

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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### **President Bush makes last visits to deployed servicemembers in Iraq, Afghanistan as commander in chief**

President George W. Bush made his last visits as commander in chief to deployed American troops Dec. 14 and 15.

Bush first visited servicemembers at Camp Victory in Baghdad, Dec. 14, where he spoke to more than 1,500 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines about the job they've done in Iraq.

“Congratulations on your inspiring accomplishments here in Iraq, and above all thank you very much for volunteering to defend our country in a time of danger,” he said. “Thanks to you the Iraq we stand in tonight is dramatically freer, dramatically safer, dramatically better than the Iraq we found eight years ago. As a result of the sacrifices of our troops, America is safer and more secure.”



STAFF SGT SAMUEL MORSE

President George W. Bush waves to military members at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, Dec. 15. The visit to Bagram and a stopover in Baghdad a day earlier are expected to be Bush's last visits as president to deployed U.S. troops.

“I bring greetings from a proud and grateful nation. Merry Christmas to you and happy holidays,” Bush continued. “This is the time of year to give thanks for our many blessings. The greatest blessing we have is freedom and the fact that we've got a United States military to defend that freedom.”

“I'd rather be with the men and women of the United States military than anyone else,” he said.

After his speech, Bush briefly shook hands with servicemembers, posed for pictures and signed autographs.

1st Lt. James C. Benson of Headquarters, Headquarters Company, XVIII Airborne Corps, said the visit gave him a renewed appreciation for his mission.

“It’s nice to see the commander in chief. It gave me purpose in what I’m doing here. It drove my purpose home,” he said.

Although Bush has only about a month left in office, some troops said it’s good to know they still have his support, as well as to let the president know they’re still on the job.

“I think it really meant a lot to everyone that was here,” said 1st Lt. Damien Butel of Marine Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron 2. “It was really good for them to see him in his final days in office and know that we’re still on his mind as we’re fighting out here.”

“We’re continuing to do the job that we’re scheduled for,” Butel said. “We’re not dropping our packs for anything. We’re just going to continue to press on.”

The following day Bush paid his last presidential visit to the servicemembers of Combined Joint Task Force-101 in Bagram, Afghanistan.

“I’m proud to be back in Afghanistan,” Bush said during his visit. “I am proud to be with brave souls serving the United States of America.”

Bush gave the troops his best wishes for the holidays and thanked them for their service.

“It was here in Afghanistan that the terrorists planned the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001,” Bush said. “After that date, America gave the Taliban a choice: you can turn over the leaders of al Qaida, or you can share in their fate. And when they refused, our just demands were enforced by the United States military.”

“Because of you, killers who wanted to take the lives of Americans back home have been brought to justice before they reached our shores,” he said to the troops.

Bush has visited troops in Iraq and Afghanistan four times during his presidency.

*(This story was compiled from reports from Multi-National Corps - Iraq and Combined Joint Task Force-101 in Afghanistan.)*

