

Notes 13N, Copy 2

Maj. Gen. James H. Burns

Washington, D.C.

December 4, 1957

**THIS INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT MAY BE USED FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES ONLY. IT MAY NOT BE QUOTED FROM, CITED OR PUBLISHED EXCEPT BY PERMISSION OF THE GEORGE C. MARSHALL FOUNDATION.**

Interview with Major General James H. Burns, USA (Ret.) at his home at 3901 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, Dec 4, 1957 by F C Pogue.

(The General looks fit. His brain is good. He talks well and combines the ability to say apt things about people without appearing to be slandering them. He seems careful in his judgments, although many of them are pointed.)

I first met Gen Marshall when he was deputy chief of staff in 1938 or 1939. I was assistant to the secretary of war. I worked more closely to Gen Craig than to Gen Marshall. Craig and I were close friends. I was never close to Marshall. I golfed with Gen Craig and we would have a drink or two afterwards. Marshall preferred riding. I think his was the better scheme. I think golf is a handicap. There is no chance to reflect on your job in gold. Marshall's concept was a good one. He wanted to keep fit, but he liked a job which gave him a chance to think. Hoover was keen on fishing. That gives you chance to think. Hunting is pretty good. The contest in the sport is not good for reflective thinking.

Doesn't recall meeting Marshall before 1938 or 1939.

I worked for a time with Hopkins under the Combined Chiefs of Staff. When Lend-Lease was passed, I became executive for that under Hopkins. Then when Stettinius came in I became executive on Lend-lease and aid to Russia.

I asked if he had been called to testify before committees dealing with the matter of aid to Russia. He said no. They wanted someone to condemn Roosevelt and Hopkins. I thought their action was right. I was able in good conscience to support the moves of Hopkins and Roosevelt. Actually I spurred them on to make some moves they were holding back on.

I did not think it unwise to aid Russia and don't now. I realize that some of our moves gave us trouble later. That is because we didn't handle things well later. If you get sick and have to have an operation, there is a chance of bad after effects, but you have the operation. For example, I had acute appendicitis. They operated and damaged my heart. But I am alive because they operated. If Germany was to be whipped, we had to help Russia.

The policy of aiding Russia was supported by CCS and JCS, by a majority of Congress, by the editorial writers of the US and by all the rest. Little opposition then. For the American people to condemn the program now is to condemn themselves. The Russians contained two-thirds of the German army. If you want to go to extremes, you could argue that we shouldn't have gone across the Channel, since that effort aided the Russians more than Lend-Lease. How many Russian lives did we save by sending Eisenhower across the Channel? It was the right thing to do. We spent over \$200 billion to defeat Germany. We spent \$11 billion to help Russia. As a consequence we reduced our casualties and our expenditure of wealth/ add it all up.

Maybe we made a mistake to let Russia get so much of Germany. Letting the Russians surround Berlin was a mistake. This had nothing to do with the concept of fighting the war. I don't blame them for their decisions

I asked about victory program.

Col, Bundy's preliminary estimate was based on certain assumptions. The basic thing was the defeat of Germany Started out with the idea of besting Germany. Have to beat her with forces available. Paper relative to an army written in 1941. Assumed the delivery of supplies to the British Isles and munitions to all those fighting the Axis; prepare way for eventual defeat of Germany by powers fighting her; total defeat of Germany Burns thinks all the people in the higher echelons fought for these objectives. Thinks Marshall did--he was not as enthusiastic on aid to the Russians (he agreed to the policy but didn't want to give up what our Army needed--King was the same way--approved but didn't want to give up the things). The saving force was that Roosevelt believed in defeating Germany by team play/ Churchill was of the same mind. Marshall had able assistants like Eisenhower and Arnold.

Hopkins differed from the others. He was hardly an executive. He was an adviser. Occasionally would take the ball. Marshall had to make decisions every minute. Hopkins didn't have to. Hopkins didn't want to make decisions. When I tried to start the victory program, I tried to get him to sign something, in the absence of the President, to get it started. He said that was taking the President's prerogative. Marshall couldn't escape these decisions.

Marshall involved in airplane program of 1938-39; doesn't recall him being in on any of the others. History of that program about like this. Ambassador Kennedy and Ambassador Bullitt were called back to the U by FDR. In turn, Mr. Roosevelt sent them over to talk with Asst Secy of War Johnson. I sat in on talks with them. They both stressed the need of large quantities of planes. England and France were short of planes. As a result of these talks, the President got interested in airplane production. Planes not manpower. We were given the job of building up the program. We worked with the General Staff and Gen Arnold. Staffed our section with people from Air Corps. Built pretty big program. Ran into several billions of dollars. Quite inter-esting how it finally worked out. Took it to the President. He was not in-terested in a big manpower program. Wanted to give planes to France and Britain so they could fight. As it developed, General staff and Arnold wanted to spend money for training. Planes they wanted to buy were more or less puddle jumpers. After mulling it over we finally went to the White House. Thinks Marshall was there. President wouldn't go along with a big program. Finally said he would give \$500 million for aid and they could cut up that amount.

Sec of War Woodring was there. He had little use for the air force. Wanted \$200 million for the Army, not the Air Force. Arnold wanted some money; King wanted some. Roosevelt got mad and said I called this conference for planes and I am not getting them. Am reserving \$300 million for planes.

The General Staff and the Air Corps started working out plans on how to spend the \$300 million. Practically all for training. They brought it to me. Johnson asked me to look at it. I said there were few fighting planes. (I don't know how much Marshall was involved in this.) I don't blame people for promoting training. Have to have a production line for men as well as munitions. We went to the President for another conference. When he found he wasn't getting fighting aircraft, he got mad and bawled out Woodring. Said get good planes with the money.

(Here he talked about Johnson. Said probably is one of my best friends. But he is selfishly ambitious. Caused trouble. Woodring was not a mind. Was an isolationist. Johnson supported what he thought Roosevelt wanted. Thinks that Roosevelt never did want Johnson. He didn't trust him. This was one of Johnson's big faults. Many people didn't trust him.

My impression is that Marshall had nothing to do with Stimson coming in, instead of Johnson. Marshall might have said if Stimson's name mentioned that he was a good man, but doubts if he had anything to do with selection. When Stimson came down he wanted to appoint his own assistants. I was told long before that Stimson wanted to bring down Patterson as his principal assistant. Thinks Stimson didn't like Johnson. Day or two before Johnson was fired, there was a congressional hearing on big munitions program of June 1940. Mr. Johnson had a good deal to do with starting it. But he didn't make a good presentation. Annoyed Stimson. Johnson didn't show any deference to Stimson in the committee. He could write off Woodring, but not Stimson. Couple of days later, Steve Early called me and asked for Johnson. I said he was going to the Bohemian Club inks in California. On that trip Johnson was relieved.

In all my association with Mr. Johnson, I never recall an occasion when he showed impatience with Gen Marshall. Always deferent. I don't believe that Marshall was involved in any intrigue against Johnson. Marshall was very, very patient in putting up with intolerable conditions in War Dept under Woodring. He often had to go to Morgenthau to get things done. The President was no longer relying on Woodring, but he was still there.

Johnson was firm, positive, makes a decision well, drives them through with terrible ambition. But he can develop wrong concepts. I have had bitter fights with him, but he didn't mind it.

(Don't use this story.) I remember a couple of days before Woodring was fired. For a while I thought this might have something to do with it. I now realize it was probably Mr. Roosevelt's desire to get a bipartisan setup. Phil Young, ambassador to Belgium, and others were on a committee to get help to Britain, France, Finland, etc. Had nothing to give, but had to buy. Reporters came to see me one night at 6. They said they had been to a White House conference. President was angry; said he was sick and tired of military refusing to give aid. They say they don't want to give aid because of military secrets. The only secret we have of importance is the Norden gunsight and we won't give it. I will override them.

I had had a couple of cocktails, so I went over to the 'White House. Advisers were ganging up to say they wouldn't favor giving aid. I finally said you are all wrong. Going contrary to the President is of no help. He got angry this afternoon. We have to obey the Commander in Chief. He said they hadn't made a fight to get planes. Woodring was flabbergasted and adjourned the conference. Said President hadn't told him this. How can I obey orders when I don't know them? He called the White House. A few minutes later the phone rang, and it was "yes, Mr. President" and "no, Mr. President". Woodring was out. He wrote a letter of resignation which was never published.

I always felt sorry for Marshall because he had to put up with Woodring's isolationism.

Woodring had married the daughter of a Democratic senator from Massachusetts. Burns thinks that the War Dept didn't press rapidly enough for preparedness. Isolationism of Woodring affected them. But doesn't think the General Staff was on the ball in getting the country read\* for the Second World War I don't single out Marshall. 'Ore impetus for rearming came from Louis Johnson than from the General Staff. There was a different atmosphere in our office than there was in theirs. They worked more closely with Woodring.

Brain power and vision didn't exist in the General Staff. Marshall grew tremendously as the war advanced. Seemed to grow with it. Had an associate of tremendous importance--Sir John Dill. Dill had a great comprehension of world affairs--great influence on Marshall. I could sense the difference in Marshall after he met Dill. He was a fine gentleman and a fine leader. Probably the British\* never made a better move than when they sent him here. Hard to beat. Great help to both men to work together. Marshall got to be a better administrator as time went on. Held on to details pretty tenaciously in the beginning. I don't blame Marshall too much for not delegating some authority since you have to have people who can take it.

I am a product of the Army. In between wars army people are not forced to think the way they should. It would be a godsend to keep them on a 44 hour week. The one bunch that worked this out was the Army Engineers Corps. They have rivers and harbor work. About the only challenge was the army schools.

Marshall was not the average army officer and never had been. Average officer spends his time in playful diversion. Marshall did a lot of reading. Didn't establish lazy habits. (Lazy habits of many officers came up to haunt us during the Second World War. I must admit that some of the young ones could work. I have just been reading some of the plans. Take the victory program. I always thought Bundy prepared it. But he worked with Wedemeyer. Maybe Wedemeyer did it and Bundy brought it to me. But you will see his name put on the plan (he showed it to me) as having outlined it to me. Am inclined to think Bundy is being neglected--he was killed in Sept 1941--and it was easy to forget him. I have heard that he did the spadework. Maybe Wedmeyer deserves much credit too.

Wedemeyer had a lot of good tie-ins. Son.-in-law of Embick, who was probably the best strategist in the Army. Wed. would naturally get ideas from Embick. Would correspond with Embick's way of how to win the war. Wedmeyer had come to school in Germany couldn't go there without working.

I said you don't think any the less of Marshall because he grew, do you? He said perhaps the greatest compliment one can pay is to say that a man develops. If I had my life to go over, I would spend fifty hours a week working.

What about MacArthur? Was he brilliant? He was a brilliant man. He had a pretty bad characteristic. He had to be tsar or he wouldn't play. He was not a team player. He was a pretty good captain but the military has to play ball with military leaders. Marshall did. Always subservient to political leaders. Thinks Marshall was a loyal staff officer. Doesn't think MacArthur built that way. MacArthur was too damned ambitious. I was in the War Dept

when he left for the Philippines. He didn't want to give up the Chief of Staff job here while serving in the Philippines.

Who sold the President on Gen Marshall? I think Pa Watson may have had something to do with it. Pa was an ardent Marshall man and I have heard that he sold him to Roosevelt.

I asked about the statement that Drum was set aside for Marshall because Drum was a Catholic. Burns said he felt this had nothing to do with it. Said he thought it wouldn't influence Marshall either. Perhaps had some prejudice against Catholics as a Protestant. All I can say is that he knew I was Catholic and he promoted me from colonel to Maj. Gen. I asked if Craig was Catholic. He said yes, and probably left church to become a Mason because of his career. He returned to the church before his death.

Marshall's record was very good. He was close to Pershing. Maybe Pershing got him in. Doubts if Hopkins chose him.

I have been in the higher councils a good deal. If one man says to you. I think the right man is so and so it may turn the trick without anyone else being in on it. I am told that Pa Watson had a big role. Then he would bring in Pershing and others to bolster his recommendation. Incidentally Pa married a Catholic and he changed to Catholicism before he died, although he was born a Southern Protestant and they don't change that way easily. I don't think he held Catholicism against Drum. Drum was a good man. I asked if Drum was too politically minded. He said perhaps. Congress would know better than anyone else if a man were too politically minded. Never felt that Marshall would be a party to intrigue. He never tried to get in on coat tails.

Hopkins--thinks Congress inquiries unjust to him on their insinuations that he was "making deals with Russia. True he wasn't a completely frank person and that told against him. Had to serve a President who played a slick game. Hopkins was completely loyal. He couldn't put all his cards on the table. I wonder how many completely do.

Something was said about Truman. He said he was surprised at Truman's knowledge. He was ready to make any decision at any time. Johnson, as secretary of defense, went up once and apologized to Truman for bringing him the matter without making the decision himself. Truman said I am paid for that. Meant he enjoyed reaching decisions. He made it in two minutes and he was right.

A military man shouldn't be President. He doesn't understand the political overtones. Not accustomed to making decisions in the same way they have to be made in politics. We spoke of the fact that a Chief of Staff would bring in a suggested order with reasons for it and the commander could accept or reject. Said Eisenhower never learned to work. Enjoyed diversions too much. Golf has become the big thing. His health plays into the hands of lazy habits.

We talked about fact that Marshall felt there were not enough pilots with staff training. Burns agreed. Said the big thing in those days was to be a pilot. Just semi-educated recruits. They have gone a long way since the war. They think now in a global manner. The army hadn't

thought in a global manner in the 1920s and 1930s. There was a good deal of isolationism in the Army. Embick was isolationist but keenly in favor of aiding Britain and Russia. Isolationism due in part to our thinking of our role as defensive.

There is a lot of professional jealousy which will always exist unless you prove to the services they are hurting themselves. When war comes each service wants to win it. They don't want to be tied up with each other nor with services of other countries. You have to get leader-ship from the political leaders. They don't care for anything but victory. It is important to have the political concept; the military concept is too restricted.

Marshall grew out of whatever restrictions he had. I got moved into an environment in 1938 where I had to be involved in international teamplay. A lot of people condemn me for being too international minded. This is possible. But it is better than being too isolationist.