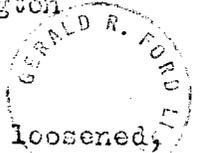


Air Force One took off from O'Hare airport at 1:55 p.m. (EDT)



Shortly after takeoff, the President, coatless and with his tie loosened, walked back to the press compartment with Jerry terHorst and Bob Hartmann. ^(to assess) The president was asked the reaction of his VFW audience to his statement on amnesty. "I think they were very understanding if the reception I got as I walked out ^(was any indication). We carefully chose our words. . . . They were very respectful. I was a little apprehensive that the worst would happen, but they were very nice."

CBS newsman Bob Pierpoint asked whether the president saw any sign that the audience objected to his statement. Pierpoint noted that there were some long silences. Said Ford: "I expected that." Asked if his children helped shape his attitude on amnesty, the president said: "I told three of ~~the~~ our children last night that I was thinking of it, and their reaction was favorable. I didn't tell them I was going to do it."

Asked how long he had been thinking of this approach, Ford said: "Well, five or six people in the cabinet, in my staff, ~~said to me last week~~ and others said to me last week at some point we have to do something about this. The more I thought of it, the more I thought that the right audience would be an audience that might be difficult rather than some ~~handpicked~~ ^{people} handpicked audience. It's better to talk to ~~them~~ ^{people} who have some understanding. It would have been ^(a little) ~~forward~~ ^{wardice}, I think, if ~~that~~ I'd picked an audience that was ecstatic."

Had he been thinking about this before he became ~~president~~ president? "You can't talk about healing unless you're going to use it in the broadest context," said the president. Was he planning to propose some form of alternative service or military service? Said Ford: "I'm not going beyond the language that I used--work their way back--earned return. The details of that ^(have to) will be reflected in what Bill Saxbe and Jim Schlesinger work out."

(more)



He was asked how he was coming on choosing a vice president. "I've been thinking about that," said Ford, laughing heartily. "I haven't told anybody. I'm a sphinx." Asked if the news reports of George Bush's finances had had any impact on his thinking, Ford replied: "No more effect than the stories about Nelson Rockefeller."

Asked to outline the standards by which he is choosing a vice president, the president said: "Naturally, I think you have to take into consideration who would be a good president. And there's a broader parameter after that. I don't want to go beyond that."

Ford asked the pool how they liked their quarters on Air Force One. The pool responded by asking the president how he liked his quarters. Said Ford: "A little ~~better~~ better than that 131." ~~Added Hartmann:~~ "We have to get used to these windows."

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

(more)

terHorst provided some statistics on draft dodgers and deserters that the president is concerned about. As of January 1, 1974, said terHorst, quoting Department of Defense figures, there were:

-- 49,500 draft evaders and deserters

-- Of that total, 7,900 are convicted as selective service violators; 8,200 are in process, either under prosecution or investigation; 4,400 are fugitives (of these, 3,000 are believed to be in Canada; 500 are elsewhere overseas; and 900, whereabouts unknown). The total in the ~~draft evaders~~ ^{draft evaders} category is 20,500. In addition, there are 29,000 military deserters at large.

terHorst said the following message was sent by the President enroute to Chicago to Mrs. Ann Davies, 20, and son John, 16, children of the slain U. S. Ambassador to Cyprus, Roger Davies:

"Mrs. Ford and all our family join with me in sending you both our deepest sympathy on this tragic day. We realize the depth of your loss and grief. Please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. Your father was a fine officer whose performance was ~~z~~ a great credit to you and to his country."

The President also sent a telegram to the ambassador's mother, ~~Mrs.~~ Mrs. John L. Davies, 1059 Skyline drive, Blacerville, Cal. The message: "Mrs. Ford joins with me in sending you our deepest sympathy on this sad and tragic day. Your son was a great credit to you, to his family and to his country. We will greatly miss him."

~~Information Source~~

Helen Thomas, UPI
Fran Lewin, AP
Bob Pierpoint, CBS
Morton Kondracke, Chicago Sun Times
Dean Fischer, Time