

## Interview I

By William M. Spencer

July 9, 1947

Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C.

The text below is from "Conversation with General Marshall at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D.C., July 14 [sic], 1947." It was presented to the Marshall Foundation by Francis S. Wyman of Brighton, Massachusetts, in a letter dated May 7, 1997; he had received it from Davis Spencer in 1991. The interviewer is not indicated on the transcript but is probably Colonel William M. Spencer of Chicago, Illinois. Marshall wrote to him on July 18, 1947, to observe: "I can't tell you how much I enjoyed visiting with you and am only sorry we did not have more time to talk." Spencer is not listed in the Secretary's Appointments Diary, for July; for July 9, the diary shows the final entry as 3:45 P.M. Bracketed material in italics was added by L. Bland, April 2005.

Last Wednesday - July 9, 1957 [1947] - I was in Washington, D.C. for a few hours, to call on our friends at the Association of American Railroads. While there, I thought I would take a shot at seeing my old friend, General George C. Marshall, Secretary of State, believing deep down that it would hardly be possible because of the terrific demands on his time. I did call his office, however, and asked for the secretary who handles his appointments. She told me, rather emphatically, that it would be impossible to see the General that day because of a series of appointments. I then told her I would stay over until Thursday to see him, but she informed me his schedule for Thursday was even worse. Accordingly, I told the gal to tell the Secretary that I was in town, and if possible I would like to see him.

After making a batch of calls, I returned to the Mayflower at about four o'clock and found a message asking me to call the Secretary at once. I did so, and in short order General Marshall was on the telephone. I told him I would like to come over to see him for a few minutes. Without hesitation, he told me not to come there, but that he would come to the hotel and be in my room at five o'clock.

Almost on the dot, he walked in, and I have never known him to be in better form or condition. He looked younger than he did ten years ago, and was on the crest of the wave, in spite of the pressure of things. Right off the bat, I called room service, and asked for four Tom Collins. We then exchanged the usual pleasantries, with inquiries about our respective families. The General was particularly interested in my children, what they were doing, etc. I told him I was anxious to see him to ask him, among other things, to go on a fishing trip to Nova Scotia with my two sons, Edson and Bill, Jr. and myself, and Mike Pearson and his son, Geoffrey. He said it would be impossible as his schedule for the next sixty days was out of this world. He is booked for the Governor's Conference at

Salt Lake City, a very important in Buenos Aires [Rio de Janeiro/Petropolis, Brazil], another in Paris, and another at Bogota, which eliminated him as far as the fishing trip was concerned. I then asked him if at sometime or other this Fall he would come to Chicago and speak at a dinner which I would give for him, inviting at least one hundred of Chicago's leading citizens. On this point, he said that he would like to do it, but that he had already refused other invitations to come to Chicago and that, under the circumstances, it would be most difficult.

He told me he could not talk to me on the telephone, when I first called in the morning, because at that particular time he was in session with nine top Senators who had come to him to ask his advice on a resolution which they proposed to adopt in the Senate urging the United Nations to change its charter or by-laws to eliminate the veto power, wherein one nation can nullify or veto the resolutions or recommendations of the others. The general said that he told them emphatically, "I would not advise the adoption of such a resolution; it has a permanent part in the United Nations set-up and the time may come when we will want that veto ourselves very badly indeed."

We discussed the European situation. The General stated that his first job was to keep as many nations as possible in the fold. Byrnes, in his conferences, had ignored the smaller nations, such as Greece, Italy and others, and had devoted his entire time toward consummating agreements with the larger nations. As a result, the General had a most difficult time in bringing back to our side the smaller nations. He said that that was one of the first missions which came to him as Secretary.

We discussed the so-called Marshall Plan, wherein the United States will lend or give to the nations of Europe enormous sums of money--up to twenty-four billion dollars has been discussed--for rehabilitation and recovery. The General said that it is entirely a selfish move; that the future prosperity of the United States depends in great measure on recovery in Europe. He said that it would be serious with the U. S. if, for example, our exports dropped to as low as six or seven billion dollars, and that the plan was designed to prevent this. At the same time, he said, it would give the nations of Europe a chance to get on their feet again. (It, to me, sounds like a glorified WPA.)

It is apparent--as our conversation developed--that the aim of the Administration is to keep the wheels turning in this country at any cost. It is felt that if production is to drop off to any appreciable degree, it can result in widespread unemployment and the shutting down of plans and businesses, which in turn might lead to chaos and the possibility of the government again being forced to take over.

At this point, we talked about politics, and the General stated that it is unfortunate that the politicians in government are constantly thinking of the effect rather than of fundamentals. For example, he stated that the Republicans are fearful of his own accomplishments because Truman will get full credit for them. The Democrats, he stated, are frightened that they may lose prestige and power.

I ask him how he got along with Mr. Truman. He said, "Very well indeed, but I am fearful of one thing--he agrees to everything and anything I suggest or propose to him." I then asked him how he got along with Mr. Roosevelt, and he likewise said, "Very well, very well, but particularly in great measure because Mr. Roosevelt let me alone." He had many battles with Roosevelt during the War, but, on the whole, Roosevelt let him run the Army without interference. He mentioned one incident prior to the Normandy invasion which is interesting--the army wanted 150 additional LSTs (landing-craft) in order to provide more tanks for the invasion. Roosevelt could not see it at all, and even suggested, in all seriousness, that the tanks be encased in canvas and floated ashore. The General said if the landing craft had been provided, it would have changed the entire strategy of the invasion.

All the General's conferences with Roosevelt were at arm's length. He was never once invited to Hyde Park, although Harry Hopkins and others tried to bring it about, but without success.

I asked the General if General Eisenhower was appointed by him or Roosevelt. He said Roosevelt did not even know the man, and that he was entirely responsible for it.

At this point, I asked him about his own appointment as Chief of Staff and told him the story as I had heard it from Van Santwoord Merle-Smith, who told me that he had heard it direct from General McCoy. Briefly, the story involved a conference, in which General Marshall participated at the White House, in which General Marshall had the courage to oppose the President. The conference had been called to discuss the adoption of a policy due to the fact that so much publicity had been given to an airplane crash on the Pacific Coast (in 1939 I think [January 23]) in which a French officer participated. There was so much publicity on the subject, stressing the fact that we were giving away military secrets to France that it reached the President's ears and he called a conference to discuss it.

The General told me later that "The President did me the honor of doing exactly as I had suggested."

There were fifteen present at the conference, the General told me, including Harry Hopkins, Jim Farley, Aubrey Williams (head of the Youth Movement) Walker (Postmaster General)--all of them new dealers. General Marshall, as Deputy Chief of Staff was present. The conference was, generally speaking, a monologue (as was customary in the Roosevelt conferences). At the end, Mr. Roosevelt determined what the policy would be with respect to the publicity covering the matter, and then went around the room asking each in turn if he agreed. Obviously, they all did, until he came to General Marshall. The General spoke up and said, "I not only do not agree, but I feel exactly the opposite course should be pursued." He told me that when he spoke up in this manner, one could have heard a pin drop around the room, as it was very rare indeed for any one to oppose the opinion of the President. Thereupon, he explained to Mr. Roosevelt in clear and concise terms why he disagreed with him.

Some weeks after this, when war appeared to be more and more imminent, another conference was called in the President's office to discuss the building of airplanes. The President wanted 30,000 built just as quickly as possible, and he was about to direct that Harry Hopkins erect 18 plants with WPA money for the purpose. General Marshall strongly opposed the plan and said so to the President in no uncertain terms. He was in favor of a more balanced program which included the training of pilots, building of airfields, etc. The conference, the General told me, was a most argumentative one and that there was plenty of heat on both sides. The President was worked up and incensed that General Marshall should oppose him. In fact, at a reception a few days later, the President gave him the coldest shoulder that could be directed at anyone. In spite of these difficulties, however, the President elected to appoint Marshall Chief of Staff, and the General told me that the basic reason why he did so was that he knew he would tell him what was what, straight from the shoulder, and, secondly, he knew Marshall was not mixed up with any political clique or other group. Obviously, the President had great respect for him for the way he handled himself in the two conferences described above. The General said that Harry Hopkins had more to do than anyone in influencing the President to select him.

I talked to the General about his memoirs. He said emphatically he had no intention of writing anything; that if he did so, it would not be history. "Unfortunately," he said, "I would have to include in the memoirs so much which would tear down men who are living, and I cannot do that, and, yet, to omit such references would not be historical. It was necessary at times to demote some of my best friends." He spoke of Mrs. Marshall's book and said he did not know it was even being written until it was about three-quarters completed. The only thing that worries him about his memoirs is that if he should die, Mrs. Marshall would be completely left out in the cold. In fact, he said, she would not even get a \$30.00 per month pension. He said that he had been offered \$350,000 to \$500,000 for his memoirs, but even that did not change his views on the matter.

This, naturally, led to the matter of his expenses, and the tough time he is having getting along on his present salary, government salaries for top men being notoriously low. He said actually his job costs him money. Incidentally, his army retirement has been cut to one-half of what it was when in active service (presumably, I suppose, because he has taken another government job).

The General spoke of Bob Doyle and regretted that he did not stay longer with the War Department as greater things would have been in store for him. He said he made a mistake, initially, in not assigning him to General Somervell (Army Service Forces) rather than to a tactical section, as he then could make full use of his business experience and knowledge.

He spoke of how much the job as Secretary of State demands of a man these days. Actually, he said, "I have had eight days' rest since the War started, and that was in Honolulu, on my return to this country." He said he had been offered the job as President of the American Red Cross and he looked forward to taking it, as it would have given

him some relaxation, but that his was called off when the President drafted him to be Secretary of State.

He spoke of various appointments. He said that everybody wanted to be Ambassador to England, but that he finally selected Lewis Douglas for the job, as an able and conscientious man. "I called him long distance on the telephone," said the General, "And he said he did not see how he could take it because his wife had the mumps! I told him that that had nothing to do with the matter, and he laughed a bit and said, of course, he would accept."

General Marshall spoke about General Wood [Robert E.: president Sears, Roebuck]. He told me that, on two or three occasions, he had proposed to President Roosevelt that General Wood be commissioned a General but that Roosevelt each time squelched the idea. "We did use him surreptitiously and sent him all around the world on more than one occasion, but we could not even give him pay for the work he did."

He spoke of Harry Hopkins and told me that he had been of great help to him. "Harry," he said, "had a very good idea of what was right and what was wrong."

I asked the General how he liked Uncle Joe (Stalin). He said, "I like him, but I don't like Molotov at all." I then asked him to tell me something about his conference with Joe in Moscow. He waxed eloquent on this point and told me at considerable length what it was all about, stating that it was very much off the record.

"I was with him for an hour and three-quarters, and for the first hour I sounded off to Stalin as never before. I told him emphatically what was wrong and why. I accused him and Molotov of being the stumbling block toward the settlement of world affairs." Pointing his finger at me (as though I were Uncle Joe) he said, "I told Stalin that at the conclusion of the War, Russia was right at the pinnacle of affection in the hearts of the people of the United States; that at that time, France thought little of us, and we were practically at war with England, but that Russia was especially well thought of by the American people. I told him that since that time, every single move the Russians had made had the effect of nullifying that good will. At one point, Molotov broke in on the conversation and stated that a great deal of adverse criticism of Russia had arisen in the United States; that the loan of gift to Greece was actually directed at the Russians; that the Russians had contributed ten billion dollars in payments to the United States for war materials--etc., etc. Pointing my finger at him, I said to Stalin, "There is not one word of truth in what that man says." "For a full hour," said the General, "I went at Mr. Stalin hot and heavy and minced no words whatsoever. My arguments were so conclusive and so true that he had not the slightest comeback or answer to any of them."

The General then said that he took a bad beating from the press because of not giving any publicity to what had been said at the conference. "I just could not do it," he said, "and I am sure you can see the reason why."

I asked the General, "What about breaking off diplomatic relations with Russia?" He said, "No, absolutely not. If we do so, it could very well result in trouble later on. We must maintain our contacts with Russia and get along as best we can. I am fully aware that a diplomatic break would probably be the most effective way of bringing about my universal military training plan."

All in all, my visit with General Marshall was most satisfactory. He is just like an old shoe so far as feeling at home with him is concerned, and it was just as though we were talking about things over at home some years ago. I have the greatest admiration and a deep down affection for him. On only one occasion during the War, when he was Chief of Staff, did I fail to see him when in Washington, when I called him on the telephone, and on that particular day, he happened to be closeted with the Combined Chiefs of Staff in a most important conference.