

Notes 167N, Copy 2

Germain Seligman

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Summary of interview by Forrest C. Pogue with Mr. Germain Seligman in New York City, March 12, 1962. Mr. Seligman was a French liaison with the 1st Division in 1917-18 during the time Captain (later Major and Lt. Col.) Marshall was with it. (These are rough notes as I took them. They are intended to aid my memory rather than to be complete statements by Mr. Seligman).

The 1st Division was the first American fighting division which landed in France. In view of my knowledge of the language, I was chosen as a liaison officer. I had been in the fighting since the beginning of the war, starting as a second lieutenant. I had been with an infantry regiment and had been through three or four years of war. Thus I was assigned as the first French liaison officer to the first American forces which landed in France--which was the 1st Division. The division at that time was under the command of General William Sibert of the Engineer Corps. He had helped in the construction of the Panama Canal. He was a remarkable man I think. He was intensely interested in learning about the war. You have to bear in mind that the 1st Division was a very green one. My first job was as ADC to General Sibert. I had to take him around--to Verdun for example, where the front was still active.

I started out with the division in Gondrecourt. Sibert had never been to any part of the front, so I took him around. We visited several generals. I remember going to the quiet sector of the Vosges held by the forces of the famous general, de Castelnau. We next visited the Aisne, sector.

General Sibert had no idea of the effect of artillery. He was perfectly startled when he saw a sign saying this was the village of so and so.

I became personally attached to Sibert. His eagerness to learn struck me. We called on Petain and lunched in his railroad car. I recall going closer to the front line to see someone-- it may have been Mangin. Sibert was intensely interested in everything. I acted as interpreter. He asked many technical questions--logistical questions interested him.

I was told that Sibert's relief was a purely political matter. (Not to be quoted. Sumner was a great fighter but I think Sibert was a greater general).

Bullard was generally a good man. I didn't find in him the eagerness of Sibert. Sibert said I want to learn about this war. He went into many details. I didn't find Bullard as eager. I was personally affected by his relief.

Marshall and I shared the same room at Gondrecourt.

There were two definite tendencies in the American army. One was for immediate help to the French troops in whatever form it could be given. The other--the Pershing idea--was to build up a separate American army. Sibert was in favor of immediate support. He went to the point of favoring sending of regiments to French units. This idea was opposed by Pershing. Sibert was affected by what he saw and by the reports of French losses. Thinks that diverging opinions on policies hurt Sibert. I felt ties to Sibert and was distressed when he was relieved.

Under my orders was Jean Hugo. Later on, under Summerall, there was Lt. Gouin and a captain Crochet.

Recalls that offices were at the Mairie in Gondrecourt.

Marshall didn't talk much. We worked in a little office--thinks there were only the two of them. He would be writing orders. I was drawing up papers and turning them over to him. We were in the same mess. Marshall spoke little. Everything pertained to his work. He was not nervous, but extremely tense. No time for anything but work. Recalls he chewed gum a lot.

Speaks of troops at Gondrecourt. They were green troops and green officers. Had to explain what trench warfare meant. Use of wire and grenades they had to learn what war really was.

Later they went by battalions into a quiet sector. The Germans soon realized that these were a different kind of troops. They were very aggressive. Presence was revealed quickly.

I don't remember how long the Americans stayed in the line. I remember later I was given orders to tell the commanding general to have the whole division transported by rail to a place in the west. It was a huge division. I worked hard helping with the movement. The French General Staff had troop movements well organized. They trained at the new place for a time.

We spoke of Chateau Tartigny. Mentioned de Chambrun. He was the top liaison officer at Chaumont. Thinks this was the first time he met him--at Chateau Tartigny. He was a lieutenant colonel of artillery.

I mentioned French fliers. Said yes there was a special French flying squadron of spads.

Says he saw General Marshall a good many times after the war. Last time I saw him was at luncheon with Belknap and Edgar. Had lunch with General Marshall in Washington. Discussed plans of reorganization. I spoke of de Gaulle's book and recommended it to him. He said he didn't know it. Asked "do you have it?" I let him have a copy and he said he would have it translated. I remember I had lost my DSM diploma--it was awarded me by General Pershing at the end of the war. He got me a copy.

Remembers that in the beginning in France, the 1st Division had no artillery. Was being trained under March at Valdaron.

I missed the St. Mihiel fight. Went to Athens.

Marshall was the driving force of the division. Sibert and Marshall worked hand in hand. Marshall was the real driving force. We worked together on a number of problems. We rode out sometimes with General Sibert (Marshall often had to stay back) and took up questions. The troops were boys with no idea of what war meant.

Discusses the organization of liaison within the division. Organized telephone lines--wireless and so on. Means of linking and infantry.

Marshall was eager to hear and to learn. Sorry he couldn't get out more often. He was acting chief of staff part of the time. He was anxious to do away with deadwood. Slashed right and left. One would suddenly notice that some officer had gone. He had moved him out. They would talk about how they fought the Filipinos. They were not representative of the modern army. Marshall was stern; never saw him drinking. Remember one day seeing an officer acting oddly early in the day. Unusual to a Frenchman to see people drinking early in the day. Marshall said he is drinking again. Was soon gone.

Marshall worked long hours. He was friendly with the French. Does not think he favored Sibert's idea of putting regiments in French units.

Pershing was always a disciplinarian. Not a pleasing Personality. In inspections, he was always checking on little things.

(We covered a number of other points which Mr. Seligman preferred to be off the record. )