

Notes 89N, Copy 2

Brig. Gen. Neal C. Johnson

San Antonio, Texas

November 7, 1957

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Brig Gen Neal C. Johnson, at home of Gen Hodges, San Antonio, interview by Forrest C. Pogue, Nov 7, 1957.

(He and Hodges asked if Gen M knew they called him Uncle George)

Some people to see (Brig Gen Denis McConiff and Forrest Harding).

Some of the people at Benning when I was there were Forest Harding, Omar Bradlye, Joe Stilwell, Morison Stayer, Pinkie Bull, Bedell Smith (secy of the post).

I was a student in the advanced class when Gen Marshall came to Benning. As far as I know in the history of the school they had never before had an assistant commandant under the rank of brigadier general (he was Lt col).

I was over halfway through when Marshall arrived. It was very apparent that he promptly took command of the school. The commandant was a pleasant, gentle person. He did this taking over without interference with the methods of instruction which were already valuable and efficient. He continued to impress his personality on the entire post at Benning. All felt that. They were all for it. Especially the G-3 of 1st Army.

He was a clear thinker and able to enunciate his ideas. Terribly interested in producing practical tactical problems. My class had, I think, completed all of our marked problems. When we learned that Marshall had directed that we have 2 or 3 extra field problems. Marked problems bothered us because they counted for or against us in getting recommendations for the general Staff School--only top 15 per cent recommended. He gave actual tactical problems in the field which we had to go out and solve. Problems in themselves were a departure. But he added problems on the ground. Not just map problems back at Hq.

I think the entire class felt the impact of the General on the school as a whole. They felt his desire to get to a practical basis. (I went away to Gen Staff school for two yrs and then came back for two yrs under Stilwell),

I would not put anyone ahead of Stilwell as a tactical man. He was a radical thinker.-a radical tactician. Sometimes too forward. A great driver. I was terribly pleased by Gen M's backing of Stilwell in China.

Stilwell worked hard to put across his training methods. I remember two slogans: "Sing something simple" and "can the farm boy from Augusta, Kansas, get it."

(Man to see Lt Gen Oscar Griswold, Colorado Springs)

Marshall was responsible (Forrest Harding and others prepared) for preparing INFANTRY IN BATTLE, a compilation of personal experiences of all types of inf units in WWI. Every student in the advance classes had to give a monograph (preferably of personal experiences) and from these we gained a great deal of tactical Knowledge. This used in preparation of INFANTRY IN BATTLE.

Remembers a Captain Adolph von Schell, student, later a German officer, heard he was procurement officer for motor vehicles. He had had four yrs of combat on the eastern and western fronts in WWI and Marshall made a great deal of use of him. Supposedly became a General Staff Officer in Reichswehr (?).

Marshall always insisted on proper regard for other services and branches. Once i was detailed to write a piece of fiction to illustrate the use of infantry weapons in antiaircraft protection against low flying attack planes. Was called "Clipped Wings". I wasn't much of a writer. I always remember Gen Marshall accused me of insulting the AA and Air Corps because I had played down their role. He showed his interest in looking out after all the services.

During Marshall's time they brought the tank school from Meade to Banning. Made for closer cooperation between tanks and infantry and helped everybody concerned. We had three Christie tanks--'War Dept wouldn't adopt them but they were fast. We had only one WWI tank. Used other vehicles as tanks to train in speed of vehicles to come. We had quite fast problems. Generally on the ground.

When Marshall arrived it was the custom for everyone to go out on horseback or by a narrow gauge railroad to problems. He brought in motor vehicles.

Tactical thoughts. On maneuvers there is a tendency to think only about front line activities. Marshall was insistent that the rear areas be umpired the same as the front lines.

He was intent on physical fitness. Organized Sunday rides. Forcibly, invited people on wild rides crosscountry. Used to hunt wildcat, boars and go on drag hunts. (Wainwright and I organized hunts at Gen Staff School. Hunted wildcats instead of foxes. ) Marshall intent on all sports. Wanted individual to participate. Liked to shoot. He was absolutely right on participating. Most of the officers were in fine physical condition.

General planning for classes was made way in advance of the school year. There had to be a tight schedule. He went over many problems after they had been approved by murder board and by the chief of training section. (Murder board was there long before his time to tear about proposed lessons).

People didn't like to write. He took out several of us including Stilwell and we locked ourselves up for about three months working on writing up material on tactics. Thinks this was published in 1940. Gen Stilwell as so radical that part of it was thrown out. He wanted to change the Nomenclature which was already well known.

(Check with Henry J. Matchett who is in California)

We had a certain amount of controversy over techniques not tactical principles. True they were hipped on wide frontages. Worked with intervals of WWI. Not so practical with our units. We had brigades then.

Experimentation started then on the triangular division. Actually Pershing had endorsed a reorganization of the WWI division--these ran to 28,000. That size division was fitted for that type of war where you were trying for penetration of heavy defense positions and had to have the men to take the place of casualties. Pershing felt they needed a smaller division and I know Marshall felt the same way. Concept of maneuver. In 1920 Pershing endorsed a triangular division of 16,000. It was about what we adopted. This done at Ft Bullis about three miles from here.

(I had the 1st Jt Task Force dispatched to the Pacific. Marshall tried to see me when he was out there but, didn't get to.

(I was against publicity. I refused to let cameras be brought in. Kept newspapers out. We had the advanced base set up for the capture of Guadalcanal. Now the navy and marine histories omit us. I saw a National Geographic picture showing my one headquarters identified as marine Hq. I had the first Seabees; they were picked up on the streets of San Diego. I never saw there until we got out there).

Marshall was not aloof to me. He was approachable. I was always fond of him. I had great respect for his ability. I used to call on him when I went East. I was always received. He is one of the greatest men America has ever developed.

Thinks no one knew whether he was smiling or scowling.

He was tough in the war and had to be.

Said they felt the possibility of war very early. I was director of training in the Hawaiian dept under Gen Drum.

Marshall had a great effect on the school and the entire force. He was just that type. His Personality covered the whole place.

Mrs. Singer was Gen M's housekeeper at Benning before his second marriage.