

October 15, 1974

POOL REPORTPRESIDENT AND MRS. FORD'S
26TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARYTENNESSEE ERNIE FORD AND
THE GRAND OLE OPRY

President and Mrs. Ford kissed and embraced each other on the White House balcony today, on their twenty-sixth wedding anniversary, while Tennessee Ernie Ford and a band of Grand Ole Opry singers, on their way home to Nashville, Tennessee, from a month-long tour of the Soviet Union, serenaded them with country and blue grass music.

Soon after the President, in a blue suit, and the First Lady, in a bright blue quilted lounging robe, came out onto the balcony after a private luncheon. Tennessee Ernie called up from the South Grounds: "Mr. President, here's something from our hearts today," and the traveling troupe sang "The Anniversary Song."

The Fords, and a crowd of White House staffers on the lawn, occasionally joined in clapping hands -- as the Opryland performers swung through "Country Roads." "Everything Is Beautiful," "I Believe In Music," and "This Land Is Your Land."

Then the President kissed his wife and walked down to the lawn, where he greeted the entertainers.

"On behalf of Betty, the boss, and myself, I want to thank you for so ably representing 213 million Americans in the Soviet Union," he said. "Betty and I are grateful and thank you for a super job."

"I was a little late getting started in marriage," said Ford, who came late to his wedding on October 15, 1948, "but these 26 years have been great."

After giving a pin to each of the women in the Opry troupe and cufflinks to each of the men, the President promised that "at some future State Dinner, we're going to have you back to play good old country music." "It's a firm commitment," the President said.

Tennessee Ernie instantly replied, "We accept."

A year ago, the President recalled, a group of newsmen traveling with him had honored the Fords' silver wedding anniversary by giving him a plaque with a big number "25" composed of twenty-five quarters and signed by "the effete snobbish intellectual press."

He responded today by giving each of his fellow-travelers a purple and yellow T-shirt emblazoned with the words, "Old Fords Never Die -- They Just Go Faster."

As the President left, the Opryland troupe repeated the "Anniversary Song" and Mrs. Ford blew a kiss from the balcony.

"What have you got cooked up now?" Betty called down to Tennessee Ernie, who replied, "We've got to get on our bus. Get Well. We all love you."

(MORE)

The Nashville troupe of thirty-one, including the singers, seven musicians and technicians, gave the Russians their first taste of country and blue grass music during a tour of five cities: Moscow, Leningrad, Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan.

Tennessee Ernie said Gerald Ford, as Vice President, asked him to "be Daddy" for the youngsters on the tour, arranged by the State Department as a cultural exchange project.

Frank van der Linden
Nashville Banner

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