

POOL REPORT**President's Visit to Auschwitz-Berkinau and Child Clinic**

The helicopter flight from Krakow airport to Auschwitz-Berkinau took 15 minutes across soft rolling farmland, where peasants working on small plots were harvesting oats and rye with hand scythes. The harvest of grain was stacked neatly along the sides of vegetable fields, and rows of hay, like brown teepees could be seen. It was a scene from Central Iowa, lacking the \$35,000 air-conditioned John Deere tractors.

Ford's helicopter landed near a barbed wire fence, electrified during its heyday, just inside the compound. He was met by the museum director, who had himself spent five years as an Auschwitz inmate, who spoke through an interpreter in explaining some of the grisly activities of the camp.

As they walked along a graveled path, the guide explained in detail the "gasification process." He told how 2,500 to 3,000 victims were marched into the gas chambers at one time, with the process of extermination lasting 15 minutes. Sometimes 25,000 to 30,000 were gassed to death in an hour in the several chambers.

The President grimly listened for the most part, asking very few questions as they walked past the charred and crumbled ruins of the crematoria to the Monument of Struggle and Victory, which was erected in 1966.

There, as many of you witnessed, the President laid a wreath and bent over it for a few seconds apparently in silent prayer. At least it appeared to be a prayerful pose. Then the President looked at a series of tablets to the side of the monument, one of which read in English:

"Four million people suffered and died here at the hands of the Nazi murderers between the years of 1940 and 1945."

"Were you brought here as a young man?" the President asked the guide, whose direct answer wasn't audible. But he said he had spent five years there from 1940.

"Did you escape?" Ford asked.

"No," the guide replied, "I was liberated by the Americans." (If memory serves, the Russians liberated Auschwitz).

The President then walked to a small table on which rested a guest book. Using a memory card, he wrote this inscription above his name: "This monument and the memory of those it honors inspire us further to the dedicated pursuit of peace, cooperation and security for all peoples."

Kissinger stepped forward and simply signed his name. Later, he was asked how he felt about his experience at Auschwitz, and he said it was "very moving."

Before moving away from the monument, the President said, "horrible, unbelievable."

As they returned toward the helicopter, they paused at one of the decaying crematoria. Ford asked how many were placed in it at one time. The guide said 2,000 to 2,500 bodies.

The President asked the guide the name of the community outside. "Auschwitz," he said. Enroute back to the helicopter, the guide described the barbed wire fence

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to the President, pointing out remnants of the electric grid. At the side of the chopper, the guide said the President had a couple of extra minutes and he would like him to see a barracks. First Secretary Gierek urged Ford to go. The President looked over at Kissinger, who nodded his approval.

They strolled over to a wooden barracks, the guide explaining "this spot was for women." Inside the darkened building, reeking of a stench that must have been reminiscent of conditions 30 years ago, the guide pointed out the huge double-deck wooden bunks, crudely constructed, on which dozens of women slept.

To Kissinger, standing just behind Ford, an interpreter was overheard saying that they were crowded in the barracks to die, and the death cycle was about six months. This was in response to the President's question, "How long did a person stay in here?"

They stayed in the barracks only a few moments. Then the President walked back to his helicopter, Gierek a few feet behind him. Ford asked the guide why this spot was chosen for the camp. The guide explained it was off the main route and had a good railroad connection.

The President shook hands with the guide, saying "Thank you very much. It's a shocking and depressing sight. Thank you very kindly."

The flight to the Institute of Pediatrics at Krakow took another 15 minutes. The President was met by the director, a woman (see bible for name), and together they walked past the clinic's staff, mainly women applauding.

Inside the clinic the President was met by half a dozen members of the faculty senate of the medical academy, dressed in priestly robes. A chap in an ermine cape said the academy was 600 years old and greeted the President in Polish, presented him with a parchment and a medallion, and introduced the other chaps. In response, the President called the greeter, "Your Honor," and expressed his appreciation for the welcome.

At one point, the President was heard to remark to the woman director that Congressman Passman and others had a great deal to do with voting funds for the clinic.

A little girl, about 8, in a wheelchair presented Ford with a bouquet of flowers as he began his tour. "How are you coming?" the President asked.

In his brief remarks to the faculty senate, the President said the clinic is an expression of the close relationship between the Polish and American people, adding "we love young Polish people and I'm sure you love young American people."

He walked into several rooms in one ward. In one were several babies with what the doctor described as "rickets." The President asked the doctor, "Is rickets a disease that afflicts young people more than the old?" Only the young, the doctor said.

To one child Ford said, "You have very very sweet eyes." He added of all the children in the room, "You're so well behaved, better than my children, and they were healthy."

He was taken into a small recreation room, where children were drawing pictures. On the wall was a drawing of the Apollo-Soyuz space flight, with Mickey and Minnie Mouse in it. When the director called his attention to it, the President

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asked, "Did they see it on TV?" the director said yes, and pointed to the TV set.

A small girl was lifted and put in the President's arms. She recited a Polish children's poem, to Ford's delight.

He spent about 12 minutes in the clinic and then drove back to the market square, with thousands along the route to greet him. Nessen said police estimated 100,000, and 70,000 in square.

Pete Lisagor
Tom Brokaw

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FYI:

The names of the two Marines who moved the wreath forward at Auschwitz are:

Sgt. Clenny White of Rockford, Illinois
Terry Rademann of Sparks, Nevada

Both are stationed at the American Embassy in Warsaw.

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