

presidents of the *United States of America*

**"I was the 33rd
President of the
United States and I
led America in the
fight against
communism."**



Harry S. Truman



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Become a Presidential Historian by Solving This Puzzle

In this book, you'll learn all sorts of facts about Harry S. Truman's amazing life and accomplishments. But there's still one last thing we need to know about him.

The Secret Service, which protects the President, gave Truman a codename, but we need to find out what it was. You can help us uncover the answer! Hidden in the text are bolded letters. Read this book carefully to find them, and fill the letters into the blanks below in the order they appear.

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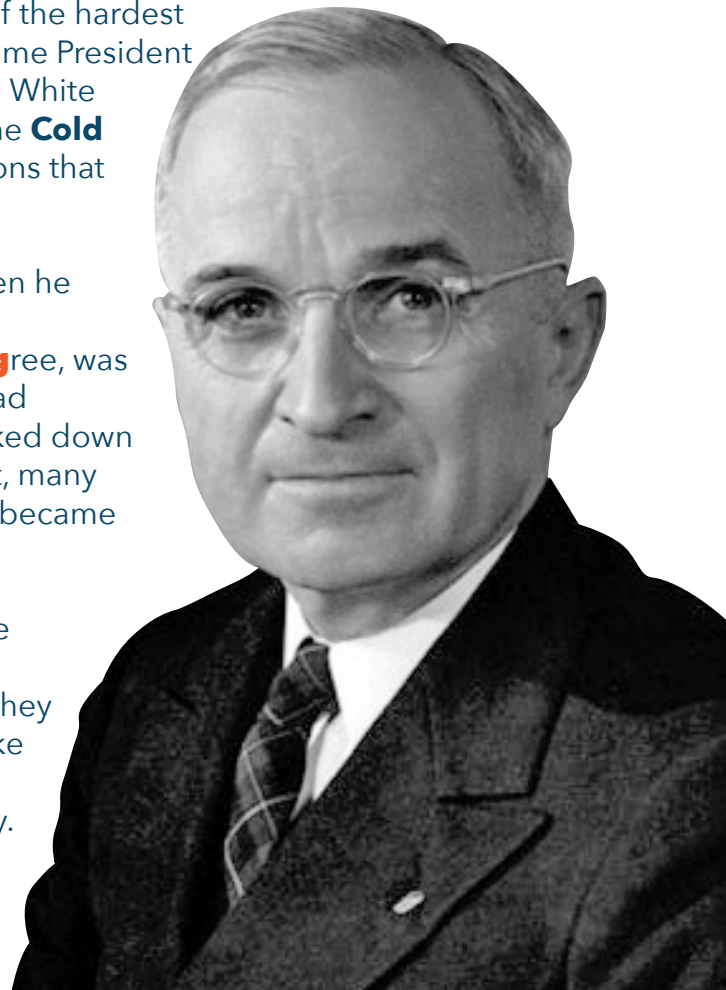
Once you've solved this puzzle, you'll be a true PragerU Kids presidential historian!

Meet Harry S. Truman

Did you know that Harry S. Truman had to make some of the hardest decisions any president has ever had to make? He became President during a very important time in history. He served in the White House during the end of World War II and the start of the **Cold War**. During these events, Truman made difficult decisions that affected millions of people's lives.

Those who knew Truman personally were surprised when he became President. He was very different from previous presidents—he wasn't wealthy, didn't have a college degree, was very blunt and straightforward, and sometimes had a bad temper. Some people, even his own mother-in-law, looked down on him for seeming so ordinary. When he was President, many disagreed strongly with the decisions he made, and he became unpopular.

It wasn't until years after he left the White House that the American people began to respect him for those same qualities. If they didn't always agree with his decisions, they appreciated that he wasn't afraid to face reality and make hard choices. They also admired how he overcame his humble beginnings to become the leader of his country. For millions of Americans, Truman became a hero and proof that, in America, anyone can become president.



Young Harry

Harry S. Truman was born on May 8, 1884 in Lamar, Missouri. He was the oldest child of John and Martha Truman. Young Harry had a younger brother, John, and younger sister, Mary Jane. He spent much of his childhood working hard on his family's farm. Like many of his friends, he wanted to play sports, but he couldn't because he had very poor eyesight. Instead, he focused on doing his chores on the farm and playing the piano. He did find a new hobby: reading. He realized that he loved reading and read as many books as he could, whether it was the Bible or plays written by William Shakespeare. Soon, his bookshelves were filled up with biographies of ancient generals and American presidents.

Harry graduated high school in 1901 and wanted to go to college, but his family couldn't afford it. He focused instead on working.

Harry worked hard at whatever job he could find. For a while, he was a timekeeper at a railway and, during that time, sometimes slept in camps for homeless people. He also worked in the mailroom of a newspaper and as a bank clerk.



Harry S. Truman's Birthplace

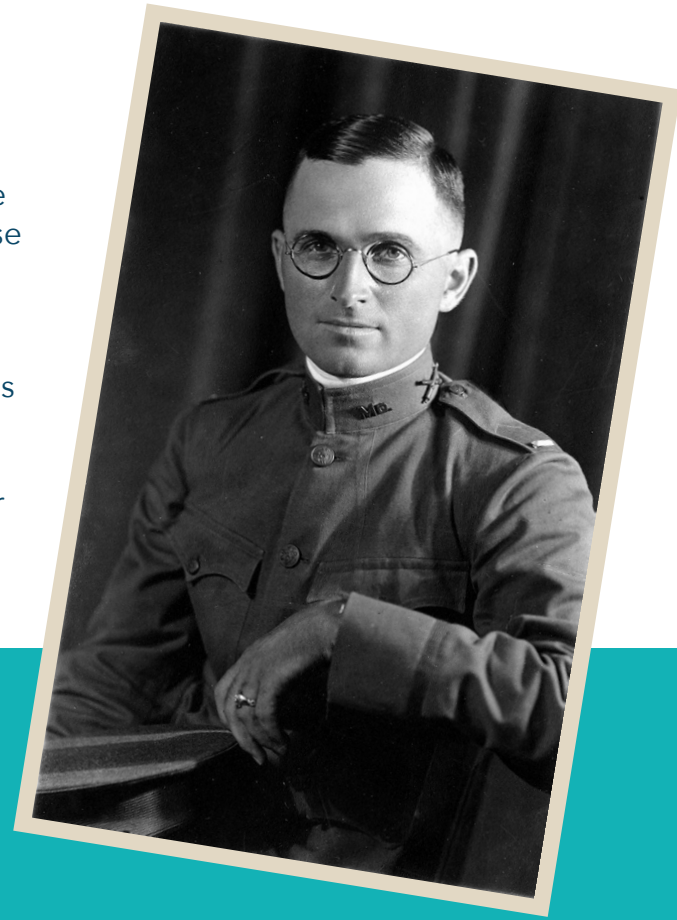
Interesting Facts

- His middle initial, "S," doesn't stand for anything. His parents couldn't decide whether to give him the middle name "Shipp" or "Solomon" (his grandfathers' names), so they just gave him the initial.
- He was a member of the Democratic Party.
- There was a famous phrase during Truman's lifetime called "passing the buck," which referred to giving someone else the responsibility of making a decision. As President, Truman had a famous sign on his desk that read "The Buck Stops Here," which was his way of saying that the President should always be willing to make hard decisions.
- Truman's inauguration in 1949 was the first to appear on television.
- In 1950, two Puerto Rican nationalists tried to assassinate Truman near the White House. The attackers failed to kill Truman but did kill a White House police officer.
- As of 2021, his wife, Bess Truman, lived the longest life of any First Lady—97 years.
- Truman's daughter, Margaret, became a famous singer and author. She wrote several bestselling murder mystery novels.



World War I

In 1917, the United States entered World War I against the Germans. Truman could have avoided the fighting because some people with farming backgrounds were allowed to stay home, but he was a true **patriot**. He joined the war effort and went to Europe in 1918 to fight. He was made a captain and courageously led his men on many dangerous missions. When they weren't performing well, he yelled at them to motivate them to fight. Truman earned the admiration of his fellow soldiers for being a tough and fair leader. He realized he had strong leadership capabilities, and he became more confident in himself.



Quote

"America has become one of the most powerful forces for good on earth. We must keep it so."
- April 1945



Rise to Power

During the war, Truman wrote letters to a woman he had known since he was a child: Bess Wallace. He had proposed marriage to her in 1911, but she turned him down. He was persistent and proposed again when he returned from the war. This time, she accepted, and they were married in 1919. They eventually had a daughter named Margaret.

Truman decided to earn a living as a small business owner. He opened up a **haberdashery**. Unfortunately, it failed, and he was left bankrupt. Despite this, a local **party boss** named Tom Pendergast thought he might make a good candidate for political office because he had a reputation for honesty. He got Truman elected Eastern Jackson County judge in 1922 and U.S. senator in 1934.

At the time, Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt was President of the United States and was battling the Great Depression. Senator Truman, a Democrat, loyally supported Roosevelt's policies.

In 1941, the United States entered World War II. It became **allies** with the United Kingdom and the **Soviet Union** and fought against Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan. Truman worked hard as a senator to make sure that the government ran the war effort smoothly and obeyed the law.

The Democrats were so impressed by Truman's work that they chose him to be the vice presidential candidate in the 1944 presidential election. That year, Roosevelt won his fourth term as President, and Truman was elected Vice President (now, presidents are only allowed to serve two terms, but at the time they were allowed to run as many times as they wanted). In January 1945, Truman took the oath of office as Vice President, but in April, Roosevelt died of a stroke.



Quote

"It is not enough to yearn for peace. We must work, and if necessary, fight for it."
- April 1945

President

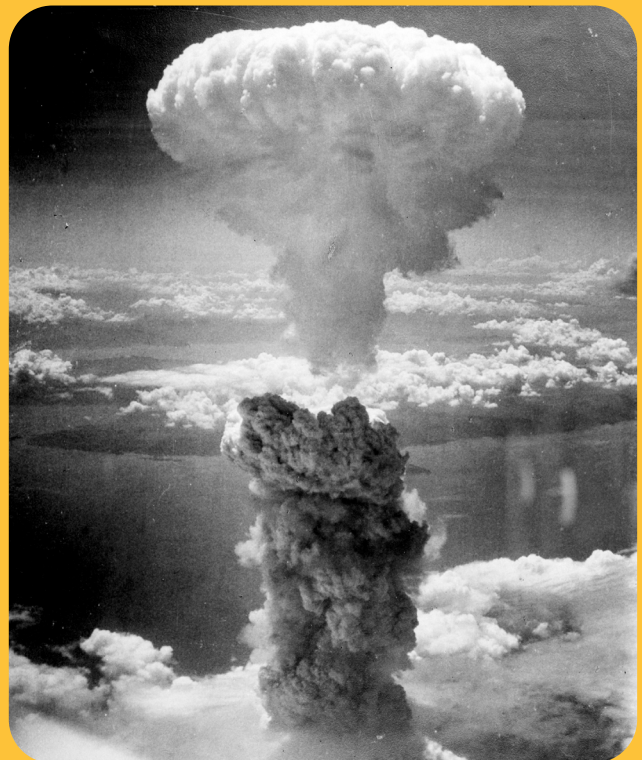
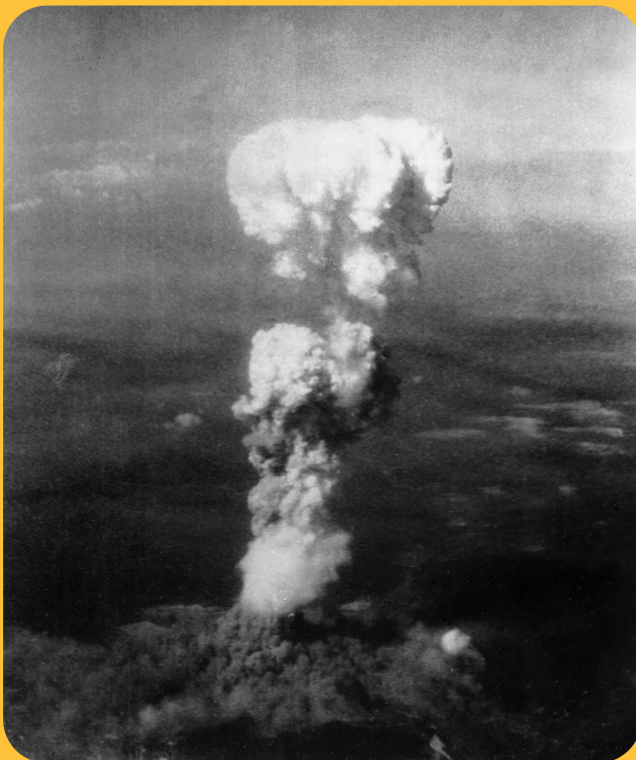
Harry Truman was now the 33rd President of the United States. He immediately had to make many difficult decisions. At first, he felt overwhelmed by his new job and wondered if he could succeed. He said, "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

In May 1945, the United States and its allies finally defeated Nazi Germany, and Italy had surrendered more than a year earlier, but the war continued against Japan. Truman learned that America had a new weapon that it could use to defeat Japan: the atomic bomb. It was the most powerful weapon ever invented and could destroy an entire city.

Some people believed that using the atomic bomb to do so much damage was wrong, but Harry Truman and many of his advisors felt that it was the best option to end the war. Victory over Japan required their **surrender**, and his other options involved using American troops to invade. Truman remembered what it was like to fight in World War I, and he worried that

more people would suffer if the Allies invaded Japan. With Truman's permission, the U.S. military dropped atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in August 1945. Both cities were instantly destroyed. Finally, the Japanese government realized they had to **surrender**, which they did on September 2. The world celebrated that one of the most difficult and painful wars in history was over.

President Truman hoped he could lead the country into a new era of peace, but already, a new enemy was emerging. Even though the Soviet Union was America's ally during World War II, it was similar to Nazi Germany because it was a **dictatorship** that controlled the lives of its citizens. The Soviet Union, led by dictator Joseph Stalin, wanted to spread **communism** around the world and destroy the American system of **freedom**. As President, Truman worked hard to stop communism wherever it spread so that people could be free. This new conflict between America and the Soviet Union was called the Cold War.



Truman knew that he needed help from other countries to stop the spread of communism, so he developed strong **alliances** all over the world. When Israel became a country in 1948, Truman established a relationship with them so that America could have another partner against the Soviet Union. When the communists tried to take over all of Korea in 1950, Truman sent troops under General Douglas MacArthur to stop them. He was able to save the southern half of Korea, which is why millions of people in South Korea are free from the communists today. Even though General MacArthur had success in Korea and was very popular, he began to disagree with Truman's policies in public. This led Truman to fire MacArthur. The war in Korea quickly became a **stalemate**, and the **A**merican people were mad at Truman for firing MacArthur and for the loss of Americans as a result of the fighting.

Back in 1948, Truman ran for his own term as President. No one thought he would win, and one newspaper even announced he had lost, but Truman surprised everyone when he emerged victorious. By 1952, however, voters were tired of the Korean War, and Truman knew he couldn't win again. He decided to retire from the presidency. That November, the American people elected World War II General Dwight D. Eisenhower to replace him.



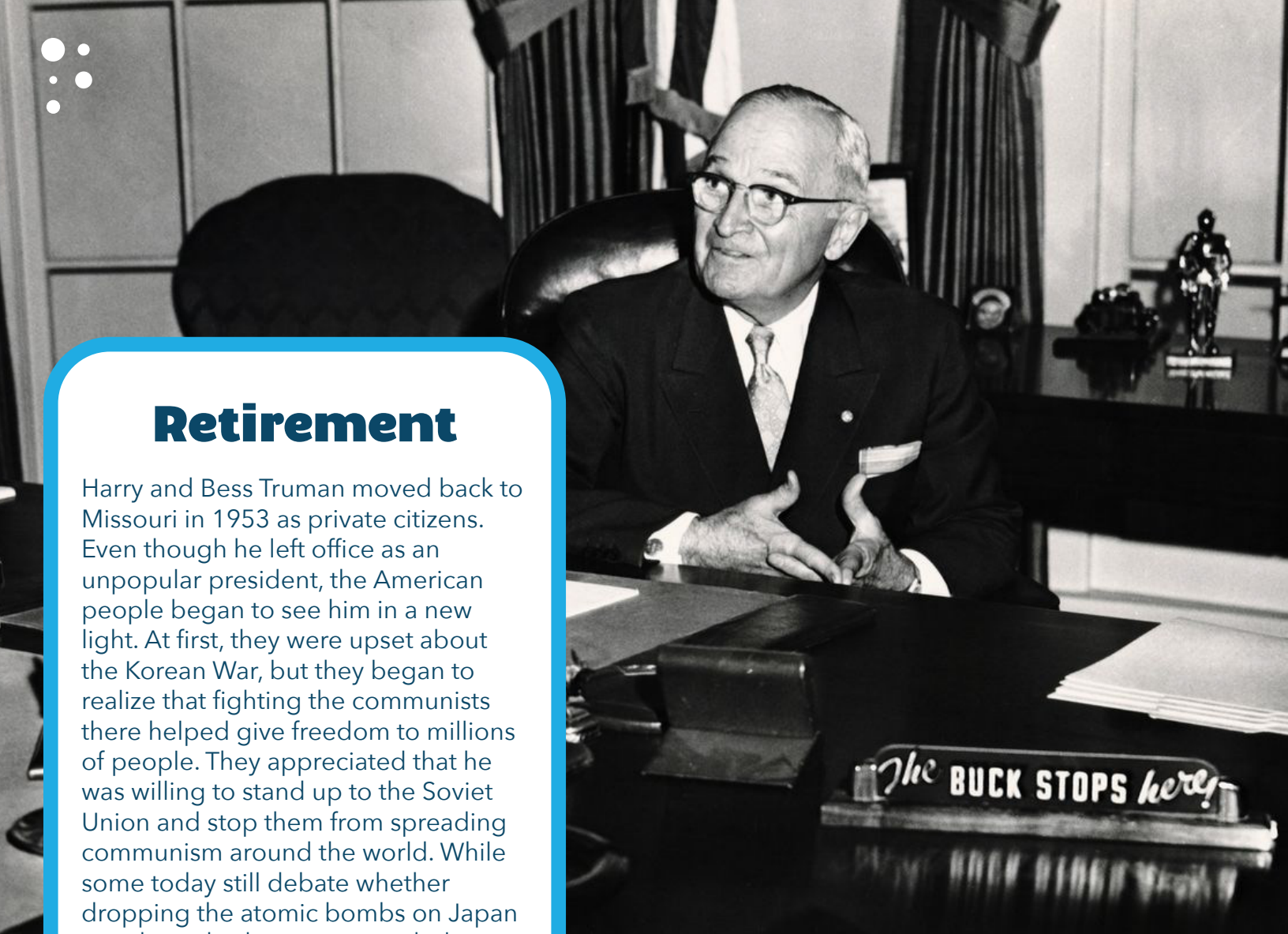
Quote

*"When you get to be President, there are all those things, the honors, the twenty-one gun salutes, all those things. You have to remember it isn't for you. It's for the Presidency."
- Plain Speaking, 1973*



Marshall Plan

One of Truman's top advisors was his Secretary of State, George Marshall. Marshall came up with a plan to invest money in European countries which had been destroyed during World War II. This would help them rebuild their economies and stand up to the Soviet Union. It was a great success and helped strengthen America's alliances in Europe. It also demonstrated to the world that the American way was superior to communism.



Retirement

Harry and Bess Truman moved back to Missouri in 1953 as private citizens. Even though he left office as an unpopular president, the American people began to see him in a new light. At first, they were upset about the Korean War, but they began to realize that fighting the communists there helped give freedom to millions of people. They appreciated that he was willing to stand up to the Soviet Union and stop them from spreading communism around the world. While some today still debate whether dropping the atomic bombs on Japan was the right decision, many believe that it was the best way to end the war.

America's World War II ally and British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, later told Truman that when he became President, he held him "in very low regard" but admitted, "I misjudged you badly... You... have saved Western civilization." This time, the American people agreed.

Truman lived for almost twenty years after he left office. He died on December 26, 1972, at the age of 88.

Legacy

Throughout Truman's life, many people underestimated him because he seemed like such an ordinary person. When he took over as President, they wondered if he was strong enough to continue the fight during World War II. When he ran for his own term as President in 1948, they felt he would lose. Even after he left the presidency, they felt he had failed in his job. Each time, however, he proved his critics wrong, and he is now much more respected.

The humble haberdasher from Missouri left an important legacy, helping to end World War II and stand up against communism. His story teaches us to never underestimate those who seem like the most ordinary of men.

Writing Activity

Have you ever had to do a job you weren't prepared for? What did you do? Write about what you can learn from President Truman's example. What can you do differently the next time you are asked to do something you feel unprepared for?



Dewey Defeats Truman

One of the most iconic images of Truman's presidency comes from the 1948 presidential election. Almost everyone thought Truman would lose to his opponent, Thomas Dewey. The *Chicago Tribune* famously ran a headline announcing Dewey's victory. Truman proudly displayed it after election night so everyone knew that the *Tribune* was wrong.

Glossary

Cold War: The conflict between America, which was free, and the Soviet Union, which was a communist dictatorship, that lasted from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Patriot: A person who loves and appreciates their country.

Haberdashery: A store where men buy clothes and other items like hats, buttons, and zippers.

Party Boss: A person who has gained political power through corrupt activities, such as stealing government money or bribing politicians to vote a certain way.

Allies: Countries that become partners and pursue the same goals.

Soviet Union: A country that existed from 1922 to 1991 which oppressed its people and tried to spread its communist system around the world.

Surrender: When a person or country gives up fighting in a war and accepts defeat.

Dictatorship: A system of government where one person or a small group has most or all political power. In dictatorships, the government has strong control over the people's lives.

Communism: A political and economic system where all property and resources are owned and controlled by the government. The result of this system is often dictatorship and government control of every aspect of people's lives.

Freedom: The ability to believe, say, and do what you want without the government controlling you.

Alliances: Agreements between countries to be partners and pursue the same goals.

Stalemate: A war that continues for a long time with neither side winning.

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Answers

TRUMAN'S CODENAME: GENERAL

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