



Stuart Symington: A Life

By James C. Olson

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Stuart Symington is the first full-length biography of one of Missouri's most influential and effective twentieth-century political leaders. It tells the story of a remarkable man whose adult life was spent at or near the center of power in America, a man who was talented and ambitious, yet maintained a realistic touch that enabled him to connect with ordinary people.

Symington was the first secretary of the air force and a four-term senator from Missouri. Prior to his long governmental career, he was a successful businessman in New York and St. Louis, developing a national reputation as a genius who could convert failing businesses to profitability. His most notable success was with Emerson Electric Company of St. Louis, which during World War II he turned into a large manufacturer of movable gun turrets for bombers.

Known as "Harry Truman's Trouble Shooter," Symington was unanimously confirmed by the Senate for six major presidential appointments—a record. As assistant secretary of war for air, he represented the War Department in negotiations leading to the National Security Act of 1947, which unified the armed services into a single national military establishment under the secretary of defense. During his tenure as secretary of the air force, he steered that organization through a series of crises, including racial integration, as it developed into an independent entity within the Defense Department. Among his other administrative positions, he served as surplus property administrator, breaking up the aluminum monopoly; director of the National Security Resources Board, where he helped develop mobilization strategy for the Korean War; and director of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, where he reformed a badly managed operation.

Highlights of his long Senate career include his confrontation with Joseph McCarthy during the Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954; his conflict with President Eisenhower over the defense budget; his long, agonizing struggle over Vietnam as he changed from a leading hawk to a leading dove; and his role in

uncovering information leading to congressional articles of impeachment against President Nixon. He was a serious candidate for the Democratic nomination for president in 1960, and for a time appeared to be Kennedy's choice for vice president.

Well written and exhaustively researched, *Stuart Symington: A Life* provides a comprehensive portrait of Symington and his exceptional career, shedding new light on presidential administrations from Truman to Nixon, the Department of Defense, the Korean War, and Vietnam. The book also contributes to an understanding of the U. S. Senate, the political history of Missouri, and the relationship between business and government during and immediately after World War II.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Stuart Symington parlayed his personal charm, social and political connections, and excellent organizational skills to claim a succession of important posts in business, government and politics. His story is as fascinating as it is complicated, and James C. Olson tackles the Herculean task of sorting it all out. This well-crafted book provides the first comprehensive portrait of Symington and his multifaceted career. The writing is clear and to the point. The research is impressive. Olson's access to personal papers still in the hands of the family afforded him valuable insights about Symington and his actions. *Stuart Symington: A Life* is a fascinating read."—**William E. Foley**

About the Author

James C. Olson is President Emeritus of the University of Missouri. He is the author of numerous books, including *The University of Missouri: An Illustrated History* (with Vera Olson) and *Serving the University of Missouri: A Memoir of Campus and System Administration*, both available from the University of Missouri Press. Olson lives with his wife in Kansas City, Missouri.

The **Missouri Biography Series**, edited by William E. Foley

Users Review

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