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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS  
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT  
AND  
CAPTAIN CHARLES T. MILLER  
CAPTAIN OF THE MAYAGUEZ  
AND  
CREW MEMBERS  
OF THE  
USNS GREENVILLE

THE OVAL OFFICE

12:40 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: It is great to have you here, and let me thank you very much. You all were just tremendous.

Believe me, it is of great significance, not only to the American people, but I think its significance goes well beyond that to the world as a whole. I want to congratulate you, Captain Miller, and through you my congratulations to the crew who were so strong and so resourceful.

The American people are proud of every one of you. You did a wonderful job in a very difficult situation, and we were sort of watching it as best we could from afar. I want you to know I am proud of you and the American people are proud of you.

CAPTAIN MILLER: I thank you, sir.

THE PRESIDENT: I should mention this group of young people over here volunteered, as I understand it, to go from the SS GREENVILLE and to join the boarding party that went aboard the MAYAGUEZ at the time that the military went in and took possession.

So, these fine seamen, when they went aboard, took charge of the ship and got it underway. We are equally proud of you for the fine job you did. But the fact that you volunteered -- this is in the best spirit, I think, of America. Thank you very much.

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I am just trying to decide where to put this wheel. I think we will have it available here, at least we are going to keep it right in the Oval Office, for a few days and maybe longer because it, to me, was a very significant incident that has very broad and, I think, tremendous impact not only on our people but people around the world.

You look pretty healthy. How badly did they treat you?

CAPTAIN MILLER: They did not treat us badly. They treated us fairly well. We did not get much sleep.

THE PRESIDENT: Did they do anything to the ship when they made you get off of it?

CAPTAIN MILLER: Some of the rooms were locked, and they kept them all in rooms on the ship. They locked the seamen in their quarters. They felt we had surveillance here as a spy ship. I convinced them that I would not go along with that; that we were just a commercial operation. We had no warfare or combat materiel: rifles, ammunition and bombs. We had no electronic surveillance equipment aboard.

THE PRESIDENT: Those American planes looked pretty good to you?

CAPTAIN MILLER: Those American planes looked like angels coming out of the sky.

THE PRESIDENT: I bet it was good to see these fellows when you saw them on board.

CAPTAIN MILLER: Yes, sir, I boarded the ship at 12:05 and I walked up to the bridge and all the men were up there, and they were telling me what happened, as we got underway, or under tow -- the destroyer escort towed us.

THE PRESIDENT: What does the ship's log say? I used to be the assistant navigator on a carrier out there in the Pacific, and part of my job, along with the quartermaster, was to keep the ship's log.

Was there a vacant space in there from the time you were boarded until you all got on board?

ANSWER: Right, one space.

THE PRESIDENT: It would be nice to have a copy of the ship's log the day that it all happened and a copy of the ship's log the day that you all boarded it and you got back home.

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CAPTAIN MILLER: We can give you a copy of the log, Mr. President. We can also give you a copy of our charts, and all the navigation reports that we had on it.

THE PRESIDENT: That would be very interesting.

What kind of a ship is the SS GREENVILLE?

ANSWER: It is a victory ship, 21 years old.

THE PRESIDENT: It is a Government-owned one?

ANSWER: Yes, sir, USS GREENVILLE CAK 237.

THE PRESIDENT: You are all part of the Civil Service crew that operates it. Where did they find you all?

ANSWER: We were part of the refugee operations in Saigon and Cam Ranh and Danang. We were on standby.

THE PRESIDENT: In the Philippines? They picked you up by helicopter?

ANSWER: Yes, in Manila Bay.

QUESTION: Was a report on the MAYAGUEZ turned in to the White House? Is a report on the operation to be made public?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think it will be made public, but there is a book being written that I gather will be very complete.

END

(AT 12:47 P.M. EDT)