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General Walter Krueger

San Antonio, Texas

November 7, 1957

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Interview with General Walter Krueger, former Commander of 6th Army, at his home in San Antonio (112 Ridgemont), Nov 7, 1957, by Forrest C. Pogue.

(Gen Krueger looks somewhat broken. He walks stiffly; speaks in a husky voice. Keeps a pipe in his mouth. Somewhat, gruff in manner. Has book-lined study; books give the appearance of having been read).

I began by asking about the Leavenworth courses at the time he and Gen Marshall were there. Said Gen Marshall was a year behind him although the work was the same for both. Thinks as the senior he may have helped Gen Marshall with advice.

Leavenworth then had a two year course. First the School of the Line--a very severe course. For an officer to get chosen for the second year he had to make 92 ½ percent. Was a grueling course.

When I was in the second year course, Marshall entered the Infantry and Cavalry School (School of the Line). I had met him first in February 1903. My battalion was on ----*Island--used as a prison--in Laguna de Bay. One day a young officer arrived, a recent graduate of VMI. George Marshall was his name. A few days afterwards we had a lot of prisoners there--the scum of the earth--some 600--deserters, murderers, etc. In view of the strenuous guard duty we had an officer of the guard and the officer of the day. On this occasion Marshall was the officer of the guard and I had the other duty. He was newly arrived and was beautifully turned out in his uniform. I had been there several years and was not so well turned out. He asked where we slept. I pointed to a corner of the shack on some straw; I could imagine how he felt.

The regiment went home in Dec 1903. Marshall's group went to Little Rock. I didn't see him again until he joined the School of the Line in 1906.

He stood number one in his class.

Everybody worked hard. I would fall across my bed when I came from class. We didn't average six hours sleep. The law course was a stinker. By the time you became a post commander they wanted you to be able to know what you could do and you what couldn't. [He showed me several of his textbooks and they were regular texts on civil and criminal law].

Marshall was a very fine student--scholarly, young and energetic.

(Here Gen Krueger got to talking about the reasons for such a stiff law course. Said it was a very curious thing but when you went on a post you were supposed to learn the metes and bounds as established by the government. In many the US did not have exclusive jurisdiction. State has easements. In the case of Jefferson Barracks the US had exclusive jurisdiction. Said several years later he was head of this post and he found that people were running their dogs across and he had the land posted, where upon farmer wrote in a rather illiterate (addressed to President Roosevelt) letter saying that that Prussian commander had interfered training of his dogs. It was shown to Krueger who endorsed it true in every particular.

The General said that he and Gen Marshall were made brigadiers the same day in 1936. He was junior to me by 60 files or something. I became Major General before he did and little later----* was for a time the senior major general in the army.

Says he remembers one occasion when he was head of War Plans, he was flying in the northwest with Frank Andrews piloting the plane. The weather was bad and the trip harrowing. They had to land on the parade ground at Vancouver Barracks. Were met by Marshall.

In 1938 Marshall succeeded me as head of war Plans. I had finished my tour and was sent by Craig to Meade. Next I took over the 2d Division here. Then to Third Army.

I had asked for Eisenhower. I assigned him the task of coordinating the staff. I said I will check the plans and the like. He rarely left headquarters since I was out a lot and I wanted a man there to look after things. I always felt that the commander or his C of S should always be at headquarters. I am fond of Ike but the story is wrong which shows him making all the plans for my Army. He wasn't known in the maneuvers but later they wrote him up as if he ran the thing. Voltaire says that history is a lie agreed upon and there is a great deal of false information.

Marshall came to the maneuvers in 1941. We had known each other for a good sized lifetime. He sent for me and knowing I had been head of war plans he asked me who was the best man for the job. I said I hated to tell him because I didn't want to lose the man, but I thought the best man was my chief of staff, Eisenhower. Gen. Marshall said I am afraid I will have to take him away from you.

Clark who was McNair's chief of staff had lots of correspondence with Eisenhower. I don't like it when he says in his book, that Eisenhower was selected for the war plans job because of his wonderful handling of the Louisiana maneuvers. He didn't do the plans.

Drum wanted me to try a flank attack in the maneuvers. I had Lear guessing. I sent a ponton train to the Sabine and organized a special group. I sent the tank forces under Scott and the 2d Division motorized. Then I sent the 1st Cav Rgt across to push north. I told the tank forces to push north hell-bent for election. I penciled an order at Lake Charles. Instead of the old form I said 3d Army will attack along the line with more than 8 divisions. I want all the trimmings left out. It was ridiculous to send enemy information as that was sent to everyone. Gen Barker was my G-3. Someone brought in a detailed order. Ike roared when he saw it all written out and said I didn't want it that way.

I knew Patton would barge around. He crossed the Sabine without difficulty. Bill Haskell was with Lear. He told me later we didn't know what you were planning. We nearly captured Lear and his headquarters.

Said he felt that since Eisenhower had done so many things, it was not quite fair for them to give him credit for the small thing which he Krueger had been responsible for. Eisenhower a good man, but in the case of the Third Army maneuvers he was carrying out Krueger's plans and orders.

MacArthur wanted me and my staff. The War Department said I couldn't take my staff with me. I took the people I wanted from my staff and had them put on orders and was many miles away before they could stop me.

The men I selected on my staff at various times proved to be pretty good. They included Eisenhower, Gruenther, Eddleman, Decker and others.

Marshall never said nay to me when I removed a general officer. If I felt I didn't want a man to command under me in battle, he went out, and Marshall backed me up. I said was this largely national guard officers. He said a number were, but he also had to relieve a regular army general of corps command. Said they ran up against strong state feeling in the National Guard matters.

Commanders differ a lot. I always wanted my chief of staff in headquarters when I went out. Some took C of S with them. But I was out much of the time--often until two or three o'clock.

Some mention was made of Marshall's selection over Drum. I asked about the libelous statement that Marshall had intrigued against Drum. He said I never knew of any intrigue. It was not consonant with Marshall's character. Thinks Marshall had Pershing's backing and that was decisive.

Drummie was selected to go to China, but turned it down. Stilwell was selected. He had been my assistant division commander in the 2d division. Few could get along with him. I always issued orders verbally and at the end I always said "General Stilwell will coordinate the battle line." I knew Joe liked it. He was a fine soldier, but was not at his best in China.

I asked about the charge that Gen Marshall and the President withheld supplies from the Pacific because of their dislike of MacArthur. He said he didn't think Roosevelt liked MacArthur, but that he didn't think this was involved. We were straitened for means in the Pacific. We had a desperate time to carry on, but we did it. However, all that matters is that a decision be made. You couldn't split the thing in two. As far as I am concerned it is a military maxim that if you disperse your forces you will be weak. You can't split. The commander on the spot is responsible. He is liable to lose his shirt. We had officers hundreds of miles apart in the Pacific. Couldn't bring reserves up quickly. Our island hits in the Pacific were different from those in the Mediterranean because of distance from supplies.

Thinks MacArthur's strategy was admirable. Just too damn bad about supplies. Says if a commander is fearful about making decisions he just cuts his own throat. Says he knows that people he relieved disliked him, but it had to be done.

MacArthur was a man of great moral courage. When they asked him in Australia where he was going to put his northern defense line, he said the Owen Stanley range. It took a lot of wisdom.

Marshall was clever. Grand with Congress. Fine mind.

Does not know why anyone wants the Presidency. People expect too much. You can't run the Presidency as you would a military command.

Says Democrats yelled to cut expenses. Now are yelling about the missile program.

I asked him to evaluate Marshall's career as he saw it. He said it was hard to do and out of his line. He handled himself well in various high jobs. Didn't do so well in China. Some failures are made by everybody. He is extremely intelligent. How understanding he is, don't know. Every commander must have patience, moral courage and human understanding.

I said that some indicated that Marshall lacked patience during the war in relieving people. He said, yes, but you can't make omelets without breaking eggs. Told of division commander he had to relieve. In some cases had to relieve lifelong friends.

I talked some about the books of Willoughby and Whitney in regard to Marshall He hit at Willoughby. Said he wasn't too accurate. Intelligence bad. Made grave errors in predictions. MacArthur didn't realize it. Failed to identify divisions. Said there were 150,000 Japanese on Luzon and we killed 273,000. Said he didn't allow these figures to be put out until checked by graves registration. On Corregidor he said there were 800 and we killed 5600.