

March 5, 1976

POOL REPORT - The President's visit to the Shriners Temple

First, I don't know how much you all saw but after his speech he walked off the platform at the gymnasium there and worked the crowd all the way on one side, went out the exit opposite the stage and then there was a rather large crowd inside behind the counter where they had been serving refreshments and he worked that crowd parallel to the stage, then went back in on the opposite side and worked the crowd all the way back up to the stage and out the back door, and just before he left they gave him a Bradley University blanket of some kind. I guess it had the symbol of the college on it.

Then we went in a motorcade a few blocks away to the Mohammed Lodge where he met very briefly with the ladies and Noble Knights of the Mohammed Lodge Shriners. Several officials of the Shriners organization met him outside the door and escorted him in. I would say there must have been five or six hundred people in that hall. It was well crowded. Twelve hundred they estimated. Twelve hundred people in the hall, Shriners and their wives.

The President was led up to the stage. He gave a little talk and the talk consisted primarily of a tribute to the Shriners. He started out saying, "We have had a great day in the wonderful State of Illinois and this is the culmination of it." He thanked Congressman Michel and others who had been his host here in Illinois during the day. And then he talked about how he comes from the Saladin Temple in Grand Rapids and "I am proud of it," he said.

I thought during this particular period he looked a little tired and he was talking in a very low-key voice. He then went on to talk about how he was invited to play in the East-West Shrine game in San Francisco while he attended the University of Michigan. His father had been a Shriner when he was a young man and he felt it a great privilege to play in that Shrine game. They went to the hospital in San Francisco that the Shriners supports particularly through that East-West game and he said that he learned what great people like all of you do. That is, in supporting hospitals and particularly that hospital in San Francisco, and he thanked them all for their efforts for people in hospitals and thanked them for having given him a warm reception and he was on the stage, I would say, less than five minutes and then left through the stage exit right and we drove back here.

He greeted some people who were taking part in the entertainment for the Shriners at that stage, some of the actors and actresses and magicians and that kind of thing. We drove back here in the motorcade and he started to go through the lobby and suddenly realized there was a crowd in the lobby and he moved over to shake hands with some of them. The only quote I heard all evening that was a direct quote to people in the crowd, not from a microphone, was as he moved over, "Aw, I love all of you fine people and we need your help." He has now gone upstairs to meet with Michel and the Mayor of Peoria and from upstairs he is going to freshen up a little and then he is going on to the reception.

Bob Pierpoint, CBS
Aldo Beckman, Chicago Tribune
Ton DeFrank, Newsweek