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This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#211

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 1:50 P.M. EDT

MAY 12, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: I have a short written statement, which I will give you and give you a chance to read. Attached to it is a map. I have a limited amount of factual information, which I think I will just give instead of waiting for questions, and that is all I have, so I would think that at that point, unless you have some burning questions, why don't you go ahead and file at that point.

You are not going to file when I give you this, you are going to wait for me to give you the factual material.

The name of the ship is the MAYAQUEZ. It is an American registered ship. It belongs to the Sealand Corporation. It has a crew, which we believe to be 39 people, all of American nationality. It is a container ship, unarmed.

The information that I am giving you comes from several radio reports from the ship itself. The radio has now stopped transmitting.

We are not sure at this point whether it is in Kompong Som or approaching Kompong Som.

The circumstances of the seizure, as we understand it from these several radio reports, the ship was reportedly fired upon and boarded by Cambodian armed forces from a Cambodian naval vessel.

You have a map which shows you --

Q What is the second "X" on the map? My map has two?

MR. NESSEN: One is a key, and one is the "X".

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Q What is the key?

MR. NESSEN: It tells you what the "X" means.

Now, you have longitude and latitude on the map, do you not?

Q In what waters?

MR. NESSEN: Just a moment. I have not finished.

The ship's probable last port was Hong Kong. The intended destination was Thailand. I don't have the name of the port in Thailand. The cargo is unknown.

The "X" on your map is 60 miles off the coast. It is about eight miles off a small rock island, which apparently is claimed by both Cambodia and Vietnam.

Q North or South?

MR. NESSEN: South.

Q When did the President find out?

MR. NESSEN: In his morning intelligence report.

Q How are we responding, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I have nothing further to add to the statement.

Q Do you know the time that the ship was boarded? It is not on here.

Q Had the ship picked up any evacuees?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a precise time on the boarding.

Q Where was its home port?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I think it is Seattle, but I am not sure.

Q Can you put some time on it? I mean, was it this morning, last night?

MR. NESSEN: Early this morning Washington time. I don't have a precise time.

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Q Had the ship picked up any evacuees from anywhere?

MR. NESSEN: As far as we know, no.

Q Are we free to file?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Where did the news reports come from that you are monitoring from the ship? Were they picked up by Navy vessels or other merchant ships, and then relayed?

MR. NESSEN: I am not sure. I don't know.

Q Do you know whether or not the Cambodians ordered them to halt and they didn't halt, and they fired upon them, anything like that?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any of that because these are all -- I mean, the only way we got anything was from a few brief radios on the ship, and they have stopped now.

Q What does it mean when the President said he considers it an act of piracy?

MR. NESSEN: I am not going to be able to go beyond the statement.

Q Ron, are there any U.S. Naval vessels in the area?

MR. NESSEN: I just rather would not say.

Q Any within striking distance?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not say.

Q Can the Pentagon give us that information?

MR. NESSEN: You can try.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:55 P.M. EDT)

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NEWS CONFERENCE

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 4:30 P.M. EDT

MAY 12, 1975

MONDAY

MR. NESSEN: Let me read again the statement I made earlier.

We have been informed that a Cambodian Naval vessel has seized an American merchant ship on the high seas and forced it to the Port of Kompong Som.

The President has met with the National Security Council. He considers this seizure an act of piracy. He has instructed the State Department to demand the immediate release of the ship. Failure to do so would have the most serious consequences.

Let me answer the questions that I can answer that have been coming into the Press Office since I gave you the other information.

Does Cambodia claim the ship was in Cambodian waters? We don't know what they claim since there has been neither public nor private communication.

Were there any injuries on the ship? None that we know of.

Has the President consulted with or advised Congressional leaders? Not formally. However, during phone conversations on other matters with Senators Scott and Mansfield, the President gave them the same information I have given you.

Congressman Rhodes is here now on another matter, and the President also will give him the same information I have given you.

Was this a spy ship or in any way involved in any kind of espionage? The answer is a flat no.

I am answering questions that have been addressed to the Press Office this afternoon.

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What was the cargo of the ship? We don't know.

Q As I understand it, the Pentagon has indicated that it was Navy material. Is that true?

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea from here what the cargo was.

How did this information come to us? It came through radio messages from the ship before the radio room was shut down. I don't have all the precise details of who relayed which radio message to whom. I do know that at one point the ship did send out a Mayday signal.

Q Where were they monitored, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know where they were monitored. That is what I --

Q Ron, is there a chance we could possibly get a transcript of those radio messages? Is that available?

MR. NESSEN: It is not available now, but I will look into it.

Q Was this monitored by a Government?

MR. NESSEN: My understanding is that this was a normal commercial radio signal sent out and picked up by some normal radio receiving station, not by American Naval ships.

Q Where was that radio signal received?

MR. NESSEN: One place it was picked up that I know of was in Indonesia.

Q Can we get now the exact times on when the President was told?

MR. NESSEN: I have not been able to put together that time table yet. I say that the incident began early this morning Washington time, and I have not been able to pin it down any better than that.

Q Ron, has there been any response from the U.S. in the way of Naval forces, et cetera?

MR. NESSEN: I am not able to talk about that part of it.

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Q Can you tell us anything at all about that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q What are the serious consequences?

MR. NESSEN: I am not able to spell that out, Fran.

Q Can you tell us anything about the State Department? Have they started efforts --

MR. NESSEN: I am told that the State Department is now able to perhaps help you out with some of these questions.

Q Ron, in view of the ban on the President using combat forces in the Indochina region, what are his Constitutional powers as the Commander-in-Chief to protect American lives and property under these circumstances?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not talk about the hypothetical legal problems.

Q It does not sound very hypothetical to me.

Q If the ship was eight miles off an island which was territory claimed by Cambodia or Vietnam, was that not in their territorial waters, whoever the island belongs to, and was it off course?

MR. NESSEN: I am just not able to give you anything on that, Tom.

Q Ron, that question is by far a theoretical question. You have a ship with 39 lives --

MR. NESSEN: I think what you are doing, Ralph, you are asking in another way what is referred to in the last sentence of the statement, and I just am not able to go into that.

Q No, I am not asking what he might likely or could do. I am just asking what are his inherent powers as Commander-in-Chief?

MR. NESSEN: I have not had an opportunity to research that.

Q Ron, could I try this? Is the President restricted in his action by any legislation of the past couple of years? I mean the War Powers Act and the so-called Cooper-Church or Church-Case amendments?

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MR. NESSEN: I have not checked that, Ted, and I am not able to tell you.

Q When you say "seized on the high seas" and "an act of piracy," is it safe for us to interpret that as meaning that the United States Government does not consider this ship to have been in territorial waters of another nation?

MR. NESSEN: I would rather turn it around. It says "the high seas," and it says "an act of piracy," so from that you can easily deduce that we consider the ship to have been in international waters.

Q What does Cambodia claim as its territorial limits?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Do you know of a WSAG meeting?

MR. NESSEN: Not scheduled, no.

Q What was the question?

MR. NESSEN: Do I know of a WSAG meeting.

Q Was there more than one NSC meeting today?

MR. NESSEN: There has only been one today.

Q How long did it last?

MR. NESSEN: It lasted from noon until 12:45.

Q Why was there such a delay between the time the President found out about this and the time the NSC was told?

MR. NESSEN: There needed to be time to pull together as many facts as were available.

Q Ron, when you say "early this morning," can you give us the time the President heard about it?

MR. NESSEN: I have not yet been able to pin together a timetable. I am working on it.

Q You did indicate he read about it in the morning briefing?

MR. NESSEN: That is my understanding, and I know for a fact that Brent, who as you know is his first caller in the morning, talked to him about it. I believe it was in his written intelligence report.

Q When he got up?

MR. NESSEN: It was roughly when he got up.



Q Isn't that a little odd for a major crisis to read about it in a report when there is an action?

MR. NESSEN: I think I won't try that.

Q Ron, we would like to know when the President was awakened.

Q What time did he have the meeting with Brent?

Q What time was the President awakened?

MR. NESSEN: All right. Now, let me just say for the rest of the day I don't anticipate any further announcements.

Q No further NSC meeting scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: I am perfectly happy to put a lid on and do a call-out.

Q You will do a full call-out?

MR. NESSEN: That is what we did on the 1:45 briefing.

Q Has the President gotten any report since this morning?

MR. NESSEN: He is being kept fully informed of what is going on.

Q Ron, you were asked this question.

Q Ron, has there been any further contact?

MR. NESSEN: What do you mean, any more contact?

Q Well, for example, with the ship company. Have they perhaps gotten any kind of message?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I have heard of.

Q Do we know where the ship is?

MR. NESSEN: We believe it is in Kompong Som, but as I told you, the radio room went out before it reached port.

Q We don't have planes flying over there?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

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Q Ron, you said there was no direct contact with Cambodia. Has there been any indirect contact with another country?

MR. NESSEN: I am not able to say that, Bob.

Q Is Kissinger changing his plans in any way?

MR. NESSEN: What are his plans?

Q Well, he is supposed to be in St. Louis about right now and supposed to address the St. Louis Council on World Affairs tonight. Is he going ahead with that?

MR. NESSEN: Ed, has he gone, as far as you know?

You don't know. Why don't you give a quick call?

Q He is supposed to have left.

MR. NESSEN: He left at 2:05.

Q Ron, were any communications made from other countries to us about this?

MR. NESSEN: I am not able to say that, Fran.

The Secretary went to St. Louis.

Q Is he returning tonight?

Q Were they flying the American flag?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it was.

Q What kind of connection does he have with the Hill on this thing, the leadership?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, he was talking to Scott and Mansfield about other subjects on the phone, and gave them the same information I gave you. Rhodes is in here on another matter and he will give the same information to him.

Q Has the President heard from Congress yet?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Did the President consider this a major crisis?

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to characterize it, Ed.

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Q Is another NSC meeting scheduled?

MR. NESSEN: As I said, no.

Q Do you know of any other ships carrying other flags that were stopped by Cambodians in that same area in the last four days?

MR. NESSEN: Do you?

Q There have been reports from the Pentagon that there was a Panamanian ship stopped.

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q Is that right?

MR. NESSEN: That is right.

Q What was it you said the State Department was able to talk to us about now?

Q A Panamanian ship was stopped when?

MR. NESSEN: You really ought to check the Pentagon on this, but I am told that there was a Panamanian ship stopped several days ago and released. That is the only one I know of.

Q Has that ship been released?

MR. NESSEN: As far as I know, it has been.

Q Did we know of this before this incident?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know, Steve.

Q That is a very pertinent question, since we might have had a warning.

MR. NESSEN: I have no idea where it was. The Pentagon will give you that, though.

Q Stopped by the Cambodians?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Do you know the nature of the Cambodian warship which seized this? Was it an MPT, a PT boat?

MR. NESSEN: It was described only as a gun-boat and I don't know exactly what kind of ship that is specifically. I am not sure that anybody here knows.

Q Did the radio room of this ship continue to broadcast after the Cambodians had diverted it and taken control?

MR. NESSEN: There were two or three broadcasts and I am not sure at what stage it stopped, except that it stopped before they reached the port.



Q What else do you know about the Panamanian ship?

MR. NESSEN: Nothing.

Q Was it stopped in approximately the same waters? Was it also boarded and fired upon?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, I don't have a drop of information other than the fact that there was such an incident.

Q You said several days ago. Do you know when?

Q What happens next? You said you might be able to give us some nuts and bolts things about what happens next.

MR. NESSEN: I have given you all the nuts and bolts except to say that I don't anticipate anything further here tonight.

Q You said there were 40 people aboard. I understand your original figure was 39. Have you revised upward?

MR. NESSEN: No, 39 is the number that we have.

Q What did you say it was the State Department was prepared to help us on?

MR. NESSEN: To talk about some of these questions about how are we issuing this demand and --

Q Could you answer them? Some of us have had trouble getting through to people because everybody is calling them. Anything you can give here would be helpful.

Q CBS has left the room. They may be filing.

MR. NESSEN: I guess maybe they are filing.

I don't have anything else I can give you.

Q What was the President doing the rest of the day?

MR. NESSEN: Following this and meanwhile keeping the rest of his appointments.

Buchen

This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#214

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 9:53 A.M. EDT

MAY 13, 1975

TUESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I just thought I would keep you posted as we go along, and also, I don't really have anything major, but I wanted to keep you posted as we go along this morning, a couple of tidbits, and also to answer some of the questions that have come into the Press Office.

As some of you have inquired about wire stories quoting Pentagon sources concerning the movement of Marines to Thailand, on that question, we will simply have to say that we cannot discuss any possible military movements.

Q Any possible military movements?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

To anticipate questions, I will tell you that there is an NSC meeting at 10:15.

Q On this subject?

MR. NESSEN: We never discuss the subject, Fred, but use your imagination.

Q Is Kissinger back?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen him this morning.

Q Is he being summoned back?

MR. NESSEN: Not summoned back, not as far as I know.

Q Is he going to be there?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

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Q Was that a yes to Helen's question?

MR. NESSEN: Just a moment.

Let's put that in reserve for a moment while we check.

Q Put what in reserve?

MR. NESSEN: The question of whether Kissinger will be back.

For timetable fans, here is a little rundown on the President's activities during the night. He talked to Brent at 10:30 p.m. for an updated account, and he talked to Brent at 2:25 a.m. for another updated account. He woke up again for good at 5:20 a.m.

Q That is a call, or just a wake up?

MR. NESSEN: No, he normally wakes up at 5:20 to 5:30.

Q Was he called?

MR. NESSEN: No, that was his normal wake-up time.

He talked to Secretary Schlesinger at 7 a.m., and he had his regular morning meeting -- it wasn't an emergency or anything, it was the regular morning meeting -- with Brent to go over the intelligence report at 7:40.

That is really about all I have in the way of an update.

Q Do you have anything as to the status of the crew, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything further on that.

Q No observations from the reconnaissance plane?

Q Were there any signs of life seen on the ship at all or anything by the planes?

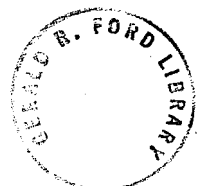
MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that.

Q Why can't we find that out? It is very simple.

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

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Q There was a report on the radio that some of the crew were wounded. Do you have anything to confirm that?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q This report over the radio came from a man named Peter Lindstrom, who was active in the PUEBLO, who says he was informed by a State Department source that four men were wounded seriously.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that, Sarah.

Q Would you say definitely then that since you do not have anything on it that it is not true that any crew were wounded?

MR. NESSEN: The last I have heard is what I said yesterday, which is that I have not seen any reports like that, but I will check since there is this radio report.

Q Ron, do you know where the ship is?

MR. NESSEN: The ship is stopped -- whether the anchor is dropped or not, I don't know -- close to this island called Koh Tang, which is 30 miles generally South of the Cambodian coast.

Q Close to the island? Is it in a port or is it just out in the waters?

MR. NESSEN: Just close to the island is as much as I have.

Q It did not get to Kompong Som, did it?

Q How far is it from the closest land? About 30 miles?

MR. NESSEN: Thirty miles from the mainland, yes.

Q In what you consider international waters?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is the President considering a military response?

MR. NESSEN: I can't talk about that right now.

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Q Ron, if I may follow up with Phil's question, some of those islands there in that particular area are used like port facilities by the Cambodians where they have little small boat bases, and then they go out to the larger boats on a ferrying type operation.

MR. NESSEN: This is a very small island, and it is not clear. The State Department was trying to determine whether this is one of the islands that is contested between Cambodia and Vietnam.

The last time I checked, no answer had come back as to the ownership of the island.

Q But it does not seem to be in and of itself a port facility?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is a very small island.

Q Ron, can you tell us about the contact?

MR. NESSEN: The island where the boat was intercepted is called Poulo Wai -- I think we gave the spelling of it earlier -- which is another 30 miles South. In other words, just to clear up what may have been a misunderstanding, the boat started off being boarded off this island called Poulo Wai.

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Q Is that eight miles off that island?

MR. NESSEN: Eight miles off that island.

Q South of the present island?

MR. NESSEN: Let me do it this way, Ralph.

Q I am sorry.

MR. NESSEN: It started eight miles off that island yesterday and during the night, it moved 30 miles almost due North to this other island, which in turn, is 30 miles off the mainland of Cambodia, if you follow.

Q It steamed under its own power there going that 30 miles?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, as far as we know.

Q Ron, can you tell us the reaction of the Cambodian government, what the contacts have been?

MR. NESSEN: No, I can't tell you that.

Q Have there been any direct contacts?

MR. NESSEN: I can't talk about it.

Q Yesterday, you said no, and now you are backing off of that.

Q I can't talk about it.

Q Ron, your statement yesterday called for the immediate release of the ship or face serious consequences. Have you any time deadline in mind on this?

MR. NESSEN: I can't give you that, Ralph.

Q Is there one?

Q If the boat was seized eight miles off an island claimed by Cambodian and South Vietnam, and the standard accepted international limit is 12 miles, how can we say this was not in their territorial waters?

MR. NESSEN: Dr. Kissinger will not come to the NSC meeting. He will be back tonight at around 9:00. He is going to go ahead and keep his appointment to speak in Kansas City.

Q Where is he now?

Q When is Dr. Kissinger scheduled to speak?

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MR. NESSEN: At noon. I didn't know about this news conference.

Q Is there one?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q I would like to ask the question a different way, about the wounded.

Q How about letting us have an answer to Tom's question.

Q It appeared he is closing his briefing.

Q I am sorry. Would you repeat the question?

Q The question is, if the boat was seized eight miles off an island which is claimed both by Cambodia and South Vietnam and the standard accepted limit to territorial waters is 12 miles --

MR. NESSEN: I don't think that is the standard accepted limit.

Q It is not the accepted limit?

MR. NESSEN: The use of the word "piracy" clearly indicates we considered that to be international waters.

Q Ron, do we have any word as to whether Cambodians are aboard the ship at this point?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q There are Cambodians aboard the ship?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The boarding party?

Q Do we have an estimate as to how many -- a handful?

MR. NESSEN: No. The radio, as I told you yesterday, has not broadcast any more from the ship, so we don't --

Q Do we know that from reconnaissance reports or from radio reports that there are Cambodians on board?

MR. NESSEN: From the radio reports before the radio went out.

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Q Can I ask a question about the wounded? You said you cannot confirm the reports of wounded.

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of any reports until you mentioned them to me.

Q I think that clears my question, but was there anything in the Mayday distress signals which went out to suggest that there were wounded, whether or not you can confirm it or not?

MR. NESSEN: I did not hear anything about any report from the ship of any wounded.

Q So, you are basing the Cambodians on board from yesterday, not from any new observations?

Q Not seen today. This is what we are getting at. Not seen by the planes today?

MR. NESSEN: Let me just say that there are Cambodians aboard.

Q Are the Americans still aboard or have they taken them off, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that.

Q Ron, I think that the American people have a right to know whether the President is pursuing this very actively through diplomatic channels and I don't understand why you cannot say at least that without going into detail.

MR. NESSEN: I think the State Department talked a little bit about that. The President did order the State Department, after all, to make the demand for the release of the ship and I think the State Department will have to tell you as much as it can tell you about how that demand is being delivered.

Q Well, the President of the United States is involved in this. Why can't we know whether the Chinese envoy was summoned in, and so forth?

MR. NESSEN: I think I would prefer, at this point, now, since the NSC meeting will start in less than 15 minutes, to wait until after that.

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Q Any comment on the Thailand report that they would not allow American military forces?

MR. NESSEN: No, I can't comment on that.

Q Ron, how did the ship get in? Was it towed? You said it went under its own power.

MR. NESSEN: We know it went under its own power.

Q That indicates that they were either ordering the pilot to take it in, or they were piloting it in themselves.

MR. NESSEN: There is no radio contact, so we can't confirm those.

Q Ron, two things. First of all, are you aware we were told on background -- and I am willing to put this comment on background, if you want to -- we were told on background just before you came out that we should stay away from the story that 1,000 Marines are on their way to Thailand. We were given the clear impression in reading that that it was a false report --

MR. NESSEN: From here?

Q Yes, from here.

You seem to have opened it up again. We have already called our offices and told them on background to stay away from the AP version, while the UPI was not ruled out.

Q The AP version is changed now. -- will be flown.

Q What?

Q The AP is saying "will be flown."

Q "Will be flown," but that still is an affirmative that it is an order that will be carried out, whereas UPI leaves it up in the air as it may be only an alert to be prepared to, if ordered to, at a later time.

We were given the impression that we should stay with the UPI version of that; also that the number was wrong, which seemed to indicate that some Marines were involved in something. So, we would sure like a clarification because we have been calling in this updated information as we have gone along.

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Q Can't you give us something on background, Ron, without quoting you directly?

MR. NESSEN: If we can all agree for background --

Q Ron, an hour ago we went with the report from a source outside the White House that 1,000 Marines from Okinawa have been told to be prepared to move to U Tapo. That that has already been reported.

Q I withdraw my request for background.

MR. NESSEN: In that case, we will just say then we are not going to talk about any possible military movement.

Q One last question, Ron. What about the Panamanian ship? Have we learned anything about --

MR. NESSEN: The Panamanian ship that was mentioned casually yesterday, I find out now that on the 7th of May -- and I don't know when exactly that was, six days ago --

Q Is that a Panamanian registry or is it a Panamanian ship?

MR. NESSEN: Panamanian registry.

Q It could be a United States ship, then?

MR. NESSEN: It could be. The identity of the ship is not clear even now.

It was detained in the Gulf of Thailand and later was released.

Q Why? Do we know why? We really don't know why, or you just won't comment?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q How long was it detained?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know the exact time.

Q Couldn't that possibly have a great deal of bearing on why we were stopped, whether or not it is a dispute over territorial waters, et cetera?

MR. NESSEN: That is all I was able to find out yesterday afternoon.



Q Ron, there is something very peculiar. Are we not being able to get information about that ship registry from the Panamanian government, or are we not being able to get it from our own merchant ship seamen?

MR. NESSEN: I just have not been able to find out anymore about the Panamanian ship.

Q Can you follow through on the idea of giving us some background on the status of the military? I am a little puzzled why with one organization going with it why you still can't give us on background the accuracy or inaccuracy of that.

MR. NESSEN: I just would rather say we are not going to --

Q This gives the impression that the White House can't talk, but the Pentagon and the State Department can. You should be able to tell us about the wounded, if there are any wounded.

MR. NESSEN: I had not heard of any wounded until I --

Q Well, now, at the State Department it sounds pretty good --

MR. NESSEN: Is the State Department saying that there were wounded?

Q This man is saying he has it from a State Department source that four were wounded severely.

MR. NESSEN: I promised I would check on that, which I will do.

Q Ron, don't you think that somebody in this Administration has an obligation to clear up as clearly a muddled situation as the status of these 1,000 Marines that may or may not be moving to U Tapo, apart from sources in varying forms of the Pentagon and of the State Department? Don't you think that in the interest of national sanity that we ought to have some clarification?

MR. NESSEN: There are several competing interests, Tom.

Q The report is out; it is broadcast.

MR. NESSEN: I know it is out.

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Q Now you have knocked down the knockdown, and so the report stands. I am going to go back and tell the folks to take the lid off again.

Q We have been getting varying degrees of advice and guidance on this thing, and it has gotten to the point of just utter confusion, and I think it is bordering on irresponsibility to let it continue this way for all of us.

Q But if it is the case the troops will go, that is different.

MR. NESSEN: I think that is all we have now, and I will come back after the NSC meeting.

Q About 11 o'clock?

MR. NESSEN: I can't pin it down that tightly because I don't know how long the meeting will last.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 10:27 A.M. EDT)

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This Copy For _____

NEWS CONFERENCE

#217

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 11:50 A.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

Q Before you begin with the announcements, can you confirm the AP bulletin that just found that U.S. airplanes have attacked three Cambodian vessels?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot, Phil. I expect Joe Laitin will be having an announcement at the Pentagon sometime in the near future.

Q What do you mean, you can't. Do you mean you won't or that you don't know? Let me ask you that question.

MR. NESSEN: I can't.

Q What does "can't" mean? That is subject to various interpretations. At least I interpret it several ways.

MR. NESSEN: What are the choices?

Q The choices are --

Q You told us today the President had not made any final decisions. Has he made a decision in the last two hours or the hours since you talked with us?

MR. NESSEN: I said that Joe Laitin will have some announcements to make shortly.

Q Will you have it during the course of this briefing? If he does, why could we not listen to it?

Q Can we tell our offices that?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to do this in an orderly way, if I could.

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Q Ron, you, in effect, have confirmed it.

MR. NESSEN: I don't intend to confirm it, Jim.

Q You said that Laitin will have an announcement.

MR. NESSEN: I said Joe Laitin will have an announcement.

Q Have you all made an agreement that you are not to announce it, but that he is? Is that it, what you said?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to go on and skip the procedure.

Q When you say that Joe will have an announcement, that reply was in response to a question about reports of military action, correct?

MR. NESSEN: Phil pointed out to me an AP bulletin.

Q Yes, indeed, and this is your reply, so can we take it the announcement deals with possible military action?

MR. NESSEN: I certainly would not, Ralph. Enough mistakes were made on this story yesterday by people who made assumptions and so forth. I think maybe it would be a good time not to do that.

Q Can we tell our offices that Joe Laitin is going to respond?

MR. NESSEN: Don't you have a reporter at the Pentagon?

Q I don't know.

MR. NESSEN: We will adjourn for five minutes.

Q We cannot be at both of them, Ron. Will you please pipe it in here from the Pentagon?

MR. NESSEN: I will check.

(AT 11:52 A.M. EDT)

* * * * *

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12 NOON EDT

MR. NESSEN: We are going to go on with the briefing now.

Phil, you know how to break up a briefing.
(Laughter)

The President met with staff members this morning, as he usually does.

At 10:15 the President went over to the Theater in the Residence of the White House to greet a group of Michigan businessmen who are here for an annual visit to Washington. This group began coming to Washington under the auspices of Senator Griffin and the President, when he was Minority leader of the House, and Vice President. They meet with Senator Griffin and the President meets with them annually.

Q What cities? All cities?

MR. NESSEN: All cities of Michigan. They are here today to receive a series of briefings by Frank Zarb, Alan Greenspan and Bill Seidman, and to express their views as businessmen to the Administration.

We will have for you, after the meeting between the President and Prime Minister Den Uyl, a report on that meeting.

This evening, the President will host a working dinner in the Prime Minister's honor at 7:30. There will be coverage of the arrival for the dinner, and also at the beginning of the dinner.

Q Will that be a stag affair?

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the guest list yet. Sheila Weidenfeld will have the guest list.

The toasts will be piped back here. We will post the pools and the details later.

Q You mean this is a dinner we can cover?

MR. NESSEN: The arrivals and the beginning of the dinner.

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Tomorrow morning, there will be a State arrival ceremony on the South Grounds for the Shah of Iran at 10:30. There will be open coverage of that and of the exchange of remarks between the President and the Shah. A meeting between the President and the Shah will follow that and, of course, photographs will be available at the beginning of the meeting.

Tomorrow evening, at 8 o'clock, there will be a white tie State dinner in honor of the Shah and the Empress. We will have full details posted later, but let me mention ahead of time that those who are going in to cover the toasts -- camera crews and photographers and so forth -- will have to wear a white tie for that photo coverage.

Q Why is it white tie?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q It is not every day you have a Shah.

MR. NESSEN: That is a good answer.

Q Ron, in connection with this, will they allow this loudspeaker to keep shouting loudly that the Shah is a U.S. puppet? It is right across the street.

MR. NESSEN: I didn't know that.

Q I heard it as I came in, and I just wondered, is that allowed?

Q Will it be piped into the State Dining Room? (Laughter)

Q Ron, why don't you go on with your briefing?

MR. NESSEN: Just to look ahead to the weekend, I have a bit on Sunday.

As you know, the President is going to Philadelphia. Check-in time at Andrews is at 10 a.m. The press plane leaves at 10:30 and arrives in Philadelphia at 11:15.

The President will leave the White House at 10:55. He will leave Andrews at 11:15, and he will arrive in Philadelphia at 11:50.

The President will attend a luncheon at the University of Pennsylvania, which will be attended by faculty and wives and the honorary degree recipients.

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The President is receiving an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. The President will attend the commencement which begins at 2:15. He will receive his degree at 3:15 and he will speak at 3:20.

For cameramen, the location of the camera platform is between 70 and 80 feet from the stage, so you should think about what kind of lens you want to take.

The location of the commencement is the Philadelphia Civic Center.

After the commencement, the President will drop in at a reception in honor of Senator Scott. It is given at the Marriott Motor Hotel on City Line Avenue in Philadelphia, beginning at 4:30. It is sponsored by, I guess you would describe it as a Jewish organization which encourages Jews to adhere to the moral, ethical and religious teaching of the Torah. It is the Lubavitcher Center.

They are naming a library for Senator Scott. That is the reason for the reception. The President will drop in on it, as I say.

Q What airport does he go to?

MR. NESSEN: There is only one airport in Philadelphia, the International.

Q Are you planning an embargo time for the speech?

MR. NESSEN: The commencement speech is at 3:20. I think we had better go ahead and make it for release on delivery.

Q Do you have a subject?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have a subject

Q Would it be available here at the White House before we leave?

MR. NESSEN: I would hope we could get this out maybe on Saturday afternoon.

Q That would be great.

MR. NESSEN: I would hope so.

Q Does the pool have to wear a cap and gown?
(Laughter)

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MR. NESSEN: They have to wear yarmulkes.

The President is accepting the resignation of James L. Mitchell as Under Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. We will have some papers on these.

The President expressed his deep personal appreciation to Mr. Mitchell for his service at HUD. You may know that Mr. Mitchell is becoming Associate Director of the Office of Management and Budget for Natural Resources, Energy and Science, coming here in June, and the President expressed his gratitude that Mr. Mitchell is remaining in the Administration.

The President is acknowledging the retirement of Stephen S. Chandler as United States District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma.

The President is transmitting to Congress the First Annual Report of the National Council on Educational Research. We will have copies in the Press Office, and you will have, or do have, a copy of the letter of transmittal.

Now, the surprise of the day: Preliminary work has started on the construction of the White House swimming pool.

Q Oh my. You mean we talk about swimming pools when you have a war on your hands? (Laughter)

MR. NESSEN: The pool will be slightly larger than the one the Fords had at their home in Alexandria. It will be built on the South Lawn just south of the West Wing.

Q What size is that?

MR. NESSEN: I am getting to all of that.

The contractor will be the National Construction Company, Inc., the same contractor which built the President's pool on Crown View Drive in Alexandria.

Q Of where, do you know, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Washington.

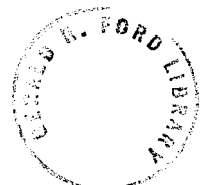
The cost is estimated at \$52,417.

Q Is this an outdoor pool?

MR. NESSEN: Yes, with an additional \$9,000 for landscaping.

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Q Who pays it?

MR. NESSEN: The funds will be raised through private donations. The President has laid down very strict guidelines for these donations, the most important of which is that no Federal funds will be used in any way. The other guidelines for donations are that the maximum donation permitted is \$1,000 per person.

Donations of equipment or services will be limited to \$1,000 in value at the wholesale cost.

Q What is that again?

MR. NESSEN: Donations of services and equipment as opposed to money will also be limited to \$1,000 at wholesale value.

No donations from any corporation or union will be accepted.

A committee has been established to supervise the receipt and collection of the public contributions. The chairman is A. J. Sehorn, of Hayward, California, Vice Chairman of the Olympic Swimming Committee.

The treasurer is William J. Schuiling, a Washington banker.

Q What is his bank, Ron?

Q He is a Washington banker?

MR. NESSEN: Washington, D. C. He is a former classmate of the President at South High in Grand Rapids, and has been a friend of the President's ever since. I understand that he is the Chairman of a company called Financial General Shareholders, Inc, a holding company for the First National Bank of Washington.

Q How is the work starting now?

MR. NESSEN: Wait a minute. You would not believe the amount of detail I have.

Q If you wanted to make a contribution, who would you see?

MR. NESSEN: I assume you have to check with the committee that does this.

The measurements of the swimming pool are 22 feet wide and 54.83 feet long. I don't have the depth. Larry, that is one thing you forgot.

MR. SPEAKES: It varies.

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Q That is not Olympic size, is it?

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so. Here is a breakdown on the cost. Excavation, \$2,500 --

Q Spare us this, will you?

Q I would like to know, did the President make this decision on his own? Why, at this time, when he has had all these budget problems does he consider spending the kind of money whether it is his or not?

Q Ron, will it be a heated pool?

MR. NESSEN: There will be a heater, yes, a 54 kilowatt heater.

Q Will it be covered?

MR. NESSEN: It will not be covered.

Q How is he going to swim in the winter?

Q That is quite an energy draw, Ron. We have people out in the Western part of the country who cannot irrigate farms because so many people in California are heating pools.

MR. NESSEN: Some of the equipment is being moved in today, as you noticed. I think some construction fences will be going up. The contract calls for the work to begin on or about May 15th, which is tomorrow, and to be concluded by July 1st. In answer to Helen's question --

Q Ron, was this put out for bids?

MR. NESSEN: It was not put out for bids. As I say, this company is the one that built the President's pool in Alexandria. There are no Federal funds involved, so there is no requirement for bids. Gordon Rudd, the President of this company, is also a friend of the President's.

Q Can you give us the costs, as you started to give us?

MR. NESSEN: Surely. The excavation --

Q Excuse me. Did he have to get permission from this commission to put it on the White House grounds?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. That is called the Fine Arts Commission, and it was approved by the Fine Arts Commission.

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Q You have not said where it will be.

MR. NESSEN: Just south of the West Wing. If you go out there, you can see the construction stakes, I think.

Q Ron, how much money has been collected already?

Q Why was this a secret?

MR. NESSEN: This was actually not a secret, Helen. You know that the President has been at least thinking about this ever since he came into office, and the project was put aside for awhile.

Q Why?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. It took a little time to work out all the details.

Q Will the taxpayers pay for this heating every month?

MR. NESSEN; The cost of running the heater whenever it is running, I have not actually gotten.

Q Ron, can you answer my question? How much money has already been collected? Is it all collected already?

MR. NESSEN: No, it is not all collected already. Some donations have already come into the White House in the total amount of \$1,000. In addition, other contributions have been mailed to various people all earmarked for this project and the White House -- a group called the White House Swimming Pool Committee -- was kind of an outfit that formed itself, I think, has checks for about \$5,000. The Swimming Pool Institute, which is a trade association of swimming pool makers --

Q I am sorry, I didn't hear that.

MR. NESSEN: Swimming pool -- what is the conflicting briefing going on over there?

Q Somebody is on the telephone.

Q You know that is not permitted during briefings.

MR. NESSEN: Where is Bill Roberts?

Q We have never had a telephone in here before. We have never had a telephone ringing in here before.



MR. NESSEN: Could we hold down the --

Q I told him not to ring his phone any more.

MR. NESSEN: Fine. (Laughter)

Now, what was the question?

The Swimming Pool Institute has received checks totaling about \$4,000, so you have a total of \$10,000.

Q May we have the names of all the contributors?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have them. It is not a White House fund-raising, but you should get it.

Q Well, it certainly is a White House fund-raising and it certainly is something that the American public should have.

MR. NESSEN: I think you should get in touch with --

Q If it were not a White House deal, you would not be announcing it today.

Q Could we get back to the briefing?

Q When did the President make the decision on this?

MR. NESSEN: Now, Helen asked why did he decide to go ahead with the swimming pool in the light of --

Q In light of the budget and the belt-tightening.

MR. NESSEN: Let me offer some thoughts on that, and I am sure you all have your own thoughts on that.

This is not an elaborate swimming pool. It is maybe a shade larger than the kind of pools that people do have in their backyards here and elsewhere in the country. It is certainly not a plush swimming pool.

The President is a swimming enthusiast. He enjoys it and it is good for his health. Dr. Lukash, I believe, has spoken publicly of the benefits of swimming for the President's health.

Federal money will not be spent in this project. Federal money is spent, of course, in the protection of the President's safety and one of the considerations was that it is seen that some money could be spent from private donations for the protection of the President's health.

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The pool does not obviously belong to President Ford. It belongs to the White House and it will be used by future Presidents and their families and guests.

There was a previous swimming pool here, as you know, right below where we are standing. It was also built by public donations for Franklin Roosevelt, also for health reasons.

The idea for the project came from people who are enthusiasts of swimming and the benefits from it. Again, it is not Federal money. I suppose you could look at it one way by saying that it is a good sign that he intends to stick around for another four years.

I made that part up. (Laughter)

Q Maybe public criticism will curtail the future.

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Q The \$9,000 landscaping. Will that be Government funds or will that be part of the private thing, too?

MR. NESSEN: Part of the private. There is a separate contract. I mean, the contract with National Construction is the \$52,417 I mentioned. Then there will be a separate contract for \$9,000, which has not been let, but it will also come out of the contribution.

Q When did the President make the final decision to go ahead with this?

MR. NESSEN: About a week ago, Ted.

Q Ron, how much did the President's pool at his home in Alexandria cost?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know. I heard him mention the figure one time, but I forget what it is.

Q Was it \$20,000?

MR. NESSEN: Oh, no, it was not that high.

Q This pool cost what, \$52,000?

MR. NESSEN: \$52,417.

Q Do you know if this swimming pool is paid off? Does he still owe money on that swimming pool in Alexandria?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q Will this committee solicit funds, Ron, for the leftover \$42,000? How are they going to raise the \$42,000?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know what their plans are, as far as soliciting goes. You will just have to get in touch with those two people and find out.

Q Is this square, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I think a rectangular shape would probably be more accurate.

Q On another subject, has the President made his decision yet on the New York financing situation?

MR. NESSEN: I would expect that on the question of the New York financial troubles, it will be late afternoon to early evening at best. I think there is a good chance that it will be tomorrow morning.



Q That sort of slops over beyond the 24-hour deadline, which Mayor Beame was talking about yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Why is it taking so long?

MR. NESSEN: He just wants to weigh what they told him yesterday.

Q Has the ship's seizure interfered with his decision on the New York situation?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, does the President plan to see Congressional leaders this afternoon for any reason?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of that.

Q Is he going to inform them of the bombing?

MR. NESSEN: Has he?

Q That is what I would like to know. Has he?

Q What about the first question? What about the Congressional leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I have not heard of a meeting with Congressional leaders.

Q Who did he talk with or meet with or discuss this situation with last night?

MR. NESSEN: The President has not, as far as I know, talked directly to leaders, other than I think we mentioned a few days ago that in the course of early in the week -- I think Monday it was -- that he had been seeing or talking to Scott and Anderson on another matter. He gave them sort of a factual fill-in, and then I think Congressman Rhodes was in on another matter.

The leaders of Congress have been consulted on the progress of this incident, by the Congressional Liaison Office.

Q Did he consult Congress before taking any action? Did he consult with the leaders before this action took place?

MR. NESSEN: What action, Peter?

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Q The one that we spent five minutes trying to catch up on from the Pentagon.

MR. NESSEN: I would rather not answer the question in that form. I will say that the White House has consulted with leaders of Congress.

Q The form of the action is what I mean.

MR. NESSEN: What action, Peter?

Q The bombing of Cambodian warships.

MR. NESSEN: I think I will have to leave it the way it is at the moment.

Q That is a discrepancy in the account, Ron. Were you prepared to straighten it out? Was this bombing of the Cambodian warships prompted by the planes being fired upon, or not?

MR. NESSEN: Peter, I have not seen an announcement of any bombing of Cambodian warships, which somewhat hampers this conversation.

Q Ron, we are even more hampered because we don't know what happened and we are trying to find out if the President consulted with Congressional leaders about taking military action. You know what military action was taken, and we don't. How can we arrive at some information in this kind of a situation? End of question.

MR. NESSEN: The question was, how can we arrive at --

Q How can we arrive at the information that we are supposed to tell the American people when we are getting stonewalled here?

MR. NESSEN: No, you are not getting stonewalled, Ted. I said that Joe Laitin was expected to have an announcement in the near future, and I think we are somewhat hampered in going beyond that until Joe has made his announcement.

Q Why did the President decree that Joe Laitin would make the announcement that ordinarily would come from the President?

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Joe Laitin is not Commander-in-Chief.



MR. NESSEN: Well, it is, as you know, the --

Q Wait a minute, now. (Laughter)

Q Wait a minute, Sarah.

MR. NESSEN: He didn't mention that to me.

We are in a difficult position here for a time, but let me say something about Sarah's question.

The Pentagon and the State Department and the White House, this Administration, are all -- you know, I think a feeling has grown up somehow that they are separate entities and that the Pentagon goes off its own way and the State Department goes off its own way and that whenever I refer you to there for information, we are somehow --

Q The question still stands, Ron. Would you answer it?

MR. NESSEN: I would like to finish making a point.

Q Yes, please answer it.

MR. NESSEN: I would like to make a point, if I may.

The Pentagon carries out the President's military policy. The State Department carries out the President's diplomatic policy. They gather information for him in their areas, so these are not separate entities. These people work for the President, carry out policy for the President, so if Joe Laitin makes an announcement, he is making an announcement for this Government. It is not some sovereign State over in the Pentagon, it is this Government, so it really does not make any difference.

Q The point is that this is potentially a very grave situation. I think the American people -- certainly, we, too -- expect the White House to have something to say about it. It is as simple as that.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

Q Ron, is the President trying to divorce himself --

Q Just a minute, Jim. Let him answer my question.

MR. NESSEN: Joe has made his announcement. Would you like to hear what it is?



Q Yes.

Q Are you going to run this off for us?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q In other words, Ron, are we to understand this is not the President, this is Joe Laitin, right?

MR. NESSEN: This is the Defense Department statement.

"Beginning at 8:30 p.m. EDT yesterday, there were indications that the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move U.S. captive crewmen from the ship to the mainland. After giving warning, U.S. aircraft began efforts to block this movement.

"Three Cambodian patrol craft were destroyed and about four others were damaged and immobilized. One boat succeeded in reaching Kompong Som.

"U.S. aircraft had been receiving small arms fire from such boats for several hours prior to this action.

"The MAYAGUEZ is still anchored off Koh Tang Island. The first U.S. Navy vessel, the destroyer U.S.S. HOLT is now in the area."

That was the announcement by the Defense Department.

Q Ron, what about the crew members of the freighter? Is there any word on them?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q The statement indicates that the crew is still aboard and someone is trying to get them off.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any information to give you on that.

Q Did the President give the order for this firing as Commander-in-Chief?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything beyond the statement, Helen.

Q Why can't you say if the President consulted with Members of Congress before he ordered that action?

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MR. NESSEN: He did consult with Members of Congress before he ordered that action.

Q He did order that action, then?

MR. NESSEN: Well --

Q Who were the Members of Congress?

MR. NESSEN: The Chairman and the ranking Republican on the Senate and House Armed Services, Foreign Relations or International Affairs, whichever they call it in the House, and Appropriations; the Speaker and the President Pro Tem of the Senate, and the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate and House.

Q When?

MR. NESSEN: Between 5:30 and 6 o'clock last night, Eastern Time.

Q By phone, or what?

MR. NESSEN: By telephone.

Q Were they sworn to secrecy about this?

Q This was after the fact, though, was it not?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was about three hours before the fact.

Q Does the President --

MR. NESSEN: Just a moment. I want to try to answer a question about being sworn to secrecy.

Q Was that by telephone, Ron, that consultation?

MR. NESSEN: They were consulted by telephone.

Q By the President?

MR. NESSEN: Just a second. Let me clear up some of these questions.

Sarah, the answer is yes, the President ordered the military action. The phone calls were by the Congressional liaison staff, which is the normal procedure. They were told at that time that the information they were being given was classified.



Q Does the consultation entail approval or just notification?

MR. NESSEN: It is difficult to answer that question. The President did this because he wants to keep Congress informed, as he did at the time of the Cambodian and Vietnamese evacuations.

Q People are leaving the briefing.

MR. NESSEN: They really should not.

Q They should not.

MR. NESSEN: Mr. Roberts --

Q Now, I was rebuked on this for filing the baseball pass.

Ron, bring those people back.

MR. NESSEN: Bill Roberts is going to get them.

Q Go ahead, Ron.

MR. NESSEN: They were informed because the President believes in keeping them informed and because the Congress has expressed a desire to be informed, and this was done consistent with that idea as expressed in the War Powers Act.

Q It says, "shall consult with," does it not? You read it yesterday.

MR. NESSEN: That was consultation.

Q Under what powers did he act?

MR. NESSEN: The President has the authority to protect the lives of Americans and the property of Americans from acts of aggression under the Constitution.

Q I am not clear whether this attack was because they were trying to prevent the Cambodians from taking the American sailors to the mainland or whether it was done in retaliation.

MR. NESSEN: No, it said, "The U.S. aircraft began efforts to block this movement."

Q Could you explain how they were trying to block them?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't understand your question.



Q Can you explain how the aircraft was trying to block them?

MR. NESSEN: I can't really go beyond the statement, Jim.

Q Just to follow that, did the President have any reason to believe that some of the MAYAGUEZ crewmen may have been on either the boats that were destroyed, damaged or the one that made it to Kompong Som?

MR. NESSEN: I can't go beyond the statement.

Q I want to go back to my question. Did the President get approval in this process?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't listen in on the phone calls, so I don't know what the reaction was.

Q This is so terribly important.

Q For the future.

MR. NESSEN: I don't know that there is -- well, are you asking just out of curiosity or are you asking whether there was some law that requires approval?

Q I am really asking you this: Does the President feel that merely notification is all that is necessary under the law?

MR. NESSEN: This was considered to be consultation.

Q But, Ron, it was made by the White House liaison staff; surely they are not consulting with these leaders. They were, were they not, just simply informing them of the action?

MR. NESSEN: They were keeping them informed and consulting with them.

Q Did they ask their approval?

Q In light of the seriousness of this question, could you find out for us exactly what message was given to the Congressional leaders?

MR. NESSEN: I know what message was given to them.



Q What was that?

MR. NESSEN: They were told that they were being called to inform them of certain developments.

Q Specifically what? Were they given several options that the Government might follow?

MR. NESSEN: I think for their reaction to this you really need to talk to them.

Q Do you know if the leaders approved or --

Q Let's see if we can get an answer to this.

MR. NESSEN: Basically, what they were informed of was briefly to bring them up to date on where the ship was and on the original statement put out demanding the release of the crew and the ship and then to tell them that the President had ordered that these Cambodian vessels, if they tried, would be prevented from going to the mainland and that if there was any attempt to move to the mainland, that the President had directed that U.S. aircraft attempt to stop the movement.

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Q Ron, was there any Congressional dissent expressed in those telephone calls, that you know of?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Q Did the President speak with anybody else on the Hill, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I am aware of.

Q Ron, an effort was made to block the ships. Is there any effort being made or plan to rescue the American seamen?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot talk about that.

Q Following on my other question, if I may, please --

MR. NESSEN: Yes?

Q -- really, isn't this information given by the President to these Congressional leaders after the fact?

MR. NESSEN: No, it was given at 5:30.

Q I mean, as you say, the President gave this information. It seems to me that he is telling them, this is the situation and this is what I have ordered to be done, period. He is not asking is it okay, is he?

MR. NESSEN: It is considered consultation.

Q Ron, there is a difference. Did he ask their approval or did he tell them what was happening? This is for the future now, when they come and criticize it, or anything else.

MR. NESSEN: I understand.

As I say, this is considered to be keeping Congress informed and consulting with Congress.

Q Who considers it to be consultation? Is that a legal opinion from the White House Counsel's Office?

MR. NESSEN: That is the White House opinion.

Q Can you pin down when the action occurred?

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MR. NESSEN: Joe Laitin's statement says, beginning at 8:30 p.m., Eastern Time.

Q Yesterday?

MR. NESSEN: Yesterday.

Q Ron, what are the HOLT's orders, the HOLT's instructions? Is it similarly to try to prevent --

MR. NESSEN: If I could just stop for a minute, Jim, Bud and some others.

After the information was given to the Members who were phoned, their comments were written down and transmitted to the President. The reason I didn't know that during the first round of questions here was that Jack has been checking and has now brought me this.

So, these comments were written down by the Members and were passed on to the President. It was not possible for the President to talk to all the Members but their views were transmitted to him.

Q Can you tell us what hour the President --

MR. NESSEN: I have not seen the comments, Ted, frankly.

Q Can you find out whether there was a consensus?

MR. NESSEN: We can make that effort.

Q Ron, what about Senator Goldwater's statement this morning that he had heard that they have got Americans onshore?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything for you on that, Les.

Q Ron, you said it was not possible for the President to talk to all the Members. Did he talk to some of these people by telephone personally?

MR. NESSEN: I am not aware in this particular consultation that he took a personal part in it.

Q Ron, what hour did he order the firing to begin if they tried to move the men? Could you tell us that, please?

MR. NESSEN: I can't, Saul. I don't have it, for that matter.



Q Ron, you are leaving the impression that there are troops on Cambodia in answer to Les' question.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. You had better run that past me again, Les, if I left that impression.

Q I just asked about Senator Goldwater's statement this morning that he had heard from an Admiral, I believe, in the Pacific Fleet, that part of that American crew has been taken ashore.

MR. NESSEN: He heard that the crew of the ship had been taken to the Cambodian mainland?

Q Part of it. That is what I understand.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything to give you on that, but from that, I would certainly not leap to any conclusion that there are crewmen on the shore.

Q Ron, at the present time, is the ship just there with no gunboats around it, it is there by itself now, right?

MR. NESSEN: I frankly don't know whether there are still gunboats around it or not.

Q What are the orders, as I asked before, to the HOLT? Does it have similar instructions to try to prevent the movement of crew members to the mainland or does it have additional instructions beyond that? What can you tell us?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the orders to the HOLT, Jim.

Q Can you tell us what is the Commander-in-Chief's response to the Thai's order to get the American Marines -- over 1,100 of them -- out of Thailand? I know we were referred to the State Department earlier and we were told they would have a statement. I called the State Department and they said they didn't have anything yet, they would call me back. They never did.

MR. NESSEN: I think what they would have told you, if you had been able to make contact with them, is that we are in diplomatic contact with the Thai government.

Q Ron, on this question of an attempt to block the Cambodian vessel, were we attempting to block them before they got to the MAYGUEZ to offload personnel or after they got personnel on it?

MORE

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MR. NESSEN: You are taking the word "block" out of the statement, "U.S. aircraft began efforts to block this movement"?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: The movement referred to is in the first sentence, "to move U.S. captive crewmen from the ship to the mainland."

Q Ron, are we then proceeding on the assumption that some of these crewmen were on board those patrol vessels that were later damaged or destroyed?

MR. NESSEN: There were indications of that, yes.

Q That they were aboard?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q On board?

MR. NESSEN: That the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move --

Q Had they been transferred from the ship to the gunboat?

Q To the island?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that.

Q So, are we to destroy these men in order to save them?

Q Is it conceivable, Ron, that we would have fired on those knowing that there are Americans aboard them?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't go beyond the statement, Steve.

Q You are leaving it that way.

MORE

#217



MR. NESSEN: Peter?

Q You have left a serious impression here --

MR. NESSEN: Tell me what it is.

Q -- that the American seamen were aboard these gunboats that were blown up.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think I did leave that impression.

Q You did.

MR. NESSEN: I don't want to leave that impression, and you should not leave here with that impression.

Q In answer to Bill Theis, you said that they were aboard.

Q Do we proceed on the assumption that some of those crewmen, at least, were on these patrol vessels that were later destroyed or damaged?

MR. NESSEN: And I did indicate.

Is somebody telephoning? Bill? Where is Bill?

Q This is ridiculous.

MR. NESSEN: Another poacher.

I understand the point, Bill and Peter, and I don't know how to quite do this within the bounds of what I can say, but I don't want you to get the impression that we know that there were any American crewmen on those Cambodian ships. May I leave it at that?

Q No. Let's pursue that a little bit. Do you know if all the American crewmen are safe right now, or don't you?

MR. NESSEN: I just can't really go beyond the statement.

Q You don't know?

MR. NESSEN: I didn't say I don't know. I said I can't go beyond the statement.

MORE

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Q What was that statement, exactly, please?

MR. NESSEN: I am reading you the Defense Department statement. You don't want that read again, do you?

Q Ron, is all of this press conference being broadcast to two or three other countries already?

MR. NESSEN: This one?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q I would be surprised if it hasn't.

Q Ron, is there a state of war between the two countries at this moment, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Not that I know of.

Q What is the President doing to prevent a wider war? Has he assured the Russians and Chinese and so forth that this is a limited engagement? You know, there is always the possibility of an expansion of a war position right now.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have anything on that.

Q Ron, have diplomatic efforts been exhausted? That is the phrase Dr. Kissinger used last night, that we would not take military action until diplomatic efforts were exhausted. Have they been?

MR. NESSEN: Like Dr. Kissinger, I am not going to talk about diplomatic efforts.

Q Ron, is the President going to speak to the American people on television today or by any other means?

MR. NESSEN: There are no plans.

Q No plans.

Q Ron, can we go back to that other question just a moment?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q The Pentagon statement says that the action took place when the Cambodians appeared to be attempting to move U.S. captives to the mainland. Now, does that not in fact mean that action --

MR. NESSEN: Let me answer your question and also let me, if I may, make a philosophical point; that is, that as I started out here much earlier saying that there were a good number of bum stories yesterday based on assumptions and adding two and two together to get five and so forth, and I would hope that in this particular situation --

Q If you don't want us to write bum stories and make bum assumptions, Ron, why don't you give us some information and why don't you answer some questions?

Q Would you clear up the situation as regards the Marines? You have not done that.

MR. NESSEN: I have said to those who have --

Q What happened to the Marines? How many went? Who came back if they went?

MR. NESSEN: Have we got everybody not filing, for one thing?

Q People using telephones through the window, under the table.

MR. NESSEN: I want to answer several unanswered questions here.

Sarah's question on Marines, I am not able to talk about any possible troop movements.

Dick's question, does not the statement imply or can you not infer -- and that is what I am trying to urge people not to do. The fact is, Jim, I am simply not able to go beyond the statement, but I just urge you strongly not to assume that there were American crewmen on those ships.

Q That was not my question.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry.

Q My question was, were you not assuming at the time that there were Americans going beyond those?

MR. NESSEN: Dick, I am not going to go beyond the statement.

Q Ron --

MR. NESSEN: I want to answer some other questions.



Q Ron, can you tell us whether the crewmen are alive or not?

Q Does the White House know whether the crewmen are safe?

MR. NESSEN: I am not able to answer that question.

Q Ron, have you people told any other country more than you have told the American people today?

MR. NESSEN: I just frankly don't have that information, Sarah.

Q Ron, one more question.

MR. NESSEN: This will help you. The Congressional liaison office reports that there was what they refer to as a strong consensus of support, and also that strong consensus of support and no objections.

Q No objections.

MR. NESSEN: No objections.

Q Did you say the Chinese were informed of this military action?

MR. NESSEN: I don't recall ever saying that.

Q Will you give us a list of all those men contacted by the liaison office?

MR. NESSEN: I gave it to you, Sarah.

Q I mean a written-out list. You lumped it with leaders. You had a lumping there of leaders.

MR. NESSEN: If you want to get it out of the Congressional Directory or --

Q No, we have that. I think you ought to give us a list.

Q The Defense statement said that at 8:30 p.m. they took some actions that indicated they were moving out.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Is there any reason why you cannot tell us the status of the crew?

Q I am in the middle of a question here.

Q Is there any reason why you cannot tell us the status of the crew?

MR. NESSEN: No, I cannot give you the reason.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END

(AT 12:50 P.M. EDT)

AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 8:30 P.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I want to give just a little house-keeping information here at the beginning. If we could hold off on the cameras for a minute?

I know and understand your interest in more news on the situation regarding the ship. I have got to ask your understanding of the fact that at this moment I cannot tell you one single thing beyond what we have already told you. As I say, I know your interest, and I have just got to ask you to be patient about this.

We have passed out to you the text of a letter --

Q Just a second. We would like to know if the President is aware of the Radio Cambodia report that they are going to release the ship?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q He is aware?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did he learn it from the news copy?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q How did he learn it?

MR. NESSEN: Helen, I begged your indulgence on this.

Q I didn't know that was the line. Is that where the line is drawn, you cannot say how he got the information?

MR. NESSEN: No.

MORE

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Q Does he have an official report that the Cambodians have said this? This is very important.

MR. NESSEN: Ralph, I understand and I sympathize, but I cannot answer any questions.

Q When will you be able to?

MR. NESSEN: I do not have a moment when I can forecast that I will be able to answer your question.

Q But you are saying that he received a report independent of UPI's bulletin that Phnom Penh is saying that the ship will be released?

MR. NESSEN: The President knows of the report that -- of the report that -- the Cambodian radio has said it will release the ship.

Q Can you just answer whether any military action that may have been contemplated has been suspended as a result of the report?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot answer that question.

Q Do you know about the crew, Ron? They said the ship will be released.

MR. NESSEN: I can't answer any questions.

Q Did he know about that report, Ron, before briefing the Members of Congress?

MR. NESSEN: I can't answer any questions, Jim.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 8:36 P.M. EDT)

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 9:15 P.M. EDT

MAY 14, 1975

WEDNESDAY

MR. NESSEN: I am going to read you two statements. I am going to give you a little bit of background material, and I think you are going to run and file and we won't answer any questions at this point.

Q When we come back, you will answer questions?

MR. NESSEN: Let's get yourselves filed first and then we will talk about it.

First of all, I want to read you a statement.

Q By whom? By you or the President?

MR. NESSEN: By the Press Secretary.

"In further pursuit of our efforts to obtain the release" --

Q Would you read it slow, please?

MR. NESSEN: I will tell you what. I frankly think I would like to read these straight on and let you file.

Q We can't file unless we get the words.

MR. NESSEN: Look, what I have to say, there is some urgency about it.

"In further pursuit of our efforts to obtain the release of the SS MAYAGUEZ and its crew, the President has directed the following military measures, starting this evening Washington time:

"U.S. Marines to board the SS MAYAGUEZ; U. S. Marines to land on Koh Tang Island in order to rescue any crew members who may be on the island; aircraft from the carrier CORAL SEA to undertake associated military operations in the area in order to protect, and support the operations to regain the vessel and members of the crew."

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Now, that is the end of that statement.

Q Ron --

MR. NESSEN: Now just a moment.

We have now, since that statement was prepared -- and we will have copies made for you -- sent the following urgent message to the Cambodian authorities.

Before you ask, I cannot tell you the method.

The message is this: "We have heard a radio broadcast that you are prepared to release the SS MAYAGUEZ. We welcome this development, if true. As you know, we have seized the ship."

MORE

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Q What?

MR. NESSEN: This is a message to the Cambodians from the United States and it includes the line, "As you know, we have seized the ship."

Q "We," the U.S.?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

"As soon as you issue a statement that you are prepared to release the crew members you hold unconditionally and immediately, we will promptly cease military operations."

I want to give you one bit of news ON BACKGROUND, if we will all agree on that.

Q Is this signed by the President?

MR. NESSEN: Let's turn the cameras off, please.

Q Who signed that message?

MR. NESSEN: From the United States Government.

For your own BACKGROUND, we don't know if the route by which we are sending this message is sufficiently fast. Therefore, we believe that news channels may be the fastest way for this message to get through.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

(AT 9:19 P.M. EDT)

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AT THE WHITE HOUSE

WITH RON NESSEN

AT 12:45 A.M. EDT

MAY 15, 1975

THURSDAY

MR. NESSEN: Let me give you what I have, and hopefully that will answer all your questions.

The crew of the ship consisted of 40 Americans and five Thais. As the President said, they have all been recovered.

Q Forty-five were recovered?

MR. NESSEN: Yes. What I said was that the crew consisted of 40 Americans and five Thais. Now, it appears that the Thais may have decided to -- after they were released -- go off on their own in a small boat. (Laughter) That is somewhat unclear at the moment.

Q They are missing?

MR. NESSEN: No, no, they were recovered.

Q Yes, but now they are missing?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is one report.

Q Did they get one of the Cambodian boats?

MR. NESSEN: As the President said, the fighting still is going on and the United States forces are preparing to disengage.

The ship, because it will take some time to fire up the boilers, it was decided to tow the MAYAGUEZ away, and it will either be towed by one of the destroyers, the WILSON or the HOLT, or two Army tugs, which have been moving in that direction and are very near by.

Where the tugs came from, I have not been able to establish.

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Q Army tugs?

MR. NESSEN: Army tugs.

Q Corps of Engineers' tugs?

MR. NESSEN: Are they building a project over there? (Laughter)

Q Probably.

MR. NESSEN: I do have little bits and pieces here that maybe will help you.

Q Where is the fighting? Is that still on the island?

MR. NESSEN: On the island, right.

Q Have they started already to tug this away?

MR. NESSEN: No, no, they have not started to tow it away.

Q Ron, there is one question. What about American casualties. Do you have anything on that?

MR. NESSEN: There were apparently reports that indicate some American casualties. I have just talked to Joe Laitin, and I told him that -- or we agreed, I should say -- he is going to take over at this point and give you all the information on when it started, how it started, who did what to whom, and how it all resolves and so for that, you need to go to the Pentagon.

Q I think you need to clear this up.

Q You are crazy.

MR. NESSEN: I am sorry. That is where the information is.

Q Why didn't you pipe it here?

MR. NESSEN: I can have Laitin piped in here, if you like.

Q Certainly.

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Q To clear up one point did the broadcast from Phnom Penh Radio come after the attacks began or did that broadcast come before the attacks began?

MR. NESSEN: Good question.

The broadcast, as most of you know, and as the wires reported, began at 7:07 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time in the Cambodian language on their domestic service, not their international service.

Now, it is very difficult for me to pinpoint the exact time when the activity started because they started at various times, and Marines were being flown at various times. As you know, the broadcasts, if you read the text, refers to the HOLT approaching, and so forth, so apparently -- not apparently -- there were military activities going on at the time of the broadcast.

More to the point, a partial translation of the broadcast was sent to the Government agencies at 8:06 p.m., approximately -- according to the figures supplied by the NSC. At 8:06 p.m., a partial translation into English was sent to the agencies. It was given to General Scowcroft, according to the NSC timetable, at approximately 8:15. He gave it to Dr. Kissinger almost immediately and Dr. Kissinger informed the President almost immediately.

So, the military operations were underway before the broadcast and certainly were well underway before a translation reached here.

Q Had the ship been seized by that time, 8:15 p.m.?

MR. NESSEN: No. Again, as reported to me the approximate time that the HOLT pulled alongside the MAYAGUEZ was 8:45 p.m. EDT.

Q Was it true that after the President received the message from Dr. Kissinger that he took no action to stop the military operation?

MR. NESSEN: At that point, we then, as you know, sent the message to the Cambodians and also gave it here in the hope that news accounts perhaps could probably reach them.

Q Wait a minute. That is not what I asked. Is it true that when the President received the message he made no action, issued no order with respect to the military operation?

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MR. NESSEN: He issued the statement that you saw.

Q But the military operation was allowed to continue without any change?

MR. NESSEN: It was underway. Marines were on the beach and under fire at that point.

Let us do get that clear, now.

Q That is why you ought to give us the blow-by-blow.

MR. NESSEN: Helen, if I had the blow-by-blow, I would give it to you, but you need to get to the people who have kept these logs, which is the National Command and Communications Center, which is in the Pentagon. But the fact is that at the time the broadcast was received here, a translation of it, Marines were on the beach and under fire.

Q Had they seized the boat?

MR. NESSEN: As I say, 8:45 was the time that the HOLT pulled alongside the MAYAGUEZ -- approximate times as reported to me.

Q Can I go back to my question of casualties? I appreciate that Joe is going to hold a briefing soon, but can you give us, now, some numbers?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot.

Q Anything at all?

MR. NESSEN: I cannot.

Q Ron, are the casualties light or heavy?

MR. NESSEN: Why do we sit here and do this when all you have to do is either get up and go over there or call and you will get the numbers.

Q Will you please pipe it in here, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: I will pipe it in here.

Q Are you prepared to say how many casualties?

MR. NESSEN: I am not. The hostilities are still going on, Bill.

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Q What time is Joe going to talk, do you know?

MR. NESSEN: Joe is ready to talk right now. The longer we stay here, the longer he is going to wait to start talking to you.

Q Then let's quit.

Q Can you pipe it in?

Q You say you sent the message to the Cambodians and you made the announcement here?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q How did you try to send it to them?

MR. NESSEN: Let me put it this way: We sent it to them on a wavelength that we knew they received.

Q Can you confirm --

Q In what language?

MR. NESSEN: Cambodian.

Q Ron, did we rescue the Cambodian crew members or were they released?

MR. NESSEN: This is what you need to talk to Laitin about because all of those details are not even clear here.

Q Our first report of military action was 8:30, I guess two days ago now.

MR. NESSEN: Yes. That reminds me. I have something else to give you.

Q At what point did the President make the decision, if you will, to escalate the action by calling in the Marines?

MR. NESSEN: I would prefer to put it this way. I do want to give you two other things before I forget.

As I say, Joe is waiting to give you -- not waiting -- he has gone home?

MR. GREENER: We are going to confirm if he is having a briefing and what time we will pipe it. We are trying to run Joe down to get that information.



MR. NESSEN: Good.

The three actions that were announced at 9:18 tonight were decided upon at the NSC meeting, which began at 3:30 and lasted until sometime after 5:00, I think it was.

The other items I want to give you are these: We always are asked for public opinion. Since the sinking of the first three boats was announced this afternoon -- I forget what time -- up until 11:45, which was the latest information I had, the phone calls to the White House show 1,034 phone calls supporting the President's action, and 112 phone calls opposing the President's action.

Q Comments?

MR. NESSEN: There were no comments on this one.

Just before the President came out here, he made a few phone calls to Congressional leaders, and the liaison office made the others, to tell them basically -- actually, what they did was they had the statement that the President read to you and they informed the Members of Congress from that statement.

Now, the War Powers Act does require that the President, as you know, notify Congress of military action within 48 hours. The report will be sent to Congress by 6:20 in the morning.

MORE

Q Why is that?

MR. NESSEN: I am glad you asked that. That is 48 hours after the American forces first were -- I am sure you will recognize this as legal language taken from the act. That was the 48 hours from the time that American forces first were introduced into a situation where imminent involvement in hostilities was clearly indicated by the circumstances.

The action which triggered the 48-hour timetable for the War Powers Act consisted of some American jet planes, jet fighters, shooting in front of the MAYAGUEZ in order to dissuade the Cambodians from moving the ship.

I understand that from the time it was seized there had been two movements by the MAYAGUEZ, and it was decided to send these fighters to shoot in front of the ship in order to prevent it from going into Kompong Som.

So, as I say, the notification required by the War Powers Act will go up to Congress sometime before 6:20 in the morning. The custom has been for Congress to release the letter. This was the case in the Saigon and the Cambodian notifications.

The method of delivery at that unusual hour is being made tonight, and frankly, we don't have the method of delivery worked out yet, but the notices go to the Speaker of the House and to the President Pro Tem of the Senate.

Q Ron, you released the Cambodian report right here.

MR. NESSEN: I don't think so.

Q I am sure you did.

MR. NESSEN: Maybe after it had been released on the Hill, I think.

Q Ron, you gave your statement that you sent a message to them on a wave length that we knew they received.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q It gives the implication that the United States was in direct radio contact with Phnom Penh.

MR. NESSEN: No.

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Q Whereas I believe it was through third parties. Is that what you mean to say?

MR. NESSEN: No, that is not correct.

Q Which is not correct?

MR. NESSEN: Either one of those.

Q Well, this is implying that you sent it by radio transmission to them on a frequency that they would be listening to. Is that what you mean to say?

MR. NESSEN: I meant to say that it was on a frequency that they would be listening to --

Q You are talking about a radio frequency now, or a diplomatic channel?

MR. NESSEN: A radio frequency.

What did I say -- channel?

Q You said a wavelength.

MR. NESSEN: Radio frequency.

Q In other words, you are saying that we sent a radio message on a radio frequency that they --

MR. NESSEN: A frequency we knew would be monitored by them.

Q In Cambodia?

MR. NESSEN: In Cambodia.

Q Has there ever been any response by the Cambodian government?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Ron, was all the ship's cargo intact or was any of the cargo removed from the ship?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that, actually.

Q Let's clear up this report now. Should everybody be at Capitol Hill at 6:20 in the morning? I mean, what is the story here?

MR. NESSEN: If you want to read the --

MR. GREENER: Several.



MR. NESSEN: Several what?

MR. GREENER: Several hours.

MR. NESSEN: It goes to the Speaker of the House and the President Pro Tem of the Senate. How it will be delivered to them at that hour has not been worked out yet.

Q Is it a newsworthy report or is it a pro forma report?

MR. NESSEN: I think it is required that the President give them a somewhat detailed accounting.

Q Will it contain new information, presumably?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably not.

Q Ron, was the People's Republic of China or any other country helpful in the diplomatic efforts?

Q Don't make O'Neill a liar.

MR. NESSEN: What did he say?

Q He said that the Chinese carried a 24 hour ultimatum.

MR. NESSEN: No, that is not correct.

Q Senator Byrd said that there had been no response.

MR. NESSEN: I am sure you are all aware that the head of the Chinese liaison office in Washington was called to the State Department on the first day of this -- that has been reported, I think, about 4:30 in the afternoon -- and met the Acting Secretary, which has been reported, and there was a message handed to him for delivery to the Cambodians since only the Chinese have an Embassy in Phnom Penh. There is no way of knowing whether the message was actually delivered, and there was no response.

Q Ron, there was a point that you brought out that for the first time we found out the ship was moved twice. Now, we know it was moved 30 miles from the coast.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

MORE

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Q When was the second movement?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have any information on the second movement.

Q Was it when the AP said it was moved?

MR. NESSEN: No, not when the AP said it was moving.

Q When did the President learn that the crew was safe, and can you tell us how he learned of it?

MR. NESSEN: I have sort of lost track of the events of the evening. When did I come down here and tell you he would be out to talk to you?

Q 11:30.

Q After the dinner.

MR. NESSEN: After the dinner.

Q When he came and said "Who is that bunch of characters," he seemed to be in a much better mood than he sounded on the toasts. Did he know at that time?

MR. NESSEN: He was on his way back to the office, wasn't he?

Q Yes.

MR. NESSEN: No, he didn't know at that time. He got back to his office and received a telephone call from Secretary Schlesinger, at which time it was confirmed that all the crew had been saved and then there was some talk in the office -- not too much, a few minutes -- and then I came down here and told you, so it was within ten minutes of the time I came down here.

Q Can those who have to file leave now?

MR. NESSEN: I think probably so.

Q Ron, I know we are handicapped --

MR. NESSEN: Let me do announce this now, and I know it is going to cause a minor riot.

Q Do not hold us up anymore. Let us have the Joe Laitin --



Q Let him finish then.

MR. NESSEN: The Pentagon tells Bill that they will not be ready to brief for several hours. It will be done later this morning. It will be announced on the wires. We are closing this Press Office.

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Q And you still will not say the casualties, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: Ted, the problem is that the operation is continuing and the Marines and others are still under hostile fire.

Q I still want to ask this question. Even though we are handicapped in asking it by not knowing how many casualties, does the President feel certain in his mind that he could not have avoided these casualties?

MR. NESSEN: Just to share with you some of the thinking here, the United States has waited with some patience since Monday when it sent its initial demand for the immediate release of the ship.

There was a diplomatic effort before there was any military effort. There was no response to that diplomatic effort. It seems clear here that the radio broadcast, which offered to free the ship, was influenced by the pressure of the American military force. Nevertheless, even at that point the broadcast did not mention anything about freeing the crew.

Also, the radio broadcast was broadcast, as I said, on their domestic service, not overseas, so it didn't seem like they were sending us a message -- it seemed like it might be something that they were broadcasting for consumption at home. But as the President indicated in his statement, the operation has ended by achieving totally its objective, which was the freeing of the ship and the freeing of the entire crew unharmed.

Q Does the President feel a sense of triumph at the conclusion of this?

MR. NESSEN: I think his own words spoke for themselves and the fact is that the mission successfully accomplished its goal.

Q You say we know of some casualties?

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did they include deaths?

MR. NESSEN: One of the reasons why I hesitate to be too specific about this is that partly the operation is still continuing and the information on casualties is not verified. I mean, the fact that there were casualties is verified now. What the casualties precisely were is not verified.

I think we have gone through this whole week with a minimum of slip-ups here at the White House in terms of information and I would not like to make one here at the very end.



Q You are putting out a very victorious story.

MR. NESSEN: I want you to be sure -- and I want you to know -- there are reports of casualties.

Q Are there deaths, Ron?

MR. NESSEN: There just is not enough firm information for me to say that.

Q Are there reports of deaths? Reports of deaths?

Q Ron, you have said that all the crew were recovered. We can account for 30 who were brought alongside by this Cambodian naval vessel. Would it be fair to assume that the remaining nine or 14, whatever they may be, were taken on the island, or how were they recovered and from where.

MR. NESSEN: I don't have that information, truly I don't.

I think it would be fair to say, since it is going to be several hours before Joe is ready to brief -- let's do it this way -- that at this point there is an unverified report of one death.

Q Can you say, Ron, if there were heavy casualties on the Cambodian side, and whether any Cambodians were captured?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have the foggiest notion.

Q Was it a pilot or a Marine?

MR. NESSEN: I don't have it, Walt. It is not that I cannot tell you, I don't have it.

Q One more question.

MR. NESSEN: Yes.

Q Did the President's orders contemplate the airstrike on the Cambodian mainland, and what was the reason for his decision?

MR. NESSEN: The reason for that was that there were 2,400 Cambodian troops in Kompong Som. Let's see, there was a Naval base and an air base in Kompong Som and in Ream there was a Naval air base, and it was feared that unless those bases were struck that they could interfere with, or attack, the rescue operation.



Q Strategic bombing, is that right?

MR. NESSEN: What is the difference? I forget.

Q Well, there is a big difference.

Q Do you know how many troops were involved in the hostilities?

Q The type of plane, for one thing.

Q Were B-52s involved?

MR. NESSEN: No.

Q Do you know how many troops were involved in the hostilities?

MR. NESSEN: I don't.

Q Ron, one other question. What is the status of the Marines who were not used in this operation? Are they going to be removed to Thailand?

Q Reports are that they have already been relieved.

MR. NESSEN: You really need to get the military stuff from Laitin.

Q Was there heavy damage in the bombing on the mainland?

MR. NESSEN: I don't know.

Folks, let me say this now. We are indeed closing the Press Office tonight. I don't anticipate opening at 6:00, as we have, because everything from here on which will be the real scenario of the military operation will come from Joe and he says there are live cameras there and the morning shows can originate from there.

Q Do you know what time?

MR. NESSEN: I have not got a time from Joe yet, but somebody will stay -- wait a minute. Laitin will put a notice on the wire of the time of his briefing.

Q What time will you be here in the morning.

MR. NESSEN: 7:00 or 7:15.

Q Will you have a message available here at that time?

MR. NESSEN: Only after it is released on the Hill, Bill.

Q Ron, there is nobody there until 7 in the morning.

MR. NESSEN: This is not going to be a big newsmaker. It is a legal document.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Ron.

END (AT 1:12 A.M. EDT)

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