

NOVEMBER 23, 1974

POOL REPORT

RIDING THE RAILS WITH FORD AND BREZHNEV

The poolers were driven in three chartreuse Volga cars to a newly constructed concrete and asphalt railway platform one kilometer (a tenth of a mile) from the military air field where President Ford landed. The platform is 75 yards long. The five Soviet journalists joined the five American poolers.

The six foot high platform was equipped with a red wooden topped railing, and 8 double-lamp light poles. The train consisted of 12 cars plus a double electric engine. The first four cars were repainted, Russian built luxury wagons. Their outsides were painted forest green with yellow trim. Each car bore the shield of the Soviet railway system. The rear cars were factory-fresh from East Germany and inside were decorated with Formica-like walls colored a mottled gray. Each of these cars contained 7 compartments seating 6 each. The pool sat in one of these compartments. So did such U.S. notables as Larry Eagleburger, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, and Don Rumsfeld, who was observed violating the rules -- as relayed in our bible -- by taking tourist photos of the snowy landscape out the train window.

Ford and Brezhnev arrived at the platform in a black Zil limousine with an American and a Soviet flag on the front fenders. A Soviet general leaped from the front seat and opened the rear door. First to emerge was Secret Service Agent Richard Keiser.

Ford and Brezhnev then emerged from different sides of the limousine.

You all saw what Ford and Brezhnev were wearing and that the President wore the Russian hat given him last Sunday by Antoly Dobrynin.

The leaders walked up the stairs to the train platform, Ford walking at Brezhnev's right. They paused on the platform with Brezhnev turning his back on the photographers who were arranged in a straight line, effectively blocking their view of the President.

Ford and Brezhnev engaged in animated but inaudible conversation. Brezhnev waggled a cigarette in his left hand. Ford laughed several times. American photographers called out, "Mr. President, oh, Mr. President." But the Chief Executive turned and moved to enter car #3. But he was told he was going into the wrong car and was guided to car #4. This left Brezhnev to wave to the photographers by himself. Brezhnev then got into car #3.

The train left a minute later.

Poolers noticed through the windows of car #4 that Ford, upon boarding, doffed his fur car, removed his top coat, and began talking with an aide we did not recognize.

Along the route, small knots of people were occasionally seen beside the tracks in towns and villages. They responded to waves from train riders.

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Malitia men stood in snowy fields near population centers and at points where trains crossed bridges or culverts.

The Soviet and American poolers were escorted to a conference room on the train within a half hour after departure. Ford and Brezhnev faced each other across a table with a white cloth. Between them was a bowl of pears, grapes, apples, oranges, and bananas. Six brands of cigarettes were laid out on the table. So were a variety of beverages -- mineral water, soft drinks... The President had a plate of meat-filled pastries in front of him. One pastry was half-eaten.

Sitting with the President were Secretary Kissinger, Ambassador Stoessel and Viktor Sukhodrev. Beside Brezhnev were Gromyko, Dobrynin, Andrei M. Aleksandrov, and Korniyeko -- titles are in the bible. White House staffers Robert Mead and Zip Zimmerman sought to enter the room with the pool but a Soviet official told them, "Press only." They were kept out. As it was, the meeting room was so crowded with poolers and conferees that photographers stood on sofas to get pictures.

When the pool entered, Kissinger was talking about seeing the Soviet coastline from the plane.

Ford then asked Brezhnev, "How much snow do you get in Moscow?"

"It changes from year to year," Brezhnev said. "It changes a lot. Sometimes a half meter falls in one night."

Ford responded, "We have snow problems in Washington, D.C. We don't get much, but it is a problem when it comes. It really handicaps the city. We don't have the equipment and we don't have the people who know how to drive in the city in the snow."

Brezhnev laughed, waved his cigarette and said, "And that will be our first deal. We send you Soviet snow plows."

Gromyko interjected, "At a good low price."

The room had akazakf carpet and red velvet drapes, the car was wood trimmed.

Available for the leaders were black and red caviar, smoked salmon and a delicate-tasting black fish.

At one point Brezhnev told Ford that in some countries people think they get their news from newspapers, television and radio. But the Soviet leader reminded Ford of an Egyptian saying, "Put on your fez and go down to the market place," with that Brezhnev held up his napkin and dangled it over his head like a fez.

"In our country too," Ford replied, "It helps to get out and around the country to find out what is going on."

Kissinger said, "General Secretary, I think we definitely can say this is a first -- an American President and the General Secretary riding on a train through the snow in Far Eastern Russia."

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Soviet officials on the train told the pool the community where the leaders were staying was Ussuresk.

Aboard the train was Valentin Zorin, noted Moscow television and radio commentator whose views are usually accepted as authoritative. He told the pool he had read American suggestions that Ford and Brezhnev were having simply a get acquainted meeting.

"I don't agree. I don't agree it is just to shake hands," he said. "I believe they meet for a discussion of fundamental problems existing between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. such as strategic weapons. There will be matters of substance. I believe both leaders have a chance to settle problems -- all problems. Asked if he expected the summit to be a success, Zorin said, "I hope so."

Asked what he thought the principal topic for discussion would be, he said, "Mainly about SALT, I think. I believe there are to be genuine discussions between the leaders -- not just a protocol meeting."

The pool was told not to hurry when the train reached its destination because another pool was pre-positioned at the platform. We could not get off the train until the two leaders had departed.

Frank Cormier - AP
Richard Growald - UPI