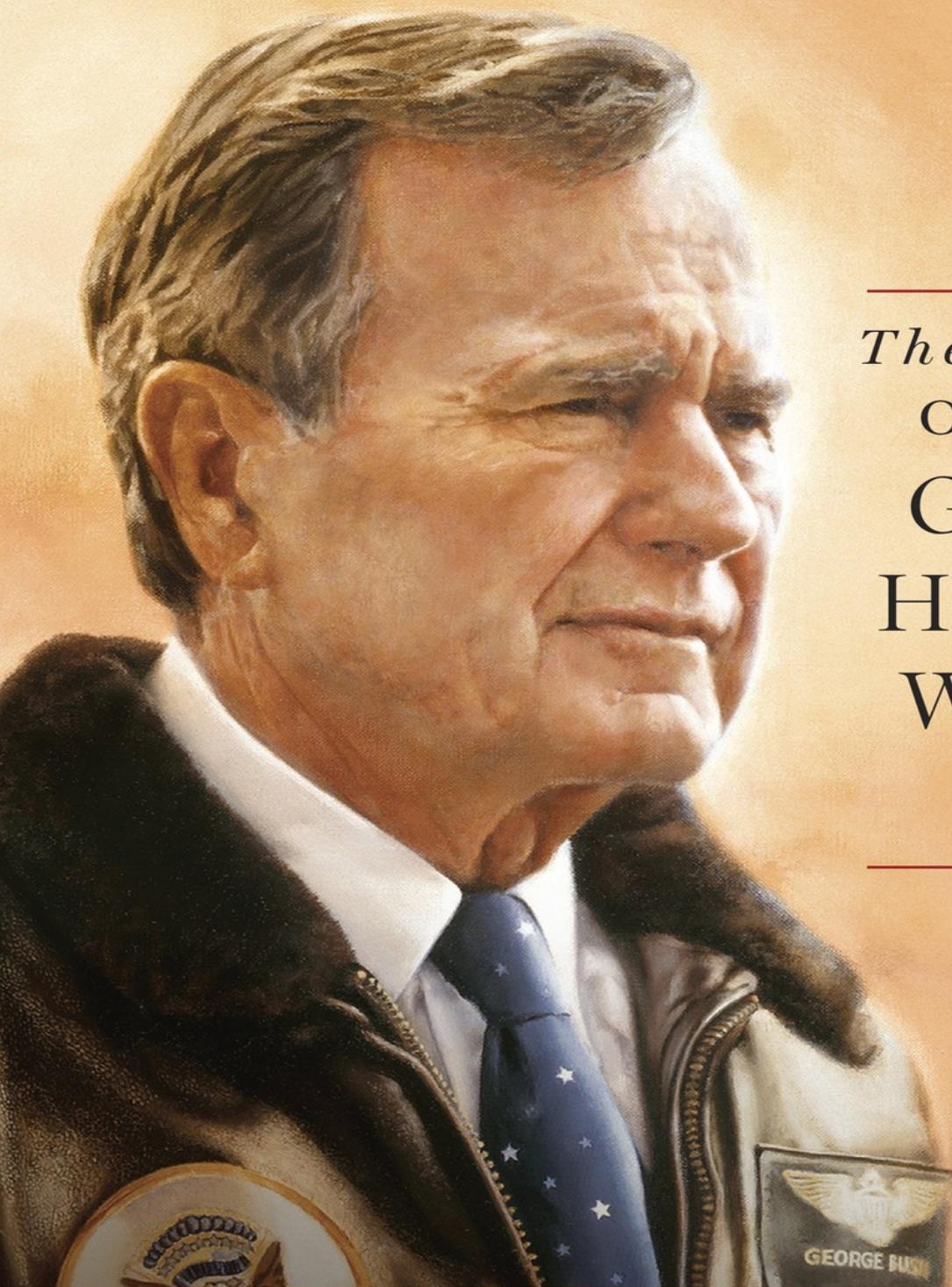


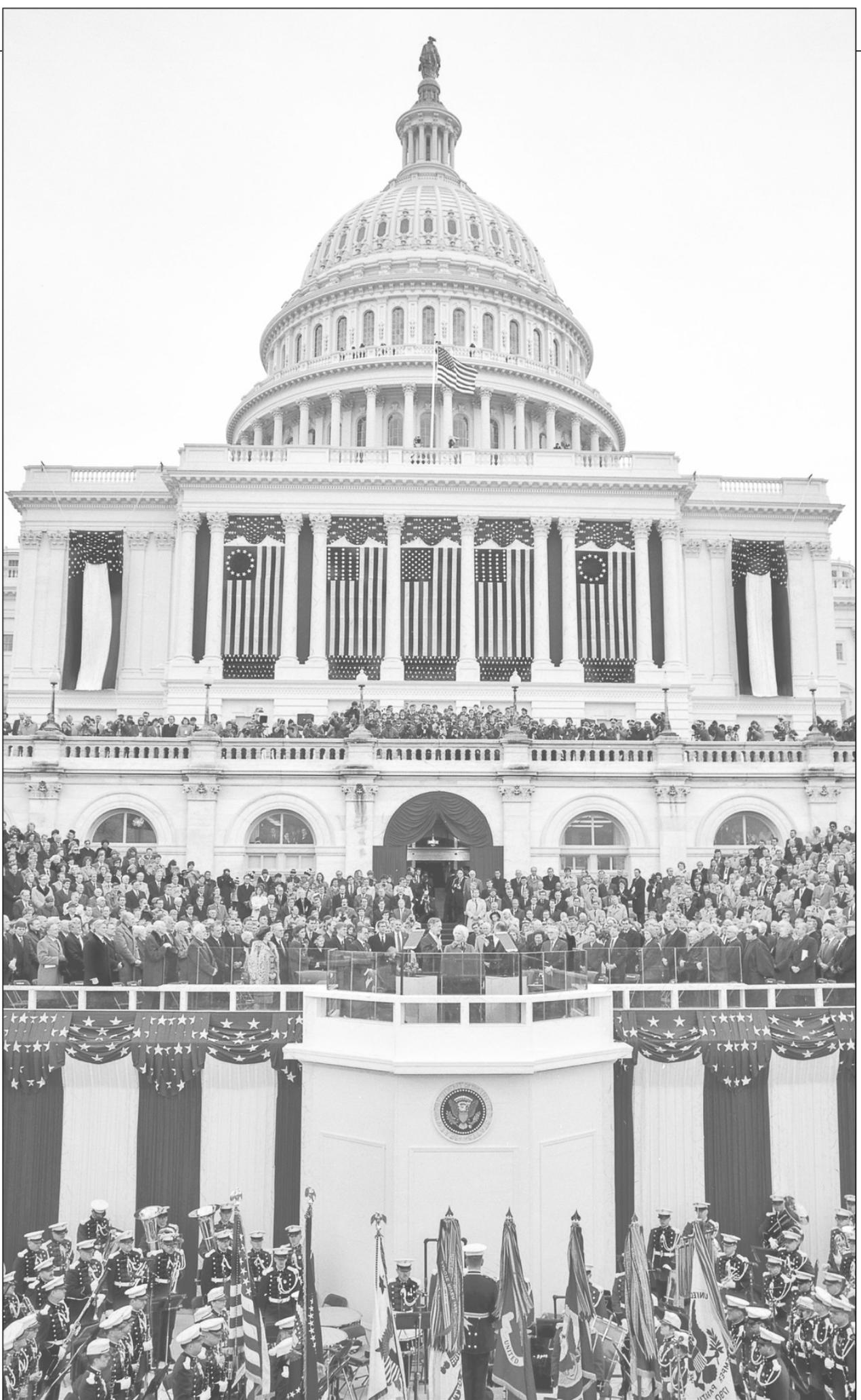
JON MEACHAM

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE



—★—
The AMERICAN
ODYSSEY *of*
GEORGE
HERBERT
WALKER
BUSH
—★—

Destiny and Power



Credit fm1.1

DESTINY
and POWER



The American Odyssey of
George Herbert
Walker Bush



JON MEACHAM



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New York

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ISBN 9781400067657

eBook ISBN 9780812998207

randomhousebooks.com

TITLE PAGE: Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist swears in George Herbert Walker Bush as the nation's forty-first president, the West
Front of the U.S. Capitol, Friday, January 20, 1989.

Book design by Simon M. Sullivan, adapted for eBook

Cover design: Tom Mckeveny

Cover painting: Jeffrey W. Bass

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Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing
to be achieved.

—WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN, American lawyer and statesman

Moods come and go, but greatness endures.

—GEORGE H. W. BUSH

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By Jon Meacham

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The Last Gentleman



HOUSTON, TEXAS, 12:15 A.M. CST, NOVEMBER 4, 1992

EVEN IN THE DARK, he tried to look ahead. It was late, and he knew he should sleep, but he just couldn't—not yet, anyway. Too much had happened; too much was on his mind.

In the Houstonian Hotel's suite 271 on the evening he lost his bid for a second term as president of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush climbed out of bed and slipped into an adjoining wood-paneled living room. Weary but restless, he settled on a small sofa. The room was empty, his heart full. There he sat, alone, struggling to make peace with the news that he, an American president who embodied the experience of the World War II generation, had just been defeated by Bill Clinton, the Baby Boomer Democratic governor of Arkansas. In his private, tape-recorded diary, Bush dictated: "I ache and I now must think: how do you keep your chin up, keep your head up through a couple of difficult days ahead?" He kept his voice low: Barbara, his devoted wife of forty-seven years, was asleep back in the bedroom. "I think of our country, and the people that are hurting, and there's so much we didn't do" Bush told his diary. "And yes, progress that we made, but no, the job is not finished, and that kills me."

Not so long before, it had all been different: George Bush had always finished the job. From his earliest days, he had done what his parents, his teachers, and his country had asked of him. He had not only met expectations but exceeded them, time and again. Born in 1924, he was a son of privilege, raised in Greenwich, Connecticut, and at the seaside Walker's Point in Kennebunkport, Maine. He had joined the navy on his eighteenth birthday. As a carrier-based bomber pilot in the Pacific in World War II, he had been shot down at the age of twenty—but had finished his mission, attacking an enemy radio tower on Chichi-Jima even after his plane had been hit. He had raised a family, lost a daughter to leukemia, built a business, and thrived in the treacherous world of American politics. As president of the United States he had ended the Cold War with the Soviet Union, lifting the specter of nuclear war from the life of the nation and of the world, and led a global coalition to military victory in the Middle East. The American economy, however, had slipped into recession on his watch, leading to a persistent public sense that he was a rich man out of touch with the concerns of the people in his care. The caricature wasn't particularly fair, but, as Bush often said, politics never was.

On this election night, he had said the gracious things, calling the president-elect in Little Rock to concede the race and promise a smooth transition. Yet the loss "hurt, hurt, hurt," Bush dictated, "and I guess it's the pride, too." It was surely the pride, too—not a doubt in the world about that. "I don't like to see the pollsters right at the end," he dictated. "I don't like to see the pundits right; I don't like to see all of those who have written me off right. I was absolutely convinced we would prove them wrong, but I was wrong and they were right, and that hurts a lot."

He had lost to an opponent he privately considered a “draft dodger.” Such was this decorated World War II veteran’s view of the younger man—now the president-elect—who had managed to stay out of the armed forces during the Vietnam War and had participated in an antiwar demonstration in England as a Rhodes Scholar. “I guess it’s losing to Bill Clinton, the person,” Bush dictated. “I like him, but how do you be the commander in chief when you duplicitously avoid service to your country? Maybe it is time for a new generation. He’s George [W.]’s age, a generation more in touch, a background more in touch....I know what the charge is, but I’ve never felt ‘out of touch,’ but then I’ve always assumed there was duty, honor, country. I’ve always assumed that was just part of what Americans are made of—quite clearly it’s not.” Two days later, in another diary entry, the defeated president said: “I still feel that there is a disconnect...honor, duty, and country—it’s just passé. The values are different now, the lifestyles, the accepted vulgarity, the manners, the view of what’s patriotic and what’s not, the concept of service. All these are in the hands of a new generation now, and I feel I have the discomfort of knowing that I have upheld these values and I live and stand by them. I have the discomfort of knowing that they might be a little out of date.”

Honor, duty, country. Those verities, together with a driving ambition and an abiding competitive spirit, had shaped his life and his understanding of the nation. There was nothing affected about Bush’s vision of politics as a means to public service, and of public service as the highest of calling. This vision of himself engaged in what Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., called “the passion and action” of the time was as real to him as the air he breathed.

Early on election night his sons George W. and Jeb had tried to cheer him up. “The boys [are] telling me, ‘We’re proud of you, Dad, we’re very proud of you,’ ” Bush dictated. “Yes, their father was President and all of that, but a failed President.” In his anguish he was being too hard on himself. He had lost an election, not his place in history.

For now, though, Bush needed a way forward through the shadows of defeat, and he returned to a few core truths that had always guided him. “Be strong,” he told himself in his living room musing, “be kind, be generous of spirit, be understanding, let people know how grateful you are, don’t gloat, even, comfort the ones I’ve hurt and let down, say your prayers and ask for God’s understanding and strength, finish with a smile and with some gusto, do what’s right and finish strong.”

With that, the forty-first president of the United States retired for the night, rejoining the sleeping Barbara. Now he had a plan. Now he could rest. He told himself something else, too, in the days after the defeat. “It’ll change,” he dictated. “It’ll change.”

And so it did. The farther the country moved from his presidency the larger Bush loomed, and the qualities so many voters found to be vices in 1992 came to be seen as virtues—his public reticence; his old-fashioned dignity; his tendency to find a middle course between extremes. He lived long enough to see the shift, and he appreciated that people were taking a more benign view of his record. Amid a conference at his presidential library in 2014, his ninetieth year, a visitor asked him what he made of all the encomiums and positive revision of his legacy. “Hard to believe,” Bush remarked. “It’s ‘kinder and gentler’ all over the place.”

His was one of the great American lives—strong parents, a sparkling education, heroic service in World War II, success in Texas oil, congressman, ambassador to the United Nations, chairman of the Republican National Committee, envoy to China, director of Central Intelligence, vice president of the

United States, forty-first president, and the only president since John Adams to see his son also win the ultimate prize in American politics.

A formidable physical presence—six foot two, handsome, dominant in person—he spoke with his strong, big hands, waving dismissively to deflect unwelcome subjects or to suggest that someone was, as he would put it, “way out there,” beyond the mainstream, beyond reason, beyond *Bush*. Television conveyed his lankiness, but not his athleticism and his grace. He was the kind of man other men noted and the kind women were often surprised to find attractive. He was a terrific flirt, charming women and men alike with a perpetual ebullience. Bush was a master of what Franklin Roosevelt thought of as “the science of human relationships,” and his capacity to charm—with a handwritten note, a phone call, a quick email, a wink, a thumbs-up—was crucial to his success in public life. He lacked the glamour of a John Kennedy or the stage presence of a Ronald Reagan; his was a quiet but persistent charisma, an ability to make others love him without, perhaps, their knowing quite why. He was driven less by ideas about politics than by an ideal of service and an ambition—a consuming one—to win.

In the White House, he peacefully managed the end of the Communist threat, secured the heart of Europe, and struggled to bring order to the chaos of the Middle East. Before his White House years, nuclear Armageddon between America and the Soviet Union was always a possibility; afterward it was unthinkable. President and statesman, politician and father, he was both a maker and a mirror of the story of American power—from the Allied victory against Germany and Japan to the beginning of the war on Islamic terror. On the home front, his 1990 budget agreement put controls on spending and created the conditions for the elimination of the federal budget deficit under Bill Clinton. He negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement, signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, and passed historic clean-air legislation.

Bush was a child of one generation’s ruling class, the head of another’s, and the father of yet a third. His life is a saga that ranges from the Gilded Age of railroad barons to the birth of Big Oil, from Greenwich and Midland to Washington, New York, Baghdad, and Beijing. His political life was shaped by two of the great forces in American life after World War II: the global responsibilities of vital atomic power in foreign affairs and the rise of the right wing of the Republican Party in domestic politics.

Americans unhappy with the reflexively polarized politics of the first decades of the twenty-first century will find the presidency of George H. W. Bush refreshing, even quaint. He embraced compromise as a necessary element of public life, engaged his political foes in the passage of important legislation, and was willing to break with the base of his own party in order to do what he thought was right, whatever the price. Quaint, yes: But it happened, in America, only a quarter of a century ago.

—

In the warm dusk of a Texas autumn a decade and a half after he left the White House, Bush, his leg propped atop a coffee table in his Houston living room, a glass of white wine at hand, reflected on what had driven him all his life. “My motivation’s always been *goal*—you know, to be captain,” he said, his left hand in a fist, punctuating his words. “Whatever it is. That’s not good in a way, but in any way it is. It’s what motivated me all my life. I’m a goal kind of guy.”

He fell silent. Hoping to hear more, a visitor ventured: “You were motivated to do well, to succeed

in the realms that life put you—”

Bush jumped in. “Whatever you’re in. Be number one.”

Where did it come from, this hunger for power? For that is what drove George H. W. Bush relentlessly and perennially: a hunger to determine the destinies of others, to command respect, to shape great events. Many men of his age and milieu attended good schools, fought in the war, and went from the Ivy League to Wall Street. They led good, comfortable lives; helped, in their way, to build the prosperity that drove the midcentury boom and gave millions of Americans the opportunity for education and affluence after World War II. The worlds of the men at the top—the kind of men who had been at Andover or at Yale with Bush—revolved around business in Manhattan, commuted home to the suburbs of New York and Connecticut, martinis at cocktail hour, golf on the weekends, subscriptions to *The New Yorker*.

Bush refused to follow that well-marked path. Offered jobs at Brown Brothers Harriman, his father’s private bank, and G. H. Walker & Company, his maternal grandfather’s investment firm, Bush demurred. “It just wasn’t *different* enough—didn’t have the edge of really doing something new,” Bush recalled. If he had chosen to join the established financial world, he knew how his life would unfold. “Wouldn’t have had much adventure, no excitement of trying new things, out of the family’s shadow. I loved my family—don’t get me wrong—but if I had gone to work for the businesses I wouldn’t have been able to set my own goals, make my own goals.”

In Greenwich and Kennebunkport, there was love, there was warmth, and there was kindness, but there was also the expectation that Walkers and Bushes were born to be tested—that life was not a country-club affair. It is a common mistake to assume that someone of George H. W. Bush’s breeding and background would see power as a birthright, as the natural inheritance of a man born to money and position. Quite the opposite: For the children of Dorothy and Prescott Bush, the truly desirable prizes were those one earned by skill and hard work, either on the field, the golf course, the tennis court, the oil fields, the business world, or in politics. To coast on the family name was a serious sin.

While this ethos of achievement produced children who were largely unentitled and unspoiled, it also created a family culture in which affection and approval could seem inextricably bound up with accomplishment. To be a good son, then, meant *doing* as well as *being*. All would be loved, no question, but those who came in first rose in the esteem of parents and grandparents. What child sensing this, would not yearn to excel, when excellence was the way to win, if not the love (which was always on offer), but the admiration of one’s elders? What child would not want to achieve what achievement was expected, noted, and honored?

Yet they were not to boast of what they won. Such was the Bush code: Strive for victory, but never seem self-involved. Dorothy Walker Bush’s admonitions to her children to be self-effacing were legendary. They were not to talk about themselves or their achievements: “Nobody likes braggadocio,” she would say, and that would be that. Dorothy Bush never asked how one of her children had played. It was “How did the team do?” When Bush would say “I was off my game,” his mother would reply “You don’t have a game.” She did not want to hear about what she called “the Great I Am.”

The Bushes kept score—fairly, but intensely and scrupulously, too. Proficiency was appreciated and admired, whether in business, sports, or politics. Things were not to be done halfheartedly or cavalierly. The family’s children were to master what they undertook and finish what they began.

No one ever met that tribal challenge with a greater sense of purpose than George Herbert Walker Bush. He had a mission: to serve, to make his mark, to be in the game. He was certain of his place

respectful of tradition, solicitous of others. Yet he was an ambitious politician, too, and therein lay the great tension of his life. To serve he had to win, and if he had to win then that meant someone else had to lose.

Which, when all was said and done, was just fine with George Bush. Such was the way of the world—a world that those closest to him and he himself (though he hated to admit it) long believed he was destined to run. As he grew up, meeting test after test, making friend after friend, impressing elder after elder, he became what Nancy Bush Ellis called “the star of the family”—a star of such brightness that winning the presidency of the United States itself seemed possible long before it became probable. “He was meant to be saved,” his sister remarked of his World War II experience. In the 1950s, Bush’s father introduced his son to the French ambassador in Washington. “This is my son George,” Prescott said, adding: “He’s going to be the President of the United States one day.”

Informed, however subtly, by the sense that he was destined to do great things, George Bush never doubted that he was the best man on the ballot. Armed with this self-confidence—a personal assurance masked by his kindness and his grace—he could justify adapting his principles and attacking his opponents as the inevitable price of politics. To Bush, such calculations were not cynical. They were instrumental to the desired end: the accumulation of power to be deployed in the service of America and of the world. What one said or did to rise to ultimate authority mattered less to Bush than whether one was principled and selfless once in command. And as president of the United States, Bush was often both.

For every compromise or concession to party orthodoxy or political expedience on the campaign trail, in office Bush sought to do the right thing. In 1964, when he ran for a U.S. Senate seat in Texas, he opposed the Civil Rights Act, only to vote for open housing in Congress four years later, much to the fury of his conservative constituents. In 1988, he made an absolute pledge on supply-side economics—“Read my lips, no new taxes”—only to break that promise two years later when he believed an agreement that included higher taxes was best for the country. After winning a hard-hitting presidential campaign, Bush sought what he called a “kinder and gentler” America, reaching out to Democrats and Republicans alike, seeking common ground on common problems.

Americans tend to prefer their presidents on horseback: heroes who dream big and sound the trumpets. There is, however, another kind of leader—quieter and less glamorous but no less significant—whose virtues repay our attention. There is greatness in political lives dedicated more to steadiness than to boldness, more to reform than to revolution, more to the management of complexity than to the making of mass movements. Bush’s life code, as he once put it in a letter to his mother, was “Tell the truth. Don’t blame people. Be strong. Do your Best. Try hard. Forgive. Stay the course.” Simple propositions—deceptively simple, for such sentiments are more easily expressed than embodied in the arena of public life.

Essentially modest, he had an underwhelming speaking style that prevented him from consistently defining a compelling national agenda. Instinctively generous, he risked appearing indecisive, even weak, when he was reaching out and listening to other people’s points of view. Highly intelligent, he could seem confused and sometimes unserious when discussing issues of great

significance.

Yet the nation was fortunate that George H. W. Bush was in power when the crises of his time came, for his essential character, his experience, and his temperament armed him well to bring the decades-long Cold War to an end, to confront the aggression of an irrational dictator, and to lead the nation toward fiscal responsibility. An imperfect leader, he was nevertheless well matched to the exigencies of his historical moment.

Bush was a steward, not a seer, and made no apologies for his preference for pragmatism over ideology. Unflinching creeds and consuming worldviews could lead to catastrophe, for devotees of a doctrine tended to fall in love with their own righteousness, ignoring inconvenient facts. He resisted ideological certainty and eloquent abstraction to such an extent that he dismissed questions about his goals for the nation as “the vision thing.” He knew all the charges and was impatient with the prevailing critique of his political persona. “One of the criticisms that got me was, ‘Well, he doesn’t have any vision, he doesn’t have any reason for being there,’ ” Bush recalled. “Well, what’s wrong with trying to help people, what’s wrong with trying to bring peace, what’s wrong with trying to make the world a little better?” Exactly why, he wondered, wasn’t that vision enough?

Taken all in all, Bush was a president less in the tradition of Ronald Reagan than of Dwight Eisenhower. Reagan spoke in terms of revolution, of great and necessary reforms to the existing order of things. Eisenhower said that his goal was to take America “down the middle of the road between the unfettered power of concentrated wealth...and the unbridled power of statism or partisan interests.” Moderate in temperament, Eisenhower and Bush were both more traditionally conservative than many of their contemporaries understood, in the sense that they sought above all to conserve what was good about the world as they found it. For them, conservatism entailed prudence and pragmatism. They eschewed the sudden and the visionary.

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For all of his years on the stage, Bush could be an enigmatic figure, and his public image conveyed neither the complexities of his character nor the depth of his emotions. He was a victim, in a way, of his instinct for dignity. Bill Clinton spoke of how he felt the pain of voters; Bush thought such language beneath the presidency even though, in private, beneath the surface and in his diary, he was an immensely sensitive man. He cried easily (especially as he grew older), but believed he should avoid such displays in public; they struck him as self-indulgent. Late in his vice presidential year Bush was visiting a children’s leukemia ward in Kraków, Poland. Thirty-five years before, he and Barbara had lost their daughter Robin to the disease, a family tragedy of which he rarely spoke in public. In Kraków, one patient, a seven- or eight-year-old boy, wanted to greet the American vice president. Learning that the child was sick with the cancer that had killed Robin, Bush began to cry.

“My eyes flooded with tears, and behind me was a bank of television cameras....And I thought myself, ‘I can’t turn around....I can’t dissolve because of personal tragedy in the face of a host of reporters and our hosts and the nurses that give of themselves every day.’ So I stood there looking at this little guy, tears running down my cheek, but able to talk to him pleasantly...hoping he didn’t see me but, if he did, hoping he’d feel that I loved him.” This was the private Bush. It was not the Bush that so many American voters knew very much, if anything, about.

His interior monologue about Kraków was found in the transcripts of diaries that Bush kept sporadically as vice president under Ronald Reagan and more regularly in his own four years

president. The diaries provide a remarkable personal perspective on Bush, who dictated into a handheld cassette recorder, sometimes carrying the device with him in his briefcase back and forth between the White House Residence and the West Wing. He would bring it along on trips aboard Marine One to Camp David and on Air Force One across the nation and the globe. He would speak into the machine quietly, often late at night or early in the morning. Taken all together, the diaries enable us, in effect, to sit with Bush as he muses about life at the highest levels.

Because he did not believe in burdening others—even his wife—with what he self-mockingly called “the loneliness of the job, the ‘woe-is-me’ stuff,” the forty-first president saved most of his expressions of frustration for his diary. When alone, speaking to himself and to history, Bush was honest about the vicissitudes of the presidency, about his hopes and fears, about the good days and the bad—and about what it was truly like to govern in what he once described as “a fascinating time of change in the world itself.”

To understand George Herbert Walker Bush and the country he led, we must begin not by the sea at his beloved Walker’s Point, nor on the lawns of Greenwich nor in the oil fields of Texas, but in the booming America of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an age in which the energetic and the ambitious were building great fortunes—and a great nation.

PART I

A Vanished Universe

Beginnings to 1942



It was a beautiful world to grow up in. A grand, funny world, really. Unimaginable now.

—NANCY BUSH ELLIS, sister of George H. W. Bush

The end depends upon the beginning.

—Motto of Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts



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"Poppy" Bush at school at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, where he was enrolled from 1937, when he was thirteen, until 1942, the year he graduated and went into the navy

The Land of the Self-Made Man



Is it not by the courage always to do the right thing that the fires of hell shall be put out?

—THE REVEREND JAMES SMITH BUSH, Episcopal clergyman and great-grandfather of George H. W. Bush

Failure seems to be regarded as the one unpardonable crime, success as the one all-redeeming virtue, the acquisition of wealth as the single worthy aim of life.

—CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS, JR.

TO SAMUEL PRESCOTT BUSH—“Bushy” to his beloved first wife, Flora—the ocean seemed to go on forever. The view from the top of the Hotel Traymore overlooking the boardwalk in Atlantic City at Illinois Avenue was grand, and unique: A publicist for the hotel assured the press that the Traymore roof was “the most elevated point on the Atlantic coast south of the Statue of Liberty.” (“In absence of evidence to the contrary,” a reporter added, “we take his word for it.”) A prominent Midwestern industrialist, Bush was at the Jersey Shore in the early summer of 1915 to take part in what was described as “the highest golf driving contest ever held in the history of the great Scotch game.”

In from Columbus, Ohio, where he presided over Buckeye Steel Castings Company, a manufacturer of railroad parts, the tall, angular Bush looked out from a makeshift tee atop the brick hotel two hundred feet above the beach. A favorite of well-heeled visitors to Atlantic City, the domed Traymore had just undergone renovations that *Bankers’ Magazine* solemnly reported had turned the hotel into a showplace with “700 rooms and 700 baths”—the kind of construction project that was making grandeur ever more accessible to men who were building a prosperous business class.

S. P. Bush was one such man. The son of an Episcopal clergyman, Bush, who was to become George H. W. Bush’s paternal grandfather, had spent much of his childhood in New York and New Jersey. After college, Bush went west, finding his future at Buckeye, a company run, in the first decade of the new century, by a brother of John D. Rockefeller, Frank. President of Buckeye since 1908 and director of numerous railway companies, S. P. Bush had grown rich. Standing on the roof of the Hotel Traymore, he was part of an emerging American elite—one based not on birth but on success and achievement. Facing the Atlantic, in a long-sleeved dress shirt and formal trousers, Bush, driver in hand, took his stance and swung smoothly. He connected just the way he wanted to—cleanly and perfectly. The ball rose rapidly, a tiny spinning meteor. Bush’s shot streaked out over the sea, soaring over the white-capped waves before disappearing deep in the distance, the sound of its splash lost to the wind and surf.

Bush won, of course. Though his opponents did what they could, they failed to surpass Bush’s dramatic drive. It was not the most serious of competitions, but that did not matter. *The New York Times* reported Bush’s triumph. A contest was a contest.

To win was to be alive; to compete was as natural as breathing—a common code among the ancestors of George Herbert Walker Bush. Theirs is a story of big men and strong women, ambitious husbands and fathers taking unconventional risks—in business, in politics, even in religion—while wives and mothers who might have expected fairly staid lives adapt and emerge as impressive figures in their own rights. Across more than two centuries, maternal and paternal lines reinforced and supported one another, producing generation after generation driven by both the pursuit of wealth and by a sense of public service.

Bush's ancestors were in America from the seventeenth century forward. Some arrived on the *Mayflower*, settling in New England. On the night of Tuesday, April 18, 1775, the Massachusetts patriot Dr. Samuel Prescott, a Bush forebear, rode with Paul Revere and William Dawes to warn the Concord of the pending British invasion.

Obadiah Bush, George H. W. Bush's great-great-grandfather, was born in 1797, served in the War of 1812 at age fifteen, and became a schoolmaster in Cayuga County, New York. He married a pupil (a young woman whom family tradition recalled as the "comely" Harriet Smith), and went into business in Rochester. He fell on hard times and, in distress, unsuccessfully turned to Senator William Sewall (who would join Lincoln's cabinet much later) in search of government preferment in Rio de Janeiro or another "healthful port."

Gold, or at least the prospect of it, saved him, then killed him. Obadiah grew obsessed with news of the gold rush in California, journeying west to look into mining opportunities in the San Francisco area. He liked what he found but died before he could collect his family and permanently relocate.

Obadiah's eldest son, James Smith Bush, who would become George H. W. Bush's great-grandfather, barely made it out of infancy. Born in 1825, he was described as "a puny and sickly child of fragile build, with weak lungs." A doctor was harsh with Harriet Bush, James Smith Bush's mother: "You had better knock him in the head, for [even] if he lives he will never amount to anything." He survived, and, in 1841, at sixteen, enrolled at Yale College. James Smith Bush was popular and charming, a conscientious student, and an excellent athlete, especially at crew. "His classmates speak of him as tall and slender in person, rather grave of mien, except when engaged in earnest conversation or good-humored repartee; ever kind and considerate, and always a gentleman—strongly very strong in his likes and dislikes," a friend of Bush's wrote. "He made many friends."

These and other family traits became evident in Bush's life during his Yale years. There was restlessness, an eagerness to break away from the established order of life, but not so much that one could not return. There was a kind of moderation, a discomfort with extremes or dogma. There was a capacity to charm and a fondness for attractive women. And there was also a sense of familial duty. At college he realized that his father, Obadiah, was short of money, and so James Smith Bush sought professional security in the law. On a visit to Saratoga Springs as a young attorney, he was dazzled by the passing figure of Sarah Freeman, the daughter of a local doctor. She was, it was said, "the most beautiful woman of this place," and Bush fell in love. They married in October 1851, and he took her to live in Rochester.

Bush adored his bride, and the world seemed a brighter, happier place to him with her in it. The eighteen months after the wedding, Sarah Freeman Bush died, devastating her young husband into near insensibility. Shattered by the loss of his wife, Bush sought consolation in religion. Initially Presbyterian, he had become an Episcopalian under Sarah's influence. Now, in the wake of the

calamity of her death, Bush was ordained a priest and served Grace Church in Orange, New Jersey beginning in June 1855. He eventually found another great love: Harriet Eleanor Fay. Like Bush's first wife, Harriet was said to be "brilliant and beautiful." The poet James Russell Lowell admired her extravagantly. "She possessed the finest mind," Lowell remarked, "and was the most brilliant woman intellectually, of the young women of my day." Bush's head turned anew, he married Harriet Fay in New York in 1859. The marriage was a happy one, producing four children, including, on Sunday, October 4, 1863, a son they named Samuel Prescott Bush—S.P.

While Obadiah appears to have had a gambler's temperament, James Smith Bush was moderate in tone and philosophy. Amid a controversy over the teaching of the Bible in public schools, the Reverend Bush preached a sermon in support of the separation of church and state. A supporter of the Union during the Civil War, Bush spoke to public gatherings celebrating the North's triumphs at Vicksburg and at Gettysburg and reportedly flew the American flag at his church against the wishes of the neighborhood's Southern sympathizers. After the grim news from Ford's Theatre on the evening of Good Friday, 1865, Bush wrote a sermon to commemorate the martyred Abraham Lincoln. "Be assured, my brethren, as that great and good man did not *live* in vain, so he has not *died* in vain," Bush told his Easter congregation that Sunday. "The President was an instrument in the hands of God."

The popular Bush served as chaplain on an expedition around Cape Horn to California under Commodore John "Fighting Jack" Rodgers. In 1867 Bush accepted a call to Grace Church on Nob Hill in San Francisco before returning east for good in 1872, where he became rector of the Church of the Ascension at West Brighton, Staten Island. There the strains of the second great spiritual crisis of Bush's life became apparent. Forged in the fire of his grief over the death of his first wife, his faith was fading. The more miraculous elements of the creeds—the Virgin Birth was one example—no longer seemed implausible to him. "I discovered early in my acquaintance with Mr. Bush that his theological garments were outgrown," said Dr. Horatio Stebbins of San Francisco, a leading Unitarian.

On a visit to the Ashfield, Massachusetts, home of George William Curtis, an editor of *Harper's Weekly*, Bush discussed his shifting views on religion. Curtis introduced his guest to a poem of Ralph Waldo Emerson's entitled "The Problem," which tells the story of a believer who has fallen out of love with the trappings of earthly ecclesiastical institutions, beginning with the "cowl," or a long robe with deep sleeves and a hood.

*I like a church; I like a cowl;
I love a prophet of the soul;
and on my heart monastic aisles
Fall like sweet strains, or pensive smiles;
Yet not for all his faith can see
Would I that cowled churchman be.*

*Why should the vest on him allure,
Which I could not on me endure?*

Bush was stunned at how Emerson's verses resonated. "Why, why," Bush told Curtis, "that is my faith." Around Christmas 1883 he resigned from his parish and moved his family to Concord, Massachusetts, a center of inquiry and of Unitarianism infused with the spirits of Emerson and Thoreau.

On Monday, November 11, 1889, James Smith Bush died after a heart attack. A eulogy underscored his love of politics and his gentleness of temper. “Interested in all public questions, possessing strong opinions, and having the courage of his convictions, he never was offensive or aggressive in asserting them,” a friend said of Bush. He was buried in Ithaca, New York, where he and his family had moved yet again, his restless journey done.

Mechanics and money, not metaphysics, was top of mind for Bush’s son Samuel Prescott Bush. This, George H. W. Bush’s grandfather reflected the larger currents of the time. The post-Civil War era found its name in Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s novel *The Gilded Age*. The excesses of the era, including the exploitation of labor and the attendant growth in the gap between the few and the many, led to the important work of the Progressives. Among elements of the Gilded Age elite, however, there was an expectation that money brought with it certain responsibilities. Andrew Carnegie articulated this new faith in “The Gospel of Wealth,” published in 1889:

This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth: To set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community—the man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves.

The pursuit of wealth was thus imbued with a sense of purpose. America, wrote the banker Henry Clews, was “the land of the self-made man.”

S.P. attended the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, a choice suggesting he had decided to seek his career in a world of certitude and of science rather than in his father’s ethos of twilight and of theology. He devoted himself to engineering, manufacture—and money making. After graduating from Stevens in 1884, Bush worked for a number of railroads, moving between Logansport, Indiana; Columbus, Ohio; and Milwaukee. In 1901, he returned to Columbus to join what was known at the time as the Buckeye Malleable Iron and Coupler Company, whose railroad parts were widely praised for being of the “highest grade.”

Late on the afternoon of Tuesday, October 14, 1902, in Columbus, Buckeye invited spectators to witness the shift from the older world of iron to the new, more profitable universe of steel. Watching a crane and furnace at work at Buckeye, a reporter for *The Columbus Citizen* wrote “the steel can be seen pouring forth in a stream of liquid fire amid a cloud of fiery spray. It was a beautiful sight, indeed.” So began S. P. Bush’s long career at Buckeye, one that made him rich and—crucial for the Bush family’s self-image—“respected,” as his grandson George H. W. Bush recalled. The Bushes were a big force in a big town in a big time. And S. P. Bush, who married Flora Sheldon of Columbus, was a big man. “Grandfather Bush was quite severe,” recalled George’s sister, Nancy Bush Ellis. “He wasn’t mean, but so correct.” He was, a Buckeye colleague recalled, “a snorter...Everyone knew when he was around; when he issued orders, boy it went!”

There was championship level golf; the leading of charities; the building of a great house with elaborate gardens; a critical role in creating the Ohio State football program; the establishment of the Ohio Manufacturers' Association; and, politically, a voice in both the state's Democratic Party and the anti-tax Ohio Tax League. There was also the support of symphonies, of art galleries, of literary and cultural gatherings. S.P. expected hard work from others and from himself. Determined and focused, he was often asked to serve as a director on the boards of other companies—perhaps the highest compliment one businessman can pay another. Yet, Bush spoke of himself in a humble, self-improving tone: “I could be a lot better man if I could do a little more of some things and less for others, and I would like to be a better man too.”

Flora, who was engaged by many things—gardening, design, history—saw her main role as that of a supportive wife. “Let me know dear what you are doing—the little details of your days & nights—for they are my greatest interest in life,” Flora wrote S.P. when he was away. “You are a very dear Bush, adored by your children and tenderly loved by your wife—loved more today than ever before.”

The eldest of those children was Prescott Sheldon Bush. Born in Columbus on Wednesday, March 15, 1895, Prescott was high-spirited, savoring athletic success and attention. After church on a summer day at Osterville, a Cape Cod village where the Buses spent time in the summers, lunch with the family was raucous. “The children were hilarious to such a degree I think your poor mother’s head whirled,” Flora wrote her husband. “Prescott is after all a naughty boy on occasion—he kept the ball rolling so that I was helpless” with laughter.

Girls liked Prescott, too. “I have had one new experience and that is the devotion of girls... Prescott,” Flora Bush wrote her husband from Osterville. She worried, a bit, that the attention “for an length of time might turn his head.” Secure and comfortable, Prescott and his family moved among the prosperous of Columbus during the year and in a wider universe on the East Coast in the summer. At Watch Hill, Rhode Island, Prescott, a gifted young golfer, caddied for Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., who sent along tickets to a Broadway performance of his as a token of thanks. The theater was a popular family pastime; S. P. Bush took his sons to shows in New York. Their social circle was such that Flora Bush reported the 1908 automobile-accident death of J. Montgomery Sears, a leading figure in Boston and in Newport, in a casual letter home.

Attentive parents, Flora and S. P. Bush were always anxious about Prescott, worrying that his good looks and charm might lead him into a permanent insouciance—a glamorous kid with only a passing sense of responsibility to others. (Harriet Bush noted that her teenage grandson had something of a “pernicious habit of fooling.”)

Prescott had enjoyed his time through the eighth grade at Douglas, the main public school in Columbus. He was apparently missing a sense of purpose, though, and Flora and S.P. decided to enroll him in St. George’s School near Newport, Rhode Island. He was, Flora said, a “boy of very tender years,” and she “sometimes [had] a feeling of great dread at sending him away to school and yet I do feel that the strict discipline may be just the thing.” Prescott loved St. George’s, where he studied from 1908 to 1913. As president of the school’s civics club for two years, he relished the combination of public affairs and public performance: “Are we for or against the popular election of United States Senators? How do we feel about a protective tariff versus a tariff for revenue only, and that type of question.”

An institution of the church, St. George's often brought the boys together for chapel services. The school prayer was moving: "Almighty God... We pray that from these walls young men may go forth generation after generation, well equipped for the battle of life and ready to contend bravely for God and the truth." The ritual of Anglicanism captured Bush's imagination for a time, and he briefly envisioned himself at the center of the drama of Christianity, presiding at the altar and in the pulpit. Like the civics club, it was another instance in which the intersection of substance and performance proved fascinating. He was, however, careful not to commit himself to any particular path as he went off to college.

Yale was inevitable, both because of his grandfather James Smith Bush '44, and because of his brother of Flora's, Robert E. Sheldon, Jr., '04. Called "Pres" and "Doc" by his classmates, Bush lettered in both golf and baseball and became one of the school's leading singers, performing in the glee club, quartet, and the choir. In his final year, Prescott placed high in the voting in the categories "Done Most for Yale," "Most Popular," and "Most to Be Admired," and won the contest to be named "Most Versatile." He crowned his career with membership in both the Whiffenpoofs, the Yale cappella singing troupe, and in Skull and Bones, the most elite of the university's senior societies.

In a poll of the class of 1917, there was an undercurrent of seriousness—seriousness about individual character and one's responsibility to the larger world. One senior called for "less caste, fewer snobs, more Christian men." It was also a thoroughly Republican student body, but partisan feeling gave way to a broader patriotism in 1916. As a junior that year, Bush joined a number of his classmates in signing up for the Connecticut National Guard to prepare for combat duty during the border conflict with Mexico. At Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania, the Yale men drilled for the summer before returning to New Haven.

There would be no call to arms in Mexico, but the training would not go to waste. On Monday, April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war: The United States was at last entering the Great War. S. P. Bush was summoned to serve in the effort with the War Industries Board; Prescott became a captain of field artillery in the army. (During a brief stay at Fort Sill, in Oklahoma, Bush led an expedition to capture, for the Skull and Bones clubhouse, what was said to be the skull of Geronimo.) S. P. Bush worked as head of the board's Ordnance, Small Arms, and Ammunition Division. Buckeye's wartime profits from government contracts were capped by a contract. A fellow industrialist, Martin J. Gillen, once warmly wrote him to recall their days serving together on the War Industries Board. "I have always thought of you as a Spartan citizen, what may be termed a Roman senator of the finest type," Gillen told Bush.

Prescott embarked for France in June 1918. There was to be one last great battle for the Allies, the Meuse-Argonne offensive. "We are close enough to the enemy to see the sunlight glint off the barrels of their rifles," Bush wrote home. As part of the 158th Field Artillery Brigade, he was near Montfaucon and Verdun, but Prescott never spoke of his combat experience. One reason for his reticence was long-standing embarrassment over a joke gone awry. From France, Prescott had written a prank letter in which he spun a story of faux heroism for his parents, telling them he had singlehandedly saved the lives of the Generals Pershing, Foch, and Haig by knocking aside a German shell with a bolo knife (similar to a machete).

It apparently did not occur to the Bushes that their son was writing tongue-in-cheek. Rather than chuckle over the letter, they sent it on to the Columbus newspaper, which also took Prescott's tale seriously, writing a front-page news story headlined "3 High Military Honors Conferred on Captain Bush: For Notable Gallantry, When Leading Allied Commanders Were Endangered, Local Man

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