

Harry S. Truman (1884-1972)

## **Interview with Senator Truman by Jimmy Mack of Radio Newsreel about National Defense**

*given on December 14, 1939*

Jimmy Mack (JM): How do you do everyone. From the Senate office building located on capital hill at Washington DC, this is Jimmy Mack of Newsreel greeting you with another round of spotnews broadcast. At the present time we are speaking from the chamber of Senator Harry Truman of Missouri. Senator Truman accompanied by a group of congressional contemporaries has just finished a 13,000-mile tour of the United States, Central America, and the Panama Canal. The tour was in the nature of inspection of army posts throughout the nation and the Central American vicinity. Senator Truman has just finished making a report of his impressions to the president at the White House, and has granted Radio Newsreel an on the spot, informal interview before leaving for home for the Christmas holidays. Senator Truman, will you tell us first of all what you believe to be the weak points in our system of national defense.

Senator Truman (HST): In my opinion our weakest points are the shortage of anti-aircraft guns and pursuit planes. Some of our weak points are due to the fact that our factories are situated close to the border instead of further inland I think.

JM: Well perhaps concerning the anti-aircraft Senator Truman Congress can do something about that. Of course we can get more equipment, but about this weak point of our air factories being located on the coast and at vulnerable points throughout the United States, what do you believe will be steps in which to make these points invulnerable?

HST: Well some effort can be made to defend them against a possible air attack from over the border or the sea. And I think in the future some effort should be made to locate them where they will not be so vulnerable.

JM: We understand too that in your tour of the United States and Central America you also visited the Panama Canal and passed judgement on our national defense there. Will you tell us specifically how strong is our national defense at the Panama Canal?

HST: I think that the defense of the Panama Canal at the present time is very efficient. They are short anti-aircraft artillery and seacoast defense guns and pursuit planes. But that is being referendumed I think.

JM: Do you think Congress in our next session Senator will attempt to make our army one of the largest in the world?

HST: Under no circumstances. We don't want the largest army in the world. We want a small efficient army to teach our citizen soldiers in case of an emergency, and that's all we need in an army.

JM: In other words, you think that perhaps we, or rather that Congress wont attempt to make it the largest army in the world, but maybe one of the best in the world. Is that right?

HST: I think it should be made one of the most efficient in the world. In fact it should be made the most efficient in the world and no doubt will be.

JM: There has been a lot of talk and a lot of discussion concerning America's air defense. Tell me, do you believe America might be called vulnerable through the air?

HST: At the present time yes, I do. We have enough anti-aircraft artillery, we have not enough pursuit planes. And it will take some time to remedy that shortage, but I think we will eventually remedy it.

JM: In what section of the United States Senator did you find our military outposts of average peacetime strength?

HST: Everywhere we went they were at average peace time strength. And that's the position at which we will have to keep that. Our plan is to so arrange things that in case of an emergency we could meet it. And to meet that we must have a reserve supply of the necessities for an enlargement of the army to wartime strength.

JM: Well as we understand it, our airplane factories are running at full time and perhaps overtime in most instances. Do you believe that in the very short future that our airforce will measure up to any of those owned now by the allied powers?

40 HST: Well that's a hard question to answer. It would take quite some time to place our airforce on wartime basis, such as England and France are attempting to do, and such as Germany has already done. But, I'll say that our airforce, such that it is, is the most efficient one in the world. We have the best pursuit planes, bombing planes, and we are able to hit the target from the air.

JM: Radio Newsreel Senator Truman, is interested particularly in the situation in California. In your trip to the West  
45 Coast, what impressions did you take away from your visit there after visiting military posts in the vicinity of the coast in the vicinity of California?

HST: We found some wonderful airfields in California. We found an air depot in the course of construction in Washington which will be one the best in the world. We found an air depot in Salt Lake, which is a very efficient one. And I think that the proposed air defense of the West Coast is going to be perfectly adequate when they get through  
50 the building program now under consideration.

JM: What about the infantry strongholds throughout the nation. What specifically are the weak points in our various military posts?

HST: The shortage of housing is the principal thing in the present military posts, and a shortage of the necessary material to create mechanized divisions and things of that sort.

55 JM: And of course all these weak spots will have to be remedied in a very short future, and we understand that that will be one of the big issues in the next congressional session scheduled here in Washington D.C. of course for January. Tell me, approximately how much money Senator do you believe will be raised by Congress for national defense purposes?

HST: I can't speak for the Congress. I think a request will be made for a very large sum, and I think the Congress will  
60 consider it carefully, and the very fact that we made this survey will help us arrive at a conclusion that will be at the public interest.

JM: Well, if you don't mind us or if you don't mind adding another point in respect to this particular question Senator Truman, we would like to mention at this time that Senator Elmer Thomas, of course who incidentally accompanied you on this tour throughout the United States and Central America, estimated that perhaps the amount raised will be in  
65 the neighborhood of a billion dollars. And that in turn has raised another question just how to get this money for purposes of national defense. How do you believe such a sum can best be raised by Congress?

HST: I think such a sum ought to be raised by taxation so that everybody will know what he is paying for and what it's costing him. I think people appreciate it much better if have to pay for it. I don't believe in deficit financing.

JM: We have been speaking most of the time Senator Truman on our arial force and the weak spots in our arial  
70 department. Tell me, do you think that the productions of tanks and gas masks and so forth will be stepped up in the near future?

HST: Yes, I think there will be an increased purchase of tanks... Well, not necessarily gas masks, I think that we can reach the (ahhh), remedy the gas mask situation if the emergency ever arrives, which I hope it never will. I think that we need tanks, pursuit planes, coast artillery, and anti-aircraft artillery. Those are the principal things that we need.  
75 We need also to equip more National Guard units and more reserve units and to train them more thoroughly than they are now being trained.

JM: At the present time of course, as the entire world knows, Finland is at war with Russia. We understand that the Finish Minister ----- has been quite busy here in Washington attempting to buy or negotiate for airplanes here through the United States industries. Do you believe that Finland will be allowed to buy any airplanes from the United  
80 States government?

HST: I see no reason why Finland shouldn't be allowed to buy planes if they can pay for them.

JM: And one more question Senator, we understand that you have just returned to the Senate Office Building from the White House where you made a report of your impressions gained on your tour to the President. Just how did he receive these reports?

85 HST: He was very happy that this survey had been made by members of both houses of Congress. And I am very sure

that the members of that committee, the committee that made the tour, will be in the position to act more intelligently on the President's message on national defense when it comes down to Congress after January the third.

JM: Thank you very much Senator Truman. Ladies and gentlemen you have just listened to an interview with Senator Harry Truman of Missouri who has just recently returned from a 13-mile survey, or rather a 13 thousand-mile survey trip of the nations scheme of national defense. This broadcast has originated in the Senate Office building on Capital Hill in Washington D.C. Jimmy Mack speaking, this has been a presentation of Radio Newsreel.  
(1592 words)

Quelle: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/educ/mack1.htm>

## Aufgaben

1. In Senator Truman's opinion, what were the weak points of the United States military?
2. What were the two main geographical areas that Senator Truman and his colleagues visited?
3. In inspecting the military outposts throughout the United States, what did Senator Truman think was the biggest problem?
4. How much money did Senator Elmer Thomas estimate would be total sum needed for national defense?
5. Do you think that the United States should be able to sell airplanes to Finland even if they are at war with Russia?
6. How long was the trip that was taken by Senator Truman and other congressional members?
7. Why do you think the United States should have been worried about their national defense?
8. Why would Senator Truman want to inspect the Panama Canal?
9. How would you define "Deficit Financing", and why was Senator Truman against it?
10. Why do you think Senator Truman said that airplane factories close to the border were vulnerable to attack?