



Year: 1969-1972

Location: Key Biscayne, FL

Author: Al Mongeon, MSgt (ret)

Richard Nixon and the Sling Psychrometer

I was one of the members of the Presidential Support team at Homestead AFB from 1969 to 1972. During President Nixon's trips to his summer White House on Key Biscayne, we would provide hourly observations from the compound. A helicopter pad had been built extending into Biscayne Bay to facilitate his move from Homestead to the compound.

We used the AN/PMQ-4, deployable weather kit. The kit consisted of a sling psychrometer, wind sensor, and barometer. The only permanent weather instrument was a ceiling light installed on one corner of the pad. Unfortunately, it was under a palm tree and the best baseline we could establish was less than 100'.

Our working area was in the Secret Service command post on the edge of the helicopter pad. The rules for taking an observation were dictated by the Secret Service. We weren't allowed out of the command post if the President or a member of his family was out of his house.

On the day in question, I was the duty observer. The President and his neighbor, Bebe Rebozo, were out in the bay fishing. Normally, if we were out taking an observation, we would get a warning to return to the command post when they started in. In this case, however, things got a bit harried when word came down that the French President de Gaulle had died unexpectedly and the President would be returning to Washington that afternoon. I was out on the deck taking an observation and, in the excitement, someone forgot to tell me the President was coming in.

I'm out on the deck slinging the psychrometer when an agent comes running out, waving to get back in. I turned around to see the President getting out of the boat. I started moving toward the building when the agent suddenly stopped me. The President came over and asked what I was doing. He asked if he could try his hand. He did a pretty good job. After that, he always made it a point to come by our spaces and inquire about the weather and we would give him a copy of the local discussion.