

Notes 105N, Copy 2

Lt. Gen. Ben Lear

Memphis, Tennessee

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Interview with Lt Gen Ben Lear (Ret) in Chamber of Commerce office, Memphis, Tenn, on 3 May 48 by F. C. Pogue,

1. You have seen General Marshall's letters so you know that he wanted me to work out the manpower problem. There were men enough in the Theater, but they weren't being placed where they needed to be, Neither the Air Corps people nor Lee at first wanted to comb them out. Lee was talking nonsense when he said he had to have combat type men for his port work. He had lots of darkies who could do that work that couldn't be used up front, and we showed him that a lot of psycho cases could be used in rear echelons. Probably would help cure their ailments if they had to do some heavy work. The Gasser Board was sent over to make a survey, outside the control of Theater Headquarters, so that we would know what could be combed out. Finally got 150,000. I believe 90,000 from Air Corps and 60,000 from Lee.
2. I tried to help Barker. He seemed like a good man to me, but they wouldn't work with him much at Lee's Headquarters. Bedell didn't like him much and he tended to bypass him and work with people at Com Z. Not a good idea. He tried it on me once, and I insisted that he go through me.
3. Lee was impractical; a dreamer sort of person. Pleasant sort of person, He would always agree with you; say agreeable things, and then go right out and do exactly what he had said he wouldn't.
4. Ike was wonderful with the men. He did great work on the inspection trips. Helped their morale a lot, although his own would get in a bad shape after he had talked to a bunch of men and found them all opposed to going back to the front. Would have been fine if he could have gone out more, but he had so many things to do. I tried to take him to as many places as possible. Said one day he (Lear) asked two or three soldiers if they knew who Gen E was. First three said no, but the fourth said "That's General Ike you dern fool."
5. Our redeployment camps were a great problem. Late getting started. Camps were a mess. Officers and men standing around doing nothing. Fortunately, they were so happy to go home they didn't mind too. Amazing how people failed to arrange things properly. We had wonderful camps on the Riviera. But there was no transportation from Marseilles. I went down and found 10,000 trucks doing nothing. I told the Major to use the trucks, He said "We can't do that; they are to be redeployed." I said use them until they are ready to go. He hadn't thought of that.
6. Much of the trouble between SHAEF and Com Z came because they didn't work out proper liaison. Lord should have been a liaison man; shouldn't have been trying to serve both SHAEF and Com Z.
7. Lee was a little afraid of me. Thought I wanted to set up a big staff. Not my idea, Actually had very few. Had Bonesteel, two or three officers from the Gasser Board and a small staff I had taken over.
8. I tried to work on the STARS and STRIPES matter. I wanted to stop all these personal complaint stories and have the matter handled through normal IG channels which we had opened

to them. Bonesteel followed up all complaints. Ike personally ordered me to leave the S and S alone and leave its editorial policy as it was. Near the end of the war we got some editorial people who knew a little something about policy. That Swede Solbert-didn't really know how to handle the public relations business.

8. General Marshall was right about rear echelon action ruining morale of soldiers. I tried to help on that. Many things he predicted came true.

9. I wanted Army talks and other things to help morale. Didn't get proper use out of these things. Osborn worked on it. But he had a habit of asking questions and taking tests on their views. Wanted to know their views on Russia and the army. As you know I was in favor of giving the soldier information, but I didn't like all this probing. It tended to give them ideas.

10. In your history stress the need of teaching leadership--particularly among the junior officers. They just didn't work on that. Field officers had to do the work of lieutenant. They should start out by knowing their men. Every noncom should be able to call every man's name. That way they know they are being watched out for. There is no danger of their being left at night. I was taught that on the way to the Philippines in 1900. We need realism in combat. That is why I studied the Marines and set up Banger schools. McNair didn't like it, and at one time I was told that I had exceeded my authority. The Chief of Staff checked up and told me that we had violated a regulation. McNair let me keep them. Rangers not properly used quite often.

11. Millikin one of my best men. Tended to be hard to deal with, He was relieved by Hodges because the latter felt Millikin didn't go fast enough. Not influenced by fact plan was upset. Thinks that fall of Remagen Bridge doesn't look good for somebody.

12. Believes Patton would have changed his writings if he had lived. Had a habit of talking strong. Lear knew him for years; went to Olympics in 1912 together. Went to see Patton in 1945; latter swore and called everybody bastards and sons of bitches. I told him I wouldn't listen anymore and he calmed down.

I know Mrs. Patton well enough to tell her she shouldn't publish these violent things. She wouldn't like it if Bradley, Eisenhower and others publish all their papers about Patton. I could tell the fact that when Patton would get on the ragged edge after getting all keyed up with excitement that Hap Gay would call up and ask for Everett Hughes to come down and stay around a few days until Georgie cooled off. Hughes came to me once and asked me about it. Stilwell's papers are unfortunate. Patton was excellent army commander. But the others were good too.

13. Ike leaned over backward on the British. Did a good job. Usually we had to do the leaving over. Simpson worked well with them, but he had to do the giving.

14. Believes that 3d Division was the best in the war, Thinks 8th Division very fine.

15. Insists on realism. Found that even at Benning they put the machine guns up nearly six feet, Had to fuss about that.

16. We found that replacements had to be taken in gradually. They need to be introduced and get them adjusted. Must know their noncoms and the noncoms know them. I went to division commanders and tried to get them to do this. Never got it done.

17. Many of the morale problems arising from supply shortages was the fault of the commanders. We found in case of overshoes that the commanders asked for the wrong sizes. Forgot that with the welt on those rough finished shoes a bigger shoe was needed. There were two rifles for every man, but the forward people cache the rifles when they got them, so we had to send up replacements without arms and then they went into action with a strange firearm.

18. I was with Ike in February when he sent word to Monty---you will do this by 8 Feb or else--was in regard to crossing the Boer. Simpson did a little better than the British on that.

19. Are you going to write the story on the darkies? Someone told me he would want to line the darkies up first, then the Brazilians, then his own troops, with the Japanese-Hawaiian troops in back to support him.

20. May have been better to go into the Balkans. Agrees, however, that in the spring of 1945 no one could foresee that the Japanese would fall out so easily.