

MAY 31, 1975

POOL REPORT

Air Force One Brussels to Madrid

At 7:26 a. m. , Henry Kissinger's motorcade arrived at the embassy residence, horns blaring and accompanied by eight motorcycle escorts. At 7:31, the President emerged, shook hands with a Belgian security agent, then walked across to the other side of the street to shake hands with a small cluster of U. S. servicemen (who had been used as drivers during Ford's stay) and embassy officials. He then shook hands with all 20 of the red helmeted motorcycle escort and some Belgian gendarmes, then left for the trip to the airport. The streets were almost totally deserted during the motorcade. The President was bade farewell by Ambassador Firestone and Belgian officials. There was no ceremony and Air Force One was wheels up at 8:01 a. m.

Nessen came back to report that Ford had risen on the third day (of his Belgian trip) at 5:45 a. m. , read the newspapers and some briefing papers. He also went through some calisthenics prescribed by Dr. Lukash. Nessen quoted Ford as having said that the food was too good in Brussels and further commenting, "Lukash gave me some stupid sitting up exercises." (Nessen said Ford "complained about eating too much.")

After breakfast, Ford posed for photos with the Firestones and the residence staff who had been assembled for the Fords to thank them for the fine care.

Nessen remarked about the President's non-stop pace in Brussels and his well-documented stamina, "He never gets tired," said Nessen, adding that Ford had managed a 20-minute nap yesterday.

Further details on last night's dinner from Nessen: the menu was prosciutto with finely chopped lettuce, two kinds of fish in sauce (one turbot), and a choice of lamb, veal or steak. Most of the party had lamb (including Ford), the house specialty. The meal concluded with crepes with strawberries and ice cream and Moet et Chandon champagne.

Ford gave an informal toast "to the host country, the alliance, and the King." Belgian Prime Minister Leo Tindemans responded by saying he hoped Ford would return to Belgium and next time visit Antwerp, Tindemans' hometown.

A senior American official said that the current U. S. - Spanish negotiations on bases is one of the reasons for the Spanish visit. The NATO leaders understand that the bases (2 air bases, a naval base and a gunnery range that is used by some of the NATO nations) do help in the defense of Europe, even though Spain is not a member.

Over the next five years the relations of Spain to Europe will have to be constantly looked at. Spain's location, history and its growth make it an important country in Europe. As far as NATO membership for Spain, "We are approaching a period when that problem has to be faced."

The official described the up-coming meeting with Sadat in Salzburg as "crucial." He said: "We will give our assessment and he (Sadat) will give his. I think it will be a very important, crucial meeting. But it will not lead to any spectacular announcement. I would be absolutely astounded if there is. But I am not saying that there isn't going to be any important developments (growing out of the Ford-Sadat meetings). I think Sadat will tell us what he thinks he can do. I have the impression that Sadat wants some progress."

(MORE)

The reason the official feels that there will be no important announcement is that whatever is proposed will have to be first run by Rabin before any announcement can be made.

The official feels that there is a "resurgence of interest in step-by-step" by all sides in the Middle East conflict and also the Soviets because they have become aware of the complexities of a full scale Geneva meeting.

"In March, a lot of heroes were saying 'let's go to Geneva for an overall settlement' but they are not saying that now. They realize that if the Geneva talks fail there will be no otherplace to go," the official said.

For ^{deep} background purposes, the following explanation was given for the Spain visit:

The visit is designed not to embrace Franco or his policies. Instead, is in recognition of the importance of U.S. bases in Spain to the defense of Europe and to the important future role Spain could play in the security of Western Europe in the post Franco era.

The trip was thus viewed as a "symbolization of America's interests," looking more to the expected transition in government within the next five years.

Additionally on the Middle East, the senior American official when questioned about his statement that he would "be astounded" if any important breakthrough was announced following the Ford-Sadat meeting said: "I'm not steering you away from a significant development," but he reemphasized that he expected no announcement simply because whatever progress is made must be gone over first in Ford meetings later this month with Rabin in Washington.

On "step-by-step" vs. Geneva, the American official said, "In March, a lot of heroes were saying 'let's go to Geneva.' We are willing to go to Geneva. The trouble with Geneva is that if it happens and fails, there is no place to go.

"I have detected a resurgence of interest in step-by-step. It is mathematically certain that if there isn't some progress somewhere down the road -- six months, one year, two years -- there will be a war. There is absolutely no question of that."

Tom DeFrank
Jim Wieghart