



Elvis' letter resulted in famous

There are hundreds of thousands of photographs owned by the Library of Congress. The most requested one is of a Tennessean, but it's not Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson or Alvin C. York.

On Dec. 21, 1970, Elvis Presley visited President Richard Nixon in the White House. The President of the United States and the King of Rock 'n' Roll had a friendly conversation lasting about 15 minutes. The White House photographer snapped a few photographs of the two men, one of whom would be forced out of office four years later; the other would die at the age of 42 seven years later.

Today, one of those photographs is the most-requested image in the Library of Congress.

Here's the story behind this bizarre encounter:

According to Jerry Schilling, a lifelong friend of Presley's, the trip started because Elvis was upset about various things (recent publicity, family matters, etc.) and wanted to get away from it all. Presley took a commercial flight from Memphis to Los Angeles, where Schilling worked, and asked him to pick him up at the airport. After Presley got a good night's sleep, he and Schilling had a long talk. "He said 'I don't want anybody in the world to know where I am,'" Schilling recalls.

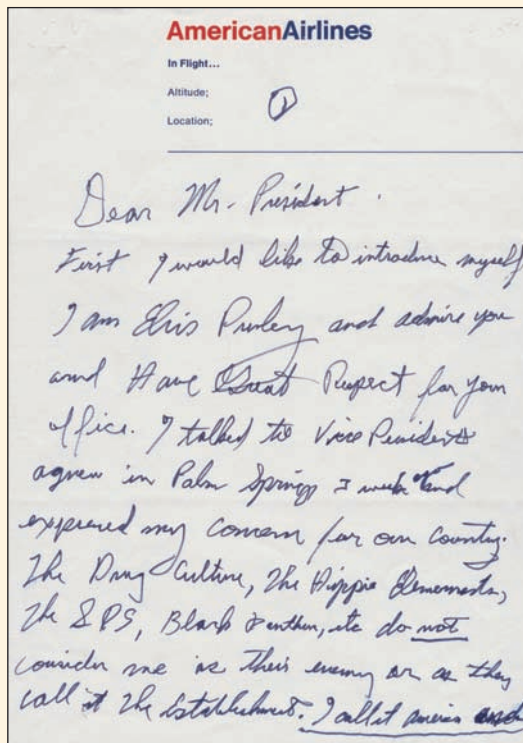
Presley talked Schilling into flying with him to Washington, D.C., but didn't hint at what he had in mind. Since Presley had no cash (only credit cards), Schilling cashed a \$500 check and accompanied his famous friend on the plane. But, in typical Elvis fashion, the \$500 didn't last long. "We get on the plane for an all-nighter (flight) to go back to Washington," Schilling says. "He (Presley) meets a guy coming back from (the) Vietnam (War) and gave him the \$500."

A few minutes later, Presley asked the flight attendant for some stationery. "That was when he started writing the letter to President Nixon, and he asked me to proofread it," Schilling says. "We flew all night, then (after landing) dropped it by the White House."

The letter mentions several organizations that were well known in the American "counterculture" of that time such as the Black Panthers and the Students for Democratic Society (SDS). Here are its contents:

Dear Mr. President:

First, I would like to introduce myself. I am Elvis Presley and admire you and have great respect for your office. I talked to Vice President Agnew in Palm Springs three weeks ago and expressed my concern for our country. The drug culture, the hippie elements, the SDS, Black Panthers, etc. do not consider me as their enemy or as they call it the establishment. I call it America and I love it.



Sir, I can and will be of any service that I can to help the country out. I have no concerns or motives than helping the country out. So I wish not to be given a title or an appointed position. I can and will do more good if I were made a Federal Agent at Large and will help out by doing it my way through my communications with people of all ages. First and foremost, I am an entertainer, but all I need is the Federal credentials. I am on this plane with Senator George Murphy and we have been discussing the problems that our country is faced with.

Sir, I am staying at the Washington Hotel, Room 505-506-507. I have two men who work with me by the name of Jerry Schilling and Sonny West. I am registered under the name of Jon Burrows. I will be here for as long as it takes to get the credentials of a Federal Agent. I have done an in-depth study of drug abuse and Communist

brainwashing techniques and I am right in the middle of the whole thing where I can and will do the most good.

I am glad to help just so long as it is kept private. You can have your staff or whomever call me anytime today, tonight, or tomorrow. I was nominated this coming year one of America's Ten Most Outstanding Young Men. That will be on January 18 in my home town of Memphis, Tennessee. I am sending you the short autobiography of myself so you can better understand this approach. I would love to meet you just to say hello if you're not too busy.

Respectfully,

Elvis Presley

PS: I believe that you, Sir, were one of the Top Ten Outstanding Men of America also.

I have a personal gift for you which I would like to present to you and you can accept it or I will keep it for you until you can take it.



it to Nixon, but the security guards asked him not to present it to the president in person. “‘No guns in the Oval Office’ was standard policy,” Krogh said. “He (Presley) seemed to take that in good grace.”

Today, it seems likely that such an encounter would immediately be news. But Presley’s meeting with Nixon remained a secret until 13 months later, when it was reported by Washington Post columnist Jack Anderson. “He (Presley) pulled up in a gaudy Cadillac,” Anderson wrote. “Resplendent in purple suit and cloak, with a gold belt buckle and amber sunglasses, he sashayed through the door. The elegant Elvis had half the secretaries in the building oohing and aahing.”

Assuming Anderson’s account is accurate, it raises a question in my mind: What about the other half of the secretaries in the building?

Elvis’ brief encounter with President Nixon has an interesting footnote that, to the best of my knowledge, has never been written about. About two years later, Presley was being treated for a minor eye problem at Baptist Hospital in Nashville. Tennessee Gov. Winfield Dunn decided to stop by and pay his respects.

“I didn’t make a big deal of it; in fact, I went completely unaccompanied by anyone else, even a photographer,” recalls Dunn, who now lives in Nashville.

Dunn walked into Presley’s hospital room and “he was very friendly to me. We shook hands and talked about this and that; I remember that we talked about Mississippi because we were both born there.”

While meeting with the governor, Presley pulled out a thick velvet pouch that opened up to several compartments, each of which had a badge on it. “He had all sorts of law enforcement badges — I’m guessing 20 or 25. I’m sure that somewhere in there was the one that he had gotten from President Nixon.

“I realized later that this was probably his way of asking me for a Tennessee badge. Well, silly me, I didn’t have the sense to say to him, ‘Well, you need a Tennessee badge!’ — which is probably what he wanted me to say. I really regret not giving him a badge.”

That wasn’t the only thing that Winfield Dunn regrets about that casual visit with Elvis. “I can tell you that when I got home, my wife was not happy with me because I didn’t take her with me. Was she ever!” ☹️



President Richard Nixon greets Elvis Presley at the White House. One of the reasons Elvis visited the president was to ask him for a badge from the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. The president obliged, and Elvis added it to his extensive badge collection. Photo courtesy of the Richard Nixon Library and Museum.



In a letter to Richard Nixon, Elvis Presley said he had a “personal gift” he’d like to present to the president. The would-be gift was a World War II-era Colt .45 pistol, but Elvis wasn’t allowed to give it to Nixon in person because no guns were allowed in the Oval Office. Photo courtesy of the Richard Nixon Library and Museum.

The White House security guard gave the letter to Dwight Chapin, a member of the White House staff, who subsequently called Egil “Bud” Krogh, the White House deputy for domestic affairs.

“The King is here,” Chapin said to Krogh.

“King who?” Krogh asked.

“No, not just any two-bit king, the real king. The King of Rock — Elvis. He’s right here in Washington, and he wants to see the president.”

A few hours later, Presley was granted a short audience with the chief executive. Here is Krogh’s account of that meeting:

“It was a little bit awkward at first because I’m not sure that Elvis really believed that he was there. They had a really weird discussion about a lot of things that had nothing to do with the talking points I had written.

Elvis was telling the president how difficult it was to play in Las Vegas. The president said, ‘I understand, Las Vegas is a tough town.’ And then Elvis said, ‘And you know, the Beatles came over here and made a lot of money and said some un-American things.’ And the president looked at me, like, ‘Well, what’s this about the Beatles?’



Tennessee History for Kids

Bill Carey is a Nashville author and executive director of “Tennessee History for Kids,” an online Tennessee history textbook.

For more great stories of Tennessee history, go to www.tnhistoryforkids.org.

“And then the real reason for the trip finally came out as Elvis said, ‘Mr. President, can you get me a badge from the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs?’ And the president looked and he said, ‘Bud, can we get him a badge?’ And I said, ‘Well, Mr. President, if you want to get him a badge, we can do that.’ He said, ‘Well, get him a badge.’

“Well, Elvis was so happy about this, he steps around the side of the desk and he goes over and he grabs him. And one of my abiding memories while thinking, ‘This is probably the last thing I’ll ever do in the Oval Office,’ was Elvis Presley hugging Richard Nixon ... And they parted. And then Elvis asked if he could bring in his bodyguards, to which the president said, ‘Bud, do we have time for that?’ And I thought, ‘You’re this far into it, why not finish it off?’ So, I said, ‘Yes, sir, you’ve got a few more minutes.’

“So (his bodyguards) came in, and the president shook hands with them and told Elvis, ‘You’ve got some big ones here, Elvis.’ And he said, ‘Yes,’ and the president went behind his desk and opened up the bottom drawer to give them each a gift. Well, Elvis just sensed that there was a lot of stuff in that drawer. So he went behind the desk and, as the president is taking out the cufflinks and the paperweights and the golf balls, Elvis is reaching in towards the back of the drawer and taking out the real gold stuff, the valuable presents — because they were sort of lined up in order of expense, or cost.

“So Elvis starts taking all these things out, and he says, ‘Mr. President, they have wives.’ And so he dived back into the drawer again and out come the presents for the wives. And they

walked out of there — of course, this was four days before Christmas — with their hands filled with all of these presidential goodies. And after that, we got him a badge, which Elvis, apparently, carried with him for a long time.”

By the way, the gift that Presley mentioned in his letter was a World War II-era Colt .45 pistol. Presley did, in fact, give



meeting with President Nixon



Above is the most-requested image in the Library of Congress — Elvis Presley meeting President Richard Nixon on Dec. 21, 1970. During his flight to Washington, D.C., Elvis wrote a letter, opposite page, to the president using stationery he got from a flight attendant. Images courtesy of the Richard Nixon Library and Museum.