

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Digital Library Collections

This is a PDF of a folder from our textual collections.

Collection: Press Secretary, Office of the:
Press Releases and Press Briefings: Records, 1981-1989

SERIES: II: PRESS BRIEFINGS

Folder Title: 05/18/1984 (#1104A)

Box: 28

To see more digitized collections visit:

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/digitized-textual-material>

To see all Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Inventories, visit:

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/white-house-inventories>

Contact a reference archivist at: **reagan.library@nara.gov**

Citation Guidelines: <https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/research-support/citation-guide>

National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>

Last Updated: 05/29/2025

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

#1104A

BACKGROUND BRIEFING
BY SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL
ON REAGAN IRISH ANCESTRY
AND THE PRESIDENT'S TRIP TO EUROPE

May 21, 1984

Room 450
The Old Executive Office Building

2:32 P.M. EDT

MR. FITZWATER: This is our second briefing on the President's trip to Ireland, Normandy and the London Economic Summit. Mike Deaver, Deputy Chief of Staff, will brief on President Reagan's Irish ancestry and the President's personal view of the trip. His opening statement will be on the record, and the Q&A to follow will be on background, attributable to a Senior Administration Official.

Following Mike will be a briefing on Irish political issues on background attributable to a Senior Administration Official.

Mike?

MR. DEAVER: The first thing I want to say is that there is absolutely no confusion with the Irish about whether this is going to be on live television or not. (Laughter.)

Q Is it going to be?

MR. DEAVER: No, it's not. (Laughter.)

Q What is --

MR. DEAVER: I'm sure some of it may be on Irish television, but whether it's live or not, I'm never going to get into that issue again. We were talking down here before we started, and Bill Henkel was there, and when we first started negotiating with the Chinese, I kept saying live television, and they kept saying yes -- little did I know that live television didn't start until 7:00 p.m. everyday.

The obvious reason for this trip was initiated by the call for the Summit and the agreement on those dates. And then President Mitterrand invited the seven other Heads of State -- six other Heads of State -- for the 40th Anniversary of the Normandy Invasion. And the President has been wanting to visit Ireland now that he's found out that his ancestors were, indeed, from Ballyporeen. We were in Ireland in the '70s, but he didn't really get a chance or, in fact, didn't even know at that point who his ancestors were. It was at that time that he found out he was related to the O'Reagans. But since he became President, all of the various research people have found his family tree.

He's corresponded with the people of Ballyporeen and the peerage houses over the last four years. And his son, Ron, visited Ballyporeen and saw, as we did when we went over in February, the record at the church that shows John O'Reagan baptized. All of you will see replicas of that. In fact, I think the parish priest will have the book with him to show the President.

MORE

Europe #2

In addition to visiting Ballyporeen, the President will receive an honorary degree from the University of Galway which is celebrating its 500th anniversary. At -- that's really the only other thing he does in that part of the country -- when he visits Ballyporeen, he will visit the parsonage of the church. There are only about eight buildings in the whole of Ballyporeen. I think the -- he will actually walk down mainstreet, which is about three blocks long.

After visiting the parish priest, he'll go to the little church there, see the records, and they'll have a brief service. He'll then walk down to the pub where the Reagan lounge is. All of you can buy Reagan memorabilia. This guy's got a very good operation going. (Laughter.)

We'll see some Irish singing and folk dancing. The President plans to, as is the tradition we learned, in Ireland, to bring a gift when you return to your native land -- he'll be giving a silver chalice to the church. He will not see the actual burial ground of his ancestors, which is about eight miles from Ballyporeen and, logistically, is pretty hard to get to.

MORE

Obviously, the President is interested in visiting his homeland, or that of his ancestors. But, in addition to that, I think you will see in the speech to the Irish Parliament a substantive speech, which will be not only directed to the Irish community, but all of Europe for that matter. The first draft of that speech has not gone to the President, so I can't tell you too much about it.

There'll be the usual state dinners, return dinners.

And on the 4th, we go to London. Basically, on those days, we will be involving ourselves with a dinner with the Queen -- a lunch with the Queen, bilateral with Prime Minister Thatcher.

Going over to Normandy on the 6th. And the first stop at Normandy will be Pointe du Hoc, where they will have a reenactment of the charge on the beach. The President will have about a 20-minute statement at Pointe du Hoc, which mainly will be remembering the sacrifices of those who are buried there and what that sacrifice meant and has meant for the last 40 years of peace and prosperity in Europe, be a reminder that it's important that we remain strong so we can defend Europe and our allies.

After Pointe du Hoc, he will visit the cemetery at Omaha -- Is that right? -- Omaha Beach. I believe there are 20,000 -- 9,300 stars and crosses that are maintained there. And after a brief visit to the memorial, he will stop at the two crosses of President Roosevelt's two sons, who are buried there. I think there are 26 brothers buried in that cemetery and one father and son. It's a very moving thing to see.

President Mitterrand will then join the Reagans for statements. President Mitterrand is visiting each other government's function that day.

Afterwards, we go to Utah Beach, where the President will join the other six heads of state. And the only person speaking at that ceremony will be President Mitterrand.

That concludes the day at Normandy.

And we go back to London where the President will basically be involving himself with whatever work is necessary that will come up as Washington work. And we will begin the bilaterals with the other heads of state, starting the summit on the 7th. Is that right? Yes. Over the working dinner with the other heads of delegation at 10 Downing Street.

On Friday, the President has a working breakfast with his staff and goes right into the summit meetings with a working lunch and a working dinner.

Saturday morning is a repeat of Friday. The only difference will be that there should be a joint press statement that day, concluding the summit with the Queen's dinner.

That's basically the schedule. I think, as I said at the beginning, the President's very excited, not only about visiting Ireland, seeing the birthplace of his ancestors, but making some, I think, significant statements to the European community, both at -- in Dublin and at Pointe du Hoc.

I'll be happy to answer any questions.

Steve.

MORE

Q On the lineage question, I've heard you and others refer to his ancestors as the "O'Reagans", but some reports that I was able to find out of Ballyporeen -- there were a lot of stories a couple of years ago when they did the research -- and also, young Ron's account. He refers to them as "Reagan." And, apparently, it is Reagan in the register there. So if it was O'Reagan -- I'm just wondering --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Do you remember --

Q -- if you can clear it up?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- what the register said? It's hand scrawled -- some years ago.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think -- there's some that are Reagans and some that are O'Reagans and the way Father Condon said is in that period of time the "O" was just -- just something that put in front of a lot of names and it didn't have any real significance.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Here's an Irishman.

MR. O'LEARY: It certainly has significance.
(Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That was Mr. "Leary."
(Laughter.)

MORE

Q Will he fly the channel by helicopter, both ways?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think that's going to depend on the weather. We have all different plans --

Q But it is now listed that he go by chopper --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We're planning -- that's the first --

Q -- from England to Normandy.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's right.

Q How long a flight is that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: What is that -- twenty minutes?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I beg your pardon?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The flight -- across the channel -- by chopper.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: An hour and five.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: An hour and five minutes.

Q Will the President make any reference to the Irish -- North and South Irish problem?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm sure he will. He and the Prime Minister discussed that when the Prime Minister was here, and I'm sure he will.

Lou?

Q Is there any concern about these -- that these protests on the President and Central America will in any way mar his visit to Ireland?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You know, we have protests on that issue just about every place we go anymore, whether it's St. Louis or Dublin, so --

Q -- except China --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We didn't have any in China, you're right. (Laughter.) We just take those in stride and be prepared. Yes?

Q You've got, what, three days in Ireland. Is it just going to be confined to ceremonial and official events, or is he going to be out in the countryside riding horseback and doing all sorts of --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. There is no time for that, really. The first day, when he receives the degree from the Galway University, that's all he'll be doing, so he will have some time for rest there.

Q Could you speak to the domestic, political implications of his visit to Ireland?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, there's a lot of Irish here --

MORE

Q Do you know how many?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have seen figures of 30 million -- 20 or 30 million who can trace their ancestry back to Ireland. A lot of them came over here during the famine. But, I think the same answer goes for the China trip. I assume --

Q -- A lot of Chinese here -- (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I assume that -- everything going well -- the President would get some sort of a blip on his job rating. I think that's been true for most Presidential trips, trips overseas, with a couple of exceptions.

Q Have you seen a "blip" as a result of the China trip?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, there was a slight blip -- couple of points. And, on the -- particularly on the handling of foreign policy.

Q Is it correct that we're going to be -- we being the press -- are going to be in Dublin and the President's going to be by himself, exclusive of a travel pool, or expanded pool, in Galway?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q So there will be --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Pool everywhere -- let me just tell you, warn you right now -- that we have had extensive conversations with the British and their ideas about press relations are a little bit different from what you saw at Williamsburg, so we are doing everything we can to get our pools expanded to our normal rates, and to get the press to cover as many events as possible in London. But, I'll tell you right now, it's going to be difficult. And the press are not going to be located near where the Heads of State are meeting -- they're going to be across town. And, the logistics of all of this are going to be very difficult. And our staff is doing everything they can to work it out so that we can have as good a job as possible.

I would hope to meet with the heads of the various press organizations sometime this week to sit down and talk to them about some of these things so that, if they actually see some of the working plans, maybe there are some other things we can do that we haven't seen. But, bear in mind when you get over there, it's going to -- it's going to be different from Williamsburg.

Q But where are they meeting that's so far from the --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They're meeting at Lancaster House which is right next to Buckingham Palace, and the press center is across town at the Connaught Rooms. Some of the briefings they're planning on doing are going to be by closed circuit television. We're going to get our briefers over to the Connaught Rooms and briefing rooms just as fast as we can after each of the sessions.

Yes?

Q What size of American contingent do you expect on this trip? Is it going to be larger than the one two years ago or smaller?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Are you talking about -- are you talking about government people or press?

Q Government people, primarily; but also press.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: What are the numbers you're dealing with?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'd say it's very similar to any international trip we've taken.

MORE

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Which is?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Including press and all, in number probably about 600.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- 600.

Q You're counting the press?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's everybody.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That also includes certain members of the press corps who don't travel on the press charter but in fact are located by their agencies, bureaus or networks into London. But they become a part of the whole group associated with the President's trip.

Q You talk about return dinners. There are no return dinners, are there?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's a return lunch. I'm sorry, Helen.

Q Return lunch?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: In Dublin. Right.

Q You said the President was excited about his visit to -- excuse me -- to Ireland. What's his feeling and his goal, if you will, for the summit? What -- In Williamsburg, I think, there was more of a focus or somewhat of a focus on the security issue in addition to the economics. And there was more controversy on the economic. What does he --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You're going to get a briefing on that in just a minute, but, basically, the London summit, as far as the President's concerned, is a continuation of the work at Williamsburg. And these, as you all know -- these summits really are opportunities for these leaders to get together and have conversations together, rather than any major substantive issues coming forth. But there will be some, and you'll get a briefing on that in just a minute.

Yes?

Q I'm a little more curious about the question of his roots because I guess this came -- this sort of dramatic information of finding a name in the registry occurred since he became President. How -- Can you give us some insight into, you know, how he learned of that? And you say he corresponded with them? I mean, how much interest did he take in --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's taken a lot of interest since his first trip over there and has had visits over the last ten years by various people from Ireland. He has corresponded with people in Ireland. The -- I think when you meet this parish priest and hear him describe how they did go back and look through the records and the baptismal records and you see -- actually see it, I think it's pretty convincing.

But why now? I don't know. He's had an interest, as I've known, for at least ten or fifteen years in Ireland. They developed an interest about three and a half years ago -- the Irish.

MORE

Q Yes. And, so, I mean, when they -- Did it happen early in the Presidency when he -- when this was discovered, that he said at some point, "I want to get to Ireland?" I mean, that kind of thing.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I can't remember exactly when he first started getting correspondence from the town of Ballyporeen. But that's the connection there.

Q It was before the assassination attempt.

Q Does he --

Q They corresponded and he sent a picture to them that -- the time of the assassination.

Q Attempt.

Q They wrote him? He didn't write them --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's right. I mean, how would he know Ballyporeen?

Q Does he agree with the exclusion --

Q He might have hired somebody to find it out for him.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. What?

Q Does he agree with the exclusion of the Germans from the D-Day commemoration?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I haven't heard him comment on that. I don't know --

Q Speaking of D-Day, wasn't there originally a group of Polish freedom fighters, or whatever you want to call it, involved in that invasion? And were they invited? Is there any Polish --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have no idea. Do you?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I believe a representative from the Polish Defense Ministry will be present at the Utah Beach ceremony.

MR. SIMS: We will have a full briefing on that tomorrow here so --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Good. Anybody else? Yes?

Q Since terrorism is likely to be one of the topics of discussion in anticipation of the various demonstrations and the recent embassy -- Libyan Embassy incident in London, can you talk at all about the security preparations? Any extraordinary precautions being taken?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, we never talk about the security preparations, but they've been working on them for some time. And they'll be as good as they always are.

Q I mean, anything extraordinary this trip?

MORE

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. I don't think there's anything extraordinary.

Q Mike, you talk about problems of pools in London --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q -- and the British getting very tough on this. Is that for security reasons or other reasons?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. It's just their idea of how to handle it. I think that at the last summit they hosted they did it pretty much the same way. And we just disagree about some of the access.

Q Well, do we have any coverage of Buckingham Palace events?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There will be pool coverage of the guests arrival in that hall of portraits or whatever it's called, but that's it. There'll be no coverage of the dinner itself.

Q And how about the lunch?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I would assume that the coverage would be pretty much the same. There won't be any coverage inside the luncheon.

Q When was the President's first trip to Ireland --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Now, I knew somebody was going to ask me that.

Q You said 1970.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It was in the '70s and I was with him and I simply can't remember.

Q Was he Governor?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He was Governor. Right. He was on a trip throughout Europe. I think we went to five or six countries.

Q Are you sure of that? --

Q And is this the second or third U.S. President to address the Parliament of Ireland?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me.

Q What -- How many other U.S. Presidents have addressed the Irish Parliament?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I assume John Kennedy did when he was there, and that was it.

Q Is this it? He's the second --

Q -- Nixon --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

MORE

Q Are you sure of that date? Because if you're right, then the President made up part of his autobiography when he talked about --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, Ann, maybe I'm wrong.

Q Oh.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I said at the beginning I wasn't quite sure of the date, but we'll find out for you.

Q Well, it's one of these facts that you get in trouble with -- I think he went there before he was a politician in the '40s.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. Well, he may have done that, but we were sent by President Nixon on that trip. So, I'm sure he was Governor at the time. We went to --

Q No, I mean, the point is that I think this is his third trip to Ireland.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It could be. I don't know about any trip before he was Governor.

Yes, Steve?

Q The -- I remember you went over to London some months ago to advise the British on -- offer some advice on the summit preparation. And did they take any of it? (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, I think they were -- We had two good days with them, and we talked about a lot of logistical problems. And they changed Directors of the summit since that time so some of those -- (laughter) -- some of that free advice isn't there now.

Okay?

Q Why did they change Directors?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have no idea.

Q You couldn't give us any insight into, for instance, that special communications operation that you had in Williamsburg with the translators in the room and all that kind of stuff that you --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There will be none of that. They're going to have the people in the room -- translators in the room.

Q Will there be shuttle buses? (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm sure there will be --

Q Yes, for Reagan. For Reagan? (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. (Laughter.)
Thank you.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

2:55 P.M. EDT