

Preface

On April 21, 1946, Col. Olin Teague limped to the microphone at the annual San Jacinto Day muster of the Reserve Officers Training Corps at Texas A&M College to introduce the main speaker. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Dwight Eisenhower spoke to the value of ROTC programs and to honor A&M's and the war dead from that program. ROTC at A&M, the largest in the country, was the entire student body. The Second World War ended the lives of 696 of them.¹

Teague wore a cast with a metal heel on his left foot, which he propped on his right knee as he sat next to Eisenhower on the stage. The Colonel was in his olive-green dress tunic and the General his khaki tropical-weight service uniform. Teague's youth, at 36, and full head of dark, centrally-parted hair, further contrasted with the 55-year-old bald Eisenhower. Known as "Tiger" since high school in Mena, Arkansas, Teague was selected by the Ex-Aggies Association to perform the introduction. He first went into combat on D-Day plus thirteen, June 19, 1944, as commander of the First Battalion, 314th Infantry. On December 18 at the Siegfried Line he was wounded in the left ankle and lower back, the last of his six wounds. With three Silver Stars and three Bronze Stars as well as other awards, he was reportedly the second most decorated soldier of the War. This, and his presidency of the A&M Club while recuperating in hospital, recommended him for his position on the stage with fourteen generals, the Governor of Texas, and six members of Congress.²

Twenty-seven days later and two days before the filing deadline, Tiger Teague announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for the United States House of Representatives from the Sixth District of Texas. On August 24, 1946, he was elected to Congress, and on September 2 he was discharged from the Army at Walter Reed Hospital near Washington, DC.³

Teague was typical of the 107 men and two women newly elected to the House in the 80th Congress in only one respect: He was a veteran of the Second World War as were 60 of them. In his quantity of medals, his wounds, his party, and his special election to fill a vacancy he was atypical. The Eightieth, and especially the Class of '46, was widely viewed as the GI Congress, but only 32 saw service overseas and five suffered battle wounds, including major burns and the loss of both legs. This is not to say that others were not in harm's way. Nine more of the Class saw active military service before World War Two. This included the Spanish-American War, and one of the fivets had received an earlier Congressional Medal of Honor. Two received significant non-combat injuries during the Second World War.

Teague was the only member of the Class of '46 elected before the second Tuesday in November. Three others were elected in special elections at the same time as the regular election in 1946, and fifteen would join the 80th Congress by special election in 1947 or 1948. Congress was in adjournment when

¹ *Abilene Reporter-News*, April 22, 1946.

² Photograph in the Olin E. Teague Congressional Collection. *Bryan Daily Eagle*, July 9, 1945; April 16, 1946. "The Cross of Lorraine Division." [Hechler], 164. "Olin E. Teague," *Congressional Directory*. Henceforth, biographical information that can be found in the *Congressional Directory* or in bioguide.congress.gov will not be cited. *The Paris News*, January 29, 1981. Audie Murphy was said to be the most decorated American soldier of the War. In 1971, Teague would sponsor HR 11220 to designate the Veterans' Administration hospital in San Antonio for Murphy. Information on congressional bills (HR – House of Representatives or S -Senate) and resolutions, as well as other matters that come on the floor of Congress, can be found in the *Congressional Record*, by use of the index volume for each session. The current work rarely footnotes such references unless there are direct quotes from the *Record*.

³ *Corsicana Daily Sun*, August 8, 1946. *Corsicana Semi-Weekly Light*, September 3, 1946.

Teague was elected and he would not be sworn in until the Eightieth opened on January 3, 1947, but he was the first of his large class.⁴

The 80th Congress was the first majority Republican Congress since 1930, and only 37 of the Class of '46 were Democrats. Teague was typical of the Democrats in being from the Confederacy, as were 23 of the Class. There was also one American Labor Party member. There were 71 Republicans.

Since the collapse of the economy in 1929, and even more so the rise of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, the Republican Party had taken the rumble seat in American government. After 1932 the number of Republican senators was as low as 17 and never higher than 38 out of 96 seats. The number of GOP representatives ranged from 89 to 209 out of 435. Since Republican efforts to fight New Deal liberalism with moderate conservatism in the 1936 presidential election was spectacularly unsuccessful, their nominees for the presidency had come from the more liberal wing of their party. After Roosevelt's election to his fourth term in 1944 there were still only 38 Republican senators and 190 representatives.

Yet 1946 offered a reset. Roosevelt was dead and his last Vice President of three, the generally discounted Harry Truman, had become President. The War was over and Americans were ready, not to return to the "normalcy" of the depressed economy before the War, but rather to enjoy the fruits of their victory and labor. Higher wages and full employment during the War, accompanied by a shortage of consumer products, built up a large demand for goods and an accumulation of savings to pay for them. But the supply channels of raw materials and the conversion of plants from war goods to consumer items required time and investment. Compounding the dislocation was the rapid demobilization of over ten million men in need of jobs and housing. In addition, labor unions, who had largely deferred wage increases during the War and been generally prevented from striking by the Smith-Connally Anti-Strike Act of 1943, were seeking a readjustment and often ready to stop work to pressure management into meeting their demands. Such strikes compounded the difficulties of post War conversion of industry and led to greater delays.

The Truman Administration met the challenge by a continuance of Wartime price controls with the objective of preventing consumers from bidding up the price of still scarce products to unpopular heights. The Democratic Congress had been reluctant to appropriate large sums to interject government activism into the private housing market, which, in any event, was suffering the same supply channel delays as the rest of the economy. The New Deal-enacted National Labor Relations Act of 1935, also known as the Wagner Act, provided protections for union organizing and activities and was blamed for enabling the post-war Labor activism.

The Republican Party met the post-war challenge with the slogan "Had Enough?," demeaned Truman's capabilities and his rise from the shady Pendergast organization in Kansas City, contended that price controls were inhibiting production, and attacked labor unions as corrupt and/or communist-dominated. The communist threat that the Party perceived was extended generally to the New Deal, with

⁴ For our purposes the 109 members of the Class of '46 include those who first took an oath of office to the House of Representatives during the 80th Congress. Four were elected to vacancies in the 79th Congress after its *sine die* adjournment. Fifteen joined the 80th Congress late due to special elections. Members elected to the 80th Congress who had served in earlier congresses are not included. Three representatives, who took the oath on December 31, 1948, the final day of the 80th Congress are not included in the 109 members of the Class of '46. Paul C. Jones of Missouri and Clarence Burton of Virginia were elected to vacancies on the same day as the general election, November 2, 1948. Lloyd Bentsen of Texas was elected on December 4, 1948.

complaints that its policies were restricting individual liberties and leading to an authoritarian, socialistic state. "The main issue of the election," Robert Taft, Chair of the Senate Republican Policy Committee, said in a broadcast on the eve of the 80th Congress, "was the restoration of freedom and the elimination or reduction of constantly increasing interference with family life and with business by autocratic government bureaus and autocratic labor leaders."⁵

The result was a Republican sweep. The Party netted 13 seats in the Senate for a majority of 51 to 45 and added 56 districts in the House, taking control 246 to 188 with one American Labor member. The new Speaker of the House, Republican Joseph Martin, would later state that the election "was the revival of the Republican Party, the ultimate proof that the party had survived the ordeal of the Thirties. While we were to suffer other setbacks, of course, the elections of 1946 restored the foundations on which the party stands today."⁶

Two years later the Republican sweep of 1946 was in turn swept away as Democrats recaptured the Senate 54-42 and the House 263-171-1, and Truman stunned the country with a come-from-behind victory to retain the presidency. This is the story of the two sweeps, the sweepers of 1946, and the continuity of American public policy.

⁵ Donovan (1977), 260.

⁶ Martin as told to Donovan, 179.