

AIR FORCE ONE POOL NUMBER ONE

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

Nessen came back to report that the President had a ten minute meeting this morning (7:10 to 7:20 a.m.) in the Oval Office with General Brown, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. General Scowcroft sat in. Nessen said he did not think it was proper to give in detail the words the President used to General Brown but referred reporters to the public statement Nessen issued yesterday: Those remarks reflected the President's reaction to General Brown's comments at Duke University.

In response to questions, Nessen said Ford did not fire Brown, nor did Brown offer his resignation. Asked if the President "rebuked" Brown, Nessen responded: "I wouldn't discourage you from using that."

Nessen then went over the sequence of events leading to Ford's full knowledge of the Brown episode.

1. Late Monday, at 9 or 10 p.m., Defense Secretary Schlesinger got a telephone call from the WASHINGTON POST. The POST said it intended to run the Brown story Tuesday morning. The POST told Schlesinger in general terms what the story was about.
2. Schlesinger then called a member of the White House staff (Nessen would not name the staffer) and told him in general terms that Brown had made some "indiscreet or embarrassing remarks," but did not spell them out in any further detail. In view of the late hour, the message was not passed on to the President.
3. The Schlesinger message was passed on to the President Tuesday in those general terms.
4. Then, on Wednesday morning with the publication of the story in the POST, Ford learned the specific remarks Brown had made. Thereupon, the President issued his statement of yesterday through Nessen.

Nessen added: "The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs neither makes nor articulates American foreign policy."

Asked if the Chairman doesn't have some peripheral input into American foreign policy, decision-making process, Nessen indicated he was not certain how foreign policy decisions are reached. But Nessen emphasized that the Chairman does not make foreign policy.

Nessen was asked if the matter was now closed? "As far as I know," he said.

Asked why someone in the White House did not follow up to determine the nature of the indiscreet remarks, Nessen said White House procedure was a "side issue." "All big organizations have problems of procedure," he added, observing a moment later: "When the remark became known the man was rebuked."

There was no reprimand in writing to Brown. The President is aware of the public reaction to Brown's remarks, Nessen said. (Off the record, Nessen advised that Len Garment's office can be called to get more information about public reaction.)

Again asked about the possibility of Brown being fired, Nessen replied: "I know of no plans for him not to continue, and I couple that with the fact that the Chairman does not speak for American foreign policy."

Later, Nessen came back to say that the President "still strongly opposes any increase in the gas tax" and there has been no change in his position.

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