

SUMMARY OF PRESIDENT'S BREAKFAST WITH BOYS ON CARRIER  
CONSTELLATION

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Holder: W. Thomas Johnson

8:00 A.M. - Sunday, February 18, 1968

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He asked one boy "If you were President what would you do to change things? Boy asked "What things, sir?" The President said "Anything. What goes on that could be corrected." Sailor said "I would hit them more." President explained they would come back at us and there were many more of them than us. Then he was asked about hitting their supply ships. Rostow said they could get their supplies other ways. It is hard to keep the roads and railroad closed. In good weather we do a lot of damage. Then they have the port of Southern China to use. We could make it more difficult to get supplies, but you would run into trouble with Russia and others by closing the ports. You would make Hanoi more dependent on the Chinese than ever."

President - We are trying to keep them (meaning Chinese and Russians) actively out of it. If you hit two or three ships in that harbor -- it is like slapping me and I would slap back. We don't want a wider war. They have a signed agreement that if they get into a war, the Russians and Chinese will come to their aid. They have two big brothers that have more weight and people than I have. They are very dangerous. If the whole family jumps on me -- I have all I can say grace over now -- that is the reason the Secretaries of Defense and State have to see that what damage we will do them will be in the end not so dangerous. We will do better tomorrow than yesterday, but if we provoke both of them and get them on us, if we have all three actively fighting us -- we are trying not to make this a wider war."

Question came up about how many wounded and killed, and the President said our wounded and killed are not much more than the replacements we are sending.

President told the boys "There is not anything that would come to you in life better than to wear the uniform. It is the proudest badge of honor and character -- the real proof of your love of your country. You fellows have acted so marvelously to it all while others have thrown themselves down in the streets. You belong to a big group.-- an honored group. Nobody likes to go to war, or die; everybody is scared to die. I was scared to death when I told my mother goodbye; I was shaking, but I did not want the fellow next to me to know it.

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SERVICE SET

"But when you come back and become citizens again and people ask you where you were you will say I was on the aircraft carrier CONSTELLATION. So you be proud of this service all your life. I think it will be a wonderful thing for you, it will make a man of you. If I had been your age when I ran off to California and did not think my Daddy was very smart -- I went out to get rich and I nearly starved to death; I was mighty glad to get back and see my Mama's quilt on the bed. But if I had had to do certain things when I was your age, you would have had a better President.

"We are fixing things up so you can go to school. If you get sick you can go to the hospital and have a pension, but the main thing is you will have the satisfaction of knowing when the roll is called up yonder you were here and you can be proud.

"You will see the great strength of our country -- the boy from Michigan, the Negro from South Carolina, the boy from New York. Our folks came from different parts of the world; we are different ages; we are all equal particularly when we sit around the breakfast table on an aircraft carrier. The good Lord doesn't recognize whether you are Scotch Irish or a Negro from Louisiana. For a long time the Negro has been discriminated against, but I don't believe there is a white boy who would like to go down to a black country and be treated second class. There are more blacks and browns than whites. . ."

President again asked the boys not to be timid; to ask him questions; told them he was trying to be "as regular a fellow as you are; don't be timid; it will be a long time before you have breakfast with the President again.

He then told them about a pay raise coming up this year; how much it would cost; how much it cost to run the whole government when he first came to Washington.

One boy said he had a question "Lot of these servicemen's wives and children want to know -- these hippies are running around and protesting everything and we are trying to do everything, and they give us a hard time. These Marines are sitting on the beaches of Vietnam and it doesn't seem right for us to be doing our job and they are walking around and getting away with it."

President - It doesn't seem right and it makes all of us feel bad. Like when there is an outlaw in town and tears up the town, but in periods like this when you are under great stress some lose their heads and get hot-headed.

SERVICE SET

Practically every period in our history beginning with the Revolutionary War -- there were hippie and beatnik types then, and the War of 1812 and 1846, and the Civil War, World War I and II -- we had zoot suiters and appeasers and isolationists. Tense moments or wars create that and you don't approve of it. In World War II they indicted 15,000 for treason and disloyalty. We will try as best we can not to fail our children and all the world, because it is a relatively small number of people. Some don't want to go in the Service. Some think I am sending them; some think I should let the Communists take South Vietnam. We think that it would be one step right after another, just like Hitler.

"We think they want what we have got, but we are going to have these dissenters and disbelievers. We are not all catholics, methodists. My grandmother used to think my sister's skirts were too short, but they weren't as short as Phyllis'. Just thank God it is not you or your brother who is a hippie or burning his draft card. You ought to pity them. The best thing to do is to just realize that in every period of history you separate the men from the boys -- some can't take it and as you go along the harder it gets to climb the hill; you will have the neurotics who will drop out. You read about it every day in our country because we have a free press. They have them too.

The young have to defend the country for us. It was left in good shape for you. You are helping to keep the country free. Be tolerant. You are so much bigger and stronger and doing so much for your country -- so much more than these hippies.

"There are dissenters who do not want to make the Negroes free, who are against public education, but the majority run our country.

"No we better go to church. Let's go. Thank you. I enjoyed it and hope you did."

(Sailor sitting next to General Walt turned to his buddy on the other side and said of the President, "Boy, he is great.")

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"We are fixing things up so you can go to school. If you get sick you can go to the hospital and have a pension, but the main thing is you will have the satisfaction of knowing when the roll is called up yonder you were here and you can be proud.

"You will see the great strength of our country -- the boy from M<sup>A</sup>chigan, the Negro from South Carolina, the boy from New York. Our folks came from different parts of the world; we are different ages; we are all equal particularly when we sit around the breakfast table on an aircraft carrier. The good Lord doesn't recognize whether you are Scotch Irish or a Negro from Louisiana. For a long time the Negro has been discriminated against, but I don't believe there is a white boy who would like to go down to a black country and be treated second class. There are more blacks and browns than whites. . ."

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One boy said he had a question "Lot of these servicemen's wives and children want to know -- these hippies are running around and protesting everything and we are trying to do everything, and they give us a hard time. These Marines are sitting on the beaches of Vietnam and it doesn't seem right for us to be doing our job and they are walking around and getting away with it."

President - It doesn't seem right and it makes all of us feel bad. Like when there is an outlaw in town and tears up the town, but in periods like this when you are under great stress some lose their heads and get hot-headed.

Practically every period in our history beginning with the Revolutionary War -- there were hippie and beatnik types then, and the War of 1812 and 1846, and the Civil War, World War I and II -- we had soot suiters and appeasers and isolationists. Tense moments or wars create that and you don't approve of it. In World War II they indicted 15,000 for treason and disloyalty. We will try as best we can not to fail our children and all the world, because it is a relatively small number of people. Some don't want to go in the Service. Some think I am sending them; some think I should let the Communists take South Vietnam. We think that it would be one step right after another, just like Hitler.

"We think they want what we have got, but we are going to have these dissenters and disbelievers. We are not all catholics, methodists. My grandmother used to think my sister's skirts were too short, but they weren't as short as Phyllis'. Just thank God it is not you or your brother who is a hippie or burning his draft card. You ought to pity them. The best thing to do is to just realize that in every period of history you separate the men from the boys -- some can't take it and as you go along the harder it gets to climb the hill; you will have the neurotics who will drop out. You read about it every day in our country because we have a free press. They have them too.

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