



US Car No. 1

Winston Churchill and Dwight D. Eisenhower
depart U.S. Car No. 1 in Richmond, VA March 8, 1946.
National Historic Landmark registration file

U.S. Car No.1 is the only private coach railroad car specifically designed for the president of the United States. The Pullman Company built the Ferdinand Magellan in 1928, and refurbished the car and presented it to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on December 18, 1942. Both President Roosevelt and President Truman used the car extensively for state business, reelection campaigns, and personal trips.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower briefly used U.S. Car No. 1 until air travel on Air Force I began to replace U.S. Car No. 1 as the preferred means of transport. In October 1984, Ronald Reagan requested the use of U.S. Car No.1 for a one-day whistle stop reelection campaign trip to Ohio in commemoration of rail travel.

In 1941 in the midst of World War II, President Roosevelt consented to the urging of aides to have a private railcar reconfigured for his safety and comfort and that of future presidents. Originally built by the Pullman Company as the Ferdinand Magellan, the car was part of a fleet of six luxury cars, all named for famous explorers and available for private charter. Armor-plated with 5/8-inch steel on the car's roof, floor, and sides and fitted with three-inch thick windows and two escape hatches, the refurbished car weighed 285,000 pounds, double its original weight. U.S. Car No. 1 is the heaviest railcar ever built in the United States.

Security removed the name Ferdinand Magellan from the sides of the car and only "Pullman" remained, making the coach resemble, from a distance, an ordinary

private car. For the remainder of World War II, this rolling fortress moved under the code word "POTUS" for President of the United States. POTUS had the right-of-way over all other rail traffic.

The 84-foot long, 15-foot high, and 10-foot wide train car, contains the presidential suite, two guest rooms, a dining room/conference room, and an observation lounge. Each room in the car has a telephone. The elimination of one of the usual five staterooms allowed for a spacious observation lounge, decorated with cream-colored woodwork, green carpeting and light brown, tufted wall covering resembling leather.

Between the observation lounge and the dining room are four bedrooms. The presidential suite consists of two separate bedrooms with a connecting bathroom. The first lady's room has a single bed that is larger than a standard Pullman berth, a dresser, closet and washbasin. The connecting bath has a shower, bathtub, toilet, and washbasin.

The president's bedroom is the largest of the bedrooms and contains a commode chair to accommodate President Roosevelt's disability needs. Exhibited in the room is a special wheelchair built for President Roosevelt's use onboard the railcar. The chair is narrow enough to fit through the doors and hallways of the railcar. The other two bedrooms are identical guestrooms, each containing an upper and lower berth, vanity, closet, dresser, washbasin, toilet, and medicine cabinet. The lower berth converts into a double seat with a table, while the upper berth retracts into the ceiling.

The dining/conference room is the biggest room in the railroad car and is furnished with a large solid mahogany table that seats eight. This is where the president entertained official visitors while aboard U.S. Car No. 1. Among the many world leaders entertained in this room was Sir Winston Churchill, who visited both President Roosevelt and President Truman aboard the car on different occasions. This room also contains the small writing desk the presidents used for official business. Displayed in a cabinet above the desk are the china, silverware, and other memorabilia from presidential use of the car. The pantry and steward's quarters are at the end of the dining room divided by a door and hallway. Here the staff prepared meals for the presidential party, and had separate small spaces for themselves and storage.

On January 9, 1943, the White House ordered the assembly of a five-car train, including U.S. Car No. 1, summoning the president's Navy attendants for work ordinarily performed by Pullman porters. Railroad officials received directions not to issue orders that might raise suspicion. The train left Washington, DC, at 10:00pm, the usual departure time for President Roosevelt's trips home to Hyde Park, New York. Only an hour later, at Fort Meade, Maryland, the train reversed directions and headed south. Just before dawn, the train with President Roosevelt aboard arrived in Miami, Florida, where he boarded a plane bound for Africa, the first time a seated president of the United States ever flew outside U.S. borders.

Roosevelt's destination was the now-famous Casablanca Summit, where he met with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and French leaders Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud to devise a joint strategy to end World War II. The first and last legs of this dangerous journey were aboard U.S. Car No. 1. There are reports and papers from this trip on display in the car.



escape hatch in U.S Car No. 1
courtesy of the Gold Coast Railroad Museum

In 1944, Roosevelt traveled the nation in U.S. Car No. 1, making numerous public speeches for his reelection. This lengthy tour was a demonstration that tempered skepticism among those who doubted the president's health, and therefore, his ability to complete another term of office. During 1943 and 1944, Roosevelt also used the car to travel to and from the two Quebec Conferences. Franklin D. Roosevelt traveled about 50,000 miles in the railcar during his presidency. In January 1945, he used it for the first leg of the trip to the Yalta Conference with Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin. During the last 28 months of his life, FDR

rode aboard U.S. Car No. 1 no fewer than 40 times to his Hyde Park, New York home on the Hudson, which served as a second White House.

April 13, 1945, President Roosevelt began his final journey home, after dying from a stroke at his Little White House in Warm Springs, Georgia. Eighteen cars formed the rail cortege. The Conneaut, the companion car usually in front of U.S. Car No. 1, carried the president's body because the reinforced windows of U.S. Car No. 1 could not be removed to fit in the casket. This was the only trip in which U.S. Car No. 1 was not the last car of the train. Traditionally U.S. Car No. 1 was the last car of the train to facilitate presidential speeches from the rear, enclosed platform. Mrs. Roosevelt and her party rode in the president's car as always.

The following day, the train reached Union Station in the nation's capital. A procession accompanied the president's body carried by horse drawn carriage to a White House funeral. At 10:00 pm, always the usual time for departure to Hyde Park, the rail cortege moved north to the Roosevelt home on the Hudson. The new president, Harry S Truman, and his wife Bess were aboard. April 15, Sunday morning, FDR was laid to rest in the Rose Garden at Hyde Park.

Mrs. Roosevelt, her party, and the Trumans returned to Washington on the train. Later, Harry Truman recalled the funeral train to Hyde Park, "... every place we stopped there'd be a crowd just as if. . . well you'd think the world had come to an end, and I thought so, too."

Excerpt from National Park Service article:
http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/presidents/us_car_number_one.html