

Six Years Astride the Tiger



"Years of Trial and Hope," by **Harry S. Truman** (Doubleday. 594 pp. \$5), the second volume of the former President's memoirs, carries the story from 1946 through 1952. It is reviewed here by **Walter Millis**, editor of *"The Forrestal Diaries."*

By Walter Millis

"YEARS of Trial and Hope," the second volume of Mr. Truman's memoirs, is, like the first, long, detailed, at times naive, lacking in literary grace but ornamented even more frequently than the first by the ex-President's tart comments upon the men who fought or failed him or savagely attacked policies which to him seemed essential. Newspaper publication of the memoirs has been accompanied by a steady counterblast of wails from the victims—sometimes effective, more often not—rising to a climax in General MacArthur's extraordinary 5,000-word denunciation of the Commander-in-Chief who dared to relieve the General from his command. This document—grossly insulting, unmeasured in its accusations, and at best factually questionable—will focus public attention primarily around Mr. Truman's account of the Korean episode. The document itself, and the probability that great numbers of persons will take it as a complete vindication of the General, is a depressing illustration of the extremes of partisan passion and recklessness which the ex-President has been obliged to face in telling his own story of his six final years in office.

By its nature, the "MacArthur controversy" is impossible of resolution. There is no doubt that the MacArthur command was taken catastrophically by surprise by the Chinese intervention in November 1950. Mr. Truman did not and does not blame the General for the failure of his November offensive, but "I do blame General MacArthur for the manner in which he tried to excuse his failure. . . . Within four days he found time to publicize in four different ways his view that the only reason for his

troubles was the order from Washington to limit the hostilities to Korea. He talked about 'extraordinary inhibitions,' and made it quite plain that no blame whatsoever attached to him or his staff."

That was really the crux of the whole matter. MacArthur became more and more convinced that he could not only redeem the failure by carrying the war across the Yalu but that this would involve no serious danger of a third world war. Mr. Truman believed that nothing could be gained by an air war on Chinese territory commensurate with what he thought would be the very great risk of general war and the probably certain alienation of our U.N. allies. Since the test was never made there is no way of knowing which man was more nearly right. But when MacArthur's wounded egotism drove him into public attempts to sabotage Administration policy and embarrass its course in the U.N. the President's short patience snapped, and the General, who had stood through so many years as the great Untouchable of the Pacific, found himself summarily relieved. In giving his side of the affair Mr. Truman will doubtless change few minds; but neither will the General by his reply—though it may confirm those who have long agreed with a verdict of the late James Forrestal that Mac-

Arthur had "a high degree of professional ability, mortgaged, however, to his sensitivity and his vanity."

IN dealing with this as with the many other colossal events of these years—the Truman Doctrine, the launching of the Marshall Plan, the Berlin Blockade, the enormously difficult and bitter problem of Palestine, the Soviet acquisition of the atomic "secret" and the H-bomb program which resulted, the National debacle in China, and the Presidential elections of 1948 and 1952—the ex-President's documentation is extensive at times to the point of the tedious. That does not mean that it is complete; this is one man's account of his stewardship, and one could not expect it to be without bias. The argument is in general crisply factual, however; and there are numerous fresh contributions to history, especially in reports of the high-level conferences. But even so great a fellow-memoirist as Sir Winston Churchill has been known, in enterprises like this, to shade the perspectives.

There are fewer of the homely personal touches and less of the cracker-barrel political philosophy than in the first volume, though these are not absent. Mr. Truman's long reverie upon Presidents and the Presidency, as he sat in the darkness on a balcony of the Philadelphia convention hall through a "hot, clammy night" in 1948, waiting to be nominated, has its appeal; so do his unaffected wonder and delight at the beauty of the Hawaiian Islands, rising out of an early-morning blue as he approached them on his way to meet MacArthur at Wake Island. Mr. Truman shows himself again the adept politician, and frequently reiterates his conviction that the Presidency is a political office which can be properly discharged only by those skilled in politics. In running the Government "you do not operate somewhere in a theoretical heaven but with a tough set of tough situations that have to be met—and met without hesitation. It takes practical men to run a government." Presidents cannot always be popular, but if they are good politicians, do



—Eliot Elisofon—Life.

Truman—"sure that he was right."

what they believe to be right, and stick to it, they will certainly have the people with them.

The ex-President is sure that he was right. He was right in vetoing the Taft-Hartley bill, the so-called Tidelands Oil bill, and in his many other vetoes—more, he believes, than were returned by any President since Cleveland—even when they were overridden by Congress. He was right in advocating a national health plan, in seizing the steel industry, in his policy in China, in his almost reverential awe of General Marshall. He was right in his criticisms of the press. At the time of Korea “three of our biggest publishers, I think, were dividing our people and leading the world to believe that the American people had no confidence in their Government. The campaign of vilification and lies and distortions of facts in so many of our papers were the greatest asset the Soviets had.” He was right in 1948 in believing he could win against the showings of the polls and the double defection of the Dixiecrats and the Wallaceites. On some of the other points his rightness will seem less self-evident to others than it does to Mr. Truman, but in the last, at least, he is on indisputable ground.

The ex-President's closing comments on the 1952 election are perhaps of the liveliest immediate interest. Mr. Truman makes certain recent maneuverings more explicable by revealing his annoyance at Adlai Stevenson's coyness before the convention, and over certain Stevenson “mistakes” afterward—chiefly those of attempting somewhat to dissociate himself from the White House and of being too tepid in the defense of the Truman record. But it is on the Republican campaign that Mr. Truman lets go: “The most brazen lie of the century has been fabricated by reckless demagogues among the Republicans to the effect that Democrats were soft on Communists.” Eisenhower “permitted a campaign of distortion and vilification that he could not possibly have believed was true.”

“Within the first few months,” Mr. Truman says in the opening sentence of this book, “I discovered that being a President is like riding a tiger. A man has to keep on riding or be swallowed.” Truman was never swallowed. Right or wrong, he rode the tiger and kept command. As the book ends, with Mr. Truman conferring with his successor on the handing over of the Government, the man from Independence manages to leave hanging a question mark as to whether Mr. Eisenhower could do—or has done—the same. The memoirist is clearly aware that another election is upon us.

The Sea Lane to Victory

“The Atlantic Battle Won,” by Samuel E. Morison (Little, Brown, 399 pp. \$6), the tenth volume in the *“History of United States Naval Operations in World War II,”* tells of the offensive that led to our ultimate victory over Nazi Germany. James A. Field, Jr., of Swarthmore College, author of *“The Japanese at Leyte Gulf,”* reviews it here.

By James A. Field, Jr.

THE seapower which Admiral Mahan saw a mighty influence on history was an exploitative and aggressive seapower, working outward from Europe to seize and maintain control of the new worlds across the oceans. Victory in the wars for empire and dominant influence in shaping the modern world went to Great Britain, situated offshore and thus able to control all by controlling the western approaches to the Continent.

In the last century, however, the employment of seapower has greatly changed. The policies of the maritime states of the Western world have become conservative. As improvements in land transport permitted increasingly effective mobilization of the manpower of interior Eurasia the previously dominant rimlands found themselves mortally endangered. Wars were no longer wars of maritime states, aggression now came from the heartland, and from the Crimean War to the organization of NATO the problem has been one of stabilization and defense. In the new context control of the western approaches has become if possible even more important, not as the way to transoceanic wealth but as the means of obtaining salvation from overseas.

In two world wars success in dividing the Atlantic world by cutting the ocean trade routes would have brought German victory. In both this success was very nearly gained by the submarine. Surprisingly, in the Second World War as in the First, neither side was prepared to contest the issue on anything like the scale that was ultimately required. In 1939 the British were very short of escort craft, while Hitler entered the war with only forty-nine operational U-boats. Yet by V-E Day the German Navy had employed 1,179 submarines,

699 of which had been lost to Allied action. In six years of war this under-sea fleet, while failing in its primary task, sank 187 warships, almost 3,000 merchant vessels, and took some 40,000 lives in the process.

The crisis of the U-boat war, which came in 1942, was dealt with in “The Battle of the Atlantic 1939-1943,” the first volume of Admiral Samuel E. Morison's “History of United States Naval Operations in World War II.” In the spring of 1943, when Volume X, “The Atlantic Battle Won,” takes up the tale, things were at a stand-off, and this just-published book is the story of the offensive which led to victory. New technical devices, new production brought the Allies through. In May 1943 U-boat losses exceeded new construction, and merchant-ship sinkings reached a new low. Admiral Doenitz, bemoaning Allied scientific superiority, was forced to redeploy his boats away from the crucial North Atlantic convoy lanes to peripheral areas such as the Central Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean. The initiative was never regained.

Like all of Morison's volumes, this is operational history written on the tactical level, and in this one more than in most the nature of the subject prevents a unitary organization. Here are more depth charges than doctrine; shifts of time and place are kaleidoscopic; there is no assembly of great forces or sweep of fleets to battle. But the hundreds of individual anti-submarine actions, presented in remarkably complete detail, are united by the shipping problem, the central problem of the war. Since solution of this permitted solution of all else this book is in a very real sense the key to the whole series. Had it not been possible to write of “The Atlantic Battle Won” the other volumes would have made very different and far less pleasant reading.

