

The following account is factual, but was written by Greg Clock in 2005 as if it had been written in newspaper style on May 13, 1958. Information on Vice President Nixon's South American trip is based on magazine articles, excerpts from four books, and a memoir by a foreign service officer at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas in 1958. Information on Steve Quinn is based on telephone conversations with Steve Quinn in 2004 and 2005. The facts were confirmed by his father. The incident involving Steve Quinn did not appear in any newspapers.

Nixons Attacked In Venezuela

VP, Wife Spat Upon, Vehicles Stoned

Gunshots Are Heard Near U.S. Embassy

American Boy, 9, Is Struck In Head

CARACAS, May 13, 1958 -- Angry Venezuelans showered Vice President Richard Nixon and his wife Pat with spit and stoned their motorcade, shattering windows.

Spitting began as the Nixons arrived today at Maiquetia Airport near here -- where banners read "Go home," "Go away Nixon," and "Out dogs" -- and continued during the Venezuelan national anthem.

Attacks continued on the Avenida Sucre in the suburb of Catia, where a traffic jam caused by a deliberate roadblock in the center of the street allowed rioters to pound on the Vice President's car for more than 10 minutes before police cleared a pathway.

Rioters ripped the U.S. and Venezuelan flags from Nixon's car, pounded the doors with clubs, pipes, and beer cans, and rocked the vehicle. Grapefruit-sized stones smashed against the safety glass, with slivers flying inside.

Secret Service agents tried to push away demonstrators who yelled "Muera Nixon!" ("Death to Nixon!") One agent threw himself across the back window of Nixon's car in an attempt to protect it from stones and clubs. The driver of Nixon's car had to use windshield wipers to see through the spit.

Mrs. Nixon was behind in a separate car. Several cars further back, Nixon secretary Rose Woods was cut by flying glass.

The Nixon motorcade was en route to a wreath-laying ceremony at the tomb of Simon Bolivar at the National Pantheon. But after breaking free

from the roadblock, the motorcade was diverted to the U.S. embassy in the Las Acacias area of the city. The Nixons went to the residence of U.S. Ambassador Edward J. Sparks.

“It is not easy to endure the kind of activity we had to go through,” Nixon said at a press conference on the veranda. At Nixon’s side was his interpreter, Col. Vernon Walters.

U.S. Marines and Secret Servicemen patrolled the corridors of the U.S. embassy while members of the Venezuelan army guarded the outside.

Meanwhile, several American embassy employees waiting near the tomb said they were attacked by a mob.

Anti-American sentiment has been strong here due to U.S. asylum for General Marcos Perez Jimenez, the military dictator who fled Venezuela in January, and controversy over Venezuelan taxation on oil extracted by U.S. companies.

The Nixons came to Venezuela from Colombia at the end of a South American “goodwill” tour that began on April 28 in Uruguay, where there was some heckling from students and signs reading “Fuera Nixon!” (“Get out, Nixon!”)

On May 1, they attended the inauguration of President Arturo Frondizi of Argentina. On May 3, Nixon was heckled during a forum at Buenos Aires University.

Visits to Paraguay and Bolivia also had some anti-American demonstrations, but for the most part welcoming crowds cheered the Nixons. On May 8, in Lima, Peru, Nixon was grazed in the neck in a stone-throwing incident at the University of San Marcos, and later spat upon. One rock broke the tooth of a Nixon aide. On May 11 in Bogota, Colombia, there were several anti-Nixon demonstrations.

In Venezuela, spitting began shortly after the Nixons stepped from a U.S. Air Force DC-6 with red, white and blue propeller tips. The Star-Spangled Banner and a 21-gun salute were drowned by howls from about 200 people on the balcony of the airport terminal. The band made a futile attempt to quiet the crowd by playing the Venezuelan national anthem.

Blotches of tobacco juice could be seen on the Nixons’ clothing as they walked along a troop-lined red carpet toward their limousines.

Separately, a 9-year-old American, Steve Quinn, received several stitches at a Caracas hospital after being grazed in the top of the head by a bullet or by a fragment sprayed by gunfire near a brick wall close to the U.S. Embassy. Quinn and two Venezuelan friends were walking toward the embassy after their evening meal because they “wanted to see Nixon.”

Earlier in the day, Quinn had seen Nixon's black Cadillac pass by his home on Avenida Las Acacias y San Cristobal, a quarter mile from the embassy.

Aware that there had been some trouble involving Nixon's motorcade, the boys approached the embassy after dark, then heard "adult voices yelling" followed by gunshots.

"I could hear the wall getting hit with gunfire," said Quinn, a fourth grader at Rodean, a British school. With blood flowing down his face, Quinn ran with the other two boys to Quinn's home, known as Quinta Anna Maria.

His father, Bill Quinn, an accountant with Tulsa-based oilfield services company Helmerich & Payne, asked what had happened.

One of the boys said: "I think he got shot."

Mr. Quinn asked: "What the hell were you doing out there?"

"We wanted to see Nixon," said Steve Quinn.

Mr. Quinn, his son, and Jesus, company interpreter and father of the other two boys, began driving toward a hospital. But as they neared the embassy, guards pulled guns and stopped them.

"Jesus yelled at them in Spanish: 'Can't you see he's bleeding?', " said Steve Quinn, who heard the words while lying in the back seat. He said he was "more scared at that point than when the shots had been fired." He then heard laughter among the guards, who let them leave the area and go to the hospital.

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On May 14, President Dwight Eisenhower held a White House press conference and said he had ordered Army paratroopers and Marines from the U.S. to bases in Cuba and Puerto Rico the previous afternoon as a precautionary measure. Also on May 14, the Nixons traveled in a heavily armed convoy to Maiquetia Airport. Venezuelan troops lining the route had machine guns and machetes, and wore gas masks after a tear-gassing operation to discourage onlookers or potential demonstrators. At the airport, Vice President Nixon reviewed an honor guard with Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal, head of the five-man junta government that had replaced Perez Jimenez. The Nixons left Venezuela seven hours earlier than originally planned, and flew to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where they were guests of Governor Luis Munoz Marin and his wife. The Nixons returned to Washington, D.C., on May 15 and were met at National Airport by about 15,000 people, including President Eisenhower and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Reaction from members of Congress and newspaper and magazine columnists was mixed: some lauded Nixon's courage while others questioned the wisdom of going to Venezuela after he had been warned against it as late as May 12.

Steve Quinn was released from the hospital late in the evening of May 13. Later in 1958, Steve and his family moved to Anaco, Venezuela. (One of his neighbors was Tom DeLay, who later became a Republican Congressman from Texas.) The Quinns moved back to Tulsa in 1959 after two years in Venezuela. Steve became an artist in Tulsa. He passed away April 10, 2015.

Sources:

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Richard Nixon Library

Steve Quinn

Bill Quinn