

Nixon 1 of 2 Truman Couldn't Stand

By William Chapman
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Harry S. Truman thought most generals were pretty dumb. He ranked Dwight D. Eisenhower as a weak battlefield general and a cowardly politician of the McCarthy era. And Douglas MacArthur? At times, Truman thought MacArthur was not "right in his head."

Everyone knows that for a long time Mr. Truman didn't like Richard M. Nixon. But it now comes out that Mr. Nixon was one of the only two people in the whole country Mr. Truman absolutely could not stand — the other being an obscure former governor of Missouri.

The late Mr. Truman described these and other of the great hates of his life in a series of interviews 12 years ago when he was 77 years old. The interviews, many of which were taped, appear in a new book, "Plain Speaking," written by Merle Miller.

Mr. Truman was asked why he thought that Mr. Nixon would be a pushover in any presidential election.

"Because Nixon is a shifty-eyed, goddamn liar, and people know it," Mr. Truman replied. "I can't figure out how he came so close to getting elected President in 1960. They say young Kennedy deserves a lot of credit for licking him, but I just can't see it. I can't see how the son of a bitch even carried one state."

He called Mr. Nixon and former Missouri Gov. Lloyd C. Stark (who had accepted Mr. Truman's support and then turned against him politically) the "only two men in the whole history of the country that I can't stand."

In the interview, he repeated his account of how Mr. Nixon allegedly



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Former President Truman in 1961 on the eve of his 77th birthday.

called him and Gen. George C. Marshall "traitors."

Mr. Truman's wrath, however, was bipartisan. When asked what was his biggest mistake as President, he replied:

"Tom Clark was my biggest mistake. No question about it . . . That damn fool from Texas that I first made Attorney General and then put on the Supreme Court. I don't know what got into me. He was no damn good as At-

torney General, and on the Supreme Court . . . it doesn't seem possible but he's been even worse. He hasn't made one right decision that I can think of."

Another long interview concerned Mr. Truman's difficulties with Gen. Douglas MacArthur, whom he dismissed from command for insubordination.

"I fired him because he wouldn't respect the authority of the President," said Mr. Truman. "I didn't fire him because he was a dumb son of a bitch, although he was, but that's not against the law for generals. If it was, half to three-quarters of them would be in jail. That's why when a good one comes along like general Marshall . . . why, you've got to hang onto them, and I did

Mr. Truman was asked about a speech in which MacArthur had proposed a vast American military force to dominate the Pacific. Commenting on that plan, Mr. Truman said, "I've given it a lot of thought, and I have finally concluded . . . decided that there were times when he . . . well I'm afraid when he wasn't right in his head.

"And there was never anybody around him to keep him in line. He didn't have anybody on his staff that wasn't an . . . kisser. He just would not let anybody near him who wouldn't kiss his . . . So . . . there were times when he was . . . I think out of his head and didn't know what he was doing . . .

In another reminiscence of their bitter relationship, Mr. Truman recalled a time when he and MacArthur flew to a meeting on Wake Island. They arrived simultaneously in separate planes

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and for some time each refused to land first, preferring that the other be on the ground to meet him. After it was settled, with MacArthur landing first, the general still refused at first to join the party greeting Mr. Truman's plane.

"After we landed, there was a welcoming party there on the ground, but I looked out the window, and MacArthur wasn't there," Mr. Truman recalled.

"Even after we stopped the engines and they opened up the door of the plane, the bastard still didn't show up.

"So I just sat there. I just waited. I'd have waited until hell froze over if I'd had to. I wasn't going to have one of my generals embarrass the President of the United States.

"Finally, the son of a bitch walked out of one of the buildings near the runway there. He was wearing those damn sunglasses of his and a shirt that was unbuttoned and a cap that had had a lot of hard wear. I never did under-

stand . . . an old man like that and a five-star general to boot, why he went around dressed up like a 19-year-old second lieutenant."

At their eventual meeting, Mr. Truman recalled, "I took one look at him and I said, 'Now you look here. I've come halfway across the world to meet you, but don't worry about that. I just want you to know I don't give a good goddamn what you do or think about Harry Truman, but don't you ever again keep your Commander in Chief waiting. Is that clear?' His face got as red as a beet, but he said . . . he indicated that he understood what I was talking about, and we went on from there."

Mr. Truman said he had regarded General Dwight D. Eisenhower as a "weak" field commander and as a political "coward" in the period when Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wis.) was accusing people in government of being communist sympathizers.

"I cussed out old McCarthy every chance I got," Mr. Truman told his in-

terviewer. "He was nothing but a damn coward and he was afraid of me. The only thing he ever did that I approved of was when he knocked down Drew Pearson.

"And when Eisenhower let McCarthy get away with calling General Marshall a traitor. Why that was one of the most shocking things in the history of this country. The trouble with Eisenhower . . . he's just a coward. He hasn't got any backbone at all, and he ought to be ashamed for what he did, but I don't think there's any shame in him."

Mr. Truman disclosed that he had removed from Pentagon files correspondence between Eisenhower and General Marshall concerning an apparent plan by Eisenhower to get a divorce and remarry.

"Why, right after the war was over," Mr. Truman said, "he (Eisenhower) wrote a letter to General Marshall saying that he wanted to be relieved of duty, saying that he wanted to come back to the United States and divorce

Mrs. Eisenhower so that he could marry this Englishwoman." It was an apparent reference to Kay Summersby, who drove the jeep carrying Eisenhower in England during the war.

Mr. Truman continued: "Well, Marshall wrote him back a letter the like of which I never did see. He said that if he . . . if Eisenhower even came close to doing such a thing, he'd not only bust him out of the Army, he'd see to it that never for the rest of his life would he be able to draw a peace-

ful breath. He said it wouldn't matter if he was in the Army or wasn't. Or even what country he was in."

According to Miller, Mr. Truman paused during the interview, and then added: "I don't like Eisenhower, you know that. I never have, but one of the last things I did as President, I got those letters from his file in the Pentagon, and I destroyed them."

Miller said this week that he recorded the interviews during several visits to Independence, Mo., Mr. Truman's home, during 1961 and 1962.