

NYTimes

Memories Are Made of This

By Robert Sherrod

WASHINGTON — Merle Miller has written a book which includes tapes and notes of conversations he had with the late President Truman in 1961-62. Among other things, Mr. Truman gave Mr. Miller an account of his meeting with General MacArthur at Wake Island Oct. 15, 1950, in which he is alleged to have said the planes of the President and the general jockeyed for landing positions: "Each refused to land first, preferring that the other be on the ground to meet him."

General MacArthur, the story goes, finally gave way but he was slow to meet the President's plane, whereupon Mr. Truman gave him hell: "I don't give a good goddam what you do or think about Harry Truman, but don't you ever again keep your Commander in Chief waiting. Is that clear?"

This story is cockeyed. In the first place, MacArthur arrived from Tokyo the previous afternoon, some twelve hours before Mr. Truman flew in from Honolulu. Some jockeying. As for what the President said to the general in their one-hour tête-à-tête, the evidence is overwhelmingly against the version Mr. Miller offers.

Wake Island, site of the Marines' gallant sixteen-day stand against Japanese invaders in 1941, is a low-lying atoll of three islands. Now, nine years later, it made history again, with the two principals and their retinues con-

verging from opposite sides of the earth. MacArthur had only a few from his staff and wasn't permitted to bring his own press from Tokyo, whereas Mr. Truman was accompanied by Gen. Omar Bradley, Army Secretary Frank Pace, Averell Harriman, Dean Rusk plus 35 reporters and photographers in a chartered Constellation (fare: about \$1,500 each).

MacArthur at this point was in no danger of losing his job. Just a month earlier he had executed the Inchon landing, despite a 31-foot tide that had frightened other military and naval experts into unanimous opposition (before the persuasive general converted them). Napoleon said that if he had been hit by a cannon ball while riding into Moscow he would have gone down as the greatest man in history; similar judgments might have been made about MacArthur if his plane had fallen into the sea between Tokyo and Wake. Even his old enemies in the Navy and Marine Corps, who sneered at "Dugout Doug's" pretensions during World War II, now wanted to give him a second Medal of Honor.

At Admiral Radford's guest house in Pearl Harbor, the President, a notorious buff, sipped his Scotch neat and told me how fervently he admired MacArthur, whom he wanted to decorate. He didn't mention another reason for their meeting: MacArthur's tendency to make foreign policy on his own, as when he sent a message in August to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, plugging for offensive operations from Formosa. This at a time when Truman

was trying to avoid stirring up any Communist intervention in Korea.

The press plane landed at Wake just before dawn, followed by the plane carrying Bradley, Pace et al. We media types thought it curious that MacArthur neglected to come out of his quonset and meet his nominal superiors. At 6:30 A.M., as the "Independence" landed and rolled toward us, I noted in my dispatch to Time magazine that Wake's temperature had already reached its normal 85 degrees. Still no MacArthur. "Goddemighty," said The New York Times' late White House correspondent, Tony Leviero, "he isn't going to meet the President either!"

Then a battered Chevrolet sedan raced to the foot of the airplane's ladder and MacArthur, in khaki (no tie) and old, greasy cap, hopped out. A grinning President descended and said, "I've been a long time meeting you, General."

MacArthur replied, "I hope it won't be so long next time, Mr. President."

"All was geniality," I cabled. MacArthur, positioned behind an airport shack, had made his entrance on time.

President and general retired to the quonset, where the former is now alleged to have racked up the latter. Nonsense. "I had been warned about Mr. Truman's quick and violent temper," MacArthur wrote in his "Reminiscences," "but he radiated nothing but courtesy and good humor during our meeting."

Mr. Truman's version: "The general

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assured me that the victory was won in Korea . . . that the Chinese Communists would not attack." About the V.F.W. statement: "He said he was sorry if he caused any embarrassment. I told him I considered the incident closed." The President added: "I found him a most stimulating and interesting person. Our conversation was very friendly—I might say much more than I had expected."

The second meeting, a general conference, mostly concerned the rehabilitation of Korea, North and South, now that the war was won. Whatever Chinese Communists might cross the Yalu, MacArthur said he could handle with his air. The general kept looking

at his watch and begged off from luncheon. He had to get back to Tokyo. On the general's breast Truman pinned his fifth distinguished service medal. The planes took off, Mr. Truman to the East, then MacArthur to the West.

I think Mr. Truman didn't really get mad at MacArthur until after Wake Island, after a quarter million Chinese troops sent the Americans and Koreans reeling, after the continuous insubordination which forced MacArthur's firing six months after Wake. At age 78 the late President had come to confuse the wish with the deed—something I noticed in a series of interviews with him in 1964. Historians are painfully aware of the fallibility of old men's memories.

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