Tape 59, Copy 2

Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke

Cadogan Hotel, London

May 5, 1961

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This is a recorded interview with Field Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, at the Cadogan Hotel in London, May 5, 1961.

Alanbrooke: On the occasion of the coronation when Gen. Marshall came over, representing the President, he was given a dinner by the English-speaking Union and he was the guest of honor at this lunch, it was, and I was asked to start proposing his toast together with Lord Halifax. At that time there in the statement I made I did express my sentiments toward him, and what I said at the time was: "I cannot let this opportunity pass without paying a special tribute to General of the Army Marshall. In him we welcome here today two personalities since he comes to us as the representative of the USA. Not only does he represent the President and their famous Secretary of State who fathered the Marshall Plan, but in addition, he stands here today in a dual capacity representing two of the greatest generals of the United States of America, to whom we owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude for their services in the last war. The pleasure of meeting here today is enhanced by the personal admiration and affection I have for him as a result of our close contacts during the last war. It is during that one gets to know men at their best and to estimate their true value. From my collaboration with General Marshall, during the last war, I carried away the happiest of memories coupled with a sense of deep admiration, respect and affection. It is indeed appropriate that we should meet again under the auspices of the English Speaking Union, since the English language played such a prominent part in our medium of cooperation and collaboration and unity of thought so essential in war. From our deliberations, I learned that the term English speaking stands for far more than the mere link of a common language. It is not merely that wave band that renders possible a mutual transmission of thoughts and ideas. Behind it lays something far greater, an English way of thought, an English way of value of the vital things of life, an English sense of fair play and above all that sense of English brotherhood. It is these later factors that played such a great part in holding English speaking nations together during the last war. And it is through them, that we arrived at a unified policy for the conduct of a war and the global strategy which led to the final victory. Let it not be thought that such unity was achieved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee without the clash of many conflicting points of view. It would indeed have been strange if divergences had not arisen between nations located in different continents and influenced by divergent sets of strategic considerations. Heated discussions were bound to arise frequently. And the danger of catastrophic rifts loomed up occasionally. That these rifts were never allowed to spread and the fact that unity of purpose was achieved was due the three main causes: the use of the English language as a medium of conversation; the English speaking outlook which governed our transactions; and thirdly, the fact that as chairman of the American Chiefs of Staff we had General Marshall, a man who stood for all that is best in the English way of thinking and acting. In conclusion, on behalf of those that are assembled here today, I wish to express to our guests a deep sense of appreciation at their presence with us here today coupled with our hope that they will carry away some of the happiest memories from the coronation visit to this old English speaking country of ours.

FCP: I think it would be interesting to the VMI cadets some day, since this library is going to be on their campus, to be able to hear the voices of the great commanders of the war. I think too that a considered statement like this helps to explain the real feeling you had for Marshall, because the great trouble with all history is that people magnify the differences. This came out the other night. I was talking to the military commentators circle and someone was talking about

the Southern France thing and they said, you must recognize that Field Marshal Alanbrooke was the master strategist of the war and that he never approached anything except from the standpoint of the overall strategy, and I said, I am willing to agree with that, but the point is that he must have looked at it from a national standpoint as well. It's impossible to divorce yourself from that. The thing that I am trying to prove is not that Marshall was a greater strategist than Lord Alanbrooke or anyone else, but to show that he had reasons other than obstinacy for some of his viewpoints. Now at the time I am sure it seemed that he was only being difficult about some of these things, when he did have a number of problems which were more real to him than they may have seemed to you or someone else. The one thing he said to me that he did not want the book to point up the differences, it was to point out the issues on which the agreements were made. His main interest was that I would show the atmosphere in which he had to operate and the problems he had to face. I think, as someone pointed out in a discussion, it was a little difficult to compare the two of you exactly, because Marshall had certain responsibilities you did not have and you had certain responsibilities he didn't have. You had a more difficult position with the Prime Minister than he had with Mr. Roosevelt. But he had to go to the Congress and do things which I think you were able to leave to the Secretary of State for War.

Alanbrooke: No, I didn't, as a matter of fact. No, I was not able to leave things to the Secretary of State for War, and I had to attend Cabinet meetings once a week regularly, and often more than that, but once a week regularly on a Monday, and I had to give the whole strategic situation.

FCP: It's valuable to have this because I think we always assume that one, Chief of Staff is exactly like the other one, when there are great differences.

Alanbrooke: And our whole outcome was bound to be different - my being on the European side of the world, he being on the American side of the world, on the opposite side, he being more closely connected with Pacific problems and the Japanese problems, he having Marshall as a close colleague of his, who was wrapped up, King King, in the naval side, whose one interest in life was the naval side. I didn't have that. I had, first of all, Sir Dudley Pound, a ? man, the main trouble of which he had ? on the brain. I did not realize that at first.

FCP: You didn't realize at first that that's what it was?

Alanbrooke: No, and when I joined the Chiefs of Staff, he was chairman. We never got anywhere. We used to go in the morning at half past 10 and were there until half past 1 very often. We never got anywhere. In the end I said, I really cannot waste all this time. I've got the Army side to do as well and I sit there not doing anything at all. I think he realized also that Pound was rather tired and he tackled Winston at that time and said he thought it might possibly be a good thing to change the chairmanship, which they did occasionally. Then I took over the chairmanship, and I couldn't again have had anyone more delightful than Pound when I took over the Chair. He had been in the Chair before. To give you an example, he was always late, or usually, to the Chief of Staff meetings, about 5 minutes, but on the morning when I took the Chair, when I felt it very awkward to take the Chair, he was already in my seat when I arrived there, so that settled it. It was typical of him, not to give me any feeling of inconvenience at all. He was already in my chair. He was a wonderful collaborator. I had him and then I had Andrew Cunningham also, so that I hadn't the drag, the naval drag that Marshall had with King and the threat of putting everything in the Pacific.

FCP: As I was pointing out the other night, there was this enormous pressure throughout. I think you mentioned part of it the other day, the desire to get back at the Japanese, a sense of national humiliation and navy humiliation, commitments to Chiang Kai-shek and to the garrison in the Philippines, so that while Marshall held, as you pointed out to the European needs, he was always conscious of the need of getting back there. The thing that we might push just a little further, although we talked about it the other day is the difference in the point of view which you and some took as opposed to the purely Mediterranean people on that matter of the Trieste operation or the operation there. Your objections, as I gathered, to Southern France, were not so much that it kept from having that operation, as the operation itself was not tactically needed. But in Alexander's, or the memoirs about him, the emphasis is that at that early time, the desire of all the British chiefs was to make this Trieste operation, but that was not your feeling?
Alanbrooke: No, it was quite definitely not my feeling. I could see no real reason - I mean if you thought of Vienna and then the Alps, it was completely off as far as I was concerned. But what I wanted to press for was to go on maintaining the pressure in Italy and to hold the German forces we were holding there. If we removed divisions out of there, they ceased to function and to exercise pressure anywhere, but quite a considerable period, by the time we pulled them out, retrained them, put them on ship again and brought them in again, the Germans realized you had taken them out, they could withdraw divisions from there and swing them around to meet them in another place very much easier and quicker than you could. My whole idea of the Mediterranean strategy was to draw the Germans down toward the Mediterranean, to eliminate Italy, to make them fill all the various places the Italian troops had up until then, and to find forces to protect all the various points in the Mediterranean which were like the fingers of a hand sticking out in the Mediterranean, with no means of communication between them, not very good communication downwards, and if they could disperse them.

FCP: You did not hold, I gather, with this so-called Balkan concept - not Balkan - but push to the east as a means of forestalling the Russians?
Alanbrooke: No, quite definitely not. Winston did. Winston was toying with it. Of course, Alex, being his ? and having to go down and do what he could there.

FCP: Our people had the feeling that in that early argument over ANVIL and DRAGOON, that the main interest in it was not so much the Trieste thing as it was keeping that a large theater. The reason I keep stressing this is that one of the great arguments of post-war-writers, and it shows up in the Alexander thing and Mark Clark has the same view on our side, is that Marshall and others were told by you and others that well now, we can just go right here and stop the Russians and you are messing up that operation by insisting on ANVIL. I do not believe this was presented in that argument.

Alanbrooke: No, it was not, and I never presented that argument to Marshall at all. I never supported Winston or Alex in that maneuver, over and into Austria, because it didn't seem feasible. But what I did support was the retention of forces to carry on in Italy and maintain pressure in holding German forces in Italy and not withdrawing forces from there, giving them an opportunity of withdrawing their forces to meet us in Normandy. They would meet us again in Marseille or wherever it was.

FCP: Did you feel that Marshall's insistence on the need of this port in the south to bring stuff from the U.S. had any validity?

Alanbrooke: He didn't stress that quite sufficiently strongly to me. I wish he had.

FCP: He apparently did to Wilson, because it made some impression on him.

Alanbrooke: He never did stress that. He gave a new [?] for American [?] assisting in maintaining this southern effort.

FCP: The point I made in my talk the other night and the approach at present that I seek for this book is not to try to argue what might have been nice to have done in view of the Russians, but the situation under which you and Marshall operated in 1943-44, and at that time that did not seem to be the most pressing problem. I am very anxious to get these stated in their proper place, because I think we are getting far enough now away from it to get all the various points of view.

Alanbrooke: There is no doubt that Winston had a Balkan liking and I had in that direction, and he used to make matters rather difficult for me with Marshall with statements he would make, which Marshall would often think were inspired by me and they were not inspired by me at all.

FCP: I think that he was frightened about these statements and he always had the feat that we would be pulled in so far into the Mediterranean that he couldn't get his troops out to send to the Pacific.

Alanbrooke: And I couldn't go to him and say, I don't agree with a word my Prime Minister is saying.

FCP: That was a good point you made the other day that sometimes Dill could go back and forth.

Alanbrooke: Yes, he could go back and forth. He was invaluable in that. He could explain the situation much easier.

FCP: I don't think there was ever the same close arrangement between him and Lord Wilson, but this was far enough along in the war that it didn't make so much difference. Then I do think there came a time when Marshall wanted to get the bulk of American troops under Eisenhower to make sure his operation would go ahead. Perhaps there was a hangover from the First World War of Pershing's desire to keep all the troops of the same nationality under one man. Now a thing I mentioned to you that I would like your story on - I know the answer - and it would be nice to have it in your own words is the question about the matter of the command for OVERLORD, how you first came into the picture, and then Marshall was considered, etc.

Alanbrooke: Winston approached me six months before the operation and said he wants me to take over the command of that operation and I was to prepare myself and fit myself for it. Until the time came, he wanted me to remain on. I guess at the time there was a question between the two of us and it was understood that I was to get it. Not very long after that, he happened to have a sherry party at 10 Downing Street and my wife happened to be out there, and we both went up to say something to him and he said to her, how do you like having your husband taking command of the operations across the channel. She had heard nothing about this. I said, you did mention that it was entirely secret, you know, and I had not told her about it, and he said, oh well, you are quite right about that. He told her all, and on several occasions he kept on referring to this, and it wasn't until we got to the big conference. He sent for me one morning after a big

conference. He was just back from stopping at Hyde Park for a visit with Roosevelt where he had been discussing of the high command and he told me then, I see now the way the war is planning itself, and there is no doubt that the preponderance of American forces in this operation will be such that really it would be infinitely better to have an American commander and, therefore, I feel we ought to, in spite of what I have said to you, hand the command over, and I suggested that to Roosevelt, and at the same time he has agreed that we could have the command.

With matters as they stand and with this American preponderance, it should be an American commander, but I never received from him the slightest sympathy on losing what I had looked forward to as being something of a climax. I had planned everything to lead up to this re-entry into France, I had been told I was going to command it, then just to be told off-hand like that, it was a little bit of a shock, but it wasn't really a bad shock because I felt it was a correct move, really.

FCP: Did he give you the impression that he had yielded to pressure from the President? That the President had asked this, or did he sort of take the lead in it?

Alanbrooke: He gave me the impression that he had taken the lead.

FCP: This is all that I can find, that perhaps he anticipated the request, but that he himself had said, well, we should follow the principle of the power---.

Alanbrooke: Yes, that's the impression he gave me. He didn't give me the impression that the President raised the matter with him. He may have. But anyhow, he told me that’s the contusion he had come to, and therefore, he wished to go back on the promise he had made.

FCP: Did you get the impression after Quebec that Marshall had been definitely selected?

Alanbrooke: I thought from the conversation that Marshall had probably been selected for it and we in the Chief of Staff meeting thought that Marshall would be selected for it. We felt it was a pity in some ways that Marshall was selected because he had been Chief of Staff for some time. The command chief of staff organization would have someone new. We didn't know who we might have. It wasn't until considerably later, until after the Cairo Conference when it was decided that Ike would have it.

FCP: I gather that decision was made at Cairo, on the way out. Apparently the assumption was that Marshall would have it.

Alanbrooke: I think that's it. On the way out I think it was still Marshall who was supposed to have it, and it was at Cairo that I think Roosevelt then changed his mind and he went back on it. I had been accused at times, and which I rather resent, of being jealous of Ike's having it, and I must say I never had the slightest feeling of jealousy whatsoever. I have criticized Ike on things he has done, but they were not based on jealousy to any degree. I entirely agree in the decision that it should be in the American command, and if it were going to be in the American command, it must be either Ike or Marshall, and I think of the two, that Ike was probably a little better than Marshall for being commander. He had been operating in [?]. But Marshall hadn't. He had been detached from it.

FCP: Ike couldn't have handled the thing back there in Washington at all. Ultimately he could but I mean immediately.

Alanbrooke: No, he couldn't. I found it rather disappointing because he had offered me the command of the Middle East Command, 8th Army first of all, and then the Middle East command. Then when we removed Auchinleck and put in Alexander and Montgomery, he had pressed me then to take command of the Middle East. Then he got Smuts over there too. I had two hours of Smuts one morning and Smuts tried to get me to take it on and what I could tell Smuts but couldn't tell Winston quite so well is that by that time I had had six months of something which I was just beginning to understand a little bit. I always said I knew how to handle him. I did understand his ways, and I did feel that I could possibly pull more weight really by remaining where I was.

FCP: I have had a number of people say to me what you have said, that you would stand up to him and not let it wear you out, as it did Dill. I think without except, every Britisher I have talked to, whether he agreed with you on this point or that point, has said always the same thing, that you were the one man who could take it, and apparently to whom the P.M. would listen.

Alanbrooke: He didn't always listen, but he listened up to a point, I must say, and he nearly got rid of me on one or two occasions, but he didn't, and I was given credit for trying--in opposing him and in refusing to agree with him when I didn't agree with him.

FCP: I think on this, and he probably never said anything to you about it, but I feel that Gen. Marshall appreciated your problem very much and, I suspect, felt that you did prevent a number of things happening.

Alanbrooke: Well, I might have prevented some of them, but Dill knew very well the troubles I was having, and he informed Marshall. I remember one time when I was getting to my wit's end and he said he had been discussing it with Marshall, and Marshall made the suggestion that I go over and have ten days or a fortnight from the Army, a complete holiday, and that everything would be fixed up for me--a very nice suggestion by Marshall, purely because he wanted to get me away from it all. But it was exhaustive and having been offered the command and have him take it back again.

FCP: I don't believe that anyone who understood the background of this ever made this charge of jealousy, because it doesn't seem to me it would belong in your pattern of action.

Alanbrooke: No. I might say, I have never felt any jealousy the least in the world.

FCP: I don't believe Gen. Eisenhower ever felt it, because I remember when I came to talk to various people in '46, he insisted very particularly that I come to see you because he had a very high opinion for your judgment and I think the same thing is true with Gen. Marshall. Gen. Marshall made clear to me that he disagreed with you on many of your points of view, but he always went on the theory that you were presenting it, not in a tremulous way or to be difficult, but because you felt this was right. Marshall was able, as you are now, to withdraw from the situation and look upon it as A and B arguments. In a particular situation it's hard to always keep your temper and keep calm. Then I suspect both of you, at times, were perfectly willing to bemuse the situation to clear it. Mr. Churchill, in one of his minutes, said now I want you to be

furious with the Americans--this was to Ismay and the chiefs of staff. Let them know we are angry over the [?] thing and he said later we will tell them it's all right. But he said, they must be shown we don't intend to [?]. I know you mentioned in your diary that one of Dill statements, to the effect that Marshall had been rude. But the General said that at times he put on a show, just being very angry, wanting this word to go back. I think anger is used in this way, but it's perfectly natural in conferences for things to flare up.

Alanbrooke: I think it's extraordinary that they didn't flare up more than they did, you know. In some of our conferences--we had about 18.

FCP: When I look at the Malta one, I have heard people say that was one of the hottest. Choosing the general [?]. I think by this time he felt Eisenhower should do it the way he wanted to, and probably from your standpoint you felt, well he's not going into this enough to see our side of it. And perhaps there was the feeling on your part that we were getting such a preponderance that perhaps we were not discussing any more.

Alanbrooke: No, and I think it was felt that as combined chiefs of staff, we were still supposed to be giving Ike his guidance generally for COMAC [COSSAC?] and, therefore, disagreed with Ike's strategy, we did one time when he was spread out, in our opinion, from one end to the other, and no definite punch on one side or the other [?]. That time there I was in very definite disagreement, because throughout the whole of my military training the object was to put your maximum pressure on what you consider is the strategic point and not to disperse your forces, and Ike kept on dispersing his forces. Then Ike came over and had dinner one night with me and we had about 2 or 3 hours, but I argued about it with Ike and I told him [?] therefore, you are not strong anywhere [?] and he graciously accepted the argument, but he couldn't decide which portion of the front was the vital part and which part .

FCP: Did you have the feeling at times that you had him pretty much won over and then he would get [?].

Alanbrooke: Yes, that you would win him over and then he would be wondering about something else, and one moment it would be Bradley, the next moment it would be Patton, and then Monty.

FCP: Apparently he did much better at winning Eisenhower over than he did of statements that infuriated Patton and Bradley.

Alanbrooke: Yes, he did. He infuriated Patton and Bradley.

FCP: It made it extremely difficult for Eisenhower to give and take things away from the Americans and give it to the British must after he had made some statement. He says you shouldn't allow these personalities and personal and political things to enter strategy. Well of course, you shouldn't ideally, but it's impossible to keep them out. It’s one thing to lay the thing out on a board and play it according to chess, but with different nations involved……

Alanbrooke: And different personalities and people.