

Nixon's Peking envoy gets drunk, boorish on plane trip

WASHINGTON — Ambassador Arthur K. Watson, who has just been given the delicate assignment of establishing diplomatic contacts with the Chinese in Paris, got gloriously drunk on the flight to Washington for his conferences with President Nixon.

Jack Anderson

A number of witnesses have told us the slim, gray-haired ambassador, normally the picture of dignity, kept shouting for more Scotch, grabbing the stewardesses and trying to stuff money down the fronts of their blouses.

He finally passed out, his arms and legs sprawled across the first-class lounge, recall the witnesses. They say he appeared to be foaming at the mouth from white tablets he had been chewing.

First drunken spree?

Apparently, this wasn't his first drunken spree in the skies over the Atlantic. Stewardesses recall that, on an earlier flight, Watson downed nearly two pints of Scotch and two miniature bottles of champagne. He allegedly tried to recruit one stewardess as a mistress for his teenage son and peevishly threw grapes at her after she turned down the proposition.

In Chinese eyes, drunken behavior is considered disgraceful. The Chinese love good liquor and even play drinking games. But the man who gets drunk loses the game and brings shame upon himself.

This raises the possibility that Ambassador Watson, in a bibulous state, could jeopardize the Chinese-American detente and undo the good President Nixon accomplished in Peking.

Merry millionaire

We have discussed Watson's liquor problem with a variety of sources. Insiders say this figures in his departure from International Business Machines (IBM), the corporate giant his late father built.

Arthur Watson's playboy ways didn't mix with Big Business, and he lost the run-off for IBM's presidency. As a consolation prize, Nixon appointed him ambassador to France.

His only apparent qualification for the job was his enormous wealth and his willingness to share it with the Republicans. We have traced \$44,000 that he contributed to the Nixon-Agnew campaign in 1968, plus another \$5,000 to the general Republican cause. Again in 1970, we have found record of \$21,000 that he dropped in the GOP hat.

Presumably, his pocketbook will be wide

open again this year to help finance Nixon's re-election campaign.

Crucial negotiations

As his reward, Watson will handle the crucial negotiations to increase trade, travel and cultural exchanges with Communist China. He will deal with China's veteran diplomat, Huang Chen, who has handled a number of sensitive missions for Premier Chou En-lai. Huang is the only Chinese ambassador who belongs to the powerful central committee of the Chinese Communist party.

We have taken testimony from several witnesses who flew with Watson aboard Pan American Airways flight 107 from London to Washington on March 9. The chief stewardess filed a complaint with Pan Am about Watson's conduct.

Flight crew muzzled

Pan Am, however, hushed up the report and ordered the flight crew not to discuss the incident. A company spokesman refused all comment. For the protection of the witnesses, therefore, we have agreed to withhold their identities.

They all agree that Watson was drunk when he boarded the plane at 10:45 a.m., London time. Before the airliner left the runway, he ignored the "No Smoking" sign, propped his feet up on a lounge chair and yelled at a stewardess: "Hey, you! I want a Bloody Mary!"

When she politely declined until the plane was aloft, he shouted at her: "Who do you think you are?" Thereafter, he called her a "bitch" and "stupid" and threatened to get her fired.

Holler for Scotch

He kept up a holler for Scotch and grabbed at passing stewardesses. Then he tried to stuff \$40 down the fronts of their blouses. Finally he passed out and slept for about three hours. He got off the plane unassisted and was met at Dulles airport by two State Department aides, Robert Aylmer and Frank Dempsey.

We spoke to the American embassy in Paris three times, but Watson was unavailable for questioning. Through an aide, he gave us a one-sentence statement that there was "no basis in fact" to the accounts of his misconduct. A State Department spokesman also said no complaints had been made.

Footnote: From other witnesses, we learned of a similar, earlier incident aboard Pan American's flight 52 from Washington to Paris. It was on this occasion that he told a stewardess that he wanted his teenage son to develop sexually and asked her to be his mistress. Afterward, he tossed grapes at her for refusing. He was abusive and foul-mouthed, the witnesses said.