



Fifteen Minutes of Fame

by Mr. Bill Desmond, DCMA BAE Systems

Artist Andy Warhol said in 1968 that all of us, at some point in the future, would be “world famous for 15 minutes.” My moment came during an encounter with President Gerald R. Ford while working as an aircraft mechanic at Westover Air Force Base, Mass.

waving little American flags. Helicopters were buzzing over the base, and numerous dignitaries waited on the tarmac.

I had to park two planes that day. The first was a Boeing 707 known as “The House.” This aircraft transported all of the reporters who traveled wherever the president went. About an hour later, Air Force One landed and immediately taxied over to the spot where I was standing in my brand new coveralls. I was waving my arms back and forth in the prescribed manner until the nose gear of Air Force One reached the specified spot. I then crossed my arms, signaling the pilot to stop. The rest of the crew put chocks in front of the tires and pushed the

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We were informed that President Ford was going to land at Westover, and a maintenance crew was needed to manage the parking of Air Force One. Five or six of us were selected, one of whom, by the luck of the draw, would actually get to marshal the aircraft to its parking space on the ramp by walking backwards and giving hand signals to the pilot. I drew the short straw, and I couldn’t have been more excited. There was much preparation that included, for me anyway, three trips to the barber shop.

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(Top) Aboard Air Force One, while en route from the People’s Republic of China to Indonesia, Mrs. Ford dons King Neptune’s crown to mark her first trip across the Equator, Dec. 5, 1975. (Photo by Mr. David Hume Kennerly; courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration)

(Above) President and Mrs. Ford on the South Lawn of the White House in May 1975. (Photo by Mr. Ricardo Thomas; courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration)

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mobile stairs to the side of the plane. I remained standing in front of the plane.

President Ford came down the staircase and shook the hands of the dignitaries lined up at the bottom of the stairs, his motorcade ready to whisk him away to downtown Springfield. He took a step toward the motorcade, then suddenly changed course and began walking in my direction. He came over to me, extended his hand, and as I shook it, he handed me a gold pen with his signature on it and thanked me for doing a good job.

The instant President Ford turned away from the waiting motorcade and began walking toward me was when I realized that this was truly my “15 minutes of fame.” It is hard to describe the feeling, but I felt as if I entered a trance. The leader of the free world was walking toward me! The background noise seemed to abate; all movement, with the exception of the president’s walking and my shivering, had also ceased. I can’t remember my exact thoughts when he finally stood before



me and shook my hand, but it is a moment that I will forever cherish.

I still have the treasured gold pen to remind me of my 15 minutes of fame and my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to meet a president but to be recognized by him for a job well done.

(Top) President and Mrs. Ford dance in the Blue Room of the White House in October 1974. (Photo by Mr. David Hume Kennerly; image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration)

(Above) President and Mrs. Ford wave to the crowd during Independence Day ceremonies at Fort McHenry, Md., July 4, 1975. (Photo by Mr. David Hume Kennerly; image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration)