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Maj. Gen. R. L. Maxwell

Washington, D.C.

October 5, 1960

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Interview with Maj Gen R. L. Maxwell in Washington, D. C., October 5, 1960, by Forrest C. Pogue.

(Maxwell's photograph of 20 years ago shows him to be bull-necked and rather tough looking. After five strokes (his "five stroke handicap") he is mild-looking; has an old man's face. His memory is good. Good sense of humor; mildly malicious; bite much worse than his bark. After retirement in 1946 was for 11 years with Am Car and Foundry. In 1957 went into consulting. Is in office with Adm. Ageton and Gen Edgerton, both of whom I met. Monaghan is helping collect his material for a book.)

First time he met Marshall. Prior to General Pershing's retirement (about 1924) he went on a farewell trip. Marshall with him. Came to Anniston, Ala. Maxwell at Camp McClellan--ordnance officer on staff. This was summer training. Living with father-in-law--Gen Wynant (sp). Pershing's private car on tracks below General's cabin on the hill. Gen. Pershing depended on Gen. Marshall a great deal. No public relations except Marshall. When they came to the house, Marshall pulled me aside and said I would like to meet your wife. Turned out his pajamas were ripped. Wanted her to sew them up. My oldest son was 9. Did sketches of everything. Had book of sketches which illustrated components of the Army. Put on a bright color and presented them to Pershing. Pershing thanked him. Three days later a nice letter came back--sure that Marshall wrote it.

In October 1938, Maxwell was on duty with Air Force at Barksdale Field. Had been out inspecting troops. Looked forward to a party. Here were orders telling me to come to Washington. So I went right on. Was told to report to Louis Johnson, assistant secretary of war. He was new--his reputation had travelled far--sounded tough. Before I went to War Dept I shined up my shoes--if you are going to be eaten by a lion, it may help to have shoes shined.

When I got there I found the damndest performance going on. The President had had a meeting with a lot of top people of the Army and Navy. Practically said we were going to be in the war. They began to say we were ready. Woodring took a firm stand; his report showed Army was in fine shape. Craig had to agree. Made Roosevelt furious. He said he never wanted to see another General Staff officer, except Marshall was then deputy chief of staff.

This is background to what I found when I went to War Dept. A big conference was about to be called. I went first to see Marshall. He said you are in this--come in. We went to Louis Johnson's office. Heard for first time that the Air Force was to be expanded. Production to be moved up from 2200 planes (actually 1300) to 6000 planes a year. Staggering, especially for those not sympathetic to air. I was told the astounding news by Gen Marshall that I was to be in charge of building and operating 13 aircraft factories. I was a lieutenant colonel in the Ordnance Dept. Suddenly I was on top instead of being eaten alive.

Louis Johnson was great on conferences. Usually included Navy secretary, Charles Edison, who couldn't hear a word, a quite good civilian, an admiral in charge of naval aviation, Gen. Arnold. I would like to say the greatest person in these conferences was Gen Marshall, but it was Louis Johnson's executive--Gen James H. Burns. Was greatest thinker and planner I knew; he pulled Johnson down to earth. He was a classmate's of Pa Watson's.

Next morning after first conference, I reported to Gen Marshall. He looked up and said I guess you wonder where you fit around here. Only God knows. I said I have been thinking about this all night. Here are some pages to help God make up his mind. I asked where to hang my hat. He said don't get mixed up with the secretariat and took me into the grand council room. Sat me down and said make myself an office. However, I couldn't preempt conference room. And there was a conference right away. I talked to Burns (I had worked with him before--both in Ordnance). I found myself a desk in Louis Johnson's outer office. I was not to disturb the General Staff side of the picture.

I was in one corner and Jesse Autun in another and Ginsburgh in another. This was the beginning of the organization of an illegitimate planning staff. The General Staff didn't want this airplane planning. Secretary of War not in sympathy; Chief of Staff not in sympathy. Johnson grabbed the show and drove through. This began the logistical end of World War II.

I was told when I came up by some friends, if you want to get along with the General Staff, never mention the name of Frank Andrews and never mention four engine planes. (I had been on Andrews' staff at Langley). I said I intended to campaign for this. I said I have already told Gen Marshall the outstanding man of the Air Force is Frank Andrews.

I used to see Gen Marshall about one-half hour a day. I needed somebody to hold my hand. He would listen to new ideas.

I was due to go on General Staff on July 1st. Gen Marshall needed an ordnance officer but I wasn't available. I said best prospect was Joe McNarney. I had been Ordnance Officer with Air Force for three years when McNarney was G-4. I had trouble with him because he wanted to retrain pursuit pilots as ordnance officers. Wouldn't work. You need to grow up with ordnance.

Andrews used to take me out on inspection trips with him. Air Force was filled with people at that time who looked on planes merely as flying machines and not as fighting machines. First general officer Marshall made, I understand, was Andrews.

We were required one day to submit program for what Army would require--\$2 billion at first bite. President said too much--will shoot for \$550 million. Burns and I made an effort to see we got something besides planes. Needed guns, bombs, radios, etc. General Marshall went along with us although he was not too interested in the logistical side. He was amenable to arguments; had great respect for Burns. Between them got these things into the program. Got a ballistic laboratory at Aberdeen; radio laboratory at Monmouth; money for bombs.

Admiral Leahy was then Chief of Naval Operations. He would wangle something at every meeting. Marshall would say I had to give him something. Said he thought when Leahy retired he would try to get him in the Army.

On Feb 28, 1939 Maxwell came up with a short memo proposing a Hemisphere Defense plan. Thinks this was first time term used. Had been talking about continental defense. Gen Marshall looked at it and said all right except your initials on it. (Meant that it should come from War Plans. They had done nothing). War Plans Man--Strong--called me over and said what do you

mean by hemisphere defense. I said War Plans should make a plan; define a program of action; figure out requirements.

Our group in Louis Johnson's office talked with Sumner Welles. Thought Gen Marshall should be announced as new Chief of Staff to follow Craig and that with announcement of his appointment, he should be sent to visit the Latin American countries. The Brazil trip was planned early. This broke the hearts of Drum and other aspirants. Not because of intrigue or Marshall better than several others. Matter of timing.

Craig was a friend of Burns. Hoped to be held on as Chief of Staff. He was a sight. He practically wept once when he saw an order which provided for us to go about the country. Said where is money coming from. Wanted to save money. Couldn't see that it was time to act as if we had a war underway. If we needed to travel; money would have to be found. Craig said to be very able at riding a horse in two directions at once. Took something to be a Mason and Catholic at the same time.

Drum a friend of mine. Thinks there was too much Spellman pressure to suit Roosevelt.

Louis Johnson had lot of little jobs under him. He was bored with details of army cemeteries and ate up people who brought in little things. He liked to talk about big things and I brought these up.

Autun was recorder of our illegitimate staff meetings. Ginsburgh came in on hemisphere defense. He was a wonderful man. Was running dry of interesting speech material for Assistant Secretary. He would grab on a new idea like this and put it in a speech. Roosevelt liked the phrase and used it. Someone said you have re-assured Roosevelt's re-election with that phrase.

I never asked the President to approve things. I became adept at writing memos in the middle of a page and addressed to President. Would say pursuant to your instructions as given in such and such a conference and attach a couple of memos. All he had to do was sign. Usually we would get OK FDR.

When we were talking of hemisphere defense; War Plans was talking about a new department in Puerto Rico.

I don't claim credit for the idea of hemisphere defense. It came from Gen Van Horne Moseley. One of the Army's real thinkers. When he was division commander at Ft. Bliss I was on the staff. He would sound off about our neighbors, arm in arm, must face the common enemy. I was G-1 and G-4 on his staff at Bliss. Moseley was ordered in to be assistant to secretary of war.

I said Embick was a thinker too wasn't he? He said he had been, but he had begun to end sentences with etc, etc, etc. Ceased to think.

Moseley didn't want to come. Was told that Chief of Staff needed a checkrein; most effective is that held by assistant secretary. He thought differently of job. Came to Washington. Made Chief swallow some of his orders. Was deputy chief of staff.

I mentioned Krueger. Recalled that one day at War College Krueger was telling us about M Day. I said would you tell us who will tell us it is here. He talked for 10 minutes. I got up and said I thought M Day would be the day someone would give us some money. He talked on that. The Asst commandant reprimanded me for heckling the speaker. War Plan didn't think about these things.