

Notes 194N, Copy 2

Gen. Joseph Lawton Collins

Telephone conversation

January 25, 1965

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(Also see tape 35)

Statement on cheating scandal at West Point in 1951 in telephone call by Gen J Lawton Collins to F C Pogue, Jan 25, 1965. (Not for publication).

Collins said that nothing he had to deal with as Chief of Staff gave him more trouble than this. He said that the question was first brought to the attention of the Superintendent of West Point by the students and that Supt. Irving, a fine soldier, had the matter brought to the attention of the War Department. Irving had careful investigations made and recommended the action finally taken.

Collins said they realized from the first the politically explosive Possibilities and took every step to handle them. A special board was set up with Judge Larned Hand--the most respected judge of the U.S. not on the Supreme Court and abler than several of them--as head. The others were General Troy Middleton, a fine soldier, a non West Pointer, and president of LSU and the president of the West Point Association (a retired general). They upheld the superintendent's recommendations.

When the matter came to Collins, he went into it carefully and decided that Irving should be upheld. He then arranged with Pace to break the news to key congressmen. They went before the chairman and key members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. They also talked to Speaker Rayburn and he thinks to the Vice President at that time. They all approved the action taken.

He does not recall discussing it with General Marshall and doubts if the General did anything more, as Secretary of Defense, than to forward it with his approval to the President.

Points out that General Marshall, as a non West Pointer, stayed out of West Point matters so far as possible. His tendency also was not to meddle with administrative matters of this type.

Absolutely wrong that General Marshall was non West Point in attitude. His career aided by Bell, Pershing and other West Pointers and he was conscious of it. Although he had VMI men on his staff, and was glad to make use of them and advance them, he picked many West Pointers and advanced them. Cites his case, that of Eisenhower, Bradley and others.

Collins was inclined to feel that I should not write editor of the POST protesting against Povich's column that quotes Coach Blaik's statement that Marshall as non West Pointer had no enthusiasm for West Point cadets and implies that he failed to reverse the decision against the cadets because of that. I said I felt I must write.--and I did.

Collins said most West Pointers backed decision. Necessary if they were to keep honor system. Defends high standard and rigid code for men to whom lives of soldiers will be entrusted.