

Notes 88N, Copy 2

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Colonel Charles S. Johnson (Retired)

Interviewed 11-12:15, April 3, 1961, by Edward M. Coffman.

I remember a story about Colonel Marshall during World War I. He must have told it to me while we were playing bridge, but I don't recall. He was a major and a staff officer. During the Meuse Argonne, he was riding in a staff car. It was rainy and the mud was over ankle deep. He came across a halted column of artillery. When he came to the front, he found an officer huddled down on a horse. He stopped and asked the officer what he was doing. The officer opened up with a tirade about the big brass not knowing what they were doing. After he finished, Marshall asked him how long he had been there. The officer answered--two hours. Marshall, then asked him--why don't you get off the horse and give him, a rest?

I first met Colonel Marshall when I came to the 8th Infantry. I knew him by reputation as a distinguished officer. When I was assigned to the unit, I was assigned as operations officer. I wondered about this until I found that the yearly training schedule was already 12 days overdue. The operations officer was in the hospital. I worked hard getting the schedule ready and then I found that we didn't have any mimeograph paper. This was during the depression, you recall. I went down to one of the Charleston news papers and begged some waste newsprint to mimeograph the schedule on. I remember feeling some trepidation about sending the training schedule to Colonel Marshall, who was at Screven, on such poor paper--particularly since he had just come from The Infantry School. I wrote him a brief note--apologizing for it.

The 8th Infantry was in a sad shape. It only had two battalions - one at Moultrie with headquarters and supply companies also a quartermaster detachment (under an officer named Sleeper who is still living--almost 90) and a medical detachment with two officers--and the first battalion at Screven. The companies were under strength with 60 men or so. There were only a dozen Officers in the regiment. I believe that there were two second lieutenants, three first lieutenants, seven or eight captains, one major, one lieutenant colonel, and one colonel. It was a poor lot of officers. When I later became adjutant, after Colonel Marshall, left, the first day in the new job, I got a sealed - registered envelope from corps. In it was the information that four of the captains were class B.

We couldn't do much training--after the cooks and administrative personnel were taken out, We didn't have much left. Besides Moultrie was on this island. I remember saying something to the effect that we didn't have much training area to Colonel Marshall. He answered: "well, you've got the beaches." That was true, but we never used them.

I don't remember how long he commanded the regiment. It seems to me it was around for six months--early summer or spring to sometime in the fall of 1933. "When he came up from Screven, Flap Adams came with him. He complemented the Colonel. He was very smooth, never rubbed anyone the wrong way and was reasonably efficient. The Colonel, Flap, and I worked together and were very close.

I believe when he came up CCC was all ready going on. I know we worked very hard that summer. I was operations officer of the regiment, the post, and the CCC. I believe we had 26 companies but I am not sure. Camps were commanded by reserve officers since we couldn't

spare the regular officers. We would send two or three good enlisted men along to back them up. We had a lot of trouble with the CCC. Some boys from New Jersey and New York were down there, and they were anti-everything. We had to send some of them home. Also we were unfortunate in that area in that we didn't have anything for them to do. Morale was a problem. I set up an athletic program and later an educational program for illiterates / after GCM left evidently, some of the camps were right in the swamps--Francis Marion's country. I remember one at Monk's Corners.

Also we had trouble with the reserve officers. Colonel Marshall had to relieve some and change others around, their camps were in such poor Shape. I don't remember whether or not he was the one who set up sub-districts with a regular officer to check the camps in each sub-district. We had District I.

That was a busy summer. We had CMTC camps - organized reserve camps, and National Guard Coast Artillery to handle. We hated it when the National Guard would come and fire those old disappearing guns at Fort Moultrie. We would have to take everything off the shelves. Colonel Marshall seemed to thrive on work. He kept up with everything and knew all about it. He had a way of seeing through things. Once or twice, I went in to see about something which I hadn't prepared very well. but that's all. If you would fumble about in stating a problem, he would listen and just from hearing you putting it badly, he could state it very clearly. He also had a way of talking in clipped sentences which sounded as if each word was precious. It sounded as if he had thought it all out, but it would be spontaneous.

I saw the correspondence between him and General MacArthur about the Illinois post. I have forgotten how I happened to see it. MacArthur wrote him--saying that he had recommended him for this post--that the Governor of Illinois had written him for a brigadier general to help build up the Guard--that he feared that it might have a lot of riot duty. MacArthur said he would send the outstanding colonel, Marshall replied that this was the first command he had had in many years, that he was enjoying it, and that he didn't want to go.

MacArthur wrote back and told him it was his duty to go. Marshall replied that since it was put on that basis, of course, he would go.

We were surprised that it took him so long to get this star.

We lived in the quarters next to his at Moultrie. I don't remember his traveling back and forth between Screven and Moultrie. We were so busy he didn't have much time. He did get out to the CCC camps as often as he could.

He played tennis with Molly a lot in a court behind the house. As I recall, they were the only ones who played. He went riding, and he liked to play bridge. I had the impression that he didn't like athletics much, but did it because he felt that he ought to in order to keep fit. He was that sort of person. He would do something he despised if he thought he should. I was in charge of the little nine hole golf course we had on the casements there. I tried to get him interested in that, but I never could. He did play once with my twelve year old son.

As I recall, Mrs. Marshall was sickly and spent much of the time in bed down there. They had a couple of servants and I believe he directed the household. The boys were gone to school most of the time. He used to ride with Molly. They were very close. The younger boy had something to him, but I can't say much for the older one.

When the younger one was at Ft. Knox, I was in the Tactics Department--I believe he said that he headed the department EMC/ later I was Assistant Commandant of the armored school. Steve Henry wrote General Marshall and invited him down. He was a grasping sort and probably saw this as an opportunity to reflect in the Chief of Staff's glory. Marshall wrote him a very brief, curt note saying that he wasn't coming that he wanted the boy to be on, is own, and that he didn't appreciate the invitation. It was almost impolite and not characteristic of the man. I thought that he had perhaps dictated it hastily or perhaps he knew what sort of person Steve was.

He did come to Fort Knox once and I escorted him about. I never served with him after Moultrie. I had a few letters from him while he was in Chicago and at Ft. Lewis. I got the impression that he didn't like Chicago. I guess it was too big for him. I went to see him after he came to Washington. He was in the Chief of Staff's office but he hadn't gotten his four stars yet. I think Paul Ransom and Omar Bradley were on his staff. I merely went in, after waiting a while, and paid my respects. Later, when he was Secretary of Defense, I saw him once or twice to speak to in the Pentagon.

He was a man of quiet reserve. He had a great influence on me. In regards to criticism of GCM as 8th CO, the Regiment was in a bad shape, but probably the criticism came because of Colonel Gil Allen who commanded it before Colonel Marshall. Allen was a heavy drinker.