

Tape 69, Copy 2

Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby

Houston, Texas

August 28, 1963

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This is a recorded interview with Mrs. Oveta Culp Hobby by Forrest C. Pogue, in Houston, (Texas), August 28, 1963.

Hobby: When the committee set this bill for a hearing, General Marshall asked me if I would testify and represent the War Department and express the War Department's views. I said, of course I would and worked closely with G-1 and the Assistant Secretary of War McCloy, General Christiansen, then General Marshall's liaison to the Hill. The testimony had all been prepared and we had done a dry run, so to speak. The morning that I was supposed to go up, General Marshall called for me. He sat down and we talked about a number of things. He asked me if I had ever testified before the Congressional Committee and I told him I had not. He said, Do you know what you are going to say? And I said, Yes. I told him about all the preparation of the testimony and the dry run. I had it folded in my purse and I handed it to him. He looked it over, took it over to the wastebasket and tore it up, then sat down and said, Now I want to give you a piece of advice. When you go to testify before a Congressional Committee, you say what you have to say. I said, General, there are many questions they will ask me that I do not know the attitude of the War Department. I am about as unmilitary a person as ever existed. He said, When you do not know what the attitude is, that's what you have a staff for. That's why members of G-1 are going there with you. When you have a question you don't know how to answer, you refer it to your staff. Well, he kept talking and the hour kept getting near, and I was very embarrassed for fear that I would be late for the Committee, and knowing full well that I could not excuse myself from the Office of the Chief of Staff. The interview was finally terminated and I got in the car in front of the Mall Entrance and a G-1 officer was waiting for me. I told him what had happened, that General Marshall had torn up my testimony and told me to make a statement. I said, "What does he expect me to do, throw the mantle of the Chief of Staff around my shoulders when I testify?" He said, "That's exactly what he means for you to do and you had better do it." The thing that amused General Marshall later he learned that for years I had been the farm rep. in Texas legislature. He used to tell with great glee about the long lectures that he had given me about how to appear before a parliamentary body, and he said, "That woman never indicated to me by word or sign that she knew anything about this." There were many consultations (complications ?) while that bill was in progress in the House and in the Senate, and when it became known that the bill was going to pass, he asked me for the names of people I would recommend to head the corps, and I gave him six or seven names. I didn't hear anything more for about two weeks, then he sent for me and he had that list and said, Thank you for this list, but we want you to head the corps. I said, But General, I have no military knowledge - none. He pointed out that no other woman did. To make a long story short, I told him I would talk to my husband about it and I did. My husband was the one who thought I should go as a consultant, because he felt that war was inevitable, and that no one should refuse to do anything. So I did agree to do it. I think one of the great qualities of General Marshall was the understanding he had of other people and of other people's problems. My husband came up for the swearing-in ceremony, and when it was over General Marshall stepped over to where my husband was sitting and said, "Captain Hobby, could you come into my office?" We all went on in and General Marshall said, "I know that any man must have great trepidation about his wife taking such an assignment, but I want to tell you this, that the Secretary of War and I mean to give her every support in doing what we know will be a very difficult job." My husband said,

General Marshall, "I had intended to seek an appointment with you to discuss this very thing because I know that it will be a very difficult thing to form a Corps and to make it acceptable not only to the Army and to the population not accustomed to the idea." General Marshall had uncanny intelligence system. He always seemed to know when people had problems and needed help. Someone may have told him, but often I would go down and he would say, I want to see you at lunch today, come home and eat lunch with Katherine and me, and we would have lunch and he would say, "Well, are there any problems?" This always happened at a time when I had problems! So I have always considered that either his intuition or his intelligence was extremely good.

FCP: This way he could say he asked for it instead of your going to him.

Hobby: Yes, but of course it was uncomfortable. Many people in the War Department, to use the old expression, always believed that I made end runs to accomplish some objective. I'm not saying that I wouldn't have if a principle had been involved. Actually, I never had to.

FCP: He apparently adopted this as one of his chief policies.

Hobby: He believed in it. You see, he saw so far ahead in a way in the testimony before the Congressional Committee will reflect that no one saw the need for manpower as it would develop in this war. He did.

FCP: I have a feeling that if he hadn't spoken up and made it known very strongly, that...

Hobby: It would have been at best a very limited and crippled organization.

FCP: I skimmed through it again, (?) book coming down. I had read it. I worked in the office next to her.

Hobby: It didn't make any difference whether it was barracks, uniforms, training, utilization, but nothing, when you look back, that you can consider unusual, because this really was a revolutionary attempt, and I must say that to have started as we started, totally unacceptable, and finished by having requisitions for 600,000, that he couldn't fill.

FCP: Of course, the Navy got along better.

Hobby: They came later. They had their problems, of course, and severe ones. The directors had a joint personnel committee. We met and tried to help them. They all had problems, but we had so many more. We were putting them in different jobs and we were also sending them overseas, which of course, no other service was doing.

FCP: I had really forgotten until I read through this again how some one item of clothing would create great problems and you would get this one to agree, then the requirements wouldn't agree, then it would land back on General Marshall and then so often, unless he personally told them he would do this, it would go to someone else and they would give it the run-around. Did General Somervell personally object to it?

Hobby: No, I don't really believe General Somervell objected. My own relationship with Gen.

Somervell - I don't mean to say we were always in agreement - we sometimes differed, but then there is nothing wrong with that, but it was an odd place for it to have been finally assigned, because we were furnishing troops for ground, air and surface, and then as you know, we became a part of General Staff, and this made everything very much easier. First, we reported to no one really, so to speak, and then in the reorganization to Services and Supply and then to the General Staff where everything was considerably easier. You know the rivalry among ground forces and services of supply was intense at that time. Once we were at the General Staff level, many of these problems disappeared.

FCP: Of course, you were coming in at a time when ground forces were having trouble with supplies too.

Hobby: Everybody was fighting for the same thing. As you know, it's a very different thing to experience, and I look back on it in quite a detached way.

FCP: [?] it took your strength and you did, towards the end, become almost ill.

Hobby: I was very ill when I left.

FCP: You actually got into a [?] thing in the early days of HEW.

Hobby: Anybody who attempts to put the Federal Security Agency into the Department and make it go easy needs that. One of the most thrilling things I have ever done. It was hard, disappointing, you couldn't move very fast, but my greatest challenge from an organizational point of view. In WAAC we had both organizational and general unacceptance of the idea. Now in Federal Security Agency and Department of Health, Education and Welfare you had some acceptance of the idea.

FCP: They just picked up all the things that were left loose and put them over there. I thought of that coming down, going through some of your early problems, and I thought what wonderful training for that later job. They still have troubles.

Hobby: They will for a long time. There are too many unrelated things in that department. How can you administer Federal Credit Unions? Is there anything more ridiculous than administering Federal credit unions, vocational, rehabilitation, public health, education, etc.?

FCP: What interested me was, how in the early stages of the organization, you were able to work out the problems very easily.

Hobby: It may look easy in the books, Dr. Pogue. Actually, it was not too difficult. It took a special kind of care and understanding. Most things can be solved with understanding, as you well know. I have never seen a man - Marshall - who could project himself more easily and more completely into the problems and situations of his subordinates, or for that matter, his superiors. His intuitive faculties in some way contributed to this. How can a Chief of staff, responsible for waging a war, have knowledge of or be concerned with these kind of problems not only WAAC - on many others. This had to be an intuitive faculty and most great people have it, I think.

FCP: But this colored thing, because I have run into several cases where he showed that he

was thinking ahead of the Army on this one. Although I think he tended to agree with the Army that it wasn't their place to solve social problems, but if for no other reason, then what is the best way to use this material, he is going to see to it that those who accept responsibility were given. It's amazing the time he spent on this type of thing.

Hobby: On working out solutions for little problems. You and I both know that they could have become big problems very easily. I'll tell you a story. You made me think of it. General Marshall, in my years in the Army, overruled me once. It is one of the dearest stories I can imagine. Before the invasion of Africa - I was in England a few days before the invasion of Africa - and had luncheon one day with General Eisenhower and Bedell Smith and they described the theoretical operation to me, and asked if they could have WAACS. They wanted, as I recall, bilingual telephone operators. So I said, yes, when the situation is stabilized. You remember now that these are women are members of the Womens Army Auxiliary Corps, they are not members of the Army, they are for the benefit of civil service and I could not send them into an unstabilized situation with a good conscience. When the situation is stabilized, let me know and I will send them. Well you know the situation in Africa, it stabilized much sooner than anyone thought, so Bedell came over and he reported in to General Marshall right away, and among the things he told General Marshall was that he was going down to see me to ask for my approval. Bedell came on down to my office and I said, Well you stabilized much sooner than I thought, and I thought that by the time you stabilized I would have this bill passed, making me one of the members of the Army. I cannot agree to send them in submarine infested waters, in battle conditions, as long as they are not members of the Army. He said, Well of course you know I am going to take this to the Old Man. I said, Of course I don't blame you, but this is my position. So I went on up to talk to General Marshall - wouldn't agree to do that on the squawk box - went in General Marshall's office and said, General Smith told me what you said about furnishing troops. I said, I hope I can get this bill passed in Congress as soon as I can. He looked at me and said, "What have you been doing ever since you've been here as a civil servant? You have been in every battle condition in the world." I said, that doesn't apply to me. I'm talking about troops for whom I am responsible. He looked at me and said, "Hitler won't wait" So then he buzzed for Frank McCarthy who was then secretary of the General Staff, and he said, have you got two companies of women ready to go? I said, Yes sir, in our training area in Daytona Beach. They are there training for these jobs. He called Frank and said, "Get my plane ready, Colonel Hobby is going to Daytona Beach." He said, Are you unhappy? I said, no sir, I am not unhappy, I have an order and I will carry it out. He said, now I know it troubles you to send these people over there and I want to tell you something. He said, "You call the officers and get the women together and you cannot tell them where they are going, but you can tell them they are going over submarine-infested waters into hazardous conditions, and then you ask for volunteers, and you tell them that the roster will be in the office in the morning, that no one will ever know that you are not going to take them all, that you will have to pick, and that no one will ever know who didn't volunteer. They may have reasons, family reasons, or otherwise why they cannot go. I went off to Daytona that afternoon and called them together that night - this was before mess - and told them the roster would be ready for them to sign, and as I walked out of that room, people were pulling tablets and pencils out, signing their names and giving them to the CO, and before they left that room, every woman had volunteered.

FCP: Good night.

Hobby: To me I can think of many wartime...I did not make this story easy - but every woman volunteered.

FCP: That must have been something.

Hobby: It is something that you will never forget.

FCP: But once more, he was understanding about it.

Hobby: He knew how I felt, he knew he was absolutely right, this should have been done, but he also made it easy for me.

FCP: That way, you felt right about it.

Hobby: That way, I felt right about it.

FCP: In connection with this thing over there, there did come up one other thing in which the General quite opposed it, and I suppose you felt it was unwise, and which he said go ahead and do, and that was the commissioning of the British WAAC for Eisenhower and the ones in Australia.

Hobby: Well Dr. Pogue, I can almost remember what General Marshall said. He said he never felt like telling a man who was responsible for winning a war not to do little things that he thought would help him win the war.

FCP: He was very strong that way.

Hobby: I had no quarrel with that. To be sure, we hadn't done this before, but war creates many precedents. This caused something of a morale problem in WAAC. It was a temporary one. It was a temporary thing. It didn't last long.

FCP: I didn't hear of it until after the war was over, then I ran into parts of it in his correspondence. There was a very strong statement by General White against it, saying it's a dangerous thing to do. I saw this note that Frank wrote and promised it while he was over there. Apparently, they were already moving in the same direction General MacArthur's. On that score, incidentally, Gen. Marshall several times talked about this fine officer he had there, Col. Newsome.

Hobby: A lovely woman. You never knew. We wanted to pick someone that would be what he wanted and who would reflect great credit to the Corps. Great care was given to the selection of that officer.

FCP: He said she could brief a group better than any officer he ever saw, that she would get everything just right, and then he said, She could bake a cake too, because I went up to Amherst after she had married, and she made him a cake. He said it was a good cake. There is a story in book about somebody, that General Smith picked the most bedraggled-looking girl to come off the boat - they hadn't had time to change - and he picked her for his office. I should know who that was. I used to know everybody in his office but I don't know. Of

course Ruth Briggs, I suppose, had been there before that time.

Hobby: Wasn't Ruth one of the first five to go over?

FCP: I expect she was, because she was with him a long time.

Hobby: I think she was one of the first five. I can see this girl you are talking about, but I can't tell you her name.

FCP: But you see, when the war ended, after General Eisenhower left, Bedell said to the historian S.L.A. Marshall, the General wants somebody to put together the history of SHAEF, so I was sent up to do it and I sat in the suite of offices where Bedell was, so I got to know nearly everybody on the staff, but I can't think who this might have been. Maybe the girl was gone by that time. Then Smith came back and was in Moscow before I got back.

Hobby: Smith was a character, wasn't he?

FCP: Do you know Mrs. Smith died three days ago?

Hobby: I saw it in the paper. Didn't know she had been ill.

FCP: Cancer. Had been there about 6... Well about 6 or 7 weeks ago I was called by Mrs. Marshall to find out about...

Hobby: How is Mrs. Marshall?

FCP: She is pretty well, heard from her yesterday. She is going to Frankfurt in October to attend the dedication of a monument to General Marshall...

Hobby: Oh dear.

FCP: ...and she said she wouldn't make the trip for anything else.

Hobby: Is she able to make the trip?

FCP: I believe so.

Hobby: Because the last note I had from her, her handwriting was so...

FCP: She is coming down to Walter Reed the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> of September for a check-up to see if it's all right, and then unless something changes - I think really why she wants to go, she wants to go to Allen's grave and this is the means to do it. She called me to find out what had happened to a letter she had sent to Secretary of State, asking if he had any objection to her going. She felt she shouldn't go if there was any possible reason, and she hadn't got an answer. It was one of those things that had gone, but had gone to the wrong place. So I called, and someone in the process told me that Mrs. Smith had died. I told her this and she said, "Well, I was afraid that was it."

Hobby: Speaking of Bedell Smith in connection with General Marshall reminds me of a story which would be of no use to you, but which I will never forget. One afternoon, I

guess, about 3, Frank McCarthy called down and said was I going to be in my office the rest of the afternoon? General Marshall wanted to see me. I said, "Yes I was." He said he was going to the White House and he would call me when he got back. Well, this was the old War Department Building long before we were in the Pentagon, and dark came and you know how they turned the lights out, and I was still sitting in my office. The telephone rang and it was Bedell, and he said General Marshall said that he remembered he had asked you to wait and he has been delayed at the White House, and would I come down to your office and bring you up to his office. So down Bedell came through dark corridors and we went up and it was the night...I can identify the night for you...the night of the rumor of a ship, an unidentified ship in the Chesapeake Bay that was going to bomb Washington.

FCP: I remember there was...

Hobby: You remember...Well, Bedell was sitting there taking these calls back and forth. He was then liaison to the White House for General Gruenther, and I said, by the way, I want to tell you something. I had Thompson call me today to tell me he had an Army officer over interviewing Mrs. Roosevelt, and asking her how she thought the War Department could utilize WAACs. She said why call me to tell me. She said, don't you know how to do it, don't you know what to do with them, also if you interview Mrs. Roosevelt, ask her. So I said, do you remember his name, where he came from, this was nobody from my office, and she said, well, I'll find out for you. So she called back and gave the officer's name and it was somebody from the Adjutant General's office, so I said to Bedell, I wish you could keep these people from going over there - this has not been an easy thing anyway - I think he must have known, and I said I am getting more free advice now than I know what to do with. I told him the story and he said, some nitwit! I said, well it's some nitwit all right, but this was a man in AG o(ffice). Oh, he said, one of our nitwits.

FCP: He could be very severe. Now on Mrs. Roosevelt, I notice that she turned up for one or two of the ceremonies with the President. Was it Des Moines they went to?

Hobby: I'm not sure whether the President went to Des Moines or Chattanooga. He went to one. She went. I know she went to Des Moines. I think he came to Chattanooga - Fort Oglethorpe.

FCP: There is a picture of him sitting there as the girls marched by.

Hobby: I think that was at Fort Oglethorpe. He always had a great interest in it, by the way. Sort of whimsical, to be sure, because he was a man of whimsey. And of course, Mrs. Roosevelt always had...

FCP: But did she tend to interfere in any way?

Hobby: No. Honestly, everybody believed that she would, but honestly she didn't.

FCP: They got a little tired of her in the War Department about passing on things about alleged mistreatment of Negroes. I never found that on General Marshall's part there was any resentment of it, but there was on the part of others.

Hobby: I know there was. I'm not attempting to say for a minute that she didn't pass on letters of criticism, but what else could she have done? I think that was appropriate.



FCP: There were hundreds of cases in the files, and I didn't see where she said, Do this, or do something about it. She just said, this is for your information. If she sent it, then they certainly looked into it.

Hobby: But you see, this is something I think I always understood, and maybe many Army officers didn't. What else could she do with it? She was the wife of the President of the United States, and in my opinion, there was nothing else that she could have done.

FCP: I do see. She couldn't very well run in and say that this is something that has come in.

Hobby: On that same point, you know for a while Jonathan Daniels would once in a while call me up and give me something. So after he left the White House he called me on something and when we finished talking he said, "Oveta, I want to tell you something. You are the only person in Washington who treats me with the same courtesy now that you did when I was in the White House." I said, "Well why shouldn't I? You are the same person - you are my friend - we've been friends for years." He said, "You would be surprised." I said, "Well Jonathan, when you called me from the White House, you never did tell me to do anything, and I said, I never had a call from you that I didn't appreciate and didn't know that you had to do." So, I think this is a lack of understanding. There was nothing else she could have done. This was not only true in the Army, you know it was true the government over.

FCP: There was a special thing they put on letters. I helped do just this for the Second Army in 1943. I know the letters that came to Ben Lear that were sent down. These had to be looked into within 24 hours. Of course, there always had to be a letter to go out to members of Congress and to people like Mrs. Roosevelt at once, saying they had been received and would be acted upon, but in these cases there had to be a report made. I never will forget this thing across the top of the letter - I don't remember whether it was red or not otherwise I might very well be suspended. But what amazed me was General Marshall. A private could write him about something, and he would see that action was taken on it, because they laid on his desk - I don't know whether it was once a week or once a day - a line or two out of each letter that came in. Sometimes these extracts would fill 20 or 30 pages; the man's name, background and all that. He would just run down the list and say, Send me this letter, I want to see it. I think this was one of his qualities of bigness too that he would take time for this. He understood, of course, that this was the essence of morale.

Hobby: Speaking of morale - this was before Pearl Harbor, and it must have been about the time of the passage of the Selective Service extending the draft, by one vote, and he asked me to go somewhere. I could not tell you where this was it was one of these over-the-hill things. I said, General Marshall, I wouldn't know whether the morale was good or bad. He looked at me and said, "You will get to the point where you can walk on a post, camp or base station and sniff and know whether the morale is good or bad." Of course, this was true. I later learned during the war that this was true.

FCP: I know I have had a few people who were out of sorts with General Marshall for some reason or other, who would complain that he had gone down to stay a half day at their place and then he would go away and make these statements. In the first place, he didn't go usually to their messes or in to the top people. He always insisted that they bring him some good non-coms to talk to, and apparently they would talk to him and they would talk to him

openly, but he knew exactly what he wanted to see. He said, I always tried to find something before I left that I could take a note on and take care of it the minute I got back.

Hobby: I have read the book about the clothing situation at Des Moines...

FCP: You mean lack of clothing? There was something about it. I know there was something about the private with the two overcoats.

Hobby: I am trying to recall this. I was coming from Denver, I guess, into Des Moines and I was talking to - I've forgotten who the woman assistant CO - goodness, years ago, and she said, Colonel Hobby, it is very cold at Des Moines - - no, I landed in Des Moines with a winter uniform and it was cold as could be and here were the WAACs in summer uniforms and no overcoats. And here were all the male officers in their winter uniforms and overcoats. I walked up to my quarters, took my winter uniform off and put on my summer uniform and went on out. I went over to speak to the quartermaster to ask him what happened to the clothes. Well you know what happened - there was not yardage enough, so I called the quartermaster and asked him what happened to these womens' overcoats, that I could understand why maybe they hadn't enough winter uniforms, but it was cold and these women should have coats. Well they didn't have any, and I told them I didn't care what kind of coats they sent, but to send them soldiers' coats and I wanted them out there. Well, this blew the War Department wide open, because this cold, this was really cold, and here were the male officers in winter clothes. (Who gave me all that trouble with the overcoats.? I wish I could remember some of their names now.) This was the kind of silly little things, but it was the kind of thing that when you got into even that kind of problem, General Marshall always saw that it happened. He didn't care if they wore overcoats down past their ankles, and they were men's overcoats, but they were warm.

FCP: Did they actually wear those for a while?

Hobby: Oh yes they did.

FCP: I know she does say a group came up there from the south in summer clothes and that they had to put them to bed for a day or so.

Hobby: That may well be true.

FCP: Apparently, after you went out, there was a telegram saying send so many thousand of this, this, and this at once. I remember the overshoes involved in it. They didn't have sizes in those either. [Hobby: Those early days were...] Well now did he favor from the beginning, making this part of the Army?

Hobby: I don't believe. I would have to re-read the testimony, Dr. Pogue. I am not certain whether the question ever arose, but he did favor putting them in the Army.

FCP: It wouldn't have worked any other way.

Hobby: No. But you see when the Corps was formed, I think I remember saying to the House on Military Affairs Committee, the maximum strength would probably be 10,000 women. It would have been possible, I suppose, to have administered 10,000 women in the Auxiliary Corps, but

when you got into the numbers and you were dispersing them the way we were dispersing, there was no other way to treat it, and in fairness this was the way it should have been from the beginning.

FCP: I think Patton was very clear on that. He would soon be faced with – were faced with - actually the problems he had in the first war- about their rights to all sorts of payments, hospitalization, and benefits in case of death. Until General Marshall was ill the last time, he continued to get letters from a woman who had been a field clerk in the First World War and she was still trying to get some sort of service connection won, but the thing that really worried her was that she wanted some sort of ribbon indicating her service. He felt very much touched by it, because apparently she had been a very capable secretary, but he couldn't do a thing in the world about it. It got to be an obsession with her.

Hobby: I still get letters. Of course, my WAAC letters are from people who are veterans and turned down for one reason or another. All the disappointed ones I hear from regularly.

FCP: You still have a considerable file, as do General Marshall and General Bradley.

Hobby: Oh yes.

FCP: After you left the WAAC, did you have any particular contacts with the General during the period of the Marshall Plan? Did you work on a committee during that period?

Hobby: No. That reminds me of a very amusing story. I went on the board of the Red Cross, and we were in Detroit for a meeting, and I always leave word with my switchboard where I'm going to be wherever I am. So I called in to the office to tell them I was going to General and Mrs. Marshall's apartment for dinner and then we were going to a baseball game. We were sitting there having dinner - this was about the beginning of the Korean War - and a call came through from the War Department from G-1, ordering me to return to active duty. I was not a reservist, so I said I was not a reservist, and with General and Mrs. Marshall sitting there, they overheard everything I said. I said, I'm not a reservist and you can't order me back to active duty. General Marshall said, "Ask them whether they want you to return to active duty or stay on the mission I have just put you on of setting up blood banks?" So I said to the officer, General Marshall said to ask you whether you want to try to order me back to active duty or leave me on the job he has just put me on.

FCP: That sort of took care of that. I was sure you must have worked with him in the Red Cross, but I didn't know whether or not. He spoke in Pittsburgh and Los Angeles, but he used the Womans' organization tremendously.

Hobby: Tremendously. I had given him the framework, you see, in the Defense Advisory Committee, and he had it. He came here once and stayed with us, but he came to speak to the VMI.

FCP: I remember he said these dern men's organizations wouldn't get moving, so I just went out and worked for the women. Will you give a final summation of what you felt General Marshall did and stood for?

Hobby: He was a soldier in the finest sense of the word, because to him being a soldier

meant putting your country first. He was a great soldier, and he was also a great human being with extraordinary - I hate to use the word vision because it was really more than that. He had an extraordinary feel for the future, not only as a military man, but as a citizen of the United States. I know of few men that commanded greater loyalty than he commanded.

FCP: Thank you.