1953

Swede and his daughter Alice attended Eisenhower's inauguration in January 1953, were seated "about 100 feet on your port bow," but had no chance to speak to him. Eisenhower's letters to Swede during the busy spring of 1953 were short and routine which—together with the fact that they were signed "DE" instead of "Ike"—revived Swede's insecurities. "Perhaps . . . I've been a bit too brash in my communications," he wrote on July 15. Eisenhower replied in the long, reassuring letter that follows. In it he attempts to outline his ideas on presidential leadership and to explain his response to the demagogic Wisconsin Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, whom Swede and others had been urging Eisenhower to "crack down on."

21 July 1953

Dear Swede:

The arrival of your letter reminded me that it has been far too long since I heard from you. My natural impulse would be to do a little complaining at this point—but when I found, at the end of your letter, that you are in the business of marrying off your youngest daughter, I automatically forgave all sins of omission.
As to the "DE" instead of "Ike," I found to my amazement—once I was actually sitting behind this desk—that I became somewhat of an embarrassment to many of my old friends. They didn’t want to call me openly—or at least in front of others—by my nickname, and this embarrassment apparently carried over in some cases into their letters. They used all kinds of dodges to avoid extremes of informality and formality, and I soon found that it seemed better to fall in, at least partially, with their own ideas than it was to engage in a long and fruitless argument. One or two of my former correspondents have even cut me off their list—I think for no other reason in the world than that they felt somewhat embarrassed in addressing me by a formal title and yet they could not quite practice the informality that once characterized their friendships.

This is, of course, only one of the many personal problems that come to a man in this particular position. In your own case, it was nothing but habit that made me use the "DE" because,
certainly, no question of embarrassment or strain had ever showed up between us—thank the Lord! After this, when you receive a communication from me, look first at the signature. If I have made an error, you send it back without reading it, and I will get back on the rails.

This business of making decisions for America brings me strange experiences. I recall almost daily an observation attributed to Napoleon that went something like this: “The genius in war is a man that can do the average thing when everybody else is growing hysterical or panicky in the excitement of the moment.” Of course you know that I have always striven to prepare myself as much as possible for the known or calculable requirements of any job assigned me. In this particular post such intentions and practices have to be almost completely discarded. This is because of the infinite variety of problems presented, and the rapidity with which they are placed in front of the responsible individual for action. Consequently, the struggle is to apply common sense—to reach an average solution.

The one thing that must never be forgotten is that when outsiders come in, always they have an axe to grind. If a man comes in protesting bitterly against any increase in second class mail rates, it is not because he has a burning desire to serve the best interests of the public; it is because he has a burning desire to save the amount it would take out of his pocketbook. Even within government itself, these distorted and selfish views are encountered. For example, you are, of course, personally acquainted with some of the inter-service difficulties resulting from granite-like support of a special or parochial viewpoint. These same quarrels I find endlessly in every department of government.

Fortunately these instances and practices are offset by the numbers of people in governmental service who are completely dedicated individuals. I do not mean merely the persons of cabinet rank, selected, of course, by the President. It extends on down through the services, both on the appointive and on the career side. All of these individuals are the ones that help the Head in reaching a common sense, average solution. They are alert for the phony argument and the selfish motive and the untrustworthy individual. They help to meet the deficiencies of a faulty memory, a deteriorating disposition, and any tendency toward the pessimistic or the morbid.
The point of this recitation is that even the matter of reaching a
common sense solution—or making an average decision—is not
one that can be performed by an individual operating alone.

I was interested in a statement of yours in which you express
your satisfaction that “at last you are ready to crack down on
McCarthy.” Now I have no doubt that you are correct in the later
statement in the same paragraph where you say, “I have always
known that you feel about him much as I do.” At the same time, I
must say that I am not quite certain as to the meaning of your first
expression. Again referring to the special significance or, let us say,
the popular standing of the Presidency, it is quite clear that
whenever the President takes part in a newspaper trial of some
individual of whom he disapproves, one thing is automatically
accomplished. This is an increase in the headline value of the
individual attacked.

I think that the average honorable individual cannot under­
stand to what lengths certain politicians would go for publicity.
They have learned a simple truth in American life. This is that the
most vicious kind of attack from one element always creates a very
great popularity, amounting to almost hero worship, in an op­
posite fringe of society. Because of this, as you well know, Huey
Long had his idolaters. Every attack on him increased their number
(an expression of the under-dog complex) and enhanced the fervor
of his avowed supporters.

When you have a situation like this, you have an ideal one for
the newspapers, the television and the radio, to exploit, to
exaggerate and to perpetuate. In such a situation I disagree
completely with the “crack down” theory. I believe in the positive
approach. I believe that we should earnestly support the practice of
American principles in trials and investigations—we should teach
and preach decency and justice. We should support—even mili­
tantly support—people whom we know to be unjustly attacked,
whether they are public servants or private citizens. In this case, of
course, it is necessary to be certain of facts if the defense is to be
a personal one. Of course, the indirect defense accomplished
through condemnation of unfair methods is always applicable.

Persistence in these unspectacular but sound methods will, in
my opinion, produce results that may not be headlines, but they
will be permanent because they will earn the respect of fair-minded
citizens—which means the vast bulk of our population. To give
way in anger or irritation to an outburst intended to excoriate some
individual, his motives and his methods, could do far more to destroy the position and authority of the attacker than it would do to damage the attacked.

Of course, it is really useless to tell you all these things. You are well aware of them. But it is always easy to grow verbose when I write to you.

The part of your letter that talked about some of the "pap" being written about me gave me quite a smile for the simple reason that I rarely, if ever, read any of these things. Once in a while I see an editorial dealing with the work I am now doing and the manner of its performance. This I try to read and apply objectively, but the old stories of smoking corn silk and fishing for mudcat are written for someone else, not for me.

I agree with you as to the convenience represented in the Williamsburg [the presidential yacht, a favorite of Roosevelt and Truman, the use of which Eisenhower had decided to forgo]. We liked her. But I am committed to an Administration of economy, bordering on or approaching austerity. So in spite of the fact that I felt she performed a desirable, if not almost an essential service, I felt that the very word "yacht" created a symbol of luxury in the public mind that would tend to defeat some of the purposes I was trying to accomplish. For the same reason I gave up the Presidential quarters at Key West. I have kept only the little camp up in the Catoctins. It has been renamed "Camp David." "Shangri-La" was just a little fancy for a Kansas farm boy.

Give my love to Ibby, and, of course, all the best to yourself.

As ever,

At the Bermuda "summit" conference, Eisenhower had pressed the French both for a more vigorous prosecution of the war in Indochina (which the United States was to a large degree financing through its foreign- and military-aid programs) and for the ratification of the European Defense Community (EDC). His efforts were unsuccessful in both instances. On his return, he delivered a much-heralded speech at the United Nations on the "Peaceful Atom," urging that the United States and the Soviet
Union join in contributing fissible materials to an international "bank" from which other nations could draw for nonmilitary purposes—"agriculture, medicine, and [the production of] abundant electrical energy in the power starved areas of the world."

His hopes for the Republican legislative program were soon to be dashed by the bitter controversies inspired by Joe McCarthy, which would dominate American politics throughout much of 1954. And he would soon change his opinions about a number of those whom he had considered to be his possible successors. Swede, meanwhile, had suffered another heart attack, had been bedridden for six weeks, and remained, as he put it, "out of circulation to a great extent."

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24 December 1953

Personal and Confidential

Dear Swede:

Your most recent letter to me was written on November twenty-sixth, more than a week before I went to Bermuda. The period has been one of the busiest of my life; but, though at times I have felt almost at the point of exhaustion, there have still been moments of real satisfaction that have made all the rest of it seem worthwhile.

I shall not attempt to give you a personal diary covering the past three weeks. I cannot set down in chronological order all of the ideas, actions and impulses that have been part of the innumerable conferences, meetings and discussions that have, at times, seemed to be never ending. But introductions and alibis will get me no further along. So without further ado, I shall try to give you a decently coherent account of the things that come immediately to memory.

First in order would be the Bermuda meeting. With respect to that trip, my initial observation is that it provides a good example of how useless it is to tell the full truth to the press—at least when the representatives of that estate want to believe otherwise. On
two occasions I informed the individuals at White House press conferences that there was no purpose of the Bermuda meeting that could be defined in terms of agreements sought or arrangements to be definitely fixed. I told them that the purpose was purely that of meeting in an informal way with friends in order that we could discuss together our common interests in various portions of the globe and compare our approaches to the problems that confront us daily. I warned that there would be no agenda—an error of omission was that I failed to say there would be no “final communique.”

As a result of that failure, all other officials at the conference, influenced by routine and custom, and needled by some two hundred press, radio, television and newsreel representatives, spent a great deal of time on the exact wording of a final, “combined” statement. It bored me immeasurably and struck me as typifying futility. When people get to arguing heatedly over such details, I inevitably recall the old saying ‘picking nits with boxing gloves.’
In spite of this frustrating item, the meeting as a whole was productive, especially in providing opportunity for necessary conversations with the British. This was not as true in the case of the French because of the known certainty that this particular French government would not be of long life.

At times Winston [Churchill] seemed to be his old and hearty self, full of vim and determination. At others he seemed almost to wander in his mind. I must confess that occasionally I suspected this latter was almost a deliberately adopted mannerism rather than an involuntary habit. At least it seemed to come over him only when the subject under discussion or the argument presented was distasteful to him.

The French situation, currently symbolized by their almost futile effort to elect a President, was clearly felt also at Bermuda. The answers were always “Yes, but” or “No, unless.”

Actually, France’s situation is merely symptomatic of what is happening to the entire world. There is the extreme Right. In France these people are the deGaullists, while in the world scene they are Fascist dictatorships, largely found now in Spanish-speaking or in the Arab countries.

There is the extreme Left, in France and in the world, Communist.

In between these two extremes is a vast center group which in basic beliefs has much in common, and, for this reason, should be a closely knit organization. In point of fact this vast center or “middle of the Road” group prefers to shut its eyes to the dangers represented in the extremes—in the current state of affairs, the only threatening extreme is Communism. The group of nations of which this center is constituted constantly indulge in all kinds of divisive arguments and name-calling that grow so important in their cumulative effect as to nullify any attempt toward unity in working against the common enemy.

So—just as the French cannot agree upon firm policies respecting the prosecution of the Indo-China war nor decide what they want to do with respect to EDC, we find that the world cannot agree on basic policies concerning trade with the Communists, firming up cooperative plans that would permit us all to advance economically and politically, nor even decide how we can best protect ourselves along the sensitive European front.

India would rather see Pakistan weak and helpless in front of a Russian threat than to see that country grow strong enough to give
substance to its hope of annexing Kashmir. France would rather see Germany weak and helpless in Europe than to see that country strong enough to serve as an effective bar against possible Russian invasion. In the latter event, France is fearful that German strength might again be used against her. Of course to us this particular fear seems senseless, in view of our guarantees that no country admitted into the combined European defensive system would be allowed to attack another.

There is no use belaboring the point nor pursuing the analogy too far. The fact is, however, that while we get almost disgusted with the picture that France currently presents, we need only to look at the rest of the world—indeed to ourselves—to see many points of similarity.

I think I have digressed sufficiently far from Bermuda that I should come back there just long enough to say that I left the Islands one morning, flew to New York, and that afternoon made a talk to the UN.

That particular talk had been evolving in our minds and plans for many weeks. Quite a while ago I began to search around for any kind of an idea that could bring the world to look at the atomic problem in a broad and intelligent way and still escape the impasse to action created by Russian intransigence in the matter of mutual or neutral inspection of resources. I wanted, additionally, to give our people and the world some faint idea of the size of the distance already travelled by this new science—but to do it in such a way as not to create new alarm.

One day I hit upon the idea of actual physical donations by Russia and the United States—with Britain also in the picture in a minor way—and to develop this thought in such a way as to provide at the very least a calm and reasonable atmosphere in which the whole matter could again be jointly studied. Once the decision was taken to propose such a plan in some form, the whole problem became one of treatment, choice of time, place and circumstance, and the niceties of language. I had, of course, a lot of excellent help—but I personally put on the text a tremendous amount of time.

Throughout the friendly world reactions have been good; our official messages have been much like the public statements you have seen in the press. The Soviets have now, at last, moved toward a meeting, though not without their customary grumbling, griping, and some sneering. We will see now what the next step
brings forth! But all in all I believe that the effort up to this point has been well worth while, and has done something to create a somewhat better atmosphere both at home and abroad.

A week after finishing the UN talk, my Cabinet and I had to be ready to meet the Republican legislative leaders and go over with them the legislative program we had prepared during these past months. We knew exactly where we wanted to go in the matter of principle and we were quite sure of the basic direction that we would take in each of the several important fields that together would make up an entire program. But it was very necessary to get together with the legislative leaders for several purposes:

(a). To gather from the legislative leaders their impressions of the sentiment of the country, compare their reactions with ours, and thus arrive at an order of precedence or priority in the presentation of the program.

(b). Under the principles and purposes laid out by the Administration, to work out applicable legislative methods, as well as modifying small details to add to the attractiveness or popularity of the particular program.

(c). To renew the habit of cooperative effort between the Executive and Legislative Departments.

(d). To bring out that the Republican Party, headed by the President, had reached that point where a combined, concerted effort to put over a progressive, enlightened legislative program was mandatory!

It is, of course, necessary for all to understand that success will lead to continuing governmental responsibility. Failure would lead to an adverse result which would be exactly what was deserved in the circumstances. Since the President, under our system, must take the lead in the presentation of such programs, the simple truth is that the mass of Republican and independent supporters have got to be behind the Administration—or else.

The meetings were on the whole successful—so far as we can determine—far beyond our expectations. Of course only the stress of actual Congressional debate and voting will tell the final story, but I am hopeful.

I do not mean by any of the above that mere partisan Republican support is, under the existing circumstances in Congress, sufficient to the success of a legislative program. We have got to have the support of reasonable and enlightened Democrats and I shall certainly do all I can to deserve that support and to act,
personally, in such a way as to encourage the Democrats to give it to us.

When last Saturday night arrived and the three days of conferences, luncheon meetings and arguments had become history, I was so weary and tired that I doubt that I could have spoken pleasantly to my best friend. However, I did have the distinct feeling that we could look forward to truly intelligent and cooperative work in both Executive and Legislative branches during the next session of the Congress. If that comes about, I will, a few months later, be reaching the halfway mark in my political career with some sense of real accomplishment, to say nothing of legitimate reason to hope that improvement and progress will characterize our country and the world during the approximate future.

I started this letter in the hope and the belief that it would really be informative. I have just glanced through what I finished yesterday and find that it is almost a dud, especially for one who makes a habit of reading the daily papers. In an effort to include a piece of news—but after all it will not be news to you—I shall tell you what would be classed as “Secret Intentions.” It involves 1956, and January 20, 1957. With respect to the political campaign of ’56, my position will be exactly as I determined it would be when finally I gave way in ’52 to the convictions and arguments of some of my friends. I shall never again be a candidate for anything, and so told my friends two years ago. This determination is a fixed decision (subject to modification only in the case of some worldwide cataclysm that I cannot now foresee and which would make political change at such a moment almost catastrophic for our country). Of course I realize that American politics demands that a President keep his intentions secret in this regard; otherwise, it is assumed his whole influence on the political scene would disappear and he could not possibly lead in the development of a legislative program. So, for the moment, I shall observe this so-called political axiom, but this will certainly in no way affect my intentions!

Meanwhile, I am doing my part to make certain that the policies in which I firmly believe will have younger and abler champions when I step off the stage. As I have more than once told you, the man who, from the standpoint of knowledge of human and governmental affairs, persuasiveness in speech and dedication to our country, would make the best President I can think of is my
young brother, Milton. Under no circumstances would I ever say this publicly because, in the first place, I do not think he is physically strong enough to take the beating. In the second place, any effort to make him the candidate in 1956 would properly be resented by our people. So he is out so far as I am concerned. Anyway, I am certain that such a thought has never crossed his mind and, if it ever did, he would reach the same obvious conclusion that I have just stated.

But here are some names of people that I am constantly trying to keep in the public eye so as to let the American people know more and more about them. Each is able, clean and energetic, and also important, relatively young. Each is a good executive—and would certainly have my support—if, at that time, my support would be helpful. [UN Ambassador Henry Cabot] Lodge, [Vice-President Richard M.] Nixon, [Attorney General Herbert] Brownell [Jr.], [Mutual Security Administrator Harold E.] Stassen, [Deputy Attorney General William P.] Rogers, [Secretary of the Army Robert] Stevens, and one or two others in the Executive Department. In Congress, [Indiana Congressman] Charlie [A.] Halleck is a standout, and along with him there are a number of young men developing who could easily become headliners before 1956. They include [Senator Charles E.] Potter, [Senator Barry M.] Goldwater, possibly [Senator William F.] Knowland and others.

All I am saying here is that, far from trying to keep young men out of the spotlight, it is my hope to push them into it and so have ready a group of young men who are not only able but who will have the publicity value that a political party always seeks in its candidate.

Of course I have no fear that you will ever reveal this information to anyone—but I want you personally to have it so that if a time ever comes when you see me even appearing to waver from strict adherence to this pledge—you are to take drastic steps to see that I do not become more of a damned fool than I was in ’52.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to Ibby and your nice family.

As ever,