

**Angier Biddle Duke, Oral History Interview—JFK#3, 7/10/1964**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Angier Biddle Duke  
**Interviewer:** Frank Sieverts  
**Date of Interview:** July 10, 1964  
**Length:** 10 pages

**Biographical Note**

Duke, Chief of Protocol for the White House and State Department (1961-1965), discusses John F. and Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy's state visits to Paris, London, Venezuela and Colombia, and John F. Kennedy's 1961 meeting with Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev in Vienna, among other issues.

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Angier Biddle Duke, recorded interview by Frank Sieverts, July 10, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Angier Biddle Duke—JFK#3

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
47	John F. Kennedy's (JFK) 1961 state visit to Paris
49	JFK's 1961 meeting with Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev in Vienna
51	JFK's 1961 state visit to London
53	JFK's 1961 trip to Venezuela and Colombia

Third of Four Oral History Interviews

with

Angier Biddle Duke

July 10, 1964

By Frank Sieverts

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SIEVERTS: This is Frank Sieverts, continuing the interview with Ambassador Duke. This is the 10th of July. Ambassador Duke.

DUKE: I'd like to recall in some orderly sequence the President's [John F. Kennedy] trips abroad. There's one personal factor common to them all, and that was my own concern as to how they should be handled from the point of view of my functions. Should I go on ahead and wait for the President to arrive, or should I return after the advance planning trip and accompany the President? There were advantages in it from both points of view. One advantage, it seemed to me, would be to brief the President just before he got off the plane as to exactly what he would expect when the plane door opened and the arrival ceremonies begin and to be at his heels and at his side as he went through at least the first part of the day's program. However, after trying both ways, I learned that he didn't like to go through any paperwork or briefing on ceremonial matters. He liked to be just told at the very last minute. I found that General Clifton [Chester V. Clifton, Jr.], General McHugh [Godfrey T. McHugh], or Captain Shepard [Tazewell T. Shepard, Jr.] could just as easily do this; and, therefore, I found myself coming to the decision that it was better for me to be on the ground with the last minute information, rather than accompany the President on the aircraft itself. Looking back,

I can recall that it was the trip to Paris, the state visit to Paris, the meeting with Khrushchev [Nikita Sergeyeovich Khrushchev] in Vienna, and then the short stop in London, where I learned the most and which stood me in good stead for all future trips overseas.

The first trip abroad, of course, was the Canadian visit, which was a short one, but an excellent training—a shakedown trip for all of us who were concerned with subsequent trips abroad. Therefore, the planning of the trip—how it was planned—the number of people to go on it—all of this was a wonderful staging period for the trips that the President subsequently took. We all remember the incident, the President’s back being injured at the planting of the tree on the Governor General’s ground. I can only say that he never showed any pain during the entire stay there. He let nobody else understand what he was going through, and he had to address the Canadian Parliament. He went to a state dinner at the Governor General’s house that night and stood in line for hours, receiving hundreds of guests, and not by one indication could you see the pain that he must have been in. But for all of us who were connected with it, it was a very good training period and particularly for the triple barreled trip that came up involving Paris, Vienna, and London, during the latter part of May, I believe.

I took off for Paris—for Vienna and Paris and London on May 24, on a preparation trip—part of the time with Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], Andy Hatcher [Andrew T. Hatcher], Ken O’Donnell [Kenneth P. O’Donnell] and others cutting in and out. The President arrived—my notes are incomplete here—but I believe it was around May 29. This, of course, was a full-scale state visit, a very, very interesting one, a fascinating one—particularly from my point of view—from the ceremonial point of view. I was very anxious to compare what we were doing at the White House and at the State Department in terms of ceremonial activity—very anxious to check it out with how General de Gaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle] and his staff did it. Nothing could ever compare, of course, to the dinner that the General gave for the President and Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] at Versailles. However, I think that in the handling of official guests, I think that the U.S. compares extremely well. One thing I can recall is that only the principal guests were introduced to General de Gaulle. President Kennedy was accompanied by perhaps ten members of his official party, and once the President and Mrs. Kennedy were introduced to the General and Mrs. de Gaulle [Yvonne de Gaulle] and the Prime Minister [Michael Debré] and his wife [Anne-Marie Debré], the rest of us were pretty well cast adrift. The protocol people and the foreign office people never paid any more attention to the rest of us. As a matter of fact, it was that experience in France which made me far more conscious of the other guests of our President when they came on state and official visits to the U.S. I don’t believe I ever met anyone in France personally at these official occasions; Pierre Salinger had the same trouble, except with his newspaper

[-47-]

colleagues. Therefore, as a result of this vacuum, I set up a procedure in Washington to have other members of my staff take care of the foreign minister and the other members of the official group who came with a visiting President or Chief of State. My experience in Paris showed me how important it is to take care of all the rest of a President’s entourage. I must say that I learned a good deal during the President’s trip to Paris. I can recall some impressions, sitting in the President’s box behind the President and General de Gaulle and



Mrs. de Gaulle and Mrs. Kennedy, the communication between Mrs. Kennedy and General de Gaulle—the mutual admiration that was obvious to us all. I couldn't help but think that this was contributing to the warmth and the fine atmosphere of the visit. I know that the President was making certain wry comments on the substantive side, but even so, the tone of those talks and conversations must have been helped along—must have been warmed up a good deal by the rapport that Mrs. Kennedy had with General de Gaulle.

SIEVERT: There was excellent press coverage of the trip to Paris. Did you have any sense of it being well staged or anything like that?

DUKE: Yes, I felt that it was magnificently staged. However, I felt that it suffered perhaps from some of the things that we too in time must suffer from, and that is the staleness of repetition. The French have gone through state visits so many times since Charlemagne, that they may be somewhat blasé about it. It's the form of the thing that seems to take hold, and I found an example of this at the reception for President Kennedy at the Hotel de Ville in Paris, which had been done so many thousands upon thousands of times since Gaul was divided into three parts. The Parisians are so used to receiving people from all over the world and they do it extremely well, and so courteously, that it's done almost mechanically. The time though, that the President broke through, I thought was at the Hotel de Ville, when he was speaking to the municipal councilors, and he reminded them of his grandfather in Boston, Mayor Fitzgerald [John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald], a municipal official. He spoke in those terms, which was so unexpected to them, that it threw the mechanics off the track, and it began to get down to human terms again. What he did was a marvelous touch, and it left them cheering.

It was raining the day that they went to the Eternal Flame at the Arc de Triomphe and there was a little hassle coming out of the Quai d'Orsay between the President and General de Gaulle—there was a little back and forth as to what car they'd ride in. The French officials, my colleagues in the protocol section of the Foreign Office, provided a closed topped car, because it was raining. The President turned to General de Gaulle and said, "Let's ride in an open car." The General aggressively, always wanting to take leadership in matters of this kind, imperiously had a convertible pulled up and the top taken down. Then perhaps to out-do President Kennedy, he took his overcoat—or raincoat off. I can't recall now whether President Kennedy wore a raincoat, but I'm sure that if he had one on, he

[-48-]

took it off after the General did. It was a question of one outdoing the other. They got in the back seat of that open car and they got thoroughly soaked. I mean it was a sloshing day when they went down the Champs-Élysées, and there was the crowd, probably the traditional French crowd—the crowd that had seen the Germans come into Paris and the Allies liberate Paris—Haile Selassie came down, the Queen of England, and now they were seeing another President of the United States. That crowd, as I say, has been there since Gaul was divided. However, President Kennedy always had a quality which could change the tone of events and situations, and the quality was there, of course, that day when the two of them went by standing up in the back of that convertible, in the rain, while everybody in the crowd was

there under their umbrellas. It was hard to see the crowd because of the umbrellas. It sort of closed down over their faces. So you couldn't see them but at the same time you did sense the welling of enthusiasm and surprise as they came by,

SIEVERTS: In an open car?

DUKE: In an open car in the driving rain! On the last day of the visit, the President moved into the embassy with General and Mrs. Gavin [James M. Gavin; Jean Gavin]. They moved out of the Quai d'Orsay. We spent a quiet evening at the General's house—just the members of the party. I don't think there were more than 20 people at dinner that night. It was somewhat of a family night, with Eunice Shriver [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] there too. We had a lot of fun, well, kidding about the events of the previous two days. It was an early evening, because the next day they were off to meet with Khrushchev in Vienna.

The Capitol of Austria was chosen because it is supposed to be a neutral city, having no particular political position in the East-West struggle. Still there was a wonderful crowd lining the streets that afternoon upon arrival. It was really early evening as we came in from the airport. I did not sit in on the meetings with Khrushchev. I did take great pains to seek out my counterpart, the Chief of Protocol of the Soviet Union, and sat with him during the entire evening at the Schonbrunn Palace reception which the President of Austria [Adolf Schärf] gave for Chairman Khrushchev and our President. We talked in French about one of the things I was particularly anxious to learn. That was the form of visits to the Soviet Union, how they did things there on such occasions. I knew that someday the possibility would arise when the President might conceivably go to Moscow, and I wanted to get to know my opposite number well. So I spent the entire evening with him. One of the things, both of us were...

SIEVERTS: What was his name—do you recall?

DUKE: Unfortunately it slips my mind right now. He's the Chief of Protocol of the Soviet Union, and he's still there. I sort of check him out every once in a while with Ambassador Dobrynin [Anatoly Fedorovich Dobrynin] here. One of the things that

[-49-]

impressed both my Soviet colleague and myself, was the way the Austrian protocol people handled the reception that night. The President had to stand up in a receiving line with Mrs. Kennedy, next to the Chairman and Mrs. Khrushchev [Nina Petrovna Khrushchev] and the President of Austria and his wife [Hilda Schärf]. But they did something that I've never seen done before or since—and I thought it was very effective for a reception of that size, because there must have been 800 people there that night. We were all assembled in one room and when the doors were opened we went through a smaller room into the area where we were to dine. In the corner of the second somewhat smaller room, behind a red velvet rope, stood the six principals. Instead of shaking them all by the hands, which might have been an

interminable proceeding for so many people, we all went by, within a few feet of them, and one might say, bowed or inclined one's head in recognition. Eyes met but we didn't shake hands. This speeded up the line, as you just walked by them, saluted one another and went on into the dining room. Yet, you know, it was quite satisfactory, because you got a good full look at how Mrs. Khrushchev looked—how the Chairman looked—and how beautiful Mrs. Kennedy looked amid those historic surroundings. It satisfied everyone, really, and I often think what a blessing it would be if we could adopt something like that on occasion.

SIEVERTS: Did the European men tend to bow and the ladies curtsy as they went by?

DUKE: No, everybody just gave a nod of recognition, and funnily enough it was quite personal. You felt that you were actually meeting them.

SIEVERTS: Everything except the handshake?

DUKE: Everything except the handshake and you were separated, as I say, by about six feet of space but, oddly enough and peculiarly enough, it worked very well and it certainly got us into the dinner a lot earlier.

SIEVERTS: It sounds like a marvelous innovation.

DUKE: It was interesting to me. Well, the following day, I believe it was—I don't have my program here—the meetings took place. Even though I wasn't in on the meetings, I could tell by the strained faces and the atmosphere of constraint among my colleagues in the White House group that things were going in a particularly grim fashion. We got into the airplane that afternoon for the flight to London and nobody spoke a word. It was the most silent flight that I've ever taken with a presidential party. Half of it, I suppose, had to do with the exhaustion of going through the Paris visit, and then through the meetings with Khrushchev, but it was a very sober-sided company that went on to London that day. Later on, after an hour or so had passed, I did get together with Paul Nitze [Paul Henry Nitze], and he gave me some inkling of the grimness and the seriousness of the conversations that took

[-50-]

place between the two men. Subsequent to that, I heard the President refer to that meeting several times. I heard him talking about the implacability of Khrushchev in that conversation and what a sobering experience it was.

SIEVERTS: Just let me follow up a point that you mentioned—was there any serious thought given in the year or so after that to an exchange of visits with Russia?

DUKE: I think that we always had it way in the back of our minds. The possibility existed, but it was an unspoken possibility. Unspoken in that Mac Bundy

[McGeorge Bundy] never said to me, “By the way, you’d better look up some of the logistical problems about getting to the Soviet Union.” No.

SIEVERTS: No sounding out with Ambassador Dobrynin or anything?

DUKE: Nothing like that, no. But anyone who had any common sense would like to be prepared for eventualities. Certainly, after that Vienna visit there was no possibility of it.

SIEVERTS: No, and then after the Cuban crisis again; but I suppose it would have been theoretically, it would have been after the test ban signing.

DUKE: Yes, I felt that...

SIEVERTS: Around the time of his death would have been...

DUKE: Would have been the time to do it—possibly after election.

SIEVERTS: Yes—conceivably right about now.

DUKE: Yes. Either about now—or I would say after the November election between then and the Inauguration might very well have been a logical time.

SIEVERTS: For him to go to Moscow in summer would have been a lot better.

DUKE: Perhaps. But they might have arranged to meet in another, more neutral place. Anyway, the point is that they would have met again—I am sure they would have met again—somewhere—possibly in Geneva—and I wanted to be sure that I got to know that Protocol Chief.

The trip to London of course, was to christen Princess Radziwill’s [Lee Bouvier Radziwill] child [Anna Christina Radziwill], and that was charmingly done. The high point of it, from my point of view, was the dinner with the Queen [Elizabeth II] and Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace that night. Again I was interested in some of the techniques and the technicalities that my colleagues employed. I wanted to be sure that everything that we did in the White House was equal to or better than anywhere else in an appropriate way. I noticed that one technique used at Buckingham Palace, which I thought effective, was not unlike the President’s and Mrs. Kennedy’s in the Oval Room. The Queen and Prince Philip welcomed

[-51-]

us at the top of the stairs in a small room where we all had a glass of champagne—or something—before dinner. After ten or fifteen minutes of talk, with the immediate members of the President’s party and the immediate members of the Queen’s group, a door opened and there in a long, rather narrow reception room, were the dinner guests. Instead of having a receiving line, the Queen took the President and Prince Philip took Mrs. Kennedy around the

room. The guests were lined up in a semicircle, probably in order of precedence. The Queen introduced the President to each one of them individually and they shook hands. This was to me, a very delightful and charming and most courteous way of doing things. Well, let's say I admired it very much. It was a delightful evening. Afterwards, the Queen took Mrs. Kennedy into the art gallery, and that was almost an amusing experience because of the way the pictures are hung in the Buckingham Palace art gallery. They are hung without regard to school, nationality, era, date or anything. They are just hung—rather haphazardly. It's quite a jigsaw puzzle to figure out what school, what painter, what period, and although very interesting, frankly, I think it's quite a hodgepodge. Very pleasant, very charming, very attractive evening! I think everybody enjoyed it very much. We took off about midnight or so—midnight, I think it was—for home, and arrived early the next day. I don't believe I can add anything more to that particular trip. Now let's see, what was the next trip?

SIEVERTS: Mexico.

DUKE: By the time we come to Mexico, I think we're all probably experienced at working together and traveling together. I thought that the Mexican visit was a fantastically well organized and well done trip, with a great deal of political success, partly due to good organization. By then, as I say, I'd learned how to handle my own part in it much better. I went to Mexico well ahead of time and had all the arrangements and details down cold by the time the presidential party arrived. My wife [Robin Chandler Lynn Duke] came down with me. I was possibly more helpful on that trip than any one I can think of, except the subsequent trip to Europe, which was the last one. Anyway, the President pulled a surprise on the Mexicans. I think that it's been well reported in the press, but they were very surprised at his salute to the Mexican revolution. This approach to the visit, by saluting their revolution in terms of ours, and our current appreciation of the world revolution, was something, I think, that took them by surprise and added a great deal to the warmth of their enthusiasm for him, particularly his laying the wreath and his words at the Monument to the Martyrs of the Revolution, which I don't believe had ever been done before by an American president. There were some very colorful things—the visit, for instance out to the workers' housing development, a short distance from Mexico City, where he really left behind the organized enthusiasm you would find in the streets of Mexico. I know that exists for every visitor—it existed for

[-52-]

de Gaulle recently. But I believe that our President probably received a more tumultuous reception than anyone else in history. When he went out to the housing development—when he walked around meeting people, even going into people's apartments—he showed a knack and a touch which broke through the official formulas in a way that was very exciting, very successful, as I can recall it now. I don't believe I can give you anything substantive in terms of the planning. They had a wonderful Chief of Protocol there, Ambassador Mariscal, who used to be, by the way, diving champion at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles]. He spoke perfect English and was awfully helpful.

SIEVERTS: That was a very fully reported trip.

DUKE: It was. One incident I do recall—that my wife kids me about and that took place at a particularly long luncheon that the President of Mexico [Adolfo López Mateos] gave, replete with really quite long speeches and the relentless translations. I guess I must have dozed off at some point or another during the luncheon, rather lightly, because I saw my wife looking at me very hard from across the room and she cocked her head in the President's direction. I looked down the table and he was smiling and shaking his head—he enjoyed catching me at my nap.

SIEVERTS: That's wonderful. Did he ever—was he ever seen to nod or doze in public on any of these occasions?

DUKE: Absolutely never, and I think it's such a temptation—not when the President of the other country is speaking but when the translator is. You see, that's the bore. Let's say that our President has said what he is supposed to say, and then for the next five minutes or so he has to look interested while somebody repeats his words in a language he doesn't understand. It would be a great temptation to sort of daydream off during that period and then come back to life when your opposite number starts to speak. But not President Kennedy! He had to look alert even while the tedious translations took place. I used to train myself to tune out when the foreign language was going on—I could close my eyes behind sunglasses and take a two-minute cutout and then tune back in. It reminds me—that Mexican trip, of course, of the trip to Caracas and to Bogotá. We spent the first night at San Juan, Puerto Rico, at the Fortaleza with Governor Muñoz Marin [Luis Muñoz Marin], which was a very useful political exercise. This was “the club” of the democratic leaders of the Alliance for Progress: Betancourt [Rómulo Betancourt], Orlich [Francisco J. Orlich Bolmarchich], the President of Colombia [Alberto Lleras Camargo], and Muñoz Marin.

The welcome in Caracas was pretty chaotic. Enthusiastic admirers broke through the press and the photographers, and then the whole crowd broke through the welcoming line and swarmed all over the field. The

[-53-]

President walked in the review of the troops with hundreds of bystanders following him, and it looked quite dangerous to me. When we got in our car, there was a mad scramble for the other cars. The whole thing, I think, was very badly organized. There are some points to be made about the kind of welcome the President got in Caracas. Obviously and inevitably, one thinks back on the incident that involved Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] years before, and I think this was in the back of everyone's mind, and not too far in back either. When you saw this chaotic reception, one couldn't help but be concerned and worried about the lack of crowd control at the arrival ceremony because you thought—“My God! This is only the start of the thing, and we are going to be here some time—is this going to roll along or is it going to be cumulative and get worse—when is the seemingly inevitable incident going to happen?” Somehow we got through, but leaving the airport there was a mad scramble among our party (and I'm speaking of our party in terms of the ten official members of the

delegation of which I was one.) It was hard enough to find and get into a car at all, and finally when I made it, my driver swung out of the motorcade, trying to catch up. When we were on the expressway into town, where careening cars tried to avoid the unofficial cars cutting in and out of the motorcade—a policeman going around a curve on a motorcycle turned over right in front of us, and it seemed we couldn't miss him. Weirdly enough, he was thrown clear, and we just crunched over his motorcycle. We stopped, nearly got killed stopping, to see if he was all right. He picked himself up, dragged the wreck off the road, and we careened on. That is really beside the main point of the story—that's just a detail. But the point is that President Kennedy's reception in Caracas took place in a wildly chaotic atmosphere. You couldn't help but have a feeling of rather hopeless concern as to whether the President was going to come out unhurt. And yet, oddly enough, as we got into the Caracas visit and arrived downtown, the streets were packed and people were delirious with enthusiasm. Still there were troops every 100 feet or so in the main part of town and in the capitol itself the crowd was far more disciplined and orderly, and we didn't run into any more disorderly scenes at all while he was there.

I can't help but think of something else in connection with the Richard Nixon trip there. In contrast to the former Vice President, John F. Kennedy was a symbol of hope to Latin America far beyond the words of the doctrine for the Alliance for Progress. His youth, his ideas, and his ideals really and truly had gotten down to the masses of people—he had reached them somehow, and it was visible in the crowds that he drew out in the streets in Caracas and later on in Bogotá. As I say this, and go back in my mind to the Mexican trip, I think that part of the reason for the subsequent success was due to the Mexican visit, which made a tremendous impression throughout Latin America. His unexpected and unprecedented salute to the Mexican revolution had a successful impact in Mexico and in Latin America. By the time he hit Caracas and Bogotá, he was a very real figure to the people. He was a mass popular figure, and that is what the crowd reaction meant to me in both those cities.

[-54-]

In Bogotá we ran into a different atmosphere—Colombia having a more traditional society. Without making any invidious comparisons, let me say it is a more dignified world; to me, it has a much more conventional Spanish feeling. The President's house—the place where he entertains—the palace where they gave the dinner for President Kennedy—was really magnificent, and it did carry with it a spirit of a fascinating past; and Mrs. Kennedy herself was particularly interested in the restoration and the maintenance of this beautiful, beautiful palace, and I understand that she drew some inspiration from that for the White House—at least so it is told.

Again, in Bogotá—when your mind goes back to the Bogotá of 1948—the wrecking of the Foreign Ministers Conference of 1948—you can't help but think of those anti-Yanqui days, it was stirring to observe the record crowds that turned out to welcome the President this time. What a tremendous contrast in feeling between those two dates!

These are, of course, superficial comments without the benefit of any notes or without looking back into even the calendar of the period.

SIEVERTS: Very fascinating though, because it does illustrate the point that sometimes maybe he was, in himself, perhaps the greatest weapon or instrument we had in our foreign policy. The way people abroad responded to him.

DUKE: Yes, it brought into focus for me one of the things I have always felt about the Alliance for Progress. Before I took these trips I felt we ought to have a personification of the Alliance through a personalized instrument of it in the same way that Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] employed a coordinator of Inter-American Affairs—he used Nelson Rockefeller [Nelson A. Rockefeller], who became a very popular symbol of the President's interest in Latin America. Being somewhat critical of our hemispheric policies, I felt that President Kennedy should have had for an Assistant Secretary of State someone who could have dramatized his interest in Latin America. Well, these trips showed me I was wrong in view of the fact that the President himself symbolized his own interest and personified it in people's minds.

SIEVERTS: Well, this is partially the result of the fantastic modern means of communication that we have. You can take a single person like this, and in a sense, broadcast him to the whole world. You don't have to have separate individuals...

DUKE: No, you don't. It is possible now to make evident on a broad, as well as a deep basis the President's own personal involvement in and commitment to such a hemispheric policy.

[-55-]

The last trip, which I would like to devote some time to, and I'm afraid I can't now, is the trip to Berlin and Ireland, and I would like to go to that with a few notes and reminders.

[END OF INTERVIEW #3]

[-56-]



Angier Biddle Duke Oral History Transcript—JFK #3  
Name Index

- B**
- Betancourt, Rómulo, 53  
Bundy, McGeorge, 51
- C**
- Charlemagne, 48  
Clifton, Chester V. “Ted”, Jr., 46
- D**
- de Gaulle, Charles A., 47, 48, 49, 53  
de Gaulle, Yvonne, 47, 48  
Debré, Anne-Marie, 47  
Debré, Michel, 47  
Dobrynin, Anatoly Fedorovich, 49, 51  
Duke, Robin Chandler Lynn, 52, 53
- E**
- Elizabeth II, Queen of England, 51, 52
- F**
- Fitzgerald, John F. “Honey Fitz”, 48
- G**
- Gavin, James M., 49  
Gavin, Jean, 49
- H**
- Hatcher, Andrew T., 47
- K**
- Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 55  
Kennedy, John F., 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55  
Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich, 47, 49, 50, 51  
Khrushchev, Nina Petrovna, 50
- L**
- Lleras Camargo, Alberto, 53
- López Mateos, Adolfo, 53
- M**
- Mariscal, Ambassador, 53  
McHugh, Godfrey T., 46  
Muñoz Marin, Luis, 53
- N**
- Nitze, Paul Henry, 50  
Nixon, Richard M., 54
- O**
- O’Donnell, Kenneth P., 47  
Orlich Bolmarchich, Francisco J., 53
- P**
- Prince Philip, 51, 52
- R**
- Radziwill, Anna Christina, 51  
Radziwill, Lee Bouvier, 51  
Rockefeller, Nelson A., 55  
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 55
- S**
- Salinger, Pierre E.G., 47  
Schärf, Adolf, 49, 50  
Schärf, Hilda, 50  
Selassie, Haile, 49  
Shepard, Tazewell T., Jr., 46  
Shriver, Eunice Kennedy, 49