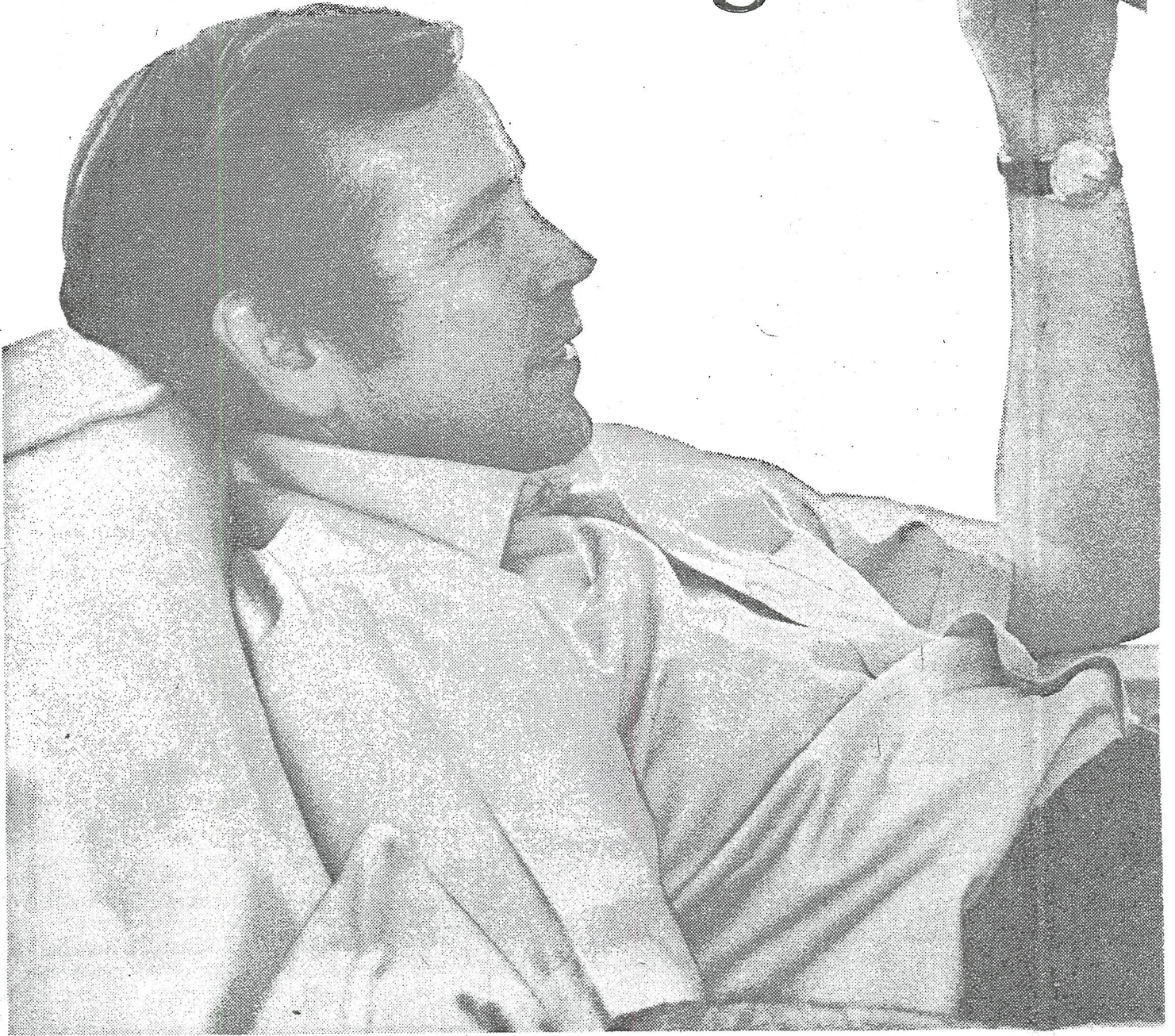


The Public Interrogator,



By Frank

Sen. Howard Baker Jr.: "I don't think I'm an ambitious man."

The Personal Man

By Myra MacPherson

One liberal Tennessean, who has known and studied Sen. Howard Baker Jr. for a decade, was talking about his politics and he was saying some kind things.

"He's a pretty good man. As a matter of fact, if there is such a thing as a true moderate, he's it. He has a natural inclination to dead center. There has been absolutely no trace of dirty politics in his campaigns."

Then the man added: "I should say I don't really care for him personally. He's such a neuter, it gets in my way. With a man who keeps the shades down all the time, you can't look inside his mind and see what wheels are spinning. And he keeps the shades down, believe me."

When Baker entered the Senate in 1966 he was so eclipsed by his father-in-law, the late Illinois Republican Sen. Everett Dirksen, that he was almost known as Howard Baker Dirksen.

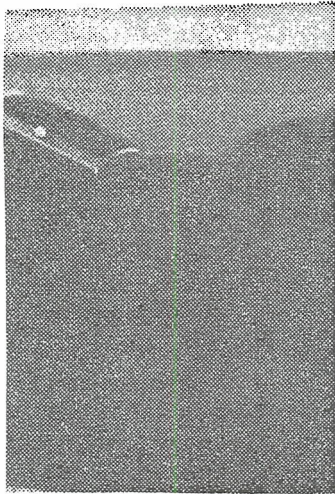
Now, thrust into national prominence as the ranking Republican member of the special Watergate investigating committee, he is being called the "darling superstar," "the brightest of the seven senators," "presidential timber . . ."

But there is also speculation that Baker may be working behind-the-scenes to protect the President.

What the public sees when they tune in the televised committee hearings is a man who, at 47, looks as though he could almost be giving his college valedictory—boyish grin, sincere gaze, sometimes lofty oratory.

He's been tagged America's latest political heart-throb by commentators. He was named to Women's Wear Daily's "Studliest of Them All" list—which includes actor Robert Redford and rock star Mick

See BAKER, K2, Col. 1



Johnston—The Washington Post

Jagger (Baker winces at that one.) Shoreham Hotel comedian Mark Russell gets laughs when he says of the American women viewing Baker on TV: "Little do they know, he's 5-foot-ONE!" (He's actually 5-foot-7).

He gets mash letters from little old ladies and from college coeds. One coed wrote that she knew he was married, but "if this situation changes, let me know."

Those who watched him on the Hill, pre-Watergate, see him as among the smartest and shrewdest senators,

he may be honestly presenting himself as the voice of Republican conscience, or that, at least, his articulate questions are probing the important realm of motivation. But a number of others object to what they consider his moralistic preambles and judgmental preachings.

The majority of his 300 daily letters and telegrams are favorable. But other letters to Baker, and to newspapers about Baker, are negative: "Who are you to pick on the smallest fry in the outfit?" The most repugnant

"I don't think I'm an ambitious man. I suspect, if you ever reached the place where you honored the thought (of being President) by a few serious moments of contemplation, you must emerge terrified. I don't mean to be self-serving, but that is a fact. I confess I've stopped the flow of events long enough to have that thought. I did, in fact, emerge terrified. After such examination, Baker says, he concluded, "No, I would not want to be President, but I would not be afraid of it."

His wife, Joy, had another view: "Does he want to be President? Let me put it this way: He does *not* want to be *Vice President*."

Baker describes himself as "moderate to moderate conservative." Smile. "Sort of like medium to medium rare." His political life has been interwoven with that of President Nixon, a man he has known for 21 years. The President campaigned for Baker in 1966. Baker gave one of the 1968 seconding speeches for Mr. Nixon. Baker went to Key Biscayne to seek Mr. Nixon's support in his 1969 fight for the Senate minority leader post. (Baker lost to Hugh Scott by five votes.) Baker was a staunch hawk and a supporter of Nixon's ill-fated Supreme Court nominees Clement Haynesworth and G. Harrold Carswell. According to news reports, Baker was offered a Supreme Court seat himself, an offer that came through former Attorney General John Mitchell, who is, himself, expected to come before the Watergate committee.

Speculation continues that Baker could be Nixon's man on the committee.

Baker's critics, declining to be quoted "at this time," say the strategy might be to make a show of getting tough with the little guys, probe their "just following orders" mentality, while foregoing questions that might implicate the President. Baker repeatedly denies this. Said one skeptical Watergate committee member: "Well, if he had it in his mind to be Nixon's pal in March, he sure couldn't get away with it now."

A former Senate aide depicted Baker as more of a fence rider. "He's not Nixon's guy, he's Baker's guy. He's very cute. He's watching this thing to see which way it's moving. If he sees those tracks going into the oval office, he'll be the first one to kick.

"He was fascinating to watch on the Hill. He's an excellent legislator and it's all calculated. That accent can thicken and thin depending on whom he's talking too. But," the aide added, "he's the real force on that committee."

The subject of all this examination is a man whose manner appears so simple that many feel he is, in fact, a complex enigma. (For all his casual air, he had an aide monitoring this interview with him, and another earlier one with his wife.)

In person, there are wrinkles that are erased by TV. But the little boy, crinkly-eyed smile is still there, as well as the ability to answer questions with candor—while carefully revealing only as much as he wants. In a rambling discourse, he admits that the "public" Howard Baker wears words like a necklace.

a subtle legislative maneuverer who understands timing, coalition, compromise, getting around committee chairmen. Reporters are enthusiastic because he is accessible and cordial.

He is also known as extremely ambitious—enough so, it is said, to want to be President. But this ambition has been muted. Until recently. With TV cameras sending his image to a nationwide audience there are those critics who believe Baker's performance is becoming increasingly studied and even self-serving. Some feel

thing in the world is for a person to set themselves up as a tin god with a 'holier than thou attitude.' In my opinion you are getting awfully close." Such a view is "strange," another wrote, "from a man who steadfastly supported U.S. warmaking policies in Southeast Asia."

While Baker at first fended off questions about presidential ambitions, he now has a well-polished statement, casually offered—feet on the desk, leaning back in his chair, toying with a letter opener:

"Every person is at least two persons. The one he appears to be and the one he really is. I'm still firmly anchored to both. I make my peace with both. I sleep at night, which is the ultimate test." He said his public person "hides behind words a lot." The private person "isn't the activist, likes to contemplate, escapes to the photo darkroom and makes pictures. The public person never goes down there."

His phrasemaking, he says, is often just an old lawyer's trick to fill in gaps while he's thinking. "They're all clichés—some very old, some new. I try to avoid the new ones." He smiled and said, "I'll tell you what my daddy told me after my first trial. I thought I was just great. I asked him, 'How did I do?' He paused and said, 'You've got to guard against speaking more clearly than you think.'"

Baker—called "Henry" in his east Tennessee hill country hometown of Huntsville (population 375) to distinguish him from his father, Howard Sr.—followed a family tradition that dates back to Civil War days. His great-grandfather was a lawyer, his grandfather was a judge. His father was a lawyer, then ran unsuccessfully for both the governorship and the U.S. Senate, before making it to the House of Representatives. When his father died, Baker's stepmother—who raised him from childhood—took over for the rest of his term. Baker had no interest in running for his father's House seat. His wife says, "He was only interested in the Senate."

Baker's father was known as a tough, conservative, wheeling-dealing Southern politician. Baker himself was so proficient a lawyer he got the nickname of "Ole 2 to 10" because his clients rarely got more, even for murder.

Baker likes to make his career choice sound extremely casual. "I majored in engineering, then went into the war. I intended to finish engineering school, but the line was too long on registration day. The line for law school wasn't, so I ended up there. I'm ashamed to admit it, but it's true."

Baker grew up in Huntsville, his stepmother said, playing in his three-acre backyard with "family boys—his little cousins—and friends like a dentist's son in Oneida and the son of a car dealer." When he was 14, he went to McCallie military school in Chattanooga. After graduating from high school, Baker volunteered for the Navy V-12 program and went to the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., and Tulane University in New Orleans.

Baker served on a PT boat in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Dirksen used to use that to his own advantage during political speeches when Baker campaigned for Dirksen before Baker got into politics himself. Joking about the PT boat publicity that John F. Kennedy received, Dirksen would say "my son-in-law served on a PT boat—and no one ever elected him to anything."

That wasn't true. Baker was elected student body president at Tulane. A college associate recalls, "He was the brightest and most ambitious person I knew in college. He was very much into campus politics."

"Although Baker was very much a fraternity man, he formed a coalition with his fraternity, and those not in the social mainstream—to get those 'independent' votes."

Baker's wife knew lonely days when she was in school in Illinois, and her father maneuvered in Washington politics. "When I was in high school I would say, 'Mother, I can't stand this business of Daddy being in politics. When I grow up I'm going to marry a plumber.' I thought I was marrying a country lawyer. I hate to tell you the crying episode (in 1966) when I pleaded with him not to run." The lack of privacy makes a look at First Lady pretty grim, she says. "It's a helluva lot

See BAKER, K3, Col. 1

BAKER, From K2

of responsibility. If I could get someone to row my boat for me, I might go along with the act—and it's an act. I might be another Tricia type and slip in and out. Or a Mamie Eisenhower who had all her old cronies over to play bridge."

The Baker-Dirksen marriage could hardly be called love at first sight. Joy Dirksen and Baker's younger sister were cherry blossom princesses together and were bridesmaids in a wedding in 1951. During one of the pre-wedding gatherings, Joy Dirksen and Baker's sister were smoking cigars on a dare in the back seat of a car. Baker saw them. "He thought I was corrupting his little sister. Anyway, he flung me into a rose bush. I got little prick marks and showed up at the wedding with mercurochrome splotches. Howard came to Washington to apologize and we were married 10 weeks later."

(Asked if he gets angry now, she said, "Sometimes," but wouldn't say about what. "I think that's real personal.")

Mrs. Baker majored in political science at Bradley University, has survived 21 campaigns for relatives, and worked for her father. "I drove him home from work among other things, which meant long hours—missed a lot of good dates that way." She now works in her husband's office, sorting the mountain of mail he gets.

Baker speaks fondly of his father-in-law. ("He's the only man in the Senate who never told me how to vote.")

There is an oil painting of Dirksen in Baker's office—one of the rare politician's offices that doesn't have walls covered with autographed pictures of the famous. There are none visible either here or in the Bakers' Northwest Washington home—they are stashed in a cupboard.

Baker says he did not ask to be on the select investigating committee, is not "ego-tripping" over it at all, doesn't watch the reruns at night. The Washington joke is that the hearings have to last long enough for the senators to get enough exposure out of all the new suits they bought. Baker went on a diet and lost 20 pounds in six weeks before the hearings and has to hitch up the slacks of his old suits. Baker says he bought only one new suit—that now familiar gray and maroon glen plaid. He also said that one day he wore one black and one blue sock to the hearings.

"I have such atrocious taste I had the manager at Saks pick the suit out. What they sent I wore. Back when I was a rich lawyer I had a tailor."

His wife says when he comes home at night he drops his briefcase, then his coat, tie and shirt, leaving a trail for someone else to pick up, until he gets upstairs to his bedroom and gets into "work" clothes.

Then he gets lost in the basement color darkroom of their rented Tudor style home. His wife, whom he calls Mrs. B. and "momma," jokes "that I have a trap door in there and sneak out to meet other women," he said as he led the way to a room with at least \$3,000 worth of professional photographic equipment. Baker is also a licensed pilot who seldom has time to fly now.

Mrs. Baker says he's a loner in Washington, but when he's in Huntsville, he relaxes with friends, playing tennis, then jumping, with tennis clothes on, into the pool. In scrub country populated by poor whites ("most are on welfare," she says), the Bakers live in a home he once described as an "ostentatious chicken coop" with a Mies van der Rohe glass table, an ocelot rug and Barcelona chairs. The walls are lumber taken from weathered barns and Baker likes to joke that some of the locals looked at it and said, "For just a little more money, he coulda got new lumber."

Baker's money comes from banking interests he inherited, his former law practice and 40,000 acres of family land.

In 1971, the Nashville Tennessean reported there was strip mining done on part of that land while Baker was managing it for the majority owners. Baker—who then decried such practices—bought out the other family owners. According to a Baker aide, there is no strip mining now on the land he owns with two other partners. And Baker is the sponsor of legislation regulating the controversial mining techniques.

The Bakers have a 21-year-old son, Darek, who dropped out of the University of Tennessee "for awhile" after two years to "do his thing," his mother says—work on construction and drive his motorcycle. Their 18-year-old daughter, Cynthia, goes to a private school in Atlanta.

Although one Baker aide privately says of the President and the Watergate, "How could he *not* know?", Baker himself refuses to make any comments until the hearings are over. Asked if he thought it possible the President did not know about Watergate, he said: "Theoretically it's possible. By saying that, I don't mean to imply that's what I believe."

Asked if it was difficult to probe to the point where it might implicate the President, an old ally, Baker answered rapidly: "It doesn't make it more difficult. It makes it more painful. But you do what has to be done."

Baker said he had seen the President a half dozen times since he was named to the committee, at public gatherings. "At my suggestion, I arranged to see the President the night he had a reception for all those on the Hill who had supported his Vietnam policy. I suggested he not invoke executive privilege for his aides." What did the President say? "Not much." Another time, he said, he turned down a White House request for the White House to have some say in the choice of Republican counsel to the committee.

Baker was asked what he likes about the President, who has been accused, as in the 1950 senatorial race against Helen Gahagan Douglas, of using unsavory campaign tactics. (Baker takes great pains to make clear, as he probes witnesses on public TV, that he finds such tactics morally offensive.)

"I guess what I like is the intellect rather than the emotional side, although Nixon's a very different person in private than in public. With half a dozen people he's a real charmer. A very warm person."

As for criticisms of Mr. Nixon's political tactics in



Photos by Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Sen. Baker with his wife, Joy, and his 18-year-old daughter, Cynthia.

the past. Baker, who has a reputation for being neither cruel nor vindictive, says, "This will sound either vain or self-serving or both; I try to judge people on their relationship to me, rather than what people say about them. He came down on a long shot race and campaigned for me. He asked my advice, which always flatters you. . . ."

Baker says that any politician who says he has not done something because it is personally expedient is "either fooling himself or about to be defeated. There's nothing immoral about that. You've got to listen to the beating drums. There are some things simply impossible for me to do politically—such as voting for gun control legislation—as long as I am representing Tennessee." This pragmatism is okay as "long as it reasonably squares with my own conscience." He says one area that did not square with his conscience was to oppose fair housing. He helped work out a compromise that had liberals yelling, but won Republican support for the Fair Housing Act of 1968. "I caught hell from both sides on that. I got soundly criticized in Tennessee." Baker had four years to go for re-election and now says, with a shrug, "By '72 it (his fair housing stance) had become a political asset. I ended up with 40 per cent of the black votes. Of course the fact that my opponent was endorsed by Wallace didn't hurt."

Although Baker spins amusing yarns privately, there was at least one public speech when his stories bombed.

Speaking recently at the Washington Press Club, Baker was regarded by members of the audience as speaking "in extremely poor taste" when he told a series of jokes including one in particular about Estes Kefauver (the late Democratic Senator from Tennessee) being laid out in his coffin in church. The joke ended: "A local says, 'You're making a terrible mistake. I've seen Estes that way a thousand times—and he'd be just fine the next day.'"

Baker is undisturbed that his Washington political audience was offended. "They didn't know Estes as well as I did. He would have enjoyed it."

Baker can philosophize on many topics. He went on at length, for example, about the love of "commonality" in our society, which creates a climate in which no one dares to be different. But he guards his views on himself. When asked if he liked himself, Baker said, "I'm not discontent." But he would reveal little about what factors contributed to the person he is.

With a hint of coolness, he said, "Who knows? You're getting more analytical than I care to be. I've kept a place in Huntsville (Tenn.). That's where the private person goes back to." Then he closed the topic with: "And that's as far as I'm prepared to let you go."

One acquaintance said, "I'd like to see Baker feel passionately about some thing or some issue. But then, Baker's a survivor. He'll probably out-survive them all."