

January 6, 1976

POOL REPORT - President's Attendance at the Funeral of
Richard Welch

The President arrived at the Memorial Chapel in Fort Myers, Virginia, just about 11:30. There were about 500 people in the Chapel which is a kind of modernistic, simple, wooden and brick structure. Behind the altar was a wooden cross framed by bright red pointsetta flowers.

The President sat facing the altar on the left in the front row. He sat between Secretary Kissinger and Mr. Colby. Mrs. Colby was also in the front row. George Bush sat two rows behind. General Scowcroft was present.

It was a very simple ceremony lasting slightly less than half an hour. There was no sermon. There was not a real eulogy, it was a New Testament lesson in which the chaplain praised Mr. Welch's devotion to duty and country. There was no formal eulogy as such.

The ceremony was conducted by the officiant, Chaplain Duncan C. Stewart, Army Colonel. It was a Protestant service -- it was not Catholic, it was not Jewish. I could not recognize it. It was sort of a non-denominational Protestant service.

It struck me as very strange and this may happen all the time -- I don't go to that many funerals -- but through the entire funeral Welch's name was never mentioned. The closest that the chaplain came was in the benediction when he said, "We give thanks to Thee for this one who Thou has taken from our presence," and then it goes on and he says, "For devotion to duty and country may these be utmost in our memories of him." But from the time the casket was rolled in with the flag over it until it was taken out after the service, Welch's name was never mentioned.

He did not mention Welch's name. I did not hear Welch's name for the entire service.

After the brief ceremony was over, the casket was rolled out the front door, the family following. Mr. Ford went out a side door and in front of the Chapel he stood at attention next to the widow while the casket was being loaded on a horse-drawn caisson. Then after the casket was loaded on the caisson, he shook hands with Mrs. Welch and spoke to her. I could not hear but from the expression on his face and his lips he seemed to be saying "How sorry I am" -- words to that effect.

Then he was introduced by Mr. Colby to the rest of the family, including Mr. Welch's father, who was in a wheelchair, and the children and shook hands and spoke briefly with all of them, and then it was all over. We ran back into the motorcade. It was one of the shortest memorial ceremonies ever seen.

He didn't stay for the burial. I don't know if Colby went to the gravesite. Kissinger did not because I saw him get in the Presidential motorcade. Scowcroft also got in the motorcade. The President and Kissinger rode back together -- I don't know whether they rode out together.

Tom Jarriell, ABC
Phil Shabecoff, New York Times