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HST: 'Cuss 'Em'

Truman Gave Salty Encouragement to Kennedy

By Richard M. Weintraub
Special to The Washington Post

WALTHAM, Mass., Jan. 24—In John Kennedy's second year in the White House, Congress was recalcitrant, the economy was acting up, the business community was in an uproar over the steel price controversy. In brief, the list of problem areas as the 1962 Congressional elections drew near was a long one.

But even at the worst of times, a person could depend on the crusty former occupant of the White House for encouragement.

President Harry S. Truman was known for his "direct" approach to things and his uninhibited use of some equally direct language. A letter from Mr. Truman to President Kennedy in August 1962, found in the newly opened President's Office Files at the Kennedy Library, is an example of the Truman style.

In a hand-written note dated August 11, Mr. Truman wrote:
Personal and Confidential.

"Mr. President don't let those damned columnist and editorial writers discourage you.

"In my opinion, you are on the right track.

"The President is just as great as the Congress—and really greater—when he exercises his Constitutional Prerogatives.

"You are going through the same situations and troubles that Franklin Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln and I had to meet. Don't like to put myself in that

class—but I had a hell of a time.

"You meet 'em, cuss 'em and give 'em hell and you'll win in 1964. HST."

In an earlier letter from Mr. Truman to President Kennedy, just after the latter's inauguration in January, 1961, the former President thanked the new, much younger man for inviting him to Washington and to the White House.

Mr. Truman had not been on the best of terms with his Republican successor, Dwight Eisenhower, and the letter reveals how the man from Missouri was deeply touched by being invited back to the White House after a long absence.

"Dear Mr. President," Truman wrote, again, by hand.

"You'll never know how very much I appreciated all the courtesies you extended to me at inauguration time.

"I was invited into the White House for the first time in eight years.

"I was shown through that great residence in a manner I'll never forget. I still hope you'll forgive me for being so impetuous at the Rose Room, and I hope the First Lady will forgive me.

"I want your administration to be most successful. Sincerely, Harry Truman."

President Truman went to the White House with his family on inauguration day, Jan. 20, and he was given a tour of the mansion. The next day, President Kennedy invited his predecessor back as his first official visitor. Mr. Truman walked the half mile from the May-

flower Hotel to the White House in 19 degree weather.

It is believed that neither the post-inauguration letter nor the "give 'em hell" note have been made public before.

Documents Detail

Crises of the Times

Special to The Washington Post

WALTHAM, Mass., Jan. 24 — The newly opened President's office files at the Kennedy Library are full of documents and memoranda that flesh out details of the great crises that shook both the Kennedy administration and the world.

One such document, a letter in which President Kennedy's national security adviser McGeorge Bundy offered to resign, offers some insight into the impact of the Bay of Pigs debacle on the new administration.

Handwritten and undated, the letter was found in Bundy's file for 1961. It said:

"Dear Mr. President,
"I think you should always have the . . . freedom in the choice and use of close associates, and so I think you ought to have at hand their resignations. Here is mine, to be accepted at your pleasure at anytime. You know that I wish I had served you better in the Cuban episode, and I hope you know how I admire your gallantry in that case.

"If my departure can assist you in any way, I hope you will send me off—and if you have difficulty, you will still have this letter for use when you may need it.

Your assistants are yours to use — and one use is in changing the air when that is needed."

There also are many sobering documents from the period of the Cuban missile crisis, many of which have been alluded to in accounts of those tense days.

Included among these documents are the letters between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, which were published previously in the State Department Bulletin last November and an "aide-memoire" from the Soviet government to Mr. Kennedy that indicated a resolution to the period of crisis.

The "aide-memoire," Feb. 18, 1963, said, in part:

"As is known the Soviet military personnel servicing the rocket installations left Cuba together with the weapons.

"It is also known that the Soviet government informed the government of the U.S.A. of the intention of the Soviet Union to withdraw from Cuba in due course those groups of Soviet military personnel devoted to the protection of the types of weapons withdrawn from Cuba.

"Now the Soviet government wishes to inform the government of the U.S.A. and the President personally that it has taken a decision to withdraw from Cuba Soviet military personnel connected with the protection of the types of weapons withdrawn from Cuba and likewise some of the military specialists involved in the training of Cuban troops. It is intended to recall from Cuba in the nearest future—before the middle of March — several thousand men.

"The Soviet government considers that this decision will lead to a normalization of the situation in Cuba."