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Mr. Erskine Wood

Portland, Oregon

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. ERSKINE WOOD, PORTLAND, OREGON, NOVEMBER 4, 1960,
BY FORREST C. POGUE

General Marshall had innate courtesy and consideration for others. I remember one time I was in Washington to visit my sister, Congresswoman Nan Honeyman. General Marshall invited me to go to the Army-Navy game with him. He went out of the way to put me on the train. This is just one of many little things that he did for his friends.

As to our first meeting, my first wife and I lived in a country home seven miles from Vancouver Barracks on the Columbia River. The Navy was paying a call. We knew several Navy officers such as Kincaid and Kirk. So we decided to give a reception. We invited the Marshalls and soon became attached to them. It was the beginning of a long friendship.

I had a fishing camp on the Metolius River 180 miles from Portland. I owned both sides for about one-half mile. It was very isolated. The cabins were open from about waist high up. We cooked outdoors. The Marshalls and Adms would come along. Marshall liked outdoor living very much.

I remember when Marshal I was called to become groomed for the Chief of Staff Job. I went to see him about this time. I was in his office when an aide began discussing some subject with him which should be discussed. Marshall listened for about ten minutes and then explained to me he was being briefed.

After he became Chief of Staff, he twice sought relief by visiting me incognito. The first time, a telephone call came from Frank McCarthy. He told me who he was and then asked, "How's your secrecy?" I said, "Fine." He said, "We are in California. We would like to come up but it needs to be hush-hush. We will fly up and our plane will land at Eugene for a brief inspection." He said he would arrange for an airplane to fly me to Eugene. We would then fly to Redmond, the nearest airfield to my camp. I got a fishing license for Marshall under an assumed name--I don't recall what it was. It worked out as planned. We got into his plane and made a 3/4 hour flight. He changed into civilian clothes. Army cars picked us up at Redmond and took us to the camp. Everyone left but McCarthy, George and me. We spent two or three days. Every day a sergeant would bring a mail pouch with messages from Washington. George kept busy but enjoyed the relaxation. After the vacation at camp, his cars came and got us and we motored back to Redmond. We unloaded there and baggage and sergeants were there. I remember I was in a tweed suit. One of the sergeants said to someone, "I know that one of them is General Marshall, but is that other gentleman, General Somervell?"

There was a young lieutenant who was an O.D. at the airport. The first time McCarthy went in to ask for messages he had on no insignia and his shirt collar was open so the young lieutenant said, "Who the hell are you?" The poor guy nearly sank when he found out.

The second time George came out was a week or ten days before the Normandy invasion. He again brought McCarthy with him. This time we went to the camp and dismissed everybody. There was no one there but my wife and I and the General and Frank. We had two or three good days. My first wife was an excellent camp cook. There was good trout fishing. Marshall was

getting a lot of reports at that time about places where fire bombs were being dropped. I remember he had a map of the United States and was listing them.

One evening we were preparing supper. Becky was bustling around. George had a dishpan between his knees, peeling potatoes. He said in a monologue but meaning for us to hear, "What did you do during the great war?" and then answered himself, "Oh, I was peeling potatoes."

Becky reprimanded George once for not washing the dishes clean enough. When he returned to Washington, he sent her a photograph with this inscription: "To a perfect cook from a careless dishwasher."

I used a star knot to tie my leader to a dry fly in a figure eight knot which was slightly complicated. George wanted to learn to tie that knot. He had a hell of a time learning. I used to chuckle. Here was great military brain but he could not tie this knot. He kept at it for a number of hours and finally mastered it.

I mentioned that General Marshall had spoke of The Dalles and he said that was a great Indian Salmon Fishery plant that George would have known.

I mentioned the fact that General Marshall had written of Mr. Wood's stay with Chief Joseph. He said, "Yes, my father was an Army Officer. He retired as a first lieutenant in the Nez Perce campaign against Chief Joseph. When the Chief surrendered, he was put in the personal charge of my father. My father and others got him released from the area where he was sent. It was malarial and many Indians died there, and sent him back north to his people. Sometime later, Chief Joseph and others on their way to Washington stopped by in Portland at our home for midday dinner and father told him he would like to send me up sometime so I could learn how to hunt. When I was about 13, I stayed with Chief Joseph living in his own tee pee, from July to December. The next year I spent the months September to December with him for the fall hunt. I kept two diaries, the first, the best, covering the six months period was lost, the other I kept and has been published by the Oregon Historical Society. General Marshall knew a lot about the campaigns."

I spoke to him about General Marshall's friend, Governor Martin. He said Martin was very fine. He had been an Army Officer ("I remember when he was at Vancouver Barracks in the Army") then retired, then went to Congress, then was Governor.

"Incidentally, I was born at Vancouver Barracks while my father was still in the Army. It is a beautiful post. There used to be a nine-hole golf course on the parade grounds. They made me an honorary member. I gave a silver cup to the Vancouver Barracks Golf Club named after Mrs. George C. Marshall, but they no longer have a golf course there, and I don't know what has become of the cup."

"Did Marshall ever tell you about Pershing and the whiskey?" Mr. Wood asked. I said, "No."

He said that on one of their trips they had two bottles of Waterfill and Frazier whiskey, Pershing's favorites, in a suitcase. It fell down and one bottle broke. So Pershing said, "Marshall,

your bottle got broken." Marshall said he told him it was the most outrageous display of rank he had ever seen.

Marshall was a very clear speaker. I remember hearing him talk once on the great importance of railroads to the United States in the matter of defense and he spoke in some detail of their use in the movement of troops in France in the First World War.

I mentioned Ham Corbett. He said he had been aide to General Harbord. Mr. Wood said that his sister was an old time friend of F.D.R. and Eleanor's. Mr. Wood said General Marshall on one occasion was invited to use a cottage up at Huron Mountain. He heard that Wood's wife had died and that Wood had pretty much gone to pieces. As a result, he invited him to visit with him. He said that on the first morning he got up and left his room in great disarray and the bed unmade. He stayed an hour or so and when he came back the bed was made up and everything put in order. When he asked Mrs. Marshall who did this she said the General did. He said he was very embarrassed, but it was an indication of his desire to be helpful. "This trip was of great value to me in getting back on my feet again. George had been through a similar experience and understood my situation."

One silly little story--" I remember once when Marshall was at a small cocktail party given by a Chicago lawyer, Laird Bell, Chief Counsel of Weyerhaeuser. He had some charming daughters. One of them was serving caviar which she passed to General Marshall said, 'That is caviar' to the General. I don't know whether he had heard of this quotation from Hamlet or not."

(Mr. Wood who is a little older than General Marshall, very robust looking, very straight, leathery face, smartly dressed. He made clear that he only knew Marshall in a social way and had only personal stories to tell. He was quite conservative and thought Mr. Truman had misused General Marshall by sending him to China and appointing him to other offices. He was interested in doing what he could in connection with the Foundation.)