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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:11 A.M. EDT

MAY 19, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: The President came into the office at 7:35 this morning and had his usual meetings with staff people in the morning.

At noon, the President will address the Advisory Committee on Refugees. That will be done in the East Room at a ceremony open for full coverage.

Q Is he going to sign the refugee aid legislation today?

MR. NESSEN: The bill has not arrived here, Ralph. I am told that it is still awaiting the signatures of the Speaker and of the President of the Senate, and it will get here perhaps around 3 or 4 o'clock. The President will sign it immediately, but it will not be here in time for this ceremony.

Q Is the President speaking at this refugee ceremony?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. The cameras should be over there by 11:30, and the rest of us will go over at 11:45. There will be no advance text of what he says.

Q Will this be on the mult back here?

MR. NESSEN: I am sure it will, yes, and we will get you an as delivered text after, as soon as we can.

We will have available for you, as soon as this briefing is over, the Executive Order creating the committee, as well as biographical sketches of the 17 members.

After the ceremony, at which he will speak and announce this committee, there will be a reception in the State Dining Room.

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Q Is there coverage of that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

At 12:30, the President will greet briefly a group of eighthgrade students from Ipswich Junior High School, in Ipswich, Massachusetts. They have been visiting Williamsburg, and they are on their way home.

The President's daughter-in-law, Gayle, is a teaching aide at that school. She is not with the students, however, on this trip. The event is in the Rose Garden. There will be no coverage.

Q Did they come down on a bus, Ron? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The trains aren't running. They have to get down here somehow.

Q You say there is no coverage of that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

At 3 o'clock, we will have Transportation Secretary Coleman here in the briefing room to unveil to you and explain the legislation that the President is sending to the Congress today called the Railroad Revitalization Act of 1975. This is open to full coverage with cameras and tape recordings.

Q Then we can cover it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, but we are going to have a reception afterwards back here, and you can't come in. (Laughter)

At 2 o'clock, we will pass out copies of the message, of the fact sheet, and of the actual legislation. The purpose of the legislation is to eliminate excessive and antiquated regulatory restrictions, to improve customer services, and to increase competition in the railroad industry.

This is the first of three major pieces of legislation the President will send to Congress proposing reforms in the transportation industry. The others will deal with the trucking business and with the airline industry, and we hope to have those in the next several weeks.

Q What is the release time on the material? Three o'clock?

MR. NESSEN: The release time on the material?

Q For the next several weeks, not this week.

MR. NESSEN: No, no. The material handed out for 2 o'clock will be for release at 3 o'clock.

At 5 o'clock, the President will have a reception in the Rose Garden for the new White House Fellows. I think you are familiar with that program. There will be some brief remarks. It is open for full coverage, and we will have a list of the new Fellows for you later this afternoon.

A personnel announcement:

The President is announcing his intention to nominate Norman R. Augustine as Under Secretary of the Army. He succeeds Herman Staudt, who is resigning, and we have a release. We will have that for you.

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One item to clean up from yesterday. When the President got back from Philadelphia last night, he made a phone call at about 8:30 to a meeting that was taking place in Manchester, New Hampshire.

It is an annual meeting of two groups -- the eighth annual meeting -- one is called the Northeast Business Group, and that has businessmen from New Hampshire and Vermont; and the other group is called the Small Business Service Group, and that has businessmen from Massachusetts.

There were having their annual meeting in Manchester, New Hampshire. Every year, they honor certain individuals for their efforts on behalf of small businessmen and this year's recipients of the award were former Senator Aiken of Vermont, and former Senator Cotton of New Hampshire. So, the President called -- and had his call piped through a loudspeaker to the dinner -- to congratulate them.

He spoke for about ten minutes. If there is any desire, we can give you an as delivered.

Q Yes, could we have it?

Q One, I was on the pool coming back yesterday, and I was in the Bureau until well after 8:30. That certainly would have helped since he commented on the MAYAGUEZ thing, if we had had some kind of direction.

Q I second the motion.

MR. NESSEN: I have not gotten any answer to that.

Steve was wondering why we didn't put this out last night. We didn't know about it last night.

Q Well, I am saying that I don't think it was the fault of Jack or anybody here because, obviously, you were with us, but somebody back here ought to be informed of our interest in such matters.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

Q Or keep your people informed because it was a logical overnight for all of us and none of us got it.

Q It left us going on the air at 11:00 already updated on the story.

MR. NESSEN: All right.

Tomorrow, the President, as you know, is going to Charlotte, North Carolina. The purpose of this trip is to take part in a commemorative ceremony on the 200th anniversary of the word reaching Charlotte of the battles of Lexington and Concord. (Laughter) Now, wait a minute. It gets a little better. (Laughter)

Q How many days did it take?

MR. NESSEN: On May 19, 1775, which is 200 years ago today, the citizens of Charlotte gathered in what is now the town square of Charlotte, at the court house, and according to local history, drafted the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence from the British. (Laughter)

It was completed in the early morning hours of May 20th. Now, those documents are said to have been destroyed in a fire of 1800. (Laughter)

I think some of you who have followed this story know that historians frankly disagree as to whether it was the exact date and precisely what the Declaration said, and so forth.

Q Who has been following this story?

Q Ron, would you ask a show of hands of those who have followed this story? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: It has been in all the papers. Anyhow, I just want you to know that so that you don't get down there and find out that there has been a controversy -- not just a controversy, but historians don't agree on the historic facts of the episode.

Q Are they going to demonstrate, the historians?

Q Did they get the word of the battles there? Is this the primary bicentennial focus of the celebration?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, it is.

The news of the battles did reach there. Now, what date the Declarations were signed and precisely what they said is in some dispute by historians.

Q He is going down there to observe the 200th anniversary of the so-called Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence, isn't that right?

MR. NESSEN: He will refer in his remarks tomorrow to his knowledge that there is a dispute about this and he will explain why he thinks it was worth going down there for. (Laughter)

Q Can you give us the times and what is his actual participation?

MR. NESSEN: All right. The press check-in at Andrews is at 9:45.

Q Is that an update from 9:30?

MR. NESSEN: It has changed from 9:30. Some of these times are changed.

Are these the accurate times, Jack?

MR. HUSHEN: Yes.

MR. NESSEN: 9:45 press check-in at Andrews.

Q Is there a bus to Andrews?

MR. NESSEN: No, there is no bus to Andrews.

The press plane leaves at 10:15. The President leaves the White House South Lawn at 10:45. At 11:05, the President leaves Andrews.

At 11:20, the press plane arrives in Charlotte.

At 12:10, the President arrives at the Air National Guard Terminal.

Q What time?

MR. NESSEN: At 12:10, the President arrives at the Air National Guard Terminal, Douglas Municipal Airport, Charlotte, North Carolina.

Q What happened to the famous Charlotte-Mecklenburg Airport?

MR. NESSEN: You've got me.

Now, this event is being held at what is called Freedom Park. It was dedicated on May 20, 1954, 21 years ago tomorrow, by President Eisenhower.

There will be a press tent with hot box lunches and beverages, and a platform for cameras which is 50 feet away from where the President is speaking.

The President speaks at 1:10.

Those of you who want to go to the East Room Refugee Committee ceremony with cameras should go now.

The President leaves Freedom Park at 1:35 and leaves the airport down there at 1:55.

The press plane leaves from there at 2:45.

The President arrives at Andrews at 2:55 and gets back to the White House at 3:15.

The press plane arrives at Andrews at 3:45.

Now, just a couple of other things here.

Q Will there be a text?

MR. NESSEN: We will have the bible available later today and hopefully an advance text before 5:00. The speech is at 1:10. We will put a 6:30 a.m. release time on it, or a 6:00 a.m. release time on it.

Q The subject matter, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: The Bicentennial.

The inadequacy of historians in pinning down bicentennial events.

Now, we hope to be able to do the Frank Zarb briefing, in which he will announce and discuss the President's decision on the strip mining bill, hopefully late this afternoon sometime. That is what we are aiming at. I don't see how we can do it in the morning. Tomorrow is the deadline. I suppose we can do it after we get back from Charlotte since the press plane gets back at 3:45.

It really depends on when all the papers are ready, and at the moment, they are not. If they are ready, we will do it late this afternoon; if not, I think we will have to do it when we get back from Charlotte tomorrow.

Q If he has papers to get ready, does that not confirm the President is going to veto that bill?

MR. NESSEN: No. Why would you say that?

Q Because if he was just going to sign it, he would not have to send any papers back to the Hill.

Q Plus the wires are already saying --

MR. NESSEN: Just a moment now. Let's straighten that out. Have you never seen a signing statement by a President? We had one on the occasion of the signing of the tax bill, did we not -- have one on the occasion of the tax bill? Okay.

Q You don't want to confirm or deny these wire reports that he is going to veto it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q When will you know?

Q I think if we can have the bill today, it would be nice.

MR. NESSEN: I know that. (Laughter)

Some of you have expressed an interest in seeing the somewhat revised daily News Summary, which is prepared for the President. As you know, there is a new editor now, has been for a couple of weeks, and he has sort of gotten his feet on the ground and revised it.

Because of requests we have had, we have had 60 copies run off, and they are in the Press Office here. These are last Thursday's News Summary, which was the day that reported on the recovery of the MAYAGUEZ.

Q That was a good news day.

MR. NESSEN: If you want some on a bad news day, we will get some on a bad news day, too.

Q Who is this editor?

MR. NESSEN: A man named James Shuman, formerly of Reader's Digest, and formerly of the UPI and of the John Rockefeller staff and author of several books.

That is about it.

Q Ron, last Friday, I guess it was, Congressmen completed final action on this jobs bill, the one that they claim is going to create 900,000 jobs. They deleted one of the things which the President didn't like in the bill and changed some other things.

Is there a kind of an updated White House reaction to the bill?

MR. NESSEN: Let me find out.

I don't have any detailed views to give you about the bill, or what the outcome will be when the bill reaches the White House, but some of the things the President did not like about the bill originally still stand.

As you know, primarily the President himself has asked for \$1 billion 600 million to continue the 300,000 public service jobs from the end of the year up through next July, July of 1976, and he also has asked for \$412 million to provide 760 summer jobs for youth.

Meanwhile, I don't have anything further to give you in terms of the bill being reviewed, and any decision being made on it.

Q Ron, could I take you back a few days ago to something you told us about Mr. Huang Chen's meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Ingersoll?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q You said at that time that the Chinese liaison officer took the President's statement and 24 hours later it was returned.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The State Department sources say that Mr. Ingersoll tried to give Huang Chen that statement and Huang Chen refused to take it and it was left by Mr. Ingersoll somewhere in Mr. Ingersoll's office and Mr. Ingersoll left the office and when he came back, the statement was still there.

If they are correct and Huang Chen didn't take the statement, how can you be correct in saying the Chinese returned it 24 hours later? Which happened, in other words?

MR. NESSEN: The State Department is correct, and I was incorrect. However, the message was -- we are sure that because of other methods used that the message did reach the Cambodians, as Secretary Kissinger said at his news conference the other day, I think, that the message was received by the Cambodian Embassy in Peking for one thing, and I believe he also -- I think the Secretary -- wait a minute.

The message was, we attempted to send the message by three different channels. The State Department had Huang Chen in and you state correctly what happened there, Jim, and I was incorrect last week.

Q This was on Monday, and he did not accept the message?

MR. NESSEN: That is correct.

The second method which the Secretary talked about at his news conference was that a copy was received at the Cambodian Embassy in Peking.

The third message which the Secretary also discussed, I believe, was a message was given to the Foreign Ministry in Peking, and that is the one that was returned 24 hours later.

Q Was there not a UN method, too?

MR. NESSEN: The fourth method was the UN on the afternoon of Tuesday, I believe, was it not? And the fifth method, of course, was through public channels.

Q Where did the Peking Foreign Minister return it, to the U.S. Embassy in Peking?

MR. NESSEN: To Mr. Bush, yes, or whoever delivered the message.

Q So you got that mixed up with the State Department, is that it?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Excuse me, Ron. I thought we were told that the UN message was on Wednesday morning.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. I forgot the timing of those, but it was either Tuesday or Wednesday.

Q Ron, on the second avenue, you say a copy was received at the Cambodian Embassy in Peking. Can you explain to us how that copy was transmitted, how it got to the Cambodian Embassy in Peking? Is this a case of Bush, who was on the scene, taking it or having it sent to the Cambodian Embassy in Peking, which sounds obvious?

MR. NESSEN: I think that is about all we probably ought to say about how the messages were delivered.

Q That may well be, except that if you are confirming that a copy was given to the Foreign Ministry at Peking --

MR. NESSEN: I think Kissinger said that at his news conference last week.

Q -- and was returned 24 hours later to Bush, it seems so obvious that at the same time the U.S. office in Peking got a copy to the Cambodian office in Peking. I just ask you, without going beyond the limits imposed on you, would you dispute that interpretation if we put it on the event? I am merely trying to tidy up some loose ends here that don't seem to me to involve anything terribly national security.

MR. NESSEN: You know, Jim, that loose end has been tidied up by Secretary Kissinger last week -- whatever day it was, the 16th. He said, "We delivered it to the Cambodian Embassy in Peking."

Q Thank you very much.

MR. NESSEN: So, this is no great news.

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Q How does the President feel about the escalation in the number of casualties? Has he gotten in touch with the families personally in any way?

MR. NESSEN: He will. I have just talked to Laitin and he promises that he will have the latest refined casualty count at his briefing.

Q Ron, why did it take so long to find out about the increase in casualties?

MR. NESSEN: I think you need to check in at Laitin's briefing because I think there has been a revision downward in some of the categories.

You know, just generally speaking, you do have people spread out over a number of ships and you had people taken off of the beach in various helicopters separated from their units, and so forth, and it is taking time to get a firm figure on casualties.

Q Ron, were there not 160 Marines which took part in this whole operation?

MR. NESSEN: How many?

Q 160.

MR. NESSEN: I think it was slightly higher plus the others who landed on the ship.

Q I must say that I find it a little bit difficult to understand how it is with that relatively small number -- we can find out good news about this operation immediately and we begin to find out bad news only days later. Now, we are in direct touch from both the White House and the Command Center at the Pentagon with the task force out there. If the President of the United States or the Secretary of Defense wants to know how many casualties, there are only about five ships involved, they can certainly count up how many Marines they have and figure out how many are missing.

This information is now trailing into a leak, almost. The country was given a first blush of great success and now we are finding out there were a lot more people killed and injured than we were first led to believe, and I suggest --

MR. NESSEN: May I disabuse you of that idea strongly, that there was any intention or is any intention to hide any sort of bad news? It simply is not true. And the Pentagon, Laitin is just as frustrated as you are and I am, and the President and the Secretary. They all want to know what the final figures are and they are having difficulty pulling them together, but there has never been any intention at any time here to hide anything in the terms of casualties.

Q Could I pursue that?

MR. NESSEN: The President regrets all the casualties and one casualty is too many. The figures will be put out, and as I say, they are having as much trouble getting firm figures as you are.

Q When did the President first know that the casualties could be as many as 20 dead and 70-some wounded? Did he know that as early as Friday, for example?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I don't know. I have to look back at the record of when these figures were accumulated but I just don't know.

Q Ron, how does the President express this frustration that he feels?

MR. NESSEN: By asking for them to get the figures.

Q Does the President know why it is that it has taken so long?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, Laitin is going to talk about this -- I just talked to him before I came out here -- and give as close to final figures as he can at his briefing.

Q That is not the answer to the question, Ron. The question is, why it took so long.

Q The question I asked is whether the President knows why it is taking so long. Has he been given an explanation from the Pentagon as to why it has taken this length of time to get an accurate count?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know whether he has or not, Jim.

Q Do you have any figures on Cambodians killed, wounded? Are we trying to find out?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

On the wounded figures, as I understand it from the Pentagon, they were counting things like sprained ankles and twisted knees from jumping down from the helicopter to the destroyer, and then jumping down from the destroyer to the cargo ship, and also, they were counting people who may have suffered the effects of tear gas and scratches and people who were suffering from fatigue and were checked out in the sick bays just for observation. This is relayed to me from Laitin.

Q Ron, every day in Vietnam -- and you had the experience as well as many of us -- if there is anything in the world that the U.S. military is expert in, it is body count. We were able every day at the briefings in Saigon to come out with figures down to breakdowns of less than five or ten in digits on estimated enemy body counts, precise counts on ARVN irregulars, for God's sake. Isn't the President concerned that if he is not delaying the figures that the Pentagon is delaying the figures to him out of some embarrassment or something? It really is totally contrary to the American military experience in reporting in the last ten years.

MR. NESSEN: Steve, I wish I could, although I doubt if I can, disabuse you of the idea that anything is being withheld. The President, as I say, wants those figures as much as you do and has indicated such.

Now, if you want to do this kind of implied criticism, the place to do it is the Pentagon -- they are the ones who are pulling the figures together.

Q We would not be doing it at all, Ron, if you or someone would give us just an explanation as to why it is taking so long.

MR. NESSEN: The proper place to address the question is the Pentagon, Jim.

Q Has the President asked why it has taken so long and, if so, what was the answer he got?

MR. NESSEN: He has indicated that he wants the figures and that he is somewhat puzzled about the length of time it has taken.

Q Has anyone indicated that Americans were taken prisoner in this operation?

MR. NESSEN: No, there is no evidence of that.

Q The captain of the vessel indicated that the Marines landed on the wrong island. Does the President have anything to say about that?

MR. NESSEN: As Doug Kiker said this morning, hindsight is marvelous because it is always 20-20. It was not the wrong island. That is where we believed they were and where their ship was and where they had been.

It turns out that they were not there. At the time, we did not know where they were, but that is where we thought they were.

Q And the two subsequent strikes after the crew was on the destroyer, the WILSON, do you hold by the same rationale that you were concerned about the island and the Marines on the island; therefore, you bombed the hell out of the Cambodian mainland?

MR. NESSEN: I reject the "bomb the hell out of" characterization, Helen.

Q All right, I retract it. Bombed.

MR. NESSEN: Bombed. There were over 100, 150 Marines pinned down and under heavy fire on the beach. The order was given at 11:16.

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Q He refuses to say they were pinned down.

MR. NESSEN: Who?

Q Laitin. You know, he is the fellow over at the Pentagon. He says they weren't pinned down or refuses to accept that designation.

MR. NESSEN: The choppers that came in to get them were driven off several times by heavy fire and, as you know, the operation, as far as the recovery of the crew, was completed late Wednesday night our time and it was not possible to get them out of there until early the next morning our time, which will indicate that they were under fire.

There were 150 Marines pinned down, and under heavy fire, and the choppers that came to get them were driven off by fire and it was felt that at their backs were 2400 Cambodian troops.

Aerial photos had spotted eight patrol boats tied up at the breakwater in Kompong Som -- four on one side, four on the other -- fairly large patrol boats 50 or 75 feet long capable of carrying troops, plus the 17 airplanes, and it was decided that for the protection of those Marines, so that they didn't get attacked from the rear, that those boats and planes and troops needed to be discouraged.

Q The crew gets back on the destroyer, right, the whole crew?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q So, you still think the Marines would have been attacked on the island? I mean, what would be the rationale for that?

MR. NESSEN: You will have to ask the Cambodians what they planned to do.

Q I am asking the Americans.

MR. NESSEN: I think the President has said clearly, Helen, that he had a responsibility to make sure those Marines were not attacked, and he told the Congressional leaders that he would never have forgiven himself if those troops and planes and boats had been used to attack the Marines.

Q What was the assignment?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen any after-battle report, Mort.

Q Isn't it rational, Ron, to apply to the bombing of the refinery at Kompong Som, which does not seem to have any direct link with any possible counterattack by the Cambodians?

MR. NESSEN: It does in the Pentagon's view in that it was necessary to deny the fuel that could have been used for those planes and boats.

Q Ron, last Friday, or Thursday, Kissinger said that this incident was merely one ship, that it was in no way a test of a demonstration of America showing its muscle in the post-Vietnam era. Friday, when Ford talked to the ethnic groups --

MR. NESSEN: I am not familiar with that Thursday quotation.

Q At a Kissinger briefing.

Friday, when Ford talked to the ethnic groups and yesterday at Pennsylvania, each time he discussed this in far more chauvinist, grandiose terms. Now which is it? Was it just an isolated freighter or was it a show of the spirit of revolution or is this going to be a theme in Ford's speeches from here out?

MR. NESSEN: I can barely accept any parts of your question. As we said, this entire operation was designed for one purpose, and that was to get the crew and the ship back safely, and in that sense, it succeeded. I think what Secretary Kissinger did say was, and what the President has said was, that that was the purpose of the operation, and it succeeded.

If there were a collateral or incidental result of it not planned to, first of all, demonstrate that the international sea lanes need to be kept open and that the United States would respond when its citizens were endangered, that is a collateral or incidental effect, but it was not part of the planning.

The Secretary was asked the question on Friday about one of the effects of this incident appears to be a restoration of the American credibility, to what extent was that a consideration in the American operation, and it said the thrust of our discussions concerned the discussion of the ship and the rescue.

If there were any byproducts -- he used the word byproducts -- that can be considered a bonus to the operation, but it was not the principal impetus behind the operation.

Q Ron, in order to disabuse or the idea that --

MR. NESSEN: Let's have the follow on that.

Q Ford referred to this yesterday, and he invoked the spirit of the American Revolution and so forth, and it seemed to me that he was talking about far more than a byproduct or a bonus of this thing.

My second question was, is this going to be a theme that he is going to pursue in his speeches from here out?

MR. NESSEN: I don't expect it will be.

Q Ron, Captain Miller's account of being taken to the mainland indicated that the boat they were on was kept under pretty constant surveillance by U.S. aircraft, which must have given us pretty good intelligence that the crew was aboard there.

The question is, what intelligence do we have that might have indicated they were on the island or on the ship? There does not seem to be any indication of that.

MR. NESSEN: As you know, the first order was to discourage any boats from leaving the island or the ship and going to the mainland or going from the mainland out to the ship, and the island, and this was done initially by firing -- actually, we have got about two or three minutes before we have to go to the East Room.

The boats were fired on first 50 yards ahead and then 25 yards ahead and finally 8 or 10 yards ahead to try to make them stop and they would not stop, and some that would not stop were sunk.

The pilot who was making the pass over the boat that actually contained the crew reported that he saw some people on deck that could have been Americans, but he was not sure. There were seven or nine of them.

He radioed that to his ship, which radioed to the Pentagon, which radioed to the White House. The President was told that a pilot was making passes over the boat. He thought that some people on the deck might be Americans, and what should he do?

The President gave the order not to sink it, and that was then relayed back through the system to the pilot, who was over the ship, and that is why that boat was allowed to escape.

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Q Ron, that is not my question.

MR. NESSEN: And your question is that if we had some suspicion that if there were seven or nine Americans on this boat, why did we think there were any left on the island?

Q What intelligence did we have, if any?

MR. NESSEN: We just didn't know where they were, but we had no evidence that they had been moved from the island.

Q We did.

MR. NESSEN: No, we didn't. We had a pilot who thought that maybe he saw seven or nine Americans on the deck, but that was not confirmed, Phil.

Q Ron, in order to disabuse us of the idea that anything is being withheld regarding the casualties, would you get the answer to the question and report it to us? When did the President know that the casualties would be as high as about 20 dead and 70-some wounded?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, all right.

Now, to take over with you this announcement in the East Room, in the bins there is the list of the Committee that the President is appointing, the Executive Order giving the instructions and also the appointment of the new Under Secretary of Army, Mr. Augustine.

Q Ron, will the President have a press conference this week when he can answer some of these questions?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans for one.

Q Ron, can I ask you a question about the Middle East, please? The reports from Cairo say that the Egyptians are rather disturbed by Secretary Schlesinger's remarks yesterday, leaving open the possibility of force to break any new Arab oil embargo, remarks which were interpreted as going much further than the President's remarks last year about strangulation, et cetera.

The Egyptians are upset because it is so close to the Salzburg meeting. Do you have any comment?

MR. NESSEN: Secretary Schlesinger said nothing beyond what the President and the Secretary of State have said previously.

Q Do you deny that any of the bombing on the Cambodian mainland was in the nature of a punitive attack?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Ron, the Polish ship that was captured over the weekend, captured by the Coast Guard, they indicated they checked with Washington before taking the ship, the Coast Guard here says they checked with the Commerce Department. Did the Commerce Department check with the White House before taking that ship?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Would we have done it if it had not been for the MAYAGUEZ incident a few days earlier?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Is the President prepared to make a concession on verification to the Soviets in the SALT talks?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on SALT.

Q Ron, did we have any intelligence that showed us about the concentration of people on that island that the Marines -- where they got such fire, Koh Tang?

MR. NESSEN: I think the Secretary said yesterday, if I am not mistaken, that the firing by the Cambodians on the island was somewhat heavier than they anticipated.

Q There are lots of people wondering why we didn't have better intelligence on that. Can you tell us why?

MR. NESSEN: No, I can't, Sarah.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 11:52 A.M. EDT)