

# Asian Trip Suffered From Political Trivia

By Lou Cannon

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On the last leg of President Ford's marathon journey to the Pacific Basin a White House aide spread the word that Mr. Ford wasn't really returning to Andrews Air Force Base.

"He's going to Pecos, Tex., instead, to dedicate a gas station," the aide said. "We're going to call it an alternate energy source."

The aide's joke was readily understood by other Ford aides, one of whom dubbed the President's 25,600-mile trip to five countries "Operation Exhaustion." The joke also was a comment on Mr. Ford's habit of calling old policies by new names as he did Sunday in Honolulu when he tied together six standing policies of his administration and labeled them a "new Pacific Doctrine."

After 16 months as President, Mr. Ford's basic style both at home and abroad remains that of a House minority leader accustomed to unrelenting Republican fund-raisers.

His Pacific Basin trip started out as a summit meeting with Chinese leaders fulfilling a commitment made by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger a year ago. It was based on the sensible premise that both American and

Chinese leadership had changed since President Nixon's historic meeting with Chou En-lai in 1972 and that the new leaders needed to know each other.

Then the political requests started coming in from domestic and foreign politicians.

Mr. Ford added an inspection of the Alaskan pipeline to his itinerary, then an overnight stop to attend a belated "birthday party" for Sen. Ted Stevens, his Alaskan campaign manager. This inconsequential social visit occurred on the eve of the President's Peking trip,

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raising doubts about the seriousness of a summit meeting he had described as highly significant.

The President also added stopovers on the way back, first in Indonesia and then in the Philippines. After spending 24 hours on the go at World War II observances at Corregidor and Pearl Harbor, Mr. Ford tacked another eight hours to his non-stop schedule by flying directly to Andrews Air Force Base, where he arrived at 2:30 in the morning.

This schedule, which even one of Mr. Ford's aides described as "bordering on mindlessness," took its toll of

the 62-year-old President.

Despite his renowned stamina and White House press secretary Ron Nessen's claim that Mr. Ford was in better shape than other members of his party because he has a bed on Air Force One, the President seemed exhausted to many of those who watched him talk to reporters upon arrival in Honolulu.

Mr. Ford himself made a rare admission that he was feeling fatigue when he told a woman at the state dinner given for him in Manila by President Ferdinand Marcos: "I'm glad to be here. Yes, I'm tired."

Even Kissinger, who is considered more indefatigable than any other diplomat, spent a night in Tokyo before returning to Washington. Kissinger's focus understandably was on the China summit, and he made little secret of his lack of interest in the political detour to Alaska.

"Any man who has seen the Alaska pipeline and Corregidor on one trip cannot die unfulfilled," he quipped to Mrs. Marcos.

Mr. Ford's scheduling had the unfortunate result of trivializing a journey that had an important central purpose of getting to know the new Chinese leadership.

But it is doubtful if the

President accomplished this fundamental purpose, for he arrived tired in Peking from his Alaska stopover and mispronounced Chinese names and English words. One Eastern European diplomat suggested that Mr. Ford had given the sensitive Chinese an impression that he was not adequately prepared for the meeting.

Whether or not this is true, there seems little doubt that the President's subsequent ceremonial stopover in Jakarta was too brief and contrived to be of any value. A generalized and meaningless "joint communique" was prepared in advance and was referred to jokingly by Mr. Ford's staff.

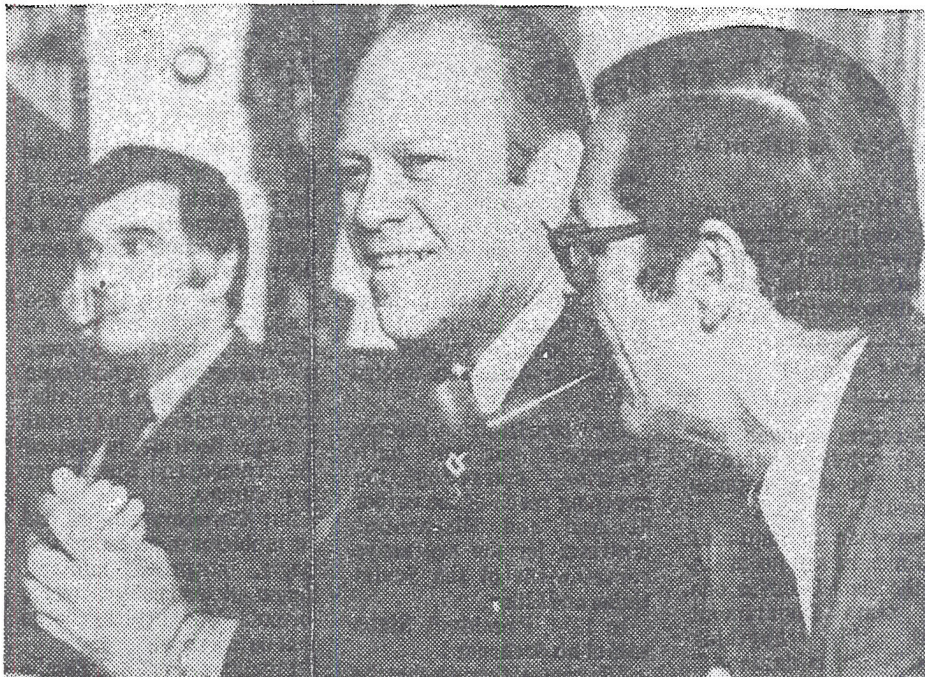
The staff remains basically a congressional staff, attuned to the needs of "good old Jerry Ford." In the House he was

known as a man who cheerfully would travel hundreds of miles out of his way to make a speech for a colleague, and he was known, too, for his habit of returning home in the middle of the night so he could be on the House floor the next day.

Mr. Ford is President now, and the office travels with him, but old habits die hard. Each and every stop on the President's schedule was approved by Mr. Ford himself, which may be an unfortunate omen for the campaign months ahead.

The President's staff has now become sufficiently frustrated that some of its members are grumbling to the press about the unfortunate consequences of Mr. Ford's failure to change his style. The test will be whether these aides are willing to make their point to the President himself.

OVER



Associated Press

At a White House meeting yesterday, President Ford is flanked by Federal Energy

Administrator Frank G. Zarb, left, and Secretary of the Treasury William E. Simon.