



WM. MICHAEL SCHUSTER

THE FACE OF HARRY TRUMAN EXPLODES OUT OF MOUNT ST. HELENS. MAY 18, 1980

The way popular history has of getting things confused it will probably be common knowledge in a few years that Harry Truman, who was once President of the United States, died in the spectacular explosion of Mount St. Helens on May 18, 1980.

At least sixty people died in that blast, which had the fury of several nuclear bombs. Thousands of animals were killed. Entire forests were obliterated. Spirit Lake disappeared. Mudslides and logjams flooded the Toutle River and knocked out several bridges. The Columbia River channel had to be dredged because mud washed downriver blocked ships. Eastern Washington was covered with volcanic ash as far as Spokane and pumice littered ocean beaches. Millions of tons of dust were hurled into the sky and it was thought a ring of dirt and smoke would form around Earth and reduce sunlight.

Mount St. Helens was the prettiest mountain in the Pacific Northwest. Its shape was almost a perfect cone like Japan's Mount Fuji and was usually wrapped in snow. The first eruption was in late March 1980, and there have been numerous others in the ten years since the cataclysmic May 18 blast, though none have approached its intensity or destruction. Lately the mountain has been quiet. No one is certain if it has shut off its fires or preparing for another blow.

Harry Truman, who was not President, became an authentic folk hero when he refused to leave the mountain that had been his home for half a century. He might not have thought he would die, but that is incidental to legend. He will be remembered as William Michael Schuster has portrayed him, eternally linked with Mount St. Helens as the man who died when the mountain exploded.

— MPMc

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