

A Normal Flight for Passengers —Except When Nixon Appeared

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LOS ANGELES, Dec. 26 — Through most of the trip none of the passengers aboard United Air Lines Flight 55 from Washington had any idea that the President was on board.

They ate and watched a movie, and most of them were thinking about getting some sleep.

"All of a sudden he was just there," Mrs. Lorna Aubrey of Bermuda said. "He was standing there in the aisle shaking hands with everybody."

Mrs. Aubrey was on her way to San Diego to visit a sister. She had watched the movie and when the lights on the DC-10 jetliner came up the first person she saw was Mr. Nixon.

"I just said 'Hello, President Nixon,'" she said. "I told him that I was from Bermuda and he said that he had visited the lovely island."

Most of the 132 passengers on the plane sat in the coach section and were not aware that the President was a passenger until he walked through the plane before it landed here Wednesday.

"I didn't know how to act," said Pvt. Robert Jones, a young Marine. "He asked me how I liked the Corps . . . He told me to have a nice flight."

Like most of the passengers, he found himself nervous when confronted by the President. "I'm not used to having all that much brass around," he said.

During the flight Mr. Nixon sat in the first-class cabin. Robert Wayt, the captain, said that Mr. Nixon had sat in Seat 2A. The captain said that the President had slept some but he was not sure whether or not Mr. Nixon had watched the movie, "From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler."

The captain said that a special briefing was held for the entire crew and the Secret Service about an hour before the flight left Washington's Dulles International Airport.

After the flight Captain Wayt wore a lapel pin he said was given to him by the President.

He said that when Mr. Nixon boarded, he "greeted me warmly." Captain Wayt, who lives in Santa Ana, Calif., said that the President noted that he was from nearby Whittier and that they had talked briefly about Orange County.

In the first-class cabin Mrs. Merle Flemings, of Tulsa, Okla., sat three seats behind the President. She said that the President, his wife and daughter, Tricia, were in their seats when she boarded. "I was thrilled to death," she said. "I couldn't believe it. The President shook my hand and we took pictures together."

When the President made his appearance in the coach cabin, a number of passengers used the opportunity to get an autograph.

One was 16-year-old Tina Myers, who said that she was scheduled to fly first class but

was bumped to coach. When greeted by the President she told him: "You look like Bob Hope." She said that Mr. Nixon replied, "Yes, he's a good friend of mine."

Another first-class passenger, Tim Hapgood, said he believed the President's trip to the back of the plane was against the judgment of his security group. "They didn't seem to like it," he said.

Once the aircraft landed in Los Angeles, Mr. Nixon was quickly whisked away by a waiting nine-car caravan. Mr. Nixon rode in a white Lincoln Continental. The Presidential party did not enter the airline terminal.

According to Captain Wayt, the presence of Mr. Nixon on Flight 55 did not interfere with normal air traffic.