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40a notes	Meeting w/Correspondents Conf. 5 p. [sanitized - placed in open file on 4-25-86] sanitized NLS 83-13, 8-2-88 opened NLS 98-1 8-17-99	2/2/68	A

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Tom Johnson's Notes of Meetings, Box 12

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FEBRUARY 2, 1968 - 4:30 p.m.

BACKGROUNDERS WITH CORRESPONDENTS
ON VIETNAM AND PUEBLO

Max Frankel
Chuck Bailey
Dick Saltonstall
Chuck Roberts
Frank Reynolds
Dan Rather

Ray Scherer
Jack Horner
Sid Davis
Jack Sutherland
Forrest Boyd

9:00:00 SFT

XERO

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 3, 1968

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FOR THE PRESIDENT

^{Tom}
FROM: Tom Johnson

Attached are the notes of your meeting with correspondents
February 2, 1968, in the Mansion.

Those attending the discussion were:

Max Frankel - New York Times
Chuck Bailey - Cowles Publications
Dick Saltonstall - Time Magazine
Chuck Roberts - Newsweek
Frank Reynolds - ABC
Dan Rather - CBS
Ray Scherer - NBC
Jack Horner - Washington Star
Sid Davis - Westinghouse Broadcasting
Jack Sutherland - U.S. News and World Report
Forrest Boyd - Mutual Broadcasting

The luncheon meeting began at 4:30 p.m. It ended at 6:02 p.m.

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NOTES OF THE PRESIDENT'S
DISCUSSION
WITH CORRESPONDENTS

February 2, 1968
In the Mansion

Chuck Bailey: How did your discussion go with General Ridgeway?

The President: We talked about the Pueblo incident and the increase in the number of incidents along the demilitarized zone in Korea. I asked for his advice as I have asked for the advice of many others who have experience in the military and diplomatic field.

Frank Reynolds: What are the North Koreans up to?

The President: It appears to have been an irrational act on their part, perhaps to help their brothers in North Vietnam.

Max Frankel: What is General Giap doing?

The President: I always over-estimate Giap. You see what he did to the French. He is extremely able. I don't know what will happen.

I asked the JCS to give me a letter saying that they were ready for this offensive at Khesanh. They have 40,000 men to our 6,700. We have 40,000 men within 40 miles and we do have air mobility. There are 1,200 B-52 sorties per month going into Vietnam.

Max Frankel: What do you believe Ho is thinking?

The President: I do not know. I felt by February 3 we could have expected the major offensive to begin. What Ho thinks I do not know. I believe he thought that the people would rally with them. They did not. There has been much sporadic activities. The ferocity was not anticipated.

They did not get into the Chancery of the embassy. They sent 19 men. All 19 were killed.

Forrest Boyd: Do you think it will take a long time to get the men back from the Pueblo?

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.6

NLI 98-01

By CB, NARA Date 8-2-99

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The President: I am hopeful that we will get it back, but I do not want to raise false hopes about how long it will take. We are working. There has been some movement. We are being heard. We talked to the North Koreans on this matter tonight.

Some people have asked why we did not cover the Pueblo with air and naval support. If we had it covered, we could not have accomplished this mission. It would have been provocative.

If any good thing comes out of this, it was that the Commander of the Fifth Air Force did not send U.S. planes in there. We would have had another Bay of Pigs. There were 76 MIGs on a nearby base and 8 MIGs circling above the Pueblo.

Dick Saltonstall: What items did the President review with the Leadership this week?

The President: I guess I've seen over 100 Congressmen and spent about 10 to 12 hours on briefings this week. We told them we would send 15 to 20 messages to the Congress by early March. We asked them to get moving on the 18 authorization bills. We discussed the schedules, and asked that the House and the Senate start to work on the appropriation bills in the committees.

After that, we then asked General Wheeler to brief on military aspects in Vietnam and the Pueblo incident.

Clark Clifford gave a scholarly presentation on the value of intelligence. He said our principal question is how to get the men and the ship back alive. Personal intelligence doesn't work well these days. We have lost a number of our men in Cuba and in North Vietnam. Since we cannot get humans in, we must turn to electronic intelligence.

Then General Maxwell Taylor reviewed Vietnam and the Pueblo.

Secretary McNamara then discussed the capability of our forces in answer to all of the questions about the Pueblo incident such as why the ship was there, why it was unprotected and why we need ships such as this type.

Then Secretary Rusk went into the diplomatic aspect of it. He does not believe we can get the men back militarily. He explained that we have gone to the United Nations, to Panmunjon, to 110 countries, to several neutral capitals, and to several Communist capitals.

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We are trying. But there is no evidence today that makes me believe we will get the men back tomorrow. I do not want to raise any false hopes.

Dick Saltonstall: Are there any contingency plans that you can discuss with us?

The President: No, I am not going to get into contingency plans. We have looked at many things which are possible. We may need to call up individual reservists. We may need to increase military aid to South Korea. We may need to extend enlistments of men in the service.

We see nothing that is required at this moment. We will have the reserves looking after things back here. That will replace the active units which were sent to South Korea.

Chuck Roberts: In light of the advance intelligence, we were in a state of sufficient readiness in Vietnam?

The President: Yes, anybody who could count can see that we were.

Chuck Bailey: Were the South Vietnamese prepared and how did they conduct themselves during this?

The President: Yes, the South Vietnamese were ready. I have heard nothing that would indicate any cowardice or lack of responsibility on their part.

The President then read to the group the Thomas Paine quote:

"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly; 'tis dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated."

Chuck Roberts asked if there had been any change since the San Antonio formula was given.

The President: We put many long hours and days into the text of the San Antonio speech. We said then and we still believe that that is as far as

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we can go with honor. We stressed prompt, productive, and "it is assumed."

We do not want another Panmunjon. Sure, there will be some regular resupply. We undoubtedly will send in more planes and food and supplies for our troops. We expect them to do something along the same lines. We haven't hit Hanoi or Haiphong in a couple of days. There is good reason to what we are doing. Clark Clifford said what I stated in San Antonio and said it better. But it all means the same thing.

The formula still stands, although you will notice I almost withdrew it yesterday at the Medal of Honor ceremony. Anybody who sees what they are doing out there now knows they do not appear very interested in peace talks.

Jack Horner: Do we have any information that North Korea is planning a massive raid across the DMZ.

The President: We have no information of that type. They are not on an aggressive alert with any evil intentions as far as I know. It just looked like they had a chance to make a contribution that then cost them militarily.

Sid Davis: What is your own gut feeling about Ho? Does he really want to talk this year before the elections?

The President: No, I don't think he wants to talk, but he may have to. I would think he would be better off before the election than after.

Sid Davis: Did the Pueblo manage to destroy all the intelligence gear?

The President: Not all, but they had orders and blew up all they could. The crew had specific instructions to destroy it.

Jack Sutherland: Have there been any reports on the health of the crew?

The President: We have been told by the North Koreans that they are being treated well and the body of the one man is being kept.

Jack Sutherland: We picked up that the Cubans may do the same thing as the North Koreans -- to increase tension in some way.

The President: I haven't seen nor heard of it.

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Ray Scherer: Do you think there will be a partisan issue made of this by Nixon, Percy and others?

The President: I do not know. I know of a lot of people being worried. I do not say this is the last gasp by the North Vietnamese. It is a kamikaze type thing. They are not getting a good return on their investment.

Ray Scherer: What are the Russians doing?

The President: I think they want to live in this world with us. I do not think they are anxious to have any major confrontation over this.

They won't be too enthusiastic about getting into a war with us.

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