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COVER

Militiamen of the Swiss Army during a training period maneuver. The young lady at right appears to recognize her brother or cousin or perhaps neighbor. This photograph captures the very central part the Swiss Army plays in national life and its complete acceptance as a natural part thereof.

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Citizen-Soldier Harry S. Truman

1884-1972

Major Francis B. Kish, *United States Army*

HARRY Truman's initial interest in the military was kindled by the books he read as a boy. From about the time of his ninth birthday, he spent countless hours reading at home and at the Independence Public Library. As he read, the men who caught his attention were more often soldiers rather than statesmen.[1]

Of his early reading, Truman later recalled:

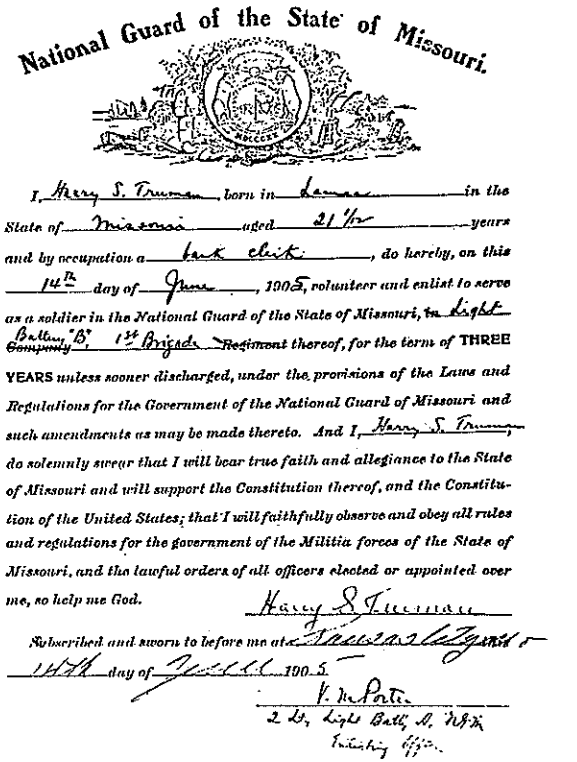
> *When I was a very young boy, nine or ten years old, my mother gave me four large books called Heroes of History. The Volumes were classified as* Soldiers and Sailors, Statesmen and Sages *and two others which I forget now.*
>
> *In reading the lives of great men, I found that most of the really great ones never thought they were great, some of them did. I admired Cincinnatus, Hannibal, Cyrus the Great, Washington, Lee, Stonewall Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart. Of all the military heroes, Hannibal and Lee were to my mind the best because while they won every battle they lost the war due to crazy politicians in both instances, but they were still Great Captains of History. I was not very fond of Alexander, Attila, Genghis Khan or Napoleon because while they were great leaders of men, they fought for personal conquest and glory. The others fought for what they thought was right and for their countries. They were patriots and unselfish. I could never admire a man whose only interest is himself.*[2]

As Truman entered high school, he studied with the thought of someday being either a professional soldier or a musician. Although his school records were lost in a 1938 fire at Independence High School, there is no indication that he was an exceptionally brilliant student. He was punctual, dutiful and did his work well. Young Harry realized, as West Point grew in his mind, that special academic coaching would be necessary. Miss Margaret Phelps, his high school history teacher, became Truman's tutor.[3]

After school hours and following his graduation from high school in 1901, Truman studied with Miss Phelps. He and his good friend, Fielding Houchens, worked together and compared their hopes for West Point and Annapolis. One day, Truman decided to check his eyesight against the West Point standard. He believes he went to the Army Recruiting Station in Kansas City. Informed that he did not stand a chance to pass the eyesight examination, the young man went no further. Contrary to what is often reported, no appointment was ever given to him. It was one of the big disappointments of his life.[4]

Truman satisfied his old military aspirations by becoming a charter member of the newly formed Battery B of the Missouri National Guard on 14 June 1905. Of his decision to join the National Guard, he stated:

> *After reading all the books I could obtain in the Independence and Kansas City public libraries, I came to the conclusion that every citizen should know something about the military, finance or banking and agriculture. All my heroes or great leaders, were somewhat familiar with one or the other or all three.*[5]



National Guard of the State of Missouri.

I, Harry S. Truman, born in Lamar in the State of Missouri aged 21 yrs years and by occupation a bank clerk, do hereby, on this 14th day of June, 1905, volunteer and enlist to serve as a soldier in the National Guard of the State of Missouri, in Light Battery B, 1st Brigade Regiment thereof, for the term of THREE YEARS unless sooner discharged, under the provisions of the Laws and Regulations for the Government of the National Guard of Missouri and such amendments as may be made thereto. And I, Harry S. Truman, do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the State of Missouri and will support the Constitution thereof, and the Constitution of the United States; that I will faithfully observe and obey all rules and regulations for the government of the Militia forces of the State of Missouri, and the lawful orders of all officers elected or appointed over me, so help me God.

Harry S Truman

Subscribed and sworn to before me at Kansas City Mo
14th day of June 1905.

V. McPorte
2 Lt, Light Batty B, 1st Brig
Enlisting Officer.

courtesy truman library

Battery B, located in Kansas City and commanded by Captain George R. Collins, was one of three batteries comprising the artillery of the Missouri National Guard. Batteries A and C were garrisoned in St. Louis and Independence respectively. Truman, who served as battery clerk, only drilled occasionally and spent a majority of his time maintaining the organization's administrative records.[6]

The unit's first training encampment was across the state at Cape Girardeau in September of 1905. From 1906 until 1911, it trained annually at Fort Riley, Kansas.[7] The records of the Missouri State Adjutant General reflect that Truman served two enlistments with Battery B, received a promotion to the rank of corporal on 19 March 1906, and was discharged on 13 June 1911.[8]

Truman's most vivid remembrance of his early years as a guardsman was a visit to his Grandmother Harriet Young. The Young family had not forgotten the infamous Order Number 11 of 1863 which required them to leave their farm for a military post. They also remembered their home being pillaged and robbed by Jim Lane and his Union-sympathizing guerrilla troops.

As Harry strode into the sitting room in his blue Missouri National Guard

uniform, Grandmother Young gave him a stern and withering look. Her lips drew out into a thin white line and she spoke crisply: "Harry! This is the first time a uniform of that color has been in this house since the Civil War. Don't bring it back!"[9]

After his discharge, Truman was not again directly involved with the military until 7 April 1917. On that date, the Congress of the United States declared war on Germany.

In the interim between his discharge from the Missouri National Guard and the declaration of war, Harry Truman had been busy with his family's 600-acre farm at Grandview, zinc mining and oil speculation.

A few days following the declaration of war, Truman ran into some of his old National Guard buddies in Kansas City. Several had served with General "Black Jack" Pershing on the Mexican border in 1916. It was like old-home week for Truman. With World War I now on, Battery B of Kansas City, his old outfit, and Battery C of Independence were to be expanded into a six-battery force called the 2d Missouri Field Artillery.[10]

Truman immediately enlisted and assisted Major John L. Miles and Captain Harry Jobes in scouring the environs of Kansas City and the Missouri countryside for recruits. One of the men recruited was a young Catholic priest, Father L. Curtis Tiernan, who became the regimental chaplain.[11]

Recalling his decision to rejoin the National Guard, Truman stated:

> *The world war made a tremendous impression on me. I'd studied history to some extent and was very much interested in politics both at home and in Europe. When Germany invaded Belgium, my sympathies were all on the side of England and France. I rather felt we owed France something for LaFayette. When we got into the struggle, I helped organize the 2d Missouri Field Artillery. I was elected as a first lieutenant in Battery F although I expected only to be a sergeant or maybe a second lieutenant.*[12]

When elected to first lieutenant, Truman seemed an unlikely soldier. He was 33 years old and possessed the same eyes that kept him out of West Point. According to family records, he was the first soldier in the direct family line since his great grandfathers served briefly during the War of 1812.[13]

On 5 August 1917, the 2d Missouri Field Artillery was sworn into the Regular Army as the 129th Field Artillery of the 35th Division. Toward the end of September, the 129th departed Kansas City for Camp Doniphan, located at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Hardly had the unit unloaded its gear when Truman was notified of his appointment to the position of regimental canteen officer.[14]

Truman remembered his experiences at Camp Doniphan as follows:

> *Colonel Klemm, the regimental commander, made me canteen officer. I asked Eddie Jacobson, a member of Battery F and a man with merchandise experience to run the canteen for me. We collected two dollars per man from each battery, headquarters and supply company.*

Twenty-two hundred dollars in all. Eddie and I set up the store, a barbershop and a tailor shop. We went to Oklahoma City and stocked up our store. Each battery and company was ordered to furnish a clerk for the store. Eddie and I deposited our sales intake everyday. In six months we paid each battery and company all the money paid in for capital and fifteen thousand dollars in dividends. In addition to my duties as canteen officer I did all the duties as a battery officer, took my turn as officer of the day, equitation officer, firing instruction officer, went to Fort Sill School of Fire as an observer and did foot drill and whatever else was to be done. When it came time for Captain Allen, my battery commander, to make an efficiency report on me, he made such a good one that the regimental commander sent it back with the comment that 'no man could be that good.'[15]

Early in March 1918, Truman received orders to leave Camp Doniphan in a group of 10 officers and 100 men for special artillery training in France. The remainder of the regiment would depart later, and he would rejoin the outfit upon completion of the training.[16] On his way east, he convinced a switchman at Rosedale, Kansas, to let him use the telephone. In the book, *Mr. President,* Truman relates the incident:

I asked the switchman if I could call my fiance in Independence and he said, 'call her, the phone's yours, but if she doesn't break the engagement by four o'clock in the morning she really loves you.' I talked to her and she didn't scold me. She's now Mrs. Truman. I also called my mother and sister. They all wept a little but all of them were I think glad to know an overseas lieutenant and be related to him.[17]

Upon arriving in New York, Truman spent the better part of a 24-hour leave buying three extra pairs of glasses. The optometrist refused any payment on the ground that the lieutenant was doing his bit for his country. On 30 March, he was one of 7000 men who boarded the *George Washington* for the trip to France.[18]

After landing at Brest on 13 April, Truman entrained to the 2d Corps Field Artillery School at Montigny-sur-Aube. There he learned the finer points of artillery fire from Dick "By God" Burleson, a hard-bitten character whose uncle was President Wilson's Postmaster General. In five weeks with Burleson, he developed into one of the finest students in the school. His flair for mathematics and faculty for calculating triangulation surprised both instructors and fellow officers. He seemed to compute ranges by rule of thumb, but the rounds always landed on target.[19]

Following the training at Montigny-sur-Aube, Truman rejoined his regiment which now was in France. He read in *The New York Times* of his 23 April promotion to captain, so he added another bar to his shoulder insignia. Recalling the promotion, Truman stated:

When I was ordered up for promotion, old General Lucien G. Berry, the division commander, conducted the examination and his object was

kc star photo courtesy truman library

Harry Truman as a private in the Missouri State Militia

not to find out how much we knew, but how much we did not know. When we could answer, it displeased him but when we couldn't he'd rattle his false teeth, pull his handlebar mustache and stalk down the room yelling at us: 'Ah, you don't know do you? I thought you were just ignorant rookies. Now you aspire to be officers and gentlemen sure enough by becoming captains in the United States Army. It will be a disaster to let you command men, etc., etc.' But the old devil finally passed us and some two or three months later commissions as captains followed us all over France. The examination was in February, the commissions were dated in April and I got mine in October.[20]

His initial assignment as a captain was as adjutant of 129th's 2d Battalion. In this capacity, he accompanied the unit to Angers in Brittany for further training at Camp Coëtquidan, an old Napoleonic artillery base. On 11 July 1918, Truman was given command of Battery D, an organization with the reputation of being wild, rowdy and unmanageable. Most of the men were Irish and came from the tough neighborhood around Rockhurst College, a Jesuit school in Kansas City.[21]

Edward McKim, a member of the unit, remembered that the captain's knees were knocking together on the first morning he addressed the troops.[22] Truman confirmed McKim's recollection:

I won't forget the day I took over. I was never so scared in my life. They had driven out five captains and they were as tough a bunch of men as you will ever find. Each man was a fine soldier, but taken together, the outfit was almost unsufferable. They loved trouble. If they couldn't mix it with the Boche they were ready to mix it with themselves.[23]

On Truman's first day of command, "Dizzy D," as the unit was called, decided to initiate him properly. They staged a fake stampede and, after taps, got into a fight among themselves, breaking cots and sending four men to the regimental infirmary. The following morning, Truman called his noncommissioned officers together and lectured them as follows:

Men, I know you've been making trouble for previous commanders. From now on, you're going to be responsible for maintaining discipline in your squads and sections. And, if there are any of you who can't, speak up right now and I'll bust your back right now.[24]

Captain Truman immediately began the task of molding the battery into a topnotch combat unit. For a month, he kept the guardhouse well-populated and exhausted all the profanity he knew. Truman slept in the mud with his battery, grunted and strained in helping to move guns mired in the mud, and bore the adversities normally associated with training in preparation for combat.

Within a month, the battery was setting regimental records for firing accuracy and speed in disassembling, moving and setting up the guns for firing. On the eve of its entry into active combat, Battery D was an efficient military organization, and Truman had won its respect and admiration.[25]

Truman's own feelings for the battery were expressed in this excerpt of a letter he wrote to his cousins, the Noland family, on 5 August 1918:

I was battalion adjutant for a month and then they gave me Battery D. I'm the hard boiled captain of the Irish Battery. It's an ambition I've always had to be a battery commander. Now I'm it and I find it's mainly trouble and hard work. It's some satisfaction though when you've worked like Sam Hill half the night and felt as if you'd have the whole organization and yourself too in the jug before sunset the next day to see all the kinks unwind themselves and have the battery pull out of the park on time, get into position and shoot the best problem on the range. That's what happened to me the other day. It was mainly good luck and the excellent work of my competent lieutenants. . . . If I can make a successful battery commander, I'll think I've really done some good in this war. Talk about your infantrymen, why he can shoot only one little bullet at a time at the Hun. I can give one command to my *battery and send 862 on the way at once and as many every three seconds until I say stop.*[26]

On 18 August, Truman's unit moved toward the front. A few days later, it was in position high in the Vosges Mountains on Mount Herrenberg in Alsace,

Officers of the 129th Field Artillery, 35th Division, at Chateau le Chenay, France. Captain Truman is identified by arrow.

reputedly a quiet sector. On the evening of 6 September, Battery D received orders to fire a gas shell barrage at the enemy. Chaos suddenly erupted and what followed became known as "The Battle of Who Run."[27]

The official description of the battle is simply stated. The battery fired approximately 500 gas rounds, and the German artillery immediately retaliated. After some confusion, order was restored and three enlisted men were decorated for valor.[28]

Harry Truman describes the story more vividly:

Our regular battery positions were in the Herrenberg forests in the Vosges Mountains. Somebody took a notion to fire three thousand rounds of gas at the Germans. So we had to move to another position and put the batteries into place to fire five hundred rounds at seven o'clock. The horses were sent back. As soon as the last round was fired, the troops were to come with the horses. They were twenty or twenty-five minutes late. I got on a horse to see what was going on. He fell in a shellhole and rolled over on me. The German batteries began to fire on us. The sergeant gave by the wrong flank and two of our guns got stuck in the mud. While we were working to release them, the Germans fired very close to us and this sergeant hollered 'Run, boys, they got a bracket on us.' I got up and called them everything I knew.[29]

The curses that Truman poured out contained some of the vilest four-letter words heard on the Western Front. Said Father Curtis, who was on the scene, "It took the skin off the ears of those boys."[30] But the effect was amazing. The troops returned and helped Truman retrieve the guns.

The Battle of Who Run did much to establish Truman as boss of the

battery. Concerning disciplinary action for the offending sergeant, he commented:

> *Colonel Klemm [the regimental commander] and his executive officer wanted me to court-martial the sergeant. I didn't but I busted him and afterwards I had to transfer him to another battery. Later in the war, he stood firm under the fiercest fire. I didn't care for court-martials. I'd get myself back of a table and look as mean as I could. Then I'd tell them, 'you can have a court-martial or, if you prefer, you can take what I give you.' That worked.*[31]

From 7 September until 16 September, Battery D was located in the Saint-Mihiel sector as part of the American First Army Reserve. On the night of the 16th, it moved via train to the Meuse-Argonne where more than 1,000,000 Americans of 27 divisions were attempting to smash the German's last-ditch defenses at the Hindenburg line.[32]

On 26 September, the day the war's final drive began, Truman ordered his men to eat an early breakfast. Father Tiernan heard confessions from the Catholics, and then the battery commander spoke to his men. Edward V. Conden, an enlisted man in the unit, recalled Truman's words:

> *I want to tell you this, too, fellows. Right now I'm where I want to be–in command of this battery. I'd rather be here than President of the United States. Now, let's go in.*[33]

Battery D made amends for The Battle of Who Run with its fighting in this sector. Additionally, Truman added to his reputation with his courting of lady-luck.

One morning, after sleeping near the edge of a forest close to his battery's position, he woke especially early. A short while after getting dressed and walking away, a German barrage landed directly on his sleeping spot. On another occasion, a French battery fired shells that just cleared the top of his head.

Still another night, he had placed his battery in position behind the infantry. In directing the firing of the barrage, he rode his horse past low-hanging branches which swept his glasses from his face. Almost panicky at being unable to see at such a critical time, he turned about in desperation. The glasses were sitting on the horse's back, just behind the saddle![34]

It was in this same offensive that Truman was threatened with a court-martial. On 28 September, as his battery moved into a new position, he stood on a knoll and scanned the countryside for targets. He was under strict orders to fire at batteries facing the 35th Division. Looking through field glasses, Truman spotted German artillery moving in front of the 35th Division and into the sector of the flank division, the 28th. He ordered his battery to unhitch, spade timbers and load. In less than two minutes, Battery D laid 41 rounds in the middle of the Huns, knocking out two batteries.[35]

Ten minutes later, his field telephone rang. Colonel Klemm reprimanded Truman for firing in the sector of the adjoining division and threatened to

kc star photo courtesy truman library

Captain Truman, commanding Battery D, 129th Field Artillery in World War I

court-martial him. "Go ahead," Truman shouted. "There were German units moving into position in plain sight of us. I'll never pass up a chance like that."[36] Captain Truman waited for days for the court-martial that never came.

During this period of fighting, the weather was damp and rainy, the air smelled of gunsmoke and the men were unshaven, dirty and tired. Lieutenant Harry Vaughn, Commanding Officer of Battery D, 130th Field Artillery, occasionally ran into Truman at the front and remembers the captain's personal appearance:

> *My particular recollection of Harry Truman is that after a couple weeks in the trenches without any chance to change clothes, the rest of us would look like bums with mud sticking out all over us, but he always looked immaculate. And I was never able to understand why. He was always clean, neat and dapper like he just stepped out.*[37]

On 3 October, the battery was pulled out of the Meuse-Argonne and sent to the Sommedieue-Verdun sector. It moved into position and, on 16 October, fought through this offensive until 7 November. Then, it took part in the second Meuse-Argonne offensive. On the morning of 11 November at about

army news features

General of the Army Douglas MacArthur greets President Truman upon his arrival at Wake Island

1030, Battery D fired its final salvo near the little town of Hermeville. Throughout the offensives in France, the unit had fired some 14,000 rounds under Captain Truman's orders.[38]

Considering its exposure to combat, it was a lucky war for Battery D. Whereas the other batteries of the regiment suffered 129 casualties, Truman's unit only had one killed and one wounded. Vere C. Leigh, a sergeant in Battery D, gave this reason for the low casualties:

> *There were pretty heavy casualties throughout the regiment and the division, but we didn't have many. We were just—well, part of it was luck and part of it good leadership. Some of the other batteries didn't have that kind of leadership. There's such a thing as sticking your battery in a spot where they shouldn't be you know and Truman didn't make those mistakes. We all found that out.*[39]

Aside from the long wait, postwar military life in France was first-rate. Truman's unit was garrisoned at Courcemont, a village near LeMans, southwest of Paris. In early December 1919, Truman took leave in France, visiting Paris, Nice and Monte Carlo. While on leave, he penned another letter to the Noland family. An excerpt follows:

> *Something has to be done to get American money after we leave. I don't blame the French for bleeding us a little, they certainly bled on the field of battle for the rest of the world so why should we squawk over a few paltry dollars. When you consider that France had as many men killed at Verdun and [Chemin des Dames] as we ever had on the front you see what she's suffered. France lost in battle 1,600,000 killed—we lost 48,000 and then we think we've been to war!*[40]

The battery did give Truman one embarrassing moment. On 17 February 1919, at Courcemont, the Prince of Wales and General Pershing were

inspecting the 35th Division. It was raining hard and the men stood in the slush from 1000 to 1400, while the Prince inspected. Then, he addressed the officers, while Battery D stood nearby. Upon completion of the speech, Truman returned to his unit to march them back to their billets. "Hey, Captain Truman!," one of the troops yelled. "What did the little S.O.B. say about freeing Ireland?"[41] If either the Prince or General Pershing heard the remark, neither disclosed it.

Truman and Battery D departed France on 9 April 1919 on the *S.S. Zeppelin* and arrived in New York on 20 April. While on-board, the men took up a collection from crap games and purchased a 4-foot-high engraved loving cup for their commander. Edward McKim later said: "We wanted to get him a trophy; I don't think another Captain in the A.E.F. had one of those."[42] The unit entrained from New York to Camp Funston at Fort Riley, Kansas, where Truman was discharged on 6 May 1919.[43]

Harry Truman's duty as a combat soldier was over. He received no medals since Colonel Klemm felt that an officer should not be decorated for doing his job. However, as the incidents related in this chapter clearly indicate, Captain Truman was a model battery commander. He was technically and tactically proficient, concerned about the welfare of his men and displayed those qualities and traits associated with successful combat command.

Finally, a discussion of Mr. Truman in World War I is not complete without citing his acquaintances and their role in his later life. Major John Miles and Captain Harry Jobes remained as two of Truman's closest friends and political confidants. Father Tiernan, as European Theater Chief of Chaplains, was at his side at the Potsdam Conference in 1945. James Pendergast, a second lieutenant in the regiment, introduced him to his Uncle Tom, the czar of Kansas City politics, in 1921.

First Lieutenant Edgar G. Hinde, the Postmaster of Independence, assisted immeasurably in the 1934 senatorial election. Captain Roger T. Sermon, the regimental adjutant, became Mayor of Independence, a candidate for Governor and Truman's "right arm" in some of his toughest political fights. John Snyder and Harry Vaughn, both battery commanders in sister regiments of the 35th Division, served with him in the Officer Reserve Corps and later occupied key positions in his administration.[44]

In June 1919, Truman married Bess Wallace and placed his military uniform in a closet of their Independence home. But it was not destined to gather much dust.

During the fall of 1919, Harry Truman enrolled in the Officer Reserve Corps and remained on its active rolls until the outbreak of World War II. He was a member of the 102d Reserve Division which was comprised of men from Missouri and Arkansas and nicknamed the "Ozark Division."[45]

Truman was still a captain upon joining the 102d, but advanced rapidly. His promotions were as follows: to major on 10 January 1920, to lieutenant colonel on 28 May 1925, and to colonel on 17 June 1932.[46]

As a member of the Officer Reserve Corps, Truman commanded the 379th and 381st Artillery Regiments. His command of the 381st was noted in the

25 July 1932 issue of the *Independence Examiner*. The article stated that, upon winding up summer training, the officers of the regiment presented Truman with an engraved wristwatch. From 1935 to 1940, he was at the helm of the 379th. During this same period, the sister regiments, the 380th and 381st, were commanded by Harry Vaughn and John Snyder respectively. During his Presidency, Vaughn served as Truman's Military Aide and Snyder as the Secretary of the Treasury.[47]

Prior to his election to the US Senate in 1934, Truman regularly attended his unit's Reserve meetings. These were held in Kansas City at the Old National Guard Armory on Main Street and the Medical Center at 34th and Broadway. Initially, the unit met twice per month, but, during the early 1930s, the meetings were weekly occurrences.

The agenda for these sessions included a lecture, instruction in a particular phase of artillery firing, and a practical exercise. Truman usually supervised and critiqued the practical exercises. Colonel Edward Thelen, a retired Army officer who served as a lieutenant in the Officer Reserve Corps, recalls Truman as a highly competent artilleryman for whom he had great respect.[48]

The Ozark Division had several summer training sites during the 1920s and 1930s. These included Camp Ripley, Minnesota; Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. However, the camp most often attended was Fort Riley, Kansas. This site was preferred because of its artillery range. According to Colonel Thelen, Truman was present at every encampment and remembers his attendance as a Senator:

He would come and stay two weeks as a rule. He put on a uniform and his eagles and you could not call him 'Senator.' You called him 'Colonel Truman' at that time. He slept in a tent at the head row of camp. He did not sleep in a barracks or cottage or anything like that. Because of the fact that Colonel Truman was also a Senator, the people stationed on-post were more attentive. Any military organization that did not would certainly be remiss. The commanding general, I'm sure, had Colonel Truman over for dinner and one thing and another and various people on the post would come out and visit us in our camp. One of these people was Terry Allen and I happened to hear Colonel Truman say on several occasions that Terry Allen was a good artillery officer. Well, of course, during the war, Terry became a division commander and later, I'm sure Mr. Truman influenced his career to some extent. He was very much impressed with Terry Allen.[49]

Truman actively participated in the actual training at the summer camps and, according to Colonel Thelen, was well liked and respected:

I do not think at our summer camps I ever heard a word of criticism of Colonel Truman. There may have been people there who had political differences but they all looked up to him and most people respected him greatly.[50]

Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Harry Truman visited

General George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, and asked for permission to join the Regular Army. But Marshall scoffingly told him:

Senator, you've got a big job to do right up there at the Capitol with your Investigating Committee. Besides, this is a young man's war. We don't need old stiffs like you.[51]

Following his rebuff by General Marshall, Senator Truman was placed in the General Assignment Group by reason of his status as a member of Congress and reserved for duty under direction of the Secretary of War.[52] It had been 37 years since his enlistment in the Missouri National Guard. During all but six of those years, he had been a member of the US military. Little did Grandmother Harriet Young realize that, on the day she reprimanded her grandson for wearing a blue National Guard uniform, someday he would be the Commander in Chief of all the US military forces.

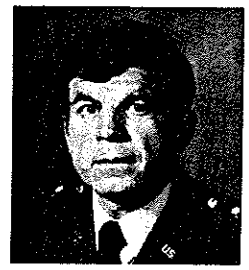
On examining Harry Truman's military career, it becomes apparent that it had a significant effect upon his political career. The most obvious influence stemmed from the fact that many of Truman's wartime associates were intimately involved in his ascent up the political ladder.

Moreover, from Truman's World War I service came knowledge and experience which later proved valuable in political life. This included a realization of the importance of teamwork, the value of military organizational techniques, the necessity for discipline, the personal observation of a nation ravaged by war, the criticality of competent and capable leaders for the military, and the reinforcement and development of leadership.

The unruly Irishmen of Battery D forced him to be a hard but fair taskmaster. He commanded the battery in the same way he later operated politically—always fair, but firm when necessary. His reduction of the sergeant following The Battle of Who Run may well have served as a prelude to the dismissal of General MacArthur in 1951.

All in all, Harry S. Truman's military career contributed greatly to his rise to the Presidency. His wartime associates, his experiences as a combat commander, and his duty with the Officer Reserve Corps each contributed to his success in the political arena. Truman himself once said, "My whole political career is based upon my war service and war associates."[53]

Major Francis B. Kish is working toward a Master's degree in public administration at the University of Missouri, Kansas City Campus. He received a B.S. in Education from Indiana University and is a 1972 graduate of the USACGSC. He has served as a Reserve Officers' Training Corps instructor at Cornell University, with the 196th Infantry Brigade in Vietnam, and with the Sixth Army Inspector General Staff.



FOREWORD

BY GEORGE M. ELSEY

Calvin Coolidge, as befitted a man raised on a Vermont farm, was such an early riser that he often reached the White House office before his staff arrived. Curious, he would walk downstairs to the mailroom, look through the first morning delivery, and open and read the letters addressed to him.

Harry Truman also was raised on a farm. He, too, rose early, but preferred a brisk morning walk through the streets of Washington to poking around the mailroom. He could not have read all his letters even if he wanted to, and by his time the volume was too great for any one person to read. The American people had begun deluging the White House with mail during the great depression of Herbert Hoover's era. Hoover received letters by the thousands —some angry, some sad, many desperate pleas for help. The torrents of mail increased during Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, and there was no let-up during the grim days of World War II nor in the Cold War that followed.

Although he could not see all his mail, Harry Truman insisted on reading a broad sample because he wanted to know what the man and the woman on the street were thinking. Mail, he thought, gave a better sense of the public mood than did the highly touted polls, which he had no more respect for than he had for political pundits of the press and the air. On the eve of the 1948 election, when a national news magazine published the unaminous opinion of fifty political analysts that Governor Dewey would trounce him, Truman snorted to his aide, "I know every one of those fellows, and not one of them has enough sense to pound sand into a rathole."

Although he was interested in public opinion as reflected in the mail, Harry Truman never let it influence his decisions. He felt it his duty to shape opinion, not to follow it. Indeed, in many areas there simply was no public opinion until the president spoke. This was especially true in foreign affairs. The United States in the early days of the Cold War was in uncharted waters. Truman had to lead the country, through speeches and messages to Congress,

Dear Mr. Short: *February 20, 1951*

I wonder if you could let me know, at your convenience, whether egg rolling on the White House lawn on Easter Monday will be reinstated this year. One of the editors has asked me to check with you.

Very truly yours,
Louis Forster, Jr.
Assistant to the Editor
The New Yorker

Dear Mr. Forster: *February 22, 1951*

Egg rolling on the White House lawn will not be revived this year because the grounds still are torn up as a result of the reconstruction work.

Sincerely yours,
JOSEPH SHORT
Secretary to the President

CHAPTER SIX

THE MACARTHUR FIRING

From my newest book: "Dear Harry"

"How stupid can you get?"
—Arizona businessman Barry Goldwater

"Mr. Prima Donna, Brass Hat, Five Star MacArthur. He's worse than the Cabots and the Lodges*—they at least talked with one another before they told God what to do. Mac tells God right off. It is a very great pity we have to have stuffed Shirts like that in key positions. I don't see why in Hell Roosevelt didn't order Wainwright home and let MacArthur be a martyr. . . . We'd have had a real General and a fighting man if we had Wainwright and not a play actor and bunco man such as we have now. Don't see how a country can produce men as Robert E. Lee, John J. Pershing, Eisenhower and Bradley and at the same time produce Custers, Pattons, and MacArthurs." Truman wrote these words in his diary on June 17, 1945, barely two months into his presidency and over five long years before the fateful clash between himself and his willful subordinate.

with

During his long service in the National Guard, Truman had closely followed the career of Douglas MacArthur, and as a full colonel and commander of various artillery regiments, he was privy to virtually all nuances of the assignments-promotions soap opera taking place in the diminutive, between-wars Army of the 1930s. Truman knew that the revered John J. Pershing, who led the American Expeditionary Force in France during World War I, had personally requested that MacArthur approve George Marshall's promotion to

*Two elite and long-established Boston families known for their power, influence, and money. Their union produced Henry Cabot Lodge, who, as a Republican senator from Massachusetts, vigorously opposed President Woodrow Wilson's idealistic post–World War I policies. Because of his determined opposition, the Senate failed to ratify either the Treaty of Versailles or League of Nations Covenant.

brigadier general in command of troops, but MacArthur instead banished the future chief of staff and secretary of state to an instructor's job at the Illinois National Guard. It is also highly likely that the straight-arrow Truman was aware that MacArthur had kept a mistress at a Washington apartment in the early 1930s and found hard to swallow MacArthur's claim that actual veterans probably didn't amount to "one man in ten" among the "insurrectionist"[1] Bonus Marchers he evicted from the capital (the Veterans Administration recorded that 94 percent had indeed been servicemen, with fully 20 percent carrying war disabilities). New Deal Democrats like Truman found MacArthur a "bellicose swashbuckler," and it mattered little that he had gone to the mat with Congress and President Roosevelt to fight cuts in the Army's budget; as Army chief of staff from 1930 to 1934, that was his job.

On top of all this was the small matter of what had happened in the Philippines. When it became apparent that the islands would fall to the invading Japanese, Roosevelt had ordered MacArthur to escape and thus deny Japan the propaganda victory of capturing America's most senior military officer. Though this made sense both politically and militarily, it was nonetheless galling for Truman to see Jonathan Wainwright, his old friend from training exercises at Fort Riley, put into the position of surrendering the Philippines to the Japanese.

After the outbreak of hostilities, Wainwright had advocated the immediate implementation of War Plan Orange, which called for the withdrawal of all U.S. and Philippine forces into the Bataan Peninsula, where, with a formidable concentration of U.S. coastal defense forts to their rear, they could both prevent the Japanese from using Manila Bay and hold out for as much as a year while waiting for the U.S. Navy to fight its way across the Pacific to their relief. MacArthur, however, shunned the idea of fighting a prolonged defensive campaign and ordered his army dispersed to cover possible invasion sites, where he hoped to force an early, decisive battle. By the time he realized that his plan would not work, it was too late to move the needed supplies, especially food, into Bataan. If not for a series of brilliantly executed rear-guard actions by Wainwright, the troops would not have made it into Bataan, where Wainwright further confounded Japan's efforts. His "soldier's reward" was to be left holding the bag for a commander who visited his troops only once during his remaining months in the Philippines, an action—or inaction—that earned MacArthur the derisive nickname of "Dugout Doug" to soldiers and Truman alike.

MacArthur was an extremely popular figure in the United States, however, where he was viewed by many as a genuine American hero. In the Pacific, he maintained his soldiers' respect but was never a popular commander with the men in the sense that Omar Bradley and Eisenhower were. A propensity to avoid visiting units—except on certain, well-publicized occasions—and unfounded rumors that the general lived in sumptuous, hilltop accommodations left a resentment among many soldiers that occasionally boiled over into angry letters that would reach the White House, such as the one forwarded by the mayor of Chicago. Written by Sgt. Leon Zelvis of the 108th Combat Engineer Battalion in the Philippines (a unit with a heavy complement of Illinois residents), it was part of a larger letter requesting that soldiers be sent home from the Pacific and was signed by seventy-one soldiers.

Your Honor; Mayor Edward J. Kelley of Chicago: 6 September 1945

Listen to these words of the fighting Illinois residents of Company "C" the 108th Engineer Combat Bn; for they are not meant to go down in history, but as we so desire, to be considered with understanding, clarity of thought, and acted upon. NOW.

The war is certainly over. We, the great Americans and her Allies have won. We were forced into war to save Democracy, and to prevent the enslavement of the many by the few. Having won we placed our trust of a world of righteousnous, a peacefull and Democratic life, with a World Charter and our trust in God.

Our history in the Pacific should be well known, but we shall here repeat, hoping that the Army's methods of indoctrinatization of thought and action in one track by repetition might apply in your case.

We have had a leader here in the Pacific, General of the Army Douglas MacArthur. Having fought under him we have listened to him. HE has been triumphant in the Pacific War. Yes, we have listened and the more he spoke, the more our admiration for him decreased. For, all he referred to is "I," "I," "I," It was "I shall return," on candy and soap wrappers, and over the air waves to the Philippinos; "I have returned," behind thousands of doughboys ahead of him, and, when referring to getting the President of the Philippines back to his home island, he said, "I shall put you there on the point of my bayonet if necessary." We ask you, "what bayonet"? About all that General MacArthur can do by himself is to park his body in Manila, after the American fighting man won back his home.

Having heard all this, we have passed judgement in our hearts that the General's immediate thoughts are only for himself. . . . The Soldier despairs, diseases, or dies; the civilians prosper; the maggots grow fatter; the jungles grow greener; and General MacArthur is home [Manila]. . . . After four hitches in Hell, we feel eligible for Heaven. For us it is the good old U.S.A. that we once knew.

With all due respect, we remain,
Sergeant Leon Zelvis
Staff Sergeant Stanley Cijanowski
Corporal Louis Jones
Corporal Paul Litanicz
[and others]

The soldiers recognized the fact that for MacArthur (who had not been farther east than Brisbane, Australia, since 1936 and would not set foot in the United States for nearly six more years), "home" was not necessarily his native Arkansas. Truman invited MacArthur back because he felt that the Far East commander "was entitled to the same honors that had been given to General Eisenhower." MacArthur, however, twice refused presidential requests in the fall of 1945 to visit the United States and "receive the plaudits of a grateful nation." He gave "the delicate and difficult situation" in the Far East and his desire to avoid "appearances before Congressional committees on any extraneous issues such as postwar organization . . . involving [him] in controversial issues" as his reasons for refusing to return.[2] As for Wainwright, he became one of MacArthur's staunchest supporters and delivered the speech at the 1948 Republican Convention nominating him as the party's candidate for president. Truman discussed MacArthur's slim chance at receiving the nomination with his aides the following day and, according to Eben Ayers, "commented that it was well that Wainwright did not know what MacArthur had said about him," but stopped short of repeating MacArthur's comments or saying how he had learned of them.

Politics is politics, however, and when Truman was asked by Richard W. O'Neill to sign a commemorative scroll to be given to the general on his sixty-ninth birthday in January 1949, it was clear that no matter how much the president would have liked to have had Hassett handle the matter with one of his eloquent "Valentines," O'Neill was too well connected to be dismissed so easily. O'Neill, who had served with MacArthur in World War I, was the chairman and Wainwright the honorary chairman of the committee

circulating the document, a committee that managed to garner an extremely large number of high-ranking military officers and prominent Americans such as former Postmaster General James A. Farley through the time-honored method of snowballing its membership: "Generals ——— and ——— are already on the committee, won't you lend your name as well."

Dear Mr. President:

The enclosed is a photostat of a commemorative scroll to be presented to General of the Army Douglas MacArthur at a patriotic, non-political and non-profit dinner on his 69th birthday, January 26, 1949.

Though it was originally planned by a group of men and women, including myself, who admire and respect the General as a soldier and statesman, to merely send this scroll to him with a covering letter, instead we have just recently decided to stage this anniversary dinner. The number one invitation is extended to you, Mr. President, not only because of your exalted position as President of the United States and Commander-In-Chief of the Armed Forces, but also because of your former status as a combat soldier in World War I.

This committee fully appreciates the stupendous executive task confronting you at this time, and the terrific time schedule to which you must adhere. However, we know too the high esteem in which you hold General MacArthur. Therefore, our committee—your time permitting—would consider it a signal honor to have you personally sign the scroll. If this meets with your approval, a committee of three will be appointed by the Chairman to call upon you at your convenience.

Our committee would like to extend their congratulations on your forthcoming inauguration. We sincerely hope your administration will enjoy peace, prosperity and success in dealing with and solving the domestic and international problems confronting our country. May God bless, inspire and guide you.

Very respectfully,
Richard W. O'Neill, Chairman

Truman placed his name at the top of the list in a place reserved for him ahead of the other signatures, but a year later, the general's admirers were back with yet another request, which Charlie Ross outlined in the memo below:

Memorandum for Brigadier General Louis H. Renfrow,
Office of the Secretary of Defense
Dear Lou:

Sometime ago the President signed an ornate and floridly worded commemorative scroll dedicated to General Douglas MacArthur. Now the promoters of this enterprise are back, asking for a letter from the President, to be placed in a special album of letters by the signers of the scroll. The request is contained in the attached wordy letter of Richard W. O'Neill.

I should like your opinion as to whether or not this request should be kissed off. It seems to me that the President went pretty far when he signed the scroll.

If you do think that the [President] should participate again in honoring General MacArthur, I should be glad if you would furnish me with a brief proposed statement for his signature. Thanks and regards.

CHARLES G. ROSS

Renfrow replied immediately and included a possible response from the president.

My dear Charlie:

My first reaction was to recommend "no letter" then I reviewed the whole project and in view of the fact that the President signed the Scroll, it seemed necessary to include a letter from the President to slam that door shut once and for all.

I trust the draft is acceptable as it seems short enough and refers in no way to the wording of the Scroll, but simply to the General's leadership and those who served with him.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your fine family and may your years ahead be healthful and happy.

Sincerely,
Louis H. Renfrow

DRAFT
Dear Mr. O'Neill:

In signing the Commemorative Scroll to General Douglas MacArthur I, like all other Americans, am deeply appreciative of the military achievement attained by him and those he led in the Pacific during World War II.

Sincerely,
HST

Truman thought that even this brief statement was too much, and scratched out most of it on the draft version. The only words he didn't change were "Commemorative Scroll to General Douglas MacArthur."

Dear Mr. O'Neill:

I have been happy to sign the Commemorative Scroll to General Douglas MacArthur and thereby express my admiration of his distinguished services to the Nation.

Very sincerely yours,
HARRY S. TRUMAN

The president's letter and others were presented to the general in a set of lavish albums on his seventieth birthday. Both men were at the peak of their careers: Truman had won an upset victory in the previous election, and MacArthur had successfully implemented a comprehensive policy of social, economic, and political reforms in Japan that was the envy of even some New Deal Democrats. Within six months, however, the outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula on June 25, 1950, would lead to a series of events that would ultimately force each of them from public service.

The United States immediately entered the war with the support of the United Nations, and MacArthur was named the U.N. commander, yet within days, the South Korean capital of Seoul was captured. Undermanned and poorly equipped U.S. and South Korean forces retreated in the face of North Korea's assault as an effective defensive perimeter was hurriedly formed around the vital port city of Pusan, across from Japan. Intense communist attacks against the Pusan Perimeter continued almost without letup into the middle of September, but an aggressive defense led by U.S. Eighth Army commander Walton H. Walker kept the communists off balance and away from the city. As the seige dragged on, the North Koreans were clearly reaching the end of their rope. They had expended most of their Soviet-built tanks during the initial invasion, and their troops were beginning to starve as U.S., British, and Australian aircraft savaged their supply lines.

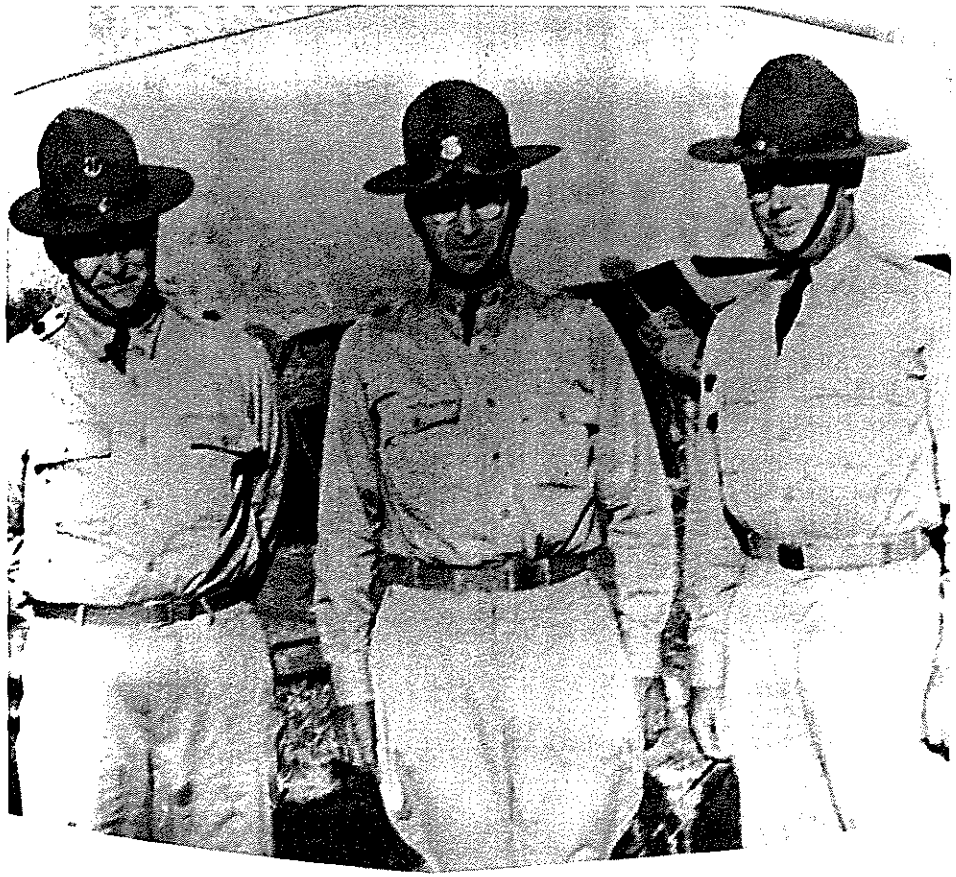
With communist troops concentrated far from their supply bases in North Korea, the road and rail net emanating from Seoul became increasingly

Both the JCS and the British government counseled President Truman to avoid being sucked deeper into a widening conflict in the Far East. In 1950, no one knew if Korea represented the opening shots in a third world war and perhaps the aim of the Chinese communists to tie down U.S. forces in Asia while the Soviets struck in Europe.

Truman decided to abandon the objective of unifying the Korean peninsula, and the U.N. consented to a resumption of its original aim, preserving the Republic of Korea. In mid-January, JCS members Collins and Hoyt S. Vandenberg flew to Tokyo and handed MacArthur a personal letter from the president in which he outlined "our basic national and international purposes" in Korea.[7] General Collins also wanted to take a firsthand look at the situation on the ground and see how the Eighth Army was faring, now that it was under the command of his former deputy.

Ridgway assumed command of U.N. ground forces on December 26, 1950. Three days earlier, Ridgway's predecessor, General Walker, had been killed when his jeep collided with a South Korean truck on an icy road. The new commander arrived to find both his army and his boss in Tokyo severely shaken by the events of the previous month, and a fatigued MacArthur told him, "The Eighth Army is yours, Matt. Do what you think best."[8] Ridgway immediately moved to instill a winning spirit in his demoralized troops. As soon as the momentum of the communists' offensive slowed in mid-January, he ordered that all units probe north.

General Collins had arrived from the United States in time to witness Ridgway's first effort, a well-coordinated reconnaissance in force codenamed Wolfhound, and left with the conviction that the Eighth Army could take care of itself. This was quite a revelation, and after his reports to Truman and the JCS, they "were no longer pessimistic about being driven out of Korea." Moreover, the Army chief of staff made it clear that "General Ridgway was responsible for the dramatic change" in the Eighth Army's fortunes.[9] Collins's visit marked the end of MacArthur's influence on U.S. policy making. The gallant old general was pressing hard to obtain four more Army divisions from the United States, stating unequivocally that he needed that many soldiers just to stabilize the front. Ridgway, however, clearly had the situation well in hand without the additional troops and was confident that the 365,000 men under his command could not only hold their own, but push the half million or so Chinese and North Korean troops back across the parallel. The JCS began to deal directly with Ridgway, bypassing his commander in Tokyo. Characteristically, MacArthur did not take the situation lying down.



Harry Truman's military career did not end with his captaincy in World War I. Here Truman poses with his future military aide, Harry H. Vaughan (left) and future treasury secretary, John W. Snyder, at a summer training exercise in the 1930s. All would retain the rank of colonel in the Reserve Officer Corps and command artillery regiments in the period before World War II.

OTHER BOOKS BY D. M. GIANGRECO

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(with Robert E. Griffin)

War in Korea, 1950–1953

Delta: America's Elite Counterterrorist Force
(with Terry Griswold)

Dear Harry . . .

Truman's Mailroom, 1945–1953

The Truman Administration Through Correspondence with "Everyday Americans"

D. M. GIANGRECO
and
KATHRYN MOORE

STACKPOLE BOOKS

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