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Who Was That Bearded Man?

By Donnie Radcliffe

CARACAS, Venezuela—Aside from being wealthy, who is Nicholas H. Morley, the Florida businessman accompanying First Lady Pat Nixon in South America this week, and why was he selected for the position of honor?

One minute Morley plays the mysterious fellow traveler, elusive and uncommunicative, arousing curiosity among the reporters traveling with Mrs. Nixon. The next he is the congenial clown, self-appointed top banana providing the laughs.

In the flesh, the 45-year-old Coral Gables real estate entrepreneur who is serving as Mrs. Nixon's escort in the diplomatic entourage attending presidential inaugurations in this country and Brazil, is almost a caricature of both.

Central casting itself could hardly have found a more meticulously manicured beard, a more convincing foreign accent, a more rotundly obfuscating jester.

U.S. Embassy staffers who underwent the scissors of Morley's hairstylist here Tuesday call the First Lady's Bulgarian-born companion "the most interesting guy in the crowd."

He well may be that. Unlike Mrs. Nixon, whose personal hairdresser, Rita Desantis travels aboard Air Force One, Morley sends his tonsorial attendant by commercial planes. He brought him here quietly from Miami that way and has ticketed him on to Brasilia where Mrs. Nixon's party heads today.

Amid some criticism of his place in the delegation, rumors about Morley fly equally high.

There are reports that he is an acquaintance of Charles "Bebe" Rebozo, Florida businessman and long-time friend of President Nixon. And the extent of his business interests soars at times to encompass either the presidency or board chairmanship of some 20 corporations.

[According to a Miami acquaintance, who asked not to be named, Morley came to the General Development Corp. in Miami 15 years ago looking for a job. He eventually got a franchise to sell Florida land to Americans living in Latin America and has since parlayed his career into ownership of the Morley Realty Corp. in Coral Gables.

["He's a financial wizard who has made millions. Very gentle and pleasant. But also one of the toughest SOB's I've ever laid eyes on—at times," the source said.

[Morley is also described as a strong Nixon supporter who has paid for numerous signed newspaper ads backing the President.]

There is a discordant note that somehow does not fit the puzzle. Listed among 1972 campaign contributors by the General Accounting Office is one Nicholas Morley, down for \$10,000 (in two \$5,000 increments) to the Finance Committee for McGovern.

Mrs. Nixon says she never met Morley before he boarded Air Force One at Homestead Air Force Base.

See MORLEY, C10, Col. 1



First Lady Pat Nixon arrived in Caracas Monday accompanied by Nicholas Morley, right; Morley also attended a ceremony at Miraflores Palace with Mrs. Nixon and U.S. Ambassador Robert McClintock (center) yesterday, above.



Above: United Press International
Right: Associated Press

in Florida on Monday. But that omission did not appear to bother her.

"Delegations are made up from people who were recommended by Congress," according to Mrs. Nixon, adding that she had "a lot of calls" suggesting names for the quasiofficial slot.

"The (foreign) delegations had to be limited because of space—you see, they have delegations from all the other countries," continued Mrs. Nixon, "and his (Morley's) senator (Edward Gurney, R-Fla.) recommended him—he's from Florida—because of his interest in Latin America and throughout the world. He's known for his civic work."

[The White House said yesterday that neither President nor Mrs. Nixon had ever met Morley before. But there was disagreement on how Morley came to be on the trip.

[The White House said he had been recommended by personal friends in Florida as a good traveling companion who speaks five or six languages. Gurney's office said their senator had suggested him. But Morley, asked about it Tuesday night in Caracas, said "Mrs. Nixon was mistaken, but that's beside the point."

[His explanation is that William Codus of the State Department's protocol office called him up to extend the invitation. When he does find out who submitted his name, he said, for what he calls "the greatest occasion of my life—after this it's downhill," he will be "his slave forever."]

According to the sketchy but official biography released by the White House, Morley was born in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1929.

Apparently peripatetic from an early age, he attended secondary schools in Bulgaria and the University of Jerusalem.

"Morley left Bulgaria during World War II and lived in Albania and Italy from



Nicholas Morley, right, with Maj. Gen. Vernon Walters, CIA deputy director, at a cocktail party for Mrs. Nixon.

1942-1944," according to the biography.

"He emigrated to Israel in 1944, serving in the Israeli army from 1948-1950. He came to the United States in 1956 and became a U.S. citizen in 1961."

Morley's civic endeavors are further described as "a founder of Mt. Sinai Hospital, and a founder and member of the board of trustees of the Florida International University Foundation. He is a member of the board of the Boy Scouts of America and the United States Committee for Refugees."

His business interests are tersely capsulized in a single reference as "president and chairman of the board for a number of corporations involving investments and land development." (One of the investments is reportedly the construction of several hundred low-cost housing units in Cardcas.)

Morley, himself, assumes the mysterious stranger role when asked to elaborate on his presence here or his activities.

He says he knows "all the senators and all the congressmen, don't you?" from

Florida, a self-designated assignment he gave himself because "I am from Bulgaria, remember."

But he denies that he has ever contributed funds to President Nixon's campaign coffers and goes even further, grandly stating for the record, "I, Nicholas H. Morley, did not contribute 10 cents to Mr. McGovern, much less \$10,000." He calls himself simply "a transplanted American," "civic-minded," who lives in Coral Gables, Fla. He has "no real estate holdings in Brazil but I keep in close touch with all the markets—Iran, Venezuela, Brazil and some Arab countries."

As the clown, he pinpoints his Brazilian interests as "the Copa Cabana where just stand and look at thousands of bikinis." His real interests, he continues in that vein, are "business and women, in that order." He says others see him as a bachelor ("divorced, actually") "who is supposed to look at beautiful ladies and charm them—is that right?"

On the subject of Rebozo, the clown turns again into

the obscure, obdurate and mysterious stranger.

"I want you to clearly understand that I sincerely regret I never met this fine gentleman," he says. "When a man is under fire in these United States of America, you don't say 'No, I'm not his friend.' If he is not under fire, you don't deny it." And though his Miami office reportedly has acknowledged that he is acquainted with Rebozo, Morley insists, "No, Ma'am, no, ma'am, no, ma'am."

Except for two official appearances with Mrs. Nixon and U.S. Ambassador Robert McClintock, one Monday night to see outgoing Venezuelan president Rafael

Caldera and the other yesterday at the military parade for the new president, Morley has remained somewhat on the sidelines. Tuesday, he was listed on White House scenarios as having a "private day" even though the major event of the three-day Caracas visit—the inauguration of President Carlos Andres Perez earlier in the day—was presumably what the whole diplomatic mission to Venezuela was all about.

Morley's explanation was ill health and according to him his "private day" was spent nursing an ear infection and a fever while awaiting medical attention.

Early in the day he said he planned to bypass the McClintock reception that night for Mrs. Nixon on grounds that it did not have "the significance the other events here do." By nightfall that evaluation apparently had become inoperative when he turned up unexpectedly at the reception. "They," he said without explaining who "they" were, "told me 'better dead than alive, so I should make it.'"

Once he gallantly paid his respects to Mrs. Nixon, he disappeared upstairs in the embassy residence searching for Dr. Walter Tkach, the White House physician who is a member of the First Lady's party.

"I'm not well," Morley moaned, an exit line he obviously intended for violin accompaniment because he added, "mentally I never was, but now I'm physically sick."