLE EAST

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population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return of the West Bank, Bush wrote in a letter.

Kurtzer and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice repeated the Bush formula, but U.S. officials also criticized the Maaleh Adumim expansion plan, which would fill the last vacant patch around Jerusalem, cutting off the Arab section from the West Bank with Jewish neighborhoods. Palestinians want east Jerusalem as the capital of their independent state.

At a Cabinet meeting Sunday, Sharon admitted that the Bush administration still opposes expanding settlements.

"The United States differentiates between keeping settlement blocs and continuing building in the settlements at this time," Sharon said, according to participants. "They have been opposed to this since 1968."

Sharon's comments came on the eve of a parliamentary vote on

calling a referendum over his plans to pull out of Gaza and part of the West Bank. The vote Monday could be close, with parties maneuvering for position until the last minute, but it appeared that Sharon had a majority against holding the referendum, which he calls a delaying tactic that would delay or scuttle the withdrawal plan.

The settlement issue has been a major sticking point in attempts to implement the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan, which never got off the ground after Bush introduced it in 2003. But with a six-week truce holding for the most part, hopes have been raised that peacemaking can resume, based on the plan.

The initial stage requires Israel to halt all settlement construction and remove dozens of unauthorized outposts from the West Bank, while the Palestinians dismantle violent groups. Neither side has carried out those steps.

Instead of peace moves, the truce itself is teetering, with charges by Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz that Palestinians succeeded in smuggling Strela anti-aircraft missiles into Gaza through tunnels under the

Egyptian border.

If true, the missiles could change the strategic picture, threatening Israeli military helicopters flying over Gaza. According to participants in the Cabinet meeting, Mofaz said, "Last week several Strelas were smuggled in by Palestinian military intelligence. If the Palestinians (police) don't get hold of the Strelas, we will."

Israel has refrained from raids into Gaza since Sharon and Abbas declared a truce on Feb. 8. Before that, Israeli forces went into Gaza several times a week, looking for militants and destroying tunnels.

Rejecting Mofaz's warnings, Palestinian Information Minister Nabil Shaath charged that Israel was trying to sabotage the truce.

"I hope this is not an indication of future Israeli acts of aggression against us," he said.

Mofaz also told the Cabinet that he postponed handing over Qalqilya, the third of five Palestinian towns due to be transferred to Palestinian security. He charged that the Palestinians are not carrying out their security pledges in the first two, Jericho and Tulkarem.

## USC student robbed at Eckerd

By TAYLOR SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

A USC student endangered her life for eyeliner Wednesday after a man robbed her of \$7 and ran out of a Columbia Eckerd shouting the catchphrase of a '90s television show.

At 9:30 p.m. at the Eckerd on Harden Street, Kathryn McCullough, a second-year English student was perusing through cosmetics when a man walked up behind her and instructed her to quietly produce her wallet because he had a gun. After McCullough took out her wallet, the man extracted \$7 and ran out of the store yelling, "She's on 'Candid Camera.'"

"It was really really bizarre. He stole \$7, ran out of the store and yelled it," McCullough said. "I was scared the entire time, but I am laughing about it now."

Stunned, McCullough walked to the counter with her roommate, second-year retail student Ashley Hotham, and told the cashier and manager what happened. After hearing what happened from McCullough, Hotham said she thought the manager would call the police, but they never did.

"The manager came up and was surprised it happened, but didn't offer anything," Hotham said. "He just said he was sorry and walked away."

The roommates left the store, but upon calling her father (an attorney in Charlotte), McCullough realized they probably should have called the police. She said her father was upset and decided to write several letters to the Eckerd the next day when McCullough pressed charges.

"He's not suing. He was just really mad," McCullough said. "They should have called the police, and I would have insisted but I was out of it and just wanted to leave."

McCullough said she talked to an investigator and gave him a description of the suspect but was unsure as to how well she saw him. She said she probably would be able to recognize the man she now laughs at when asked if she could recognize him in a lineup.

"I figured he was either crazy or just trying to confuse everyone," McCullough said. "I mean, I didn't look around for a candid camera."

The City of Columbia denies the state capital is any more

dangerous than other city's of similar size, but Hotham disagrees. She said she prefers her home city of Charlotte, N.C., to the Five Points area where she lives.

"I am a resident and student here, but this doesn't need to happen," Hotham said. "Parents are entrusting the city with our safety and then this happens."

Typically, McCullough said she goes to the Eckerd on Rosewood Avenue. She even said she can notice a difference in police presence between USC and the city.

"I don't ever see an officer down (in Five Points)," McCullough said. "I see officers on campus, but I live down there and I don't see many."

Hotham said it is a little amusing that something like this happened to the "cautious" McCullough. She said she isn't surprised it happened to her.

"She gets herself in situations like this, and I can look back and laugh," Hotham said of the lost \$7. "For this to happen is a little amusing because people always think I am the reckless one."

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