

Notes 87N, Copy 2

Col. Louis A. Johnson

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Interview with Col. Louis A. Johnson, at the Metropolitan Club, Washington, Oct 28 by Forrest C. Pogue.

Col Johnson, former assistant secretary of War and former Secretary of Defense, had talked with me first on the telephone and then at the club. Mark Watson had suggested that I see him, saying that Johnson was strongly critical of Gen Marshall and that it was well to see what he was saying against him so that I would know how to deal with it. He wrote me a cordial letter, saying he would be glad to talk with me. Today he said he would be glad to talk to me, but wouldn't discuss where Gen Marshall was the night before Pearl Harbor, that he preferred not to discuss whether Gen Marshall told the truth about the Vincent memorandum and one of two other matters. He said he felt that the children of America shouldn't be deprived of their heroes and that he wouldn't want to tell me things which would show that Gen Marshall had feet of clay. Paving insinuated that there were lots of things he could say, he went ahead to indicate that Gen Marshall rated very high in his books and that he did a fine job during the war. He said he felt he was getting old and didn't do as well after the war as he might--particularly in Defense.

On the telephone and again at lunch, Col. Johnson said that He brought Gen Marshall to Washington and had a big hand in making him Chief of Staff. He said that he had decided to bring in some younger men to Washington. Had been dissatisfied with Army, except under Hurley. Picked out 6 or 8 and brought them. Made a speech at Portland and Gen Marshall, Also met Mrs. Marshall. Asked her how she would like to come to Washington. Recommended that Marshall be brought into War Plans. Looked fine.

Said Woodring opposed Marshall and spread lies about him, as he did about Arnold. Was against Marshall because Johnson was for him. Johnson says he thought Marshall was younger than he was or he might not have recommended him to Roosevelt for Chief of Staff as age was one thing which was used to get the appointment. Said Woodring had said to the press that Marshall would never be chief of staff. Said Woodring was for Drum and there was strong pressure by several senators and by Farley. Doesn't think Marshall used pressure for job. Says he (Johnson) went to Hopkins on the appointment. Doesn't think Pershing had anything to do with the appointment.

Says he recommended Arnold for head of air corps (Westover had been killed). Woodring opposed on the ground that Arnold had disgraced the country on Alaskan maneuvers and was a drunkard. Roosevelt said what about it. Johnson said I told him I had heard several things from that source and didn't believe it. Asked Roosevelt if he (Johnson) told FDR that it wasn't so would he believe and appoint Arnold. Roosevelt said yes. Johnson had Gen Adams, the AG, to check. Discovered Arnold not on Alaskan maneuvers. Johnson asked Arnold if he ever got drunk. Arnold said no and said he would sign affidavit and get witnesses. Johnson went to FDR on it and got him appointed.

Johnson said he had written a letter about army regulations at close of first war and had been called in to write something on them. FDR remembered this or heard of it and called Johnson in. Woodring a pacifist; strong Buchmanite. Roosevelt promised to make Johnson Secy of War

ten times. Johnson resigned ten times and each time FDR would promise him the job if he would stay. Then brought in Stimson and Knox on the theory that he could break up 1940 convention. Says he told him it wouldn't work. Would* probably have blown up but for Baruch who was there. Says Stimson didn't hold the Republicans off the President and got to point he didn't contribute anything. I said did his assistants do the work. He said yes--just like Sherman Adams does the work now.

When he resigned, Roosevelt said stay on as Sec of Commerce. I said give it to Jesse Jones. He said Jesse won't give up RFC. I said he knows that a simple resolution will take care of that. They kept coming back. Finally called me and said I want you to be Sec of Commerce. I said I recommended you. Aren't you sitting at the President's desk now? He said yes. I said tell the President that.

A little later I went out to California to make a speech. Corcoran came out all in a state of nerves and I evaded him. Then they tried to call. Then Steve Early came out and said he wanted to see a copy of my speech and wanted me to come back to Washington. When he saw the speech and saw there was no bitter feeling, he felt better.

Roosevelt called me and said he wanted me to go to India. I said too late to get a plane and besides I didn't know anything about India. He said haven't. You read Kipling. I said I had read the Rover boys on Clive in India. He said OK. Drive up and go over. You know Roosevelt actually was responsible for the Cripps Mission.

When I went over orders went out that the people in that areas were to report to me. The Amb to China came in and said by what right do you issue such an order. I said get the other people out of the office and I will tell you in proper language. I said the President issued that order and I had nothing to do with it. He calmed down. I prepared a speech to give on the All India radio. The British representative said he wanted to see a copy of the speech before I gave it. I saw that I would have to get another secretary (he was an Indian). I sent back through Hull to Roosevelt for clearance. When the time came and there was no clearance, I gave it any way and then cabled that I assumed there would be repercussions and that I hereby resigned. Before it could be encoded I had a wire from Hull for Roosevelt saying I couldn't have done better myself. It was fine.

We mentioned the quarantine speech. He says there have been all sorts of stories told about it. Three people have lied in print and said they helped write it. Actually, they didn't even know the President was going to give it. He just decided to do it. Liked to surprise people.

(I should note that speaking of falsehoods, he said that Marshall did not speak accurately when he said that he had nothing to do with the Vincent directive relative to China, since he had seen Marshall's corrections of the directive. Doesn't say Marshall lied. Said he probably forgot).

Said that Roosevelt hated MacArthur and feared him as a candidate. Said He (Johnson) finally persuaded Roosevelt to let Johnson rewrite the cables to MacArthur so they wouldn't be so rough. Said Marshall told him once he noticed the tone changed after Johnson began writing the

cables. Said Roosevelt withheld things from MacArthur so he wouldn't do too well. Doesn't know that Marshall was a party to it.

He said that MacArthur had been interested in political possibilities. Wanted to be President. Said he would have been if he had been satisfied to make his speech before Congress and to make his statements before the congressional committee. But when he went down to Texas and began to talk about taxes and a lot of things he messed things up. I said didn't he scare Taft and others as a potential candidate and he said yes. Said MacArthur tends to look down on people. Said once he wanted to give a party and then invited MacArthur and was told that he couldn't set a precedent. Said he actually wanted to make clear that he had been above me in rank and so I said I withdraw the invitation, I don't want you. Thinks MacArthur our greatest soldier.

Was called in on the VFW letter of MacArthur. Truman wanted to fire him then. Truman feared him as a candidate.

Said Eisenhower is catching some of the trouble which Johnson caught when he tried to cut before Korea. (I said didn't Taft and others favor the cuts.) Be said they certainly did and they attacked me later.

In here somewhere he said that Mrs. Roosevelt kept him from being Secretary of War. Said she didn't like him because he was opposed to her Communist-inspired ideas. The records will show a lot on that. Said she disliked him because he wanted the CCO people to have some military training. Helped beat me on that. Woodring opposed to that as well. Marshall backed me.

Johnson told of how he had shocked people with his proposal for 30,000 planes and later raised it to 50,000. Said he got \$4 billion appropriation the day he resigned as Asst Secy of War. Told of trying to get 17 B-15s and finally they agreed to give him 34. Said Marshall didn't always actively back him up in these early days since he didn't know all the background.

Said Roosevelt after Dunkirk said can you get the British some Weapons. I ordered rifles and 75s out. Went over to Roosevelt and told him that I had gotten trucks and ships and had ordered the stuff sent off. He said good. I said I want you to do something for me. He got serious and I said I want you to indicate that if I am convicted of a felony on this that you will give me clemency. He threw his big head back and laughed and then wrote: if you go to jail for what he had done today I will go with him. Put it on his stationery with FDR up at the corner and addressed it to me. I would have been willing to go to jail to get the stuff to the British. They were our people and fighting a battle we should have been in on. He said Roosevelt had been trying to get in on this since his quarantine speech. For two years he had virtually declared war. Says he agreed with FDR.

Says Marshall out horseback riding so he couldn't be found. Kept repeating he couldn't tell me where Marshall was the night before Pearl Harbor but implied he was hiding out, so he couldn't be found. Says I can't tell you but I can just say that how can a man do something which his commander in chief doesn't want him to do. If he goes so far as to say if you see one of their

submarines around somewhere drop a charge on them and let war start that is clear enough isn't it (he was referring vaguely to Roosevelt. He said a Russian submarine but he had been speaking of Germans and Japanese).

Said MacArthur was the one man who would tell the President what He thought. Marshall didn't always do that. More diplomatic.

I asked if Martin had inspired the MacArthur letter so as to start a MacArthur boom for the presidency and he said certainly.

Said Truman was afraid MacArthur and Johnson might develop into competition with him for Presidency

Says Democrats in bad shape for candidate now. Symington in front unless Meyner wins by 150,000, then he gets it. I asked if Kennedy started too fast. He said yes and his father is spending too much money. People in Massachusetts don't like this business of him giving Holy Cross so much and somebody else so much. Might make good vice- presidential candidate.

Nixon can beat Symington. Says Knight will pull out of the race and run for senator or take an ambassadorship. Says Nixon told him. (At first he didn't say.) Then said well I can trust you now, it was Nixon.

Says Eisenhower and Adams didn't handle Sputnik thing well. Both belittled. Nixon spoke just right on it. Says he has been for Eisenhower. But worried now. Mentioned fact that Bradley was recently asked about Eisenhower and he said I once knew him.---* Says Eisenhower effort to build up Gruenther has collapsed. Gruenther able, but too closely connected with Eisenhower.

We would go back to Marshall from time to time. He said that he intended to duplicate WW I set-up of a field commander (as Pershing was) and a chief of staff (as March was) with Marshall as C of S. Says Marshall changed lit after Johnson left. Says he (Johnson) as Sec of Defense tried to unify missile research and Marshall revoked it. Mistake; led to present trouble.

Said a man named Gross saw FDR on atomic thing before Einstein. Roosevelt mentioned name to Truman. Had never heard of him. Found he was a mathematical genius. Wrote on 4th dimension.

Doesn't think Marshall tried to get Johnson out and himself in as Sec of Defense. Once thought he might have intrigued for Stimson against Johnson as Sec of War but Baruch says no.

Says he saw Baruch nearly every Monday. B saw Roosevelt for long time. FDR got tired of talking to him. Wanted us to see him and give him ideas. Baruch my friend. He was responsible for me being offered a \$52,000 a year job I left War Dept. I didn't take it.

Says no one bothered him when he was up for Sec Defense except a man who had wanted to sell them a special powder. Experimented with goats. Johnson ruled against him. Man opposed his nomination.

I mentioned a number of screwballs. He said yes, but that sometimes a crazy idea would start people to thinking about something which would work.

Says Pershing had little influence. Had office but didn't come in.

Said Marshall told him when he became Sec of Defense he would be all right if he didn't play politics. Says he didn't.

Says Eisenhower went along with cuts in Korea. Eisenhower favored idea of cutting costs.

(Johnson, while he looks like the old time loud talking politician, talks very softly. He gave me the impression of being a very affable person. People who have crossed swords with him say that he can be overbearing. He out the throat of the people he talked about in a very mild manner, always protesting that he bore no ill will and would leave it to his grand-children to go through his papers and find the truth. He obviously attempted to leave the impression that he knew lots of dirt in Marshall if he wanted to tell it.

(I should note that I kept no notes of this conversation and that I wrote these notes after lunch. I am positive about the names, the substance of the conversation and the innuendo. I had merely told him I was writing on Gen Marshall and not that I was with the Foundation or I think he would have been loss frank. He was pleasant; gave the impression he trusted me; bought me a nice meal. I have sent him a copy of my book so I won't be under a feeling of obligation. He obviously feels that Gen M. let him down, but doesn't intend to have anyone say that he was slandering him. He actually never raised his voice against Wood ring while saying he lied. He never showed feeling when he was talking against Mrs. Roosevelt. And he not once implied that he was angry at Truman. If he hadn't repeated so often that he would not let himself be persuaded to talk against the General and tell the things he hinted were too sinister too tell, I would probably have thought well of him)

(Coming out of the club, he introduced me to Adm Strauss.)