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Arthur W. Page

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Interview with Mr. Arthur W. Page, 20 Pine Street, New York City, April 3, 1959, By Forrest C. Pogue.

(Mr. Page is the son of former Ambassador Walter He Page. Formerly head of Doubleday, Page; onetime vice president of American Tel and Tel. In his late 70s. Spare of form. Mind still good. Has kept some North Carolina expressions. Vigorous).

I told him I had been sent down by General Osborn. He said that Osborn headed a committee which had to do with all activities of armed forces except fighting. When he moved to head of Army's operations in this field (special services), Page took over the committee. Worked more with Army than with the other services. In this post didn't see much of General Marshall.

Later Colonel Stimson said quit the committee and come to the War Dept as an adviser to me. I didn't know exactly what I was to do. I was assigned an office down the hall from him and had an office and secretary. Theoretically I was helping with Public relations. Without further to-do I was supposed to help with problems. I later saw that help with the atomic bomb was the main problem. The Colonel took the bomb with desperate seriousness, as to the moral righteousness of its use. I settled it in his mind pretty rapidly. I got the view of the rightness of using it when I saw the plans for the hospitalization of casualties if we landed on the mainland of Japan. The bomb was a psychological weapon. You could do as much damage with B-59s. The bomb was a poker bet. If it gave the peace party the handle they wanted, it was worth using.

During that period I used to see the General once in awhile. One day a decision was made, which would be known to members of Congress. I got on my horse and went to the General and said if anyone in Congress knows about this it will be known. We had better have a statement. He thought it would not be known all that fast. However, we made up a statement. In an hour the word was back from the Congress.

The General was the easiest man in the world to get on with and to do business with. If you knew what you wanted, he knew what he wanted. There was no palaver. You had a feeling that it was foolish to go in with questions. Have something prepared to recommend and he would tell you whether he wanted it or not.

If a paper needed agreement, he took the paper and sat down and made corrections then and there. Instead of his haying it down, you got it back with a decision. He didn't see you until his desk was clear from the last decision.

I was struck by his complete simplicity. By his directness and by his courtesy.

My daughter lived in Arlington during part of the war; her husband was a lieutenant commander in the Navy. She knew Mrs. Marshall's daughter and invited the Marshalls to a cocktail party. She had no idea that they would come. I was at home that down. A couple of girls came in, bringing their babies. In a few minutes a sergeant came up to ask if this was where Commander Hewitt lived and said the Marshalls were outside. The General came in and talked to us. The General was sitting where every girl who came in saw him. He got up and got the name of everyone who came in. Half of the time he had to take a couple of babies off his lap to get up.

This was at a critical time of the war, but he was as detached and courteous as if he were at a faculty meeting. Towards the end, a lieutenant colonel—the highest ranking officer other than Gen. Marshall to come—arrived. He got far enough to see the four or five stars and in a loud tone he said, “Jesus!” General Marshall and everybody else broke into a roar. The Colonel went on for drinks and didn’t come in.

Later I proposed to the Army that they reorganize public relations and appoint a high ranking officer to head it. Resulted in men like Joe Collins and Floyd Parks being appointed. Public relations is the job of the Chief of Staff and he should have somebody to be his deputy who can be equally responsible. Worked well until the new Defense set-up installed.

I had mostly to do with old Tom Handy. General Marshall approved the idea of a memorandum on public relations. I wrote out my ideas and took them to Tom Handy. He didn’t believe much in the thing, but I left the copy with him. He and I were good friends. I wrote the memorandum really personal to him. We got a bad name we didn’t deserve in public relations. I didn’t hear from him for quite a while. I thought he was angry. One day I ran across an officer in the hall and he said I read you memo. I said that wasn’t meant for general distribution. He said it had been circulated and about 80 per cent believed in it. Army people are like that. They have been schooled in case studies. Whatever came up they took it. Didn’t let this prejudice them. Never knew businessmen that were more open-minded.

I didn’t see Gen. Marshall much more in the War Dept. Once he came to Long Island and had luncheon before going to the Stimsons. My wife, who was president of Army relief Society, saw a little of Mrs. Marshall.

When Gen. Marshall became Secretary of State, he was living in Leesburg. McCoy asked if he would like to live in 1717 H Street. Chaney, McCoy and one other lived there originally. As they moved out, others came in. They called themselves the family. I was in on it. So was Ambassador Phillips. About 20 lived there. House was run by a negro man named James Hick and Julia. Like many negroes, they thought it was the most important place on earth. When Frank asked General Marshall, he sent an aide to look it over. The aide made comments on thing which the place lacked. James Hicks said I don’t think we want this General. But by the end of the week, James was won over by the General—his proudest moment was to have the General.

General Marshall or Frank McCoy told me that before the war the General used to talk to McCoy once a year about me coming up in the Army. At one stage, he said you know this man Eisenhower. Frank said he didn’t. The General said he may be the coming man. (Ask Mrs. McCoy.)

Gen. Marshall asked me through Lovett to be assistant secretary of state for public relations, but I didn’t do that. He wasn’t going to be there long. I couldn’t go on a temporary basis.

Always in a sense I have been sorry, and in another glad, that he took the secretaryship of state. It didn’t add to his reputation or his stature. It hurt. But it was of great advantage to the U. S. Public service desperately needed to have someone of stature and character at that time. It would

not have mattered to him if he had thought it would hurt him to take it, if he thought it was his duty to take it.

He tried to get the grip on the State Dept which he had on the War Dept without knowing in the people. By getting to the top in the Army, he knew by instruction, operation and record his men and whether he could trust them. He gave his confidence and he was able to function in the War Dept. He didn't know these things in the State Dept. He was as bad off as anyone taken by the left hind leg and thrown in.

He showed great enterprise at Leavenworth. I have picture of him there.

He had great clarity in his own mind and the capacity to ask questions to produce clarity in other people.

I spoke to Mr. Page of the fine relations between Gen. Marshall and Mr. Stimson. He replied, "Yes." Stimson was prouder of that open door between them than almost anything in the world. From Stimson's point of view, there was unified command. Practically no friction existed between them.

Colonel Stimson produced friction but not a high level. He was so intense that minor matters upset him. If you were a friend and collaborator, he was as tolerant as a man could be. I served as adviser to him at the Naval Conf of 1930 and had no trouble with him. He could be impatient with people and could scare them. He was different from most people. He struggled harder than most to make... It was exquisite torture for him to get the words he wanted. Once he had these down he was then like Stonewall Jackson. He became convinced that God was on his side. Once this was done, he was convinced of his eternal righteousness. It was decided and it was going to stay decided and he would fight like grim death. Then if you opposed him, he could explode. Stimson had the sword out and the flag up all the time. As far as I know, he and Marshall never disagreed.

One must differentiate between Roosevelt and Stimson on the Far East. Stimson had reached his conclusions about the Japanese from the Washington Naval Conference, when Franklin hadn't any ideas about them. He was expedient instead of righteous (there isn't anything bad about that, but they are different). I think Roosevelt was scared of the Colonel.

When you talk (I had quoted Tansill and others) of making the Japanese war inevitable, you must look at the whole thing. I could remember when they had killed their people who had tried to make peaceful settlements. They had broken the treaty. Peace meant giving up the treaty and negotiating on how much of Asia they could have. Pearl Harbor was bungled. They had set up something and it hadn't worked. You could read those dispatches to the commanders out there with one emphasis or another. Of course, the possibility of keeping alert 24 hours a day for a year is almost beyond human capacity. It takes something to keep alert day after day after day.

I worked for Father with his business here while he was overseas. Then I was asked to go to France and work on propaganda. The mission was sunk by a submarine. I arrived with one suit. Was decided I could do more in store clothes than in an army suit. I like it. No one knew just

what my rank was. When the war was over, I could come home. Worked under Dennis Nolan. He said be nice to the civilians and listen to them, but pay no attention to what they tell you. Jim Kearny was one of the people over there. He said you don't appreciate home until you get abroad. Lippman worked with us. He showed courage in opposing the 14 Points. Not opposed to ideas, but said not legal to operate. You can't give every country its historic boundaries and an outlet to the sea.

Stimson insisted that we must have military objectives for the atomic bomb. Only by stretching it was Hiroshima one. Were bound to kill civilians. The fellow who wrote the Journey to the Missouri book makes clear that the peace party had done all it could do. The bomb gave them a handle.

Stimson was not strongly in favor of a negotiated peace at that conference Millis quotes. There is no evidence he went over to this idea. He was examining the ideas. The part that worried him most was killing civilians. He was strong on Grew's (?) idea of propaganda based on keeping the emperor.

On the defeated countries. The Colonel always had the feeling you had to re-establish these countries. He did want any more Reconstructions. (I said it had been suggested that he was merely reflecting the views of Wall Street). He said that Stimson was a Wall Street lawyer, but he was on no bank board. He was less interested in business than almost any lawyer down here. Most of his life he was in politics and that was what he liked. Roberts, his successor, is interested in business. Colonel was an old fashioned lawyer. He didn't enjoy mortgages and bonds. He liked the law. But public service was the thing which fascinated him.

The War Dept. under Marshall and Stimson was the once place you could go in and never look behind for a political implication. If you were honest you didn't have to think about political implications. Franklin had to beg help from the Republican Party to get Stimson in his cabinet. It would have ruined him if Stimson had resigned giving as his reason the fact that politics was being played.

Says it is absurd to speak of conspiracy. You couldn't have one with Stimson. Marshall same way.

Says Stimson had Marshall's idea that history would vindicate you. I said if you don't write your story, they will quote the books that are in print. They can't neglect books that are in print. Can neglect looking up the record. Glad we are working on Marshall.