

# Duvalier Gives Impression He Has Clear Conscience



**SURE OF HIMSELF**—President Francois Duvalier of Haiti seems relaxed and serene in his palace during interview with Elaine Shepard. (WNS Photo)

By ELAINE SHEPARD  
Women's News Service

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — President Francois Duvalier walks around with the innocent air of a seraph right off theistine ceiling, as if humility alone might wipe out the sins of which he is accused. If he is guilty of the killings and terrorism which are laid to him, he has thrown his conscience, like a dead cat, into the Caribbean.

He has said that improved relations between Haiti and the United States could be arrived at only by "top-level members of both governments, who must work to achieve their mutual interests." The 56-year-old president appears physically much older but his foxy instincts are razor sharp.

"What would be your reaction to a meeting between you and President Kennedy in Washington?" I asked during an interview in his private palace quarters.

"It would be impossible to go. I work around the clock seven days a week. I have a house outside the city, but I cannot find time to spend there. My ministers I call on all the time to work day and night."

What if President Kennedy were to visit Haiti? "If anyone comes to Haiti, he will be welcomed by the Haitian people."

Music was piped through the palace and peacocks strutted on the courtyard, squawking.

In various strategic spots around the palace are signs: "Avis. Aucun Militaire n'est

authorise a penetrer arme au bureau de Son Excellence Le President de la Republique." (Check your hardware before entering Duvalier's presence).

An Army captain requested a peek into my quite flat shoulder bag, containing film and lipstick, before I was presented to Duvalier.

What are his hobbies? "Walking and reading. But I have too



**STAR STRICKEN**—Bebe Daniels, 62, silent screen star, reportedly suffered a stroke in London and was in serious condition. She and her husband, Ben Lyon, made a comeback on British television after many years in Hollywood.

much to do all the time. I do not have what you would call weekends to take rest or leisure time."

Duvalier led me into his palace living quarters, first to greet his wife, Mme. Simone Duvalier who was seated chatting with her housekeeper, then a few steps into a bed chamber. Piled on a large bed with a maroon silk spread were stacks of folders, newspapers and files with a slight space left for resting. "You see, my work continues after I retire."

He likes to walk for exercise, but on top of the documents piled on his bed is a muscle developer used by boxers, a small two-handed affair resistant to squeezing, which is what you're supposed to do with it to develop the forearm.

"I hope you will tell about Haiti and what happens here," he said. "I have been the close friend of North American people. I studied for my doctorate at Ann Arbor, Michigan."

For five minutes I groped for a direct answer to the question of a possible successor. Should he decide to retire at some time in the future, did he feel there were men around him or in his cabinet competent to carry on his policies and the ideas of his administration?

I suggested it would be similar to President Eisenhower's nod toward Nixon in 1960. "Ah, but Eisenhower does not designate who is to be his actual successor. It is my people who are the masters. It is up to them."

If Duvalier has any preference for a successor, it is the best-kept

secret in Port-au-Prince.

Duvalier mentioned that the world press says the palace is surrounded by machine guns. "Look," he said and pointed to the three antique pieces guarding the palace and the three equally antique tanks (none of which have been seen to move).

"What about the broadly-mentioned torture chamber in your palace here?" I ventured.

"You shall have a tour of the entire palace," he decided.

The palace is the fifth, the previous four having been blown up during Haiti's violent history. It includes cavernous reception halls (rugs rolled up in corners), ministers' offices and the president's modest and small living quarters. In the rear are open garages for about eight automobiles.

The entire first floor is occupied by the militia. Double-decker iron cots with GI woolen blankets stand row upon row in room after room. Morale seemed high among the militiamen. The few I had time to talk with and observe were literate and their uniforms neat. They clean their firearms regularly.

Our entire interview was conducted in English. Duvalier does not speak rapidly, but he knows his English.

I mentioned the rumor that Madame Duvalier had went and begged him for three weeks to flee the country following the ambush on the limousine carrying his two youngest children, John Claude, 10, and Simone, 12, in which the bodyguards lost their lives.

Both he and his wife smiled.

(Duvalier has two gold teeth in front.) She is a pleasantly plump but chic, serene woman. There seems no doubt her husband makes the decisions.

An eyewitness has claimed to have seen Duvalier's "voodoo altar," but when I asked the Haitian president if he had ever been a practitioner of voodoo, he pointed to the crucifix secured above his bed and said:

"Christ is the boss. I am a devout Catholic."

He reads his lines with convincing intonations, yet the local press uses capital letters in pronouns referring to their president, and the signs around Port-au-Prince reading, "I am the flag . . . Francois Duvalier" would indicate that he regards himself (See DUVALIER, Page 6)

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