

# Eisenhower Divorce Letter May Still Exist

## ASKED MARSHALL'S ADVICE

WASHINGTON STAR-NEWS  
Washington, D. C., Sunday, November 25, 1973

1973

By Isabelle Shelton  
Star-News Staff Writer

A letter Gen. Dwight Eisenhower is reported to have written many years ago, declaring his intention to divorce his wife, Mamie, and marry Kay Summersby, the British woman assigned to drive him around London, probably still exists.

The fact that the World War II supreme allied commander wrote such a letter to Gen. George C. Marshall, and that Marshall sent a scorching reply, were widely rumored when Eisenhower ran for president in 1952. But so far as is known, the episode did not appear in print until last week, when newspapers published excerpts from a new book about former President Harry Truman by Merle Miller.

Truman told Miller, the author wrote in his book, "Plain Speaking," that he had "destroyed" the letters. But retired Maj. Gen. Harry Vaughan, Truman's longtime military aide at the White House, commenting on the book insisted yesterday that Truman did not destroy the letters, but sent them to Gen. Marshall for his personal files.

"It's true (that the letters exist). I saw them," Vaughan told the Star-News from his home in Alexandria, Va. "The way he (Truman) told it is absolutely true — except that he did not have the letters destroyed (as he told Miller).

"He got them from the Pentagon and sent them to Gen. Marshall (by then retired) for his personal files."

RECONSTRUCTING the episode, Vaughan recalled:

"Eisenhower was commander of our forces in Europe, and he wrote Gen. Marshall seeking advice. He wanted to know what getting a divorce would do to his career. Marshall wrote back that that was 'the most stupid thing you could think of doing.'"

Truman, according to Miller, had put that much more harshly. Marshall the former President said, "wrote him back a letter the like of which you 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 peaceful breath. He said it wouldn't matter if he was in the Army or wasn't. Or even what country he was in."

When Marshall, the World War II Army chief of staff and later secretary of State, retired from duty, he left his files in the Pentagon, Vaughan continued. "In 1952, before the Republican convention, (Sen. Robert) Taft and Eisenhower were jockeying for position (for the presidential nomination). The Taft boys heard about the letters and wanted to get copies. Truman heard about it.

"He did have the letters sent to him from the Pentagon. The Taft bunch was going to use them all over the country. But he didn't destroy them. He sent them to Gen. Marshall with a covering note — 'This should be in your personal files. I don't think they should be used for dirty politics.'"

"THAT'S FIRST hand — I was there," Vaughan insists.

He assumes the letters now are at the George C. Marshall Research Library at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Va., Vaughan said, "—or maybe Mrs. Marshall has them." Marshall died in 1959.

The Star-News was unable to reach anyone at the Marshall Library to ascertain if the letters are there.



TOM CLARK



HARRY VAUGHAN



Miller's revelation of Truman's recollection of the long-secret letters has astonished many of the late president's associates here—especially since he was the one chiefly responsible for keeping them a secret.

Some also have voiced amazement at his extremely salty comments to Miller about several of his contemporaries, including Eisenhower, President Nixon, Gen. Douglas MacArthur and former Supreme Court Justice Tom Clark.

In at least one instance—Truman's account of being snubbed by Gen. MacArthur when the president and his Pacific commander-in-chief met on Wake Island in the Pacific—friends think time may have played tricks with the memory of the late president.

He was 77 in 1961-2 when veteran writer Merle Miller conducted the interviews—many of them tape recorded—on which his book is based.

**EVERYONE AGREES**, however, that Truman's scorching comments about Nixon—whom he called one of "only two men in the whole history of the country that I can't stand"—are vintage Truman. They all said they had heard him say much the same thing for years.

In Miller's book (scheduled for publication next Feb. 28 by G. P. Putnam's Sons) Truman said:

"Nixon is a shifty-eyed, goddamn liar, and people know it. 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." While verifying the Eisenhower-Marshall letters, Gen. Vaughan challenges other parts of the book.

"I have known him personally and intimately for 55 years, and 95 percent of what I read doesn't sound like Mr. Truman. I found a dozen inaccuracies. I'm sure he didn't say what he was quoted as saying about Eisenhower, MacArthur or Tom Clark."

Vaughn also takes issue with his former boss's recollection of his Wake Island meeting with Gen. MacArthur—whom Truman was later to fire, creating a major confrontation with Congress.

As Truman told it to Miller, the two men arrived at Wake Island simultaneously, in separate planes, and for some time the two planes jockeyed in the air, with each man seeking to be the last to land.

**TRUMAN WON** that tussle, but "after we landed, there was a welcoming party there on the ground, but I looked out the window, and MacArthur wasn't there," Miller quotes Truman.

"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 of 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 understand . . . 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."



**HARRY TRUMAN**



**GEORGE MARSHALL**



**DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER**



Says Vaughan: "His description of the Wake Island incident is entirely in error. Nothing like he said happened. I was there. MacArthur and Truman were on friendly terms.

"MacArthur was on the ground waiting when our plane landed, and he was waiting at the foot of the steps as Truman came down. I would remember, because I had been MacArthur's provost marshal when he was stationed in Australia, and he turned to me and said, 'Hello, Harry, I haven't seen you for a long time.'"

The two men then went over and "sat on the beach together, talking, for about 40 minutes, with no one else around," Vaughan recalls.

ROBERT Donovan, now an associate editor of the Los Angeles Times, who covered the Wake Island meeting, agrees with Vaughan's version.

"I don't doubt Truman told that story to Miller, because he'd been telling it for quite a while," says Donovan, who also is working on a book about Truman's presidency.

Some of Truman's former associates are unhappy over his unflattering comments about former Justice Clark, whom he named to the highest court.

That nomination "was my biggest mistake," Miller quotes Truman. "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 attorney general, and on the Supreme Court . . . it doesn't seem possible but he's been even worse. He didn't make one right decision that I can think of."

The statements "are just going to be absolutely heartbreaking to Clark," one old friend says with amazement. "I can't understand it. Clark wasn't just another appointee. He was one of Truman's poker-playing cronies.

"I was terribly shocked and surprised about the Clark quotes," says another long-time Truman intimate. "I don't know who could have poisoned him on that. He must have been upset when Clark ruled against him on the steel case."

Truman tried to have the federal government take over operation of the country's steel plants during a wartime strike, but the companies appealed to the courts, and a majority of the Supreme Court — including Clark — ruled the seizure illegal.

ANOTHER FORMER colleague says he is certain Truman's Nixon quotes are correct.

"I believe absolutely; I know that to be his attitude toward Nixon. There were a number of statements

made by Nixon that stuck in Truman's craw badly.

"One was when Nixon said it was clear to him that the Communist effort in the United States was being made within the Democratic party. Oh, boy! Truman was brought up in the Democratic party. That really poisoned him — that whole McCarthy period.

"The sense of distrust that Mr. Truman had for Mr. Nixon was a very deep one, and had gone back a long, long time."

The friend thought he also could understand Truman's bitterness toward Eisenhower, as expressed to Miller in these words:

"When Eisenhower let McCarthy get away with calling Gen. 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 of what he did, but I don't think there's any shame in him."

The Truman associate commented: "I have to say to you that Gen. Eisenhower acted very badly toward Mr. Truman. Gen. Marshall was a hero to Truman, and the President very much resented Sen. (Joseph) McCarthy's calling Marshall a traitor. Truman denounced McCarthy for it, and he wanted Eisenhower to also.

"EISENHOWER started to once. He had a paragraph supporting Marshall in a speech, but he was talked into taking it out. I think that was what Truman was referring to, when he said Eisenhower was a coward. I think he thought it was a cowardly political act. I don't think he thought Eisenhower was a coward."

Friends suggested that Truman was especially indignant toward Eisenhower because he felt he had done him a great favor by removing the Eisenhower-Marshall correspondence at a time when it could have acutely embarrassed Eisenhower.

The Nixon White House had no comment, except to point to the "friendly circumstances" attending Nixon's 1969 visit to Truman, when Nixon presented the former president with the piano Truman used to play while in the White House.

Margaret Truman Daniel, who might know something about the condition of her father's health when he granted Miller the interviews, refused to comment "until I've read the book."

Miller, reached at his home in Brewster, N.Y., expressed both dismay and delight at the reactions to his book.

He was "distressed" that anyone would question his quotes, or the condition of Truman when he gave them, Miller said.

"My goodness! I thought he was in fine shape when I talked to him. I have much of it on tape. I didn't try to check anything he told me. It was not my function to be an investigative reporter. I was working on a 13- or 26-week television series, to be done with David Suskind. My function was to keep him (Truman) happy until we did the television show."

Much of his interviewing had been preliminary to the filming, although two pilot films had been made, Miller added. In the end, CBS turned down the show, and Miller sat with his tapes for years. "I kept thinking about doing a book, but I guess I was too lazy."

He's glad he waited.

