April 29, 1951

THE MACARTHUR DISMISSAL

Following are notes of the President's recollection of events leading up to the recall of General MacArthur, as recited to George Elsey and me, on Saturday, April 28th (10:30 - 11:00 a.m.):

The order recalling MacArthur was precipitated by the action of Rep. Joe Martin of Massachusetts on April 5th, in reading to the House of Representatives, a letter addressed to him by MacArthur on March 20th. (1)

The next morning, April 6th, after the regular cabinet meeting at 11:00 a.m., the President called in General Marshall, Secretary of State Acheson, General Bradley and Averell Harriman and discussed with them the situation that had arisen as a result of MacArthur's letter to Martin. (It is the President's recollection that the matter was not brought up at the cabinet meeting).

Each of the four, the President said, gave his views and his reasons for his position. General Marshall expressed the opinion that the situation should be weighed carefully before any action was taken. Acheson urged caution and said there was no hurry. General Bradley and Harriman said MacArthur "should be fired immediately" - in the words of the President. The President told the four to meet and discuss every angle of the situation.

The President said that what concerned him more even than the MacArthur letter to Martin was the statement issued by MacArthur about March 26th (published in U.S. papers March 25) (2) which, in effect anticipated a Presidential announcement then in preparation of which MacArthur had been advised in a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 20th (3).

The President said he was particularly concerned about this, in the light
of a directive which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sent to MacArthur on December 6th, (4) calling attention to a memorandum of the President to instructing Cabinet members and other agency heads to refrain from direct communication on military or foreign policy with newspapers, magazines or other publicity media in the U.S. (5) MacArthur's attention had been called to this directive again on March 21st by a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (6) He was specifically advised in this March 21st message that "in view of the information given you 20 March 1951 any further statements by you must be coordinated as prescribed in the order of 6 December."

The four officials, Marshall, Acheson, Harriman and Bradley conferred on Friday afternoon, April 6th; then came in to see the President on Saturday morning, April 7th. They told the President, he said, they had concluded that MacArthur should be recalled. The President said he directed Marshall to work up a message setting forth the reasons for the dismissal.

At 1 o'clock that afternoon (Saturday, April 7), the President talked with Speaker Rayburn, Chief Justice Vinson and Averell Harriman at Blair House. He also called Vice President Barkley, who was in the hospital for a check up and could not attend the meeting, and told him of the situation. Barkley, he said, told him he understood the situation and would be satisfied with whatever decision was reached. The Vice President expressed the opinion that MacArthur
should be dismissed. Rayburn urged caution and pointed out that MacArthur was something of a popular hero and any action would have political repercussions.

Justice Vinson also advised caution, as the authority of the President of the United States was at stake and Constitutional questions were involved. The President said he had been going through some books dealing with previous cases, such as Polk's dismissal of General Scott and Lincoln's recall of McClellan, Hooker and Pope. The President said that "after a long talk the three said that I would have to weigh everything and would have to decide it myself".

On Monday, April 9th, the President held his regular meeting with the congressional leaders Speaker Rayburn, Senator McNary and Representative McCormack. General Bradley briefed them on the situation and the President said he told the leaders he was going to fire MacArthur. McCormack and Rayburn, the President said were "warmed up" over the MacArthur letter to Martin and particularly so when Martin extended an invitation to MacArthur to address the Congress.

Later General Marshall came in with the draft of the proposed order recalling MacArthur and the statement to be issued in connection with it and discussed with the President ways and means of handling it. Marshall suggested that the order be sent to Frank Pace, Secretary of the Army, at 11:00 AM, Tuesday (10:00 AM, Wednesday, in Tokyo) to be delivered by Pace to General MacArthur. It was planned to send the message at 8:00 PM, Tuesday (10:00 AM, Wednesday, in Tokyo) to be delivered by Pace to MacArthur that (Wednesday) afternoon. The President said that that evening (Tuesday, April 10th) General Bradley, Averell Harriman, Dean Rusk of the State Department and Joe Short, Press Secretary, came to Elixir House to see the President. They were disturbed over the possibility of a newspaper "leak" concerning the action which was being taken. This resulted from a report that had reached General
Marshall to the effect that the "Chicago Tribune" had learned something about
the MacArthur dismissal and was going to print it. As a result the President
said he authorized Short to call a press conference and authorized General
Marshall to send the order to MacArthur. Short held the press conference about
1:00 AM, Wednesday, April 11th, and released the statement of the President and
the order to General MacArthur. (7 & 8)

The President said that at that time Secretary Pace was at the front and
did not know of the action until the Ambassador telephoned it to him there. The
result was that Pace was not able to deliver it to MacArthur as planned.

The President said he had made up his mind to dismiss MacArthur before his
conferences with the State and Defense officials and others but that he wanted
to be sure that everything was in order and proceeded as he did for that reason.

The President said what disturbed General Bradley was that MacArthur gave
the impression that he wanted to rearm South Korean forces, whereas he had urged
that any available weapons be used in Japan rather than for additional ROK
troops. (9), (10).

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(The usher's records show that the President's meeting with Justice
Vinson and Speaker Rayburn was at 1:00 PM, Saturday, April 7th, and that the
meeting with General Bradley; Dean Rusk; Averell Harriman; Joe Short and Matt
Connally was at 10:00 PM, Tuesday, April 10th.)