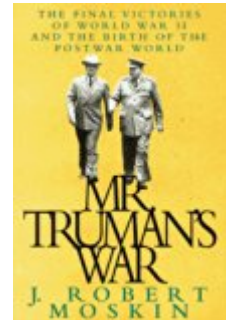


Moskin Robert, J.. *Mr. Truman's War: The Final Victories of World War II and the Birth of the Postwar World.* New York: Random House, 1996. xvii + 411 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-679-40936-6.



Reviewed by Oscar Patterson

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Harry Truman became President of the United States at five p.m. on April 2, 1945. At 5:47 p.m., INS moved the story first with "FLASH--FRD DEAD." In a letter to his mother, Truman wrote: "I had hurried to the White House to see the President, and when I arrived, I found I was the President."

And President he was. The farm boy from Missouri, the failed shopkeeper, Tom Pendergast's choice for county judge, would, in the first five months of his presidency, make many of the momentous decisions that shaped the postwar world. Within those five months the Nazis' Thousand-Year Reich and the Empire of Japan were utterly (and unconditionally) destroyed, the first atomic bombs were dropped, the United Nations born, colonialism undermined, the Indochina debacle begun, and the first battle cries of the Cold War sounded.

In April 1945 the man who was chosen vice president as a political compromise--and had been excluded from all international discussions--was forced to deal with Stalin, Churchill, de Gaulle, MacArthur, Stimson, Marshall--a veritable

pantheon of World War II notables. This bespectacled former artillery commander, without hesitation, destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, refused Churchill's demands that U.S. troops remain in the Russian zone of Germany, cut off supplies to de Gaulle's French army and insisted that Japan surrender "unconditionally."

Truman and the nation had been toughened by the war. "When you have to deal with a beast, you have to treat him as a beast." And most Americans agreed. Immediately after Nagasaki was flattened, 75 percent of the Americans polled were glad the bombs had been dropped. Truman was decisive, to a degree--his reading of the past was displayed in the sign on his desk: "The buck stops here." But he was also much appreciated for his other qualities. While FDR had been devious, Truman was accessible and forthright. He was an orderly administrator. He was not short, however, standing 5 feet 10 inches. And much later, when the nation was disgusted by presidential excesses, Truman became the people's president, admired for his directness and decisiveness.

Mr. Truman's War covers those first five tense months of Harry Truman's path to maturity as an assured, powerful President and world leader. Written by a former foreign editor of Look and senior editor of Collier's, the book clearly, precisely and compellingly reviews those critical 150 days. Truman, says Moskin, was a realists as were the men and women of the nation he led. They knew that the real war wasn't over, but they had the faith that if this war could be won, so could the other.

Robert Moskin, himself a soldier in the Southwest Pacific during World War II, is also the author of *Among Lions*, the story of the battle for Jerusalem in the Six Days War, and *Morality in America*. His varied background has helped add maturity and color to our increasingly enhanced perspective of The Man from Missouri since the publication of David McCulloch's Pulitzer-Prize winning biography.

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