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 Date 3 July 1991

Bush presents three top war advisers with Medal of Freedom  
 By HELEN THOMAS

UPI White House Reporter

WASHINGTON (UPI) — President Bush Wednesday surprised his three chief Persian Gulf War advisers by including them as recipients when he presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf and Gen. Colin Powell.

The three additional recipients, Secretary of State James Baker, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and national security adviser Brent Scowcroft all said they were taken completely by surprise.

"Astonished," exclaimed Scowcroft, who Bush described as an "unsung hero."

The three men looked flabbergasted when their names were called by Bush to step to the stage in the East Room at a gathering of the administration's top dignitaries and Pentagon leaders. Diplomats from five allied countries, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Britain and France, were on hand.

The ceremony was held shortly before Bush left for a two-day trip to Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills of South Dakota and to participate in Fourth of July parades Thursday in Springfield, Mo., and Grand Rapids, Mich.

"It will be a great Fourth of July," said Bush. "This year this event takes on a special significance," he added, referring to the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation.

The young men and women who returned from the gulf found a nation far different than the one they left," Bush said. "They came home to a country that is confident and proud, an America that is sure of itself and strong and an America that other nations look to for leadership.

"I think there is a new-found credibility around the world," he declared, reiterating a statement he has made many times since the end of the Gulf War.

The president, with an assist from his wife Barbara, also presented the Presidential Citizens Medal to eight men from the State Department, the Pentagon, the CIA and the White House, known as the 'small group' who plotted strategy for the war and provided special expertise.

He noted that Americans usually receive the award for their contributions over a lifetime. But he said, "In Desert Storm we have a watershed event, so unique, so singular ... that it is fitting, particularly before the day of our independence, that we recognize the exceptional service that was rendered by a special few.

Among those receiving the citizens medal were Deputy Secretary of Defense Donald Atword; Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger; deputy national security adviser Robert Gates, who has been nominated to

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be CIA director; Adm. David E. Jeremiah; Deputy CIA Director Richard J. Kerr; Undersecretary of State Robert M. Kimmitt; Undersecretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz.

The honors for Schwarzkopf, commander of Operation Desert Storm, and Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had been announced.

The president said the two generals would be "first to tell us we owe our success to the men and women who fought in the gulf. They are the heroes."

But he described Schwarzkopf and Powell as the men those "heroes look up to."

As the president put the beribboned medal around Powell's neck, Mrs. Bush struggled to clasp it. The president then handed her his glasses and she achieved her task.

Baker, Cheney and Scowcroft all said after the ceremony they had no idea they would be receiving the medals. "They kept it pretty tight, didn't they," Baker said. "No leaks. No leaks."

"I was surprised," said Scowcroft. "The first I heard about it, I was sitting right here."

Cheney said he received "all those weird messages" Tuesday when he and Scowcroft were visiting Fort Bragg.

The defense secretary said that as the president put the medal around his neck, he said, "Surprised you, didn't it."