

INTERVIEW WITH
General Arthur Nevins

on

August 15, 1972

by
Dr. Maclyn Burg
Oral Historian
and
Dr. John Wickman
Director



for

Dwight. D. Eisenhower Library

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of
Arthur Nevins.

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44,
United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions
hereinafter set forth, I Arthur Nevins, of Gettysburg, PA,
do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of
America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape
recording and transcript of a personal interview conducted
on August 15, 1972 at Gettysburg, PA and prepared for deposit
in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. This assignment is
subject to the following terms and conditions:



(1) The transcript shall be available for use by
researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

(2) The tape recording shall not be available for use
by researchers during the donor's lifetime. After the donor's
death, access to the tape recording shall be for background
use only, and researchers may not cite, paraphrase, or quote
therefrom.

(3) During the donor's lifetime the donor retains all
copyright in the material given to the United States by the
terms of this instrument. Thereafter the copyright in both
the transcript and tape recording shall pass to the United
States Government. During the donor's lifetime, researchers
may publish brief "fair use" quotations from the transcript
(but not the tape recording) without the donor's express
consent in each case.

(4) Copies of the open portions of the interview
transcript, but not the tape recording, may be provided by
the library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the interview transcript, but not the tape recording, may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

Arthur S. Minnie
Donor

January 12, 1979
Date

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States



January 30, 1979
Date

This is an interview with Gen. Arthur Nevins in Gettysburg on August 15, 1972. The interviewers are Dr. John Wickman and Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library.

DR. WICKMAN: Monitor that and it's good.

DR. BURG: Good. We've learned to mistrust our machines over time.

DR. WICKMAN: That's one problem we haven't solved in oral history yet, is how to get a foolproof machine, you don't--

GEN. NEVINS: I suppose so.

DR. BURG: Yeah.

DR. WICKMAN:--the idea was fine.

DR. BURG: Well, General, let's start by asking you, What was your duty when the war began?

GEN. NEVINS: My duty here was, I was in the old War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff, and I was head of the Strategy Section. And at that time there were only eighteen officers in the War Plans Division. It was, at least I considered it a compliment to be a member of the War Plans Division, and then



later, as soon as Pearl Harbor came along, it became the Operations Division.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And I suppose wound up with several hundred officers. At the time I was--at the time of Pearl Harbor it was a small division in the War Department General Staff. General Eisenhower came along, incidentally, shortly after Pearl Harbor to head the Division.

BURG: Now what precisely were your duties at the time the war broke out?



NEVINS: I was working on, passing on, various plans for the conduct of the operations, and keeping in close contact with our forces that we had in England.

BURG: And your planning activities, then, were directed towards the European--

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG:--side of the war?

NEVINS: I had--it hadn't been long after General Eisenhower arrived, when I was sent over to England to work with the British Planning Staff. That was an idea of General George C. Marshall's-- to have some U.S. Army officer in with the British Joint Planning Staff. And I worked with them for about three or four months, and then shortly after that I worked on the plans for the landing inside the Mediterranean. And accompanied the II Corps into Oran.

WICKMAN: Uh-huh.

BURG: Let me ask you, going back just a bit--



NEVINS: What's that?

BURG: Let me ask you, going back just a bit--

NEVINS: Oh.

BURG:--When Eisenhower showed up, then, in Washington D.C., was this your first time together again since about 1917?

NEVINS: No, we served together in the Philippines in 1936 to '38.

He was over there as an advisor to General Douglas MacArthur, who was charged with the formation of the Philippine army. And I was a general staff officer with the troops out at Fort McKinley.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: But we went over on the same boat with Mrs. Eisenhower and John, who was a young boy then, and we were with the Eisenhowers a great deal--played bridge with them at night, and had dinner together and so on during the two years I was there, from '36 to '38.

BURG: So before he came to Washington, you had had an opportunity to form an opinion of him as an officer.

NEVINS: Oh, yes. Of course. General MacArthur had three army officers as his assistants, and they were Eisenhower and Lucius Clay and Pat Casey, and you couldn't pick three finer officers in the army.

WICKMAN: Right.

NEVINS: He knew what he was doing when he got those officers to



help him. The story was that he usually--MacArthur, General MacArthur--usually went to his office about ten o'clock in the morning, and back again to the penthouse in the Manila Hotel upper floors at about noon. But he was a fine organizer, and the three assistants that he had worked overtime.

BURG: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Was it a pretty common view, General, that those three officers were among the best in the army at that time?

NEVINS: Was it what?

BURG: Was it a fairly common view in the army that those three officers were among the best?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, certainly.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: Yes. And of course that's borne out by their records.

BURG: Right.

NEVINS: I don't think so many people know of Pat Casey--he was a



major general at the end of the war. But Lucius Clay, of course, was a full general, and a tremendously successful officer.

BURG: Right. Did you work directly under General Marshall while you were in Washington? Or who was your superior?

NEVINS: No, the head of the War Plans Division before General Eisenhower reported there was General /Thomas T./ Tom Handy.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And he was the head of the Division. Of course, there were a number of General Staff divisions in the Pentagon at that time, and also now, and they, of course--the heads of the divisions--worked with General Marshall. I didn't personally have much contact with him because I was a junior officer in--I was a full colonel, but I was a junior officer in the War Plans Division.

BURG: Right. Now, was there much chance for you to have contact with General Eisenhower in that short time after he came and before you went over to England?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, I was there several months, and then I returned



to the War Plans Division after three or four months in England, and then was sent back. I have a photograph up there in the Center of that little group, which was taken in the War Plans Division--General Eisenhower supervising, ostensibly, at least, four or five of the officers there in the War Plans Division.

BURG: Now, was there any indication at that time of what might be in store for him. Did you hear any talk, for example, about what his prospects might be?

NEVINS: No, I don't think he suspected that he would--at that time--that he would be named the Supreme Commander in Europe at all. He was a brigadier general when he reported there, and he soon was promoted. And of course he impressed General Marshall with the way he handled the Operations Division--and then his ideas.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And the way he immediately organized the effort to put troops in Australia and so forth, and assist in the Far East job.

BURG: Did you find him at all changed in the two or three years



that had lapsed since you had last seen him, or was he basically the same man?

NEVINS: You mean towards his death?

WICKMAN: No, in the Philippines.

BURG: No, you had seen him in the Philippines; now two or three years have passed. When you next saw him, had he changed at all-- he was now a brigadier general.

NEVINS: I don't think so--at least I didn't notice any great change. Of course, he had gained in reputation a good deal.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: He had done some excellent work in the 15th Cavalry ed.
note: actually, the 15th Infantry Regiment ed. out at Fort Lewis, Washington, and then he had been ordered down to General Walter ed. Krueger's corps ed. note: actually, Third Army ed. in San Antonio and had worked with that outfit on maneuvers and he had done so well that he had attracted the attention of General Marshall.

BURG: All right, now let me ask you this, General, When you go to



England and you work with the British planners, who were the men you were working with--can you give us some of their names?

NEVINS: No, I can't. I'd have to look it up. They had a very interesting system that differed a great deal from our General Staff planning. They had a, what they called a group of directors [ed. note: actually, Directors of Plans] of their Joint Planning Staff who got instructions, usually, from Winston Churchill. And they were usually of the rank of colonel, and maybe a brigadier,--not a brigadier general, they don't have one-- but a brigadier or two. And then underneath them they had a lesser group which did the dogsbody planning and presented it to this higher echelon of planners, and in it, as in the directors' group, there was a navy, air force and a ground force and a diplomatic representative. And the same thing applied to this lesser group which I joined; they had several, two or more representatives, of each of those services at least, so that when a plan was prepared such as for landing in the Mediterranean for example, the plan had the approval, presumably, of the services and also of the political end. The way we did in the Pentagon was quite different.



We prepared a plan on our own, then we sought the agreement with the other services--and that was almost impossible to get.

BURG: Yes.

NEVINS: Because they had no part in the preparation of the plan. It was very difficult to get it, to get an agreement. I thought the British system was a very intelligent scheme.

BURG: Now, were you the only American at that particular level, the dogsbody level?

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG: You were the only one--

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG:--at that time?

NEVINS: Then, they thought well of that idea in the War Department here, in Washington, and when I was relieved to come back to the War Plans Division, I was replaced by another American officer.



BURG: I see. Now, what was the point in bringing you back, General--did they want to question you about the systems?

NEVINS: No, I think they just wanted to rotate that particular job.

BURG: Now, how had you been received by the British members of this planning group?

NEVINS: Well, I was received very well after they decided to receive me. But General Marshall sent me over there without their agreement.

BURG: Oh!



NEVINS: And at the same time I was there, General Eisenhower and Gen. Mark Clark came over on a visit, and I was waiting for the planning directors to decide whether or not I would be accepted. They hated to have me come in without being fully-fledged, a full-fledged member of the planning group, and knowing all of the comments and so forth. There were times, of course, when they weren't particularly complimentary about us, and they were hesitant, I think, about accepting me, but they saw it was pretty

nearly impossible for me to be in there and chased out whenever anything was said that I might not like. So they had agreed pretty soon; I conferred with General Eisenhower at the time. I was just twiddling my thumbs waiting to see what happened, and told him that that was the case, and he said that was all right, just to sit and wait and see what they're going to do. But they decided to accept me on good faith completely, and we got along very well because I assured them that any reports or comments I made to our War Department would be passed through their hands-- so they were assured.

BURG: What kinds of things about us caused them to get angry?



NEVINS: I can't remember any specific things, but they, oh, there was such things as--you see, at that time the British were very short of materiel. And we were rather up against it too, because we hadn't been preparing for a war and we were short of landing boats and short of landing craft and short of trucks and short of the things that they needed, and they were impatient sometimes. And then, of course, there's always a natural rivalry--

the British officers probably thought they were superior to us in ability, because the French, of course thought, they were far superior to both. And those things happen.

BURG: Now you came back, then, to the United States, and you were here briefly, and then you were sent back over to England again?

NEVINS: Yes, I went back and worked on the plans for the landing at Oran, which was by the U.S. II Corps landing in British ships. And it required, of course, a lot of G-3 work because we had to have a complete outfit, and material, including the supply echelon as well as the engineers and artillery and infantry and so forth, and it had to be a carefully-selected outfit, but one which could be accommodated on the transportation available.



BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And I worked on that for quite awhile.

BURG: With the same planning group or with a different group of men now?

NEVINS: Oh, no, this was our own, an American planning group.

BURG: And you were by that time a member of the II Corps?

NEVINS: No, I wasn't exactly during the planning stage, but I was made deputy chief of staff of the II Corps for the operation when we got under way.

BURG: Now as you did the planning, General, did you know that that was in prospect for you?

NEVINS: No, I didn't know, I expected probably to be G-3.



BURG: Now, can you recall any particular problems that you people faced as you did that planning? Anything that loomed large to you--it seems to me that for a first American endeavor you might have been very worried about what was going to happen--do you recall what might have worried you most?

NEVINS: No, not particularly. The thing that worried me most in the planning was to satisfy the requirements for a balanced force and still stay within reason as far as our transportation facilities were available. And of course the artillery wanted

more artillery, and the engineers wanted more engineers, and everybody wanted more of their own particular branch, and it made it difficult. But we finally got an accepted troop basis and it worked out very well.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: After we got to a foothold on the North coast of Africa and got settled there, we arranged to get the combat elements of the II Corps separated from the supply echelon, and that required ditching the quartermaster trains and various things of that character. And General Thomas B. Larkin--I don't know whether you have heard of him or not--he was a very fine worker, was instrumental in getting that thing arranged properly.



BURG: Now was it done ahead of time, General, or after you got there?

NEVINS: After we got there.

BURG: You sort of separated them out?

NEVINS: Yes, we separated them. And General Larkin and I did

the staff work on that and it worked quite well, so I was sent out to Casablanca to propose the same sort of a deal there to General George Patton.

BURG: And what was his reply? Did he like that idea?

NEVINS: I think he did. I didn't have anything to do with the planning of that because he had his own staff and that gave him some other very competent officers. But I knew General Patton very well, he was a friend of mine, and it was an easy mission to go out and just tell him how we handled it in Oran.



BURG: Who was chief of staff of the II Corps?

NEVINS: Col. William B. Kean.

BURG: Now--

NEVINS: Al Gen. Alfred M. Gruenther--

BURG:--can you--

NEVINS:--the photograph up there--

BURG: Ah, yes.

NEVINS:--in the corner.

BURG: Can you give us your impressions of Gruenther as an officer and a man to work for?

NEVINS: Oh, one of the finest, one of the finest! Oh, he was chief of staff of the--

WICKMAN: II Corps.

BURG: II Corps, yes.

NEVINS: Oh, no. It was Kean. I was thinking of the Fifth Army at the time; I joined it shortly after I was there--I was assigned as G-3 of the Fifth Army under General Clark, and he Gen. Gruenther was chief of staff then.

WICKMAN: Yeah.

BURG: Now, who led II Corps, was--



NEVINS: [Gen. Lloyd R.] Fredendall.

BURG: Fredendall?

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG: Did you have much contact with him?



NEVINS: Yes, I, of course I had known him quite well, but shortly after we got to Africa, and got to Algiers, I was assigned to the G-3 division of headquarters there, so I didn't accompany Fredendall and the II Corps into the field. And pretty soon I was appointed G-3 of Mark Clark's Fifth Army, and worked on the organization of the Fifth Army. And since Al Gruenther was assisting at Supreme Headquarters in Algiers, I was acting as chief of staff for the Fifth Army for awhile until we got the organization settled. Everything was fine, I had a fine G-3 division in the Fifth Army, suddenly I was ordered into Algiers to work as senior army planner for the landing on Sicily. I worked on that, and we prepared this plan which the commanders, particularly [Gen. Sir Bernard L.] Montgomery, found not heavily enough supported and

they pried loose another division, and also they thought it was too complicated in places, and they simplified it somewhat and I think improved it all right, although it was a pretty good plan to start with. And then it was decided to implement the plan, and since I had worked on the plan I was assigned to General [Sir Harold R.L.G.] Alexander's headquarters as his operations officer, and I was his operations officer during the full campaign in Sicily.

BURG: I see.



NEVINS: A great officer.

BURG: Now, before we get back to him, because I'd like to hear more about him--your time with Fifth Army was very brief, then?

NEVINS: Yes, I should say two or three months at most.

BURG: Did you have much contact with General Clark?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, I liked him much, very much, I thought he was a fine officer. But I didn't get to accompany him, the Fifth Army, into Italy.

BURG: What qualities about Clark, just from that brief acquaintance, stand out in your mind--as an officer and as a man?

NEVINS: Well, he was decisive, and very intelligent, and he understood handling troops, and he also knew how to handle his staff organization. A very competent officer.

BURG: Any drawbacks that you can recollect in that man?



NEVINS: No, offhand, I don't think I can.

BURG: Now, back in headquarters, how long were you involved in Algiers planning the Sicily operations--was that a matter of several months that you were there?

NEVINS: Yes. It was, I should say, three or four months planning there.

BURG: Now, here again, were you much in contact with General Eisenhower during that period?

NEVINS: Not too much, no. I had dinner with him occasionally, and I saw a good deal of the staff, mostly through Gen. Walter

Bedell Smith, who was his chief of staff then--

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS:--and Lowell [W.] Rooks who was in the G-3 division. But I worked on the outskirts of Algiers in an old school building there--they called it Ecole Normal--with the U.S. and British planners. It required an awful lot of supervision, because we didn't have very many good junior planning staff officers. Our policy in the past in respect to the Command and General Staff School, which was the source of the most of our knowledge of staff work, was that it required ten years of superior ratings to get there, and the officers when they graduated were--there was a two-year course when I took it--and we were old, we were getting old, and soon were senior officers--that is, full colonels--and we didn't have the trained captains and the majors that we ought to have had to do the planning. So it required pretty close supervision. But we got some pretty good American staff officers as junior ones and trained them, and also had some pretty good British staff officers. We had to also coordinate matters while we--I was the senior ground force officer--while we had to coordinate with the air force and the--



(Interruption)

BURG: You were saying that you had people to coordinate with the air force and the navy on your planning.

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG: Do you remember any men, now, who stand out--any names of men who stand out in your mind as having been very effective in this kind of work, either British or American officers?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, the air force commander in the Algiers area, in North African area, was Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, a very brilliant officer. And I remember going with one of the senior American officers to see Tedder and to persuade him to approve of a clause in our planning for the landing in Sicily which indicated that the air would furnish close support for the landing troops, and I was rebuffed. He said, "Nothing doing, the objective of the air is the enemy air." That taught me a lesson.

BURG: Yes.

NEVINS: But a fine officer, and he became, later became, General Eisenhower's second in command in SHAEF, you know.



BURG: Now, later on close support was given by the air, so had he changed his mind later on or had circumstances sort of forced a change?

NEVINS: Yes, I think circumstances forced that; we had air superiority later, and could do lots of things which we couldn't do at first.

BURG: Right. Now, you had some contacts, then, with Bedell Smith?

NEVINS: Oh, yes.

BURG: Now, he has a reputation, as you know, of being pretty raspy if he wanted to--did he ever show you that side of his nature?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, he did, yes. I had an interesting time with him. I had known him for a long time--as a matter of fact, I was senior to him at one time when he was a general officers' aide was a first lieutenant, I knew him. But he grew pretty rough. He was General Eisenhower's executioner, really. He didn't like the British officer who was working with me on the Sicily planning--he was a senior officer to me--but he called us both in, Bedell Smith did, and just gave us a good going over because he didn't



think we had submitted a plan fast enough. Then when he got through dressing us down he told me to wait, and dismissed the British officer, and then he said that he was sorry that he had to make me a whipping post, that he was after this other guy. And I said I didn't like it a damn bit; that if he didn't like the way I was functioning I'd appreciate it very much to be relieved, I would like to go to the 3rd Division--I had been offered the second in command position of the 3rd Division under General Lucian K. Truscott--and he said, "No, God damn it! You'll stay right where you are."



BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And of course I stayed. He was rough, but I liked him and I appreciated how essential he was to General Eisenhower. General Eisenhower was softer-spoken and diplomatic and he got along with people, but Bedell Smith was rough, and the British needed somebody sometimes that would dress them down a little and get them in line.

WICKMAN: In talking to Ford Trimble--remember Ford Trimble?

NEVINS: Yes.

WICKMAN: He suggested that there were times when Smith was not well, physically--he had trouble during the war--

NEVINS: Yes, he had an ulcer that gave him hell every few months, and he wasn't in good health. But I think he was just naturally mean--a very forceful officer. And General Eisenhower said of him, that he realized that it was said that no man was indispensable but he came as near being indispensable as anyone could be. And I believe he was.

BURG: Well, we know that he didn't hesitate to chew you out. How did you find him whenever problems came up--Bedell Smith?



NEVINS: Oh, he was always decisive, and he handled them well, always.

BURG: So anything that came up that you wanted an opinion on or you needed to check out, you went to Smith--was that your route?

NEVINS: Yes, I didn't do that much, though; I didn't have a chance to because I was told what to do and I tried to do it.

BURG: Now, what about this question--historians have pointed out that there was quite a bit of doubt on the American side about going into the Mediterranean at all--Do you recollect either your opinions on this when you were in England getting ready for North Africa, or in North Africa getting ready to go to Sicily?

NEVINS: Well, it was necessary to do something, and we weren't ready to do anything else, and it was a very good move I thought.

BURG: Was that generally the opinion you ran into among the Americans?



NEVINS: I believe so.

BURG: The feeling that action of this kind had its usefulness?

NEVINS: Yes. You see, we were really not battle-trained, not battle-experienced, and it was a very good thing for us.

BURG: Now I wanted to ask you, too, before we leave North Africa, what was your reaction to the Kasserine Pass affair, especially since you knew Fredendall--how did you feel about that?

NEVINS: Well, actually, I didn't think it was handled too well. And I know--I talked to General Eisenhower about it a good deal--that worried him more than anything that I have known to bother him, anything else, because it was reported that some of our officers in the II Corps were not too efficient and the troops were not efficiently led, and we lost a lot of tanks and trucks and suffered a good many casualties. And he worried about that a good deal. But he got the chief intelligence officer, the finest one that we had in the area, a British officer, Major General Kenneth W.D. Strong who was later G-2 of SHAEP, to make an investigation. And he went down there, and he came back and reported that while some of the officers lacked experience and were possibly not as efficient as they might have been, that they were attacked by a superior force of Romney's ed. note; actually, Gen. Erwin Rommel experienced desert fighters, and it was not a defeat that could have been avoided much in his opinion. And he encouraged General Eisenhower quite a bit with his report. And General Eisenhower got the most immediate answer for refitting the divisions' losses that I've ever seen--they came immediately.

And then he decided that he would replace Fredendall, and he replaced him with what I would call without prejudice at all, and Fredendall came back to the States to take a job, a training job, and I believe became a three-star general. It wasn't a disgraceful affair at all, but he replaced him with Gen. Omar Bradley.

BURG: Did you see Fredendall before he went back home?



NEVINS: No.

BURG: Did you talk to any of Fredendall's officers, finding out from them how they viewed Fredendall's replacement?

NEVINS: No, I never had a chance to do that; I didn't join the II Corps again.

BURG: I just wondered if the general view there in Algiers was that Eisenhower had acted fairly in Fredendall's case?

NEVINS: Well, I should think so. I think everybody would have said so. If he'd have sent him home and disgraced him, or anything of that kind, he never would have gotten a couple more stars--another star--and undoubtedly he was better-fitted for a training job than he was for troop-leading--and not the equal of Bradley.

BURG: And probably would do the training job very well indeed, having had his nose bloodied at Kasserine Pass.

NEVINS: Yes, that would help, too.

BURG: All right. Now, when you went with General Alexander, was this the first time you had met and been with him?



NEVINS: Yes, I had seen him a time or two, and I had met him, but the only real close association I ever had with him was when I became his operations officer in Sicily, and that was a good job. He was a fine officer. Unlike Montgomery, he didn't seek any publicity, and was sort of a soldiers' soldier--he'd get in the jeep and go visit Patton's army headquarters, or up to Montgomery's headquarters, and was an ideal commander.

BURG: Got along well with Americans.

NEVINS: Yes, fine.

BURG: And was well-liked by Americans.

NEVINS: Yes, much better-liked than Montgomery.

BURG: Yes. Were there any special problems for you in that job?

NEVINS: No, I got along fine with that job. There was one incident which I think has been publicized and you probably know it in detail. Shortly after we had established our headquarters we got a message from Montgomery which said, in effect, there being limited space for maneuver on the island of Sicily, he recommended that the British Eighth Army be given the offensive mission and that Patton's Seventh Army protect his left and rear. Well, that created the most, greatest consternation amongst the American forces I've ever seen. It wasn't long until Patton and Bradley and probably a couple more, another officer or two came down to see General Alexander and expostulate about that business. And General Alexander, of course, did not accept that recommendation at all. And the execution of the campaign in Sicily made it a sort of a laughing matter because the British Eighth Army was held below the very rugged terrain on the eastern part of Sicily, Mt. Etna and so forth; and they were held there and stalled while the Seventh Army encircled the whole island of Sicily and got to Messina before the Eighth Army. And I think the Eighth Army would have still been there if--



BURG: Yes.

NEVINS:--if the Seventh Army hadn't turned the opposition out.

BURG: Were you present when those American officers, including Patton and Bradley, showed up at Alexander's headquarters?

NEVINS: Oh, sure.

BURG: May I ask you in what terms did Gen. Patton state his case?

NEVINS: Oh, quite, quite freely.



BURG: And how did Alexander react? Was he calm, was he amused at Patton's--

NEVINS: No, I think, no, he was quite calm about it and said in effect that you don't need to worry about this message.

BURG: Now was Patton's reaction one of "if you tell me that, O.K.?" Did he like Alexander and respect him that well?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, he respected Alexander. They got along awfully well. The American officers all liked Alexander. I can't say the same for Montgomery.

BURG: Now had Montgomery actually joined you in Algiers and was he there and criticizing the Sicily plan? Had you met him there?

NEVINS: Yes, yes, he came and of course he talked to the higher echelon. We just presented the plan and he and General Patton-- I don't know whether Bradley got in on that or not--I doubt it-- talked about how it ought to be changed, how it could be improved, how it needed more strength, and how some of the refinements could be discarded. We had a plan for attacking the air installations which was a little complicated and so on. But I wasn't called in to defend the plan or anything of that kind--



BURG: I see.

NEVINS: They just pointed out what they regarded as deficiencies in the plan and we rectified them. The principal one was, of course, furnishing an additional division to Montgomery.

BURG: So you felt that his criticisms of the plan were not irrational criticisms at all, they were--

NEVINS: Oh, no, no.

BURG:--perfectly sound military--

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG:--reasons.

NEVINS: Yes, they were all right, and the same thing happened in the plan for the invasion of Europe--in France. The plan was altered to strengthen, to agree with the ideas of the commanders who had to fight it.

BURG: Right. Now did you meet Montgomery personally then in Sicily?

NEVINS: Montgomery? No, I can't recall that I saw him personally at all.

BURG: Do you remember any conversations that you may have had with General Alexander on the subject of Montgomery?

NEVINS: No. Of course, I didn't discuss Montgomery with Gen. Alexander or discuss him with any British officer, nor attempt to discuss him with Alexander. The junior British officers didn't like him much, didn't like Montgomery.

BURG: I see.



NEVINS: But that was because I think they were so loyal to Alexander and Montgomery had gotten a lot of credit at El Alamein which had been set up for him by Alexander in the opinions of these British officers. And I think they're probably right.

BURG: Right.

NEVINS: Not that Montgomery wasn't a fine field commander also, but he was a little hard to get along with.

BURG: And a showman, a great showman.

NEVINS: Yes. And also, we thought, slow.

BURG: Did you think that in Sicily too? I know it was said of him later on in the European affair, but did you find it a characteristic of Montgomery as early as Sicily?

NEVINS: Not in Sicily because I had to admit that he had an almost impossible terrain position; but I found out a lot about it when we got into lower Italy because his progress was tremendously slow and he always wanted to do what he called "good housekeeping" and "bring up his tail", and so forth. And he was in my opinion slow.



BURG: Now did you stay with Alexander after the Sicilian campaign ended? Was your next move into Italy or--

NEVINS: Yes, we moved into Italy across at Messina and established our headquarters, 15th Army group headquarters, near Bari in lower Italy, and I was only there a few weeks. I was there when the Nazi Air Force bombarded the port of Bari, but shortly after that I was ordered up to SHAEP because I was requested in the G-3 department, G-3 division of SHAEP. So I didn't stay with Alexander long in Sicily or in Italy--only a few weeks. But I remember I had dinner with General Alexander the night before I flew to London, and he was such a nice host. And I remember him asking me if I had been interested as an undergraduate in sports, and I told him, Yes, I had. I had won letters in track and baseball at the University of Illinois. And that interested him, and he asked me what event in track. And I said, "Well, I tried to sprint but I was pretty slow" but that I had been a successful broad jumper and could broad jump 23 feet at that time-- which was all right. And I said, "Were you a track man?" And he said, "Yes, I was a miler, but", he said, "I was not a very



good one; I could only run about a 4:40 mile"--and as I said a delightful person. And he was kind enough and generous enough to cite me for a decoration which I received in England for my service under him.

BURG: That was very good of him. Do you know who it was that requested you for SHAEF duty?

NEVINS: Yes, it probably was General Bull whom I had served with, and he was going to be the--he was the G-3--and also, of course, there was a sort of gathering of officers who had served in North Africa. Of course, Bedell Smith and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur William Tedder and General Eisenhower, of course, and the G-2 officer whose name always escapes me at the moment--I know it just as well but my memory is bad. But I remember when I reported in at SHAEF headquarters and shook hands with General Tedder, he said it was the gathering of the team.

BURG: Now did you meet Ray Barker at about this time?

NEVINS: Yes, Ray Barker was on the planning team. They worked a long, long time on the planning team. They worked I guess at least two or maybe three years for the invasion. And I had met



him before and then he was with G-1 division.

BURG: Now what were your duties then when you got to England? You stepped in with an invasion plan pretty well formulated?

NEVINS: Yes, but there were lots of other plans. There were two sections which I had control of in the G-3 division, the plans section, which was headed by a British brigadier--who was an awfully good man and therefore did most of the work there-- and the operations section of which I was the senior--well I was also the senior of the plans division but my supervision there was easier. But I had a lot to do. I instituted the preparation of what we call standing operating procedures; and we got out, I guess, some twenty-five orders or so which covered things like time. For instance, there had to be a standard time and the order covering that and an order on control of the recognition signals and so forth. That had to be controlled because at the time of the invasion if everybody had used recognition signals there would have been terrific radio conflict.

BURG: Sure.



NEVINS: And dozens of other things. And then the operations division also handled a good deal of the work to--I forget the exact term for it--skull and duggery, dagger, skull and dagger--

BURG: Skull duggery.

WICKMAN: Cloak and dagger.

NEVINS: We devised a tremendous number of stunts, you know, too, to deceive. For example, we wished to deceive the Nazis as to where our landing was to take place. And we instituted a fake headquarters with required full radio contact. This headquarters was ostensibly going to make the main effort and land in the Pas-de-Calais area.



BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And that kept, reportedly, a number of German divisions in that area and saved us quite a few lives. We also sent a representative, an actor who represented Montgomery and who appeared in Gibraltar a few days before the landing, so as to deceive them as to the time of landing. And we planted fake orders on the body of a drowned officer and so on. And we also handled the

supply of the supporters of the underground in France--arms and equipment and so forth--to help them. There was plenty of work.

BURG: Now do you remember again any standout men--

(Interruption)

NEVINS: I had several billets. The first billet I had, other than a hotel, was in the Richmond Park area. It had been selected by our headquarters commandant, General Brig. Gen. Robert Q. Brown, Headquarters Commandant of SHAEF "Quinney" (a nickname for Quincy I believe) Brown, and we had been together down in--had a mess together--down in Africa. And so a few of us organized this mess, and "Quinney" Brown got us a billet in the Richmond Park area. And we got bombed out of it in about a week. One night Nazi planes came over, and we could hear this whistling coming--it was a kind of a keen sound--and it landed in the yard and blew out all the doors and windows in our house. And I thought there was a loud anti-aircraft response, but I didn't notice it particularly then. There was too much other excitement. But I found out that "Quinney" Brown had gotten us this house about two blocks away from a British anti-aircraft



battery--wasn't a very good place.

BURG: Turned out not to be.

NEVINS: No, it didn't. We moved out to a house in Bushey Park-- which is near Bushey Park and was away from this anti-aircraft battery.

WICKMAN: I asked that question because I've been very curious in the fact that there was some officers who, as you say, organized the mess, organized a group--

NEVINS: Yeah.

WICKMAN:--and lived that way, others seemed to have been in other places. It seems a little disorganized according to the way they do things now.

NEVINS: Well, it was largely a matter of choice, I think. This was a sort of a natural thing to happen because we had been together in North Africa in Algiers. And so "Quinney" Brown, who was headquarters commandant, got us this house; and he had no trouble, you see, because he had control of such matters and could get us a small staff, a cook or two, and somebody to do the cleaning and also get us supplies.



WICKMAN: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: We did that several times. Later, when headquarters was moved to Versailles, we had a small group together, and that time it included General Harold Roe Bull who was the head of the G-3 division. Had a little place outside of Versailles.

BURG: The pace when you got there--was it pretty hectic?

NEVINS: The what?

BURG: The pace, the pace of--

WICKMAN: Activity.

BURG:--everything that you were doing?

NEVINS: Yes, it was long hours and every day--

BURG: Every day?

NEVINS: Yeah. So that it was pretty strenuous.

BURG: Now what would a daily routine for you be like? What time would you be up, and what would you do in an average day?



NEVINS: Well, it's hard to describe an average day. I would say we usually worked from eight o'clock--that is, while we're in London.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: From eight o'clock until we got through--which was frequently late at night. And there would be a lot of papers that had to be attended to and a lot of instructions from the Chief of Staff, telling what he wanted to do.

BURG: Was your association with him as close at this time in London as it had been in Algiers, or were those people more remote from you?

NEVINS: No, it was more remote for me because, you see, I had two major-generals who were above me. All the staff divisions are organized in the same way--either headed by a British officer and seconded by an American officer or headed by an American officer with a British second in charge. And I had General Bull, American officer, and General John Francis Martin Whiteley, the British officer, both between me and the Chief of



Staff so that the instructions would come through them.

BURG: Any particular problems? I'm thinking here of the kinds of things that would cause you headaches as you tried to get ahead with the job. Anything about just life in London itself that caused you problems?

NEVINS: No, I don't think so.

BURG: Telephone exchanges worked fine?



NEVINS: Oh, no. Sometimes we lost communications. I remember once I got out of humor and called the head of the communications system, the American head of it, and asked him which he could recommend most, drums or smoke. And I got some action.

BURG: So you probably gave him a few problems--

NEVINS: Yeah.

BURG:--to cope with. Was there any time during this period when you had doubts about being able to carry off this invasion, or, by and large, do you recall being pretty confident?

NEVINS: I was always confident. I didn't think there was any doubt of it. I had participated in two successful landings: the one at Oran and also the one in Sicily. And this was so detailed a plan and so minutely planned, so carefully planned, that I didn't think there was any doubt.

BURG: Do you remember anyone who was gloomy about the prospects?

NEVINS: No, except Churchill. He was hard to convince for a while. He would talk about dreaming of great numbers of soldiers' bodies floating in the channel and so forth. And I remember one rather interesting thing. You'll find these in this manuscript ed. note: General Nevins refers here to a book-length unpublished manuscript he has written. I was telling you about. We were required to prepare a plan which showed the phase lines where we expected to be each month, and we prepared that plan in my plans section. Most of the work was done by this British brigadier, but it was my responsibility. And it showed that we would be in the heart of Germany in a year. We had to present that plan to Churchill, and I sent Brigadier Kenneth G. McLean to do it because he was really the one closest to it and also a British



officer. The Prime Minister approved it. He thought it was all right, but he thought it was very optimistic. McLean came back and reported to me and he said, "The Prime Minister said if I could only believe it, if I could only believe it!"

BURG: Uh-huh,

NEVINS: But we were there. We were a little slow getting out of the lodgment area due, somewhat, I thought, to Montgomery's slowness. But, anyway, we were there in about eleven months instead of the twelve.

BURG: Now what happened to you personally when the invasion took place? What, physically, did you do? I know you went over to the continent, but what was the sequence of events?

NEVINS: Well, I was down at an advance CP Command post. And then, when the the actual decision for the actual invasion had been made, I was ordered back to London to the G-3 office there. General Bull being down at the advance CP then, I was in charge. One of my duties also I haven't mentioned was to run the War Room. We had a very extensive map set-up there for the invasion,



and we had immediate reports, of course. And every morning for a week or ten days King George, Prime Minister Churchill, and Prime Minister Jan Christiaan Smuts came out to look at the War Room and be briefed on the situation. I would greet them there. They usually arrived at ten o'clock or so and I had a ground force, air force, and naval officer give them the situation at the time. And they would sit there and give the briefing complete attention. After about a week or ten days I was instructed to set up the War Room at 10 Downing Street. That was a busy site.

BURG: Yes. Do you remember what kinds of questions they asked? What was it that seemed to interest them the most as the situations were explained?

NEVINS: I can't remember their questions at all. The only thing that impressed me particularly about their visits was how deferential the two Prime Ministers were to the King who was so much younger than they. And they deferred to him in every way. Of course, I had never had any experience with royalty, so it rather surprised me that these two highly important individuals would defer so much to this younger man.



BURG: Now he has a reputation of having been a rather shy man--

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG:--did he seem to ask questions too?

NEVINS: Yes, I don't think he was shy. He had to overcome an impediment in speech, but I think he was all right.

BURG: Now do you recollect--

NEVINS: He asked me if I was going to get over to France, and I said, "I certainly hope so." I remember that.



BURG: Did he laugh?

NEVINS: Yeah.

BURG: Did you view his questions as being those of an informed man?

NEVINS: Yes, of course. I don't recall any of their questions, but they were sensible. And, of course, Churchill was always so closely informed. You could hardly keep him from going over with the assault wave.

BURG: Right. Do you happen to remember Mr. Churchill expressing any views about the slowness in breaking out. As I recall, the

original thought was that the British would try to take Caen as soon as they could.

NEVINS: No, I didn't see him at that time. You see, we were quite a little while getting the lodgment area, and Montgomery was held up. He claimed--I think with some correctness--that he was holding a sizeable force of the Nazis. But Churchill had left the War Room much before that time.

BURG: I see. Had his own War Room set up.

NEVINS: Yeah.

BURG: Now how long did you continue in that duty before you went over?

NEVINS: Well, I visited the front--flew over to the front-- and visited Bradley's headquarters. And also I visited Joe [Gen. Joseph Lawton] Collins' headquarters and then flew back, but I didn't, of course, go over to France until SHAEF headquarters was moved to an area near Granville. And, as I remember, that was probably in early September. I'm not sure of that, though.



BURG: What duty then were you assigned to when you went to Granville?

NEVINS: Just the same one I always had--operations officer.

BURG: Did you keep any kind of a mobile map room now as part of your duties?

NEVINS: Oh, yes, of course.

BURG: Uh-huh. This--

NEVINS: We had continuously at headquarters a war room.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: And, of course, I got out almost all of the operational orders. Not that I initiated them, but I was given a draft and told what was desired. I authenticated almost all the orders that were issued. Not every one but almost all of them. My file of orders up here is that thick.

BURG: Now, again, that puts you in pretty close contact with Bedell Smith?



NEVINS: Yes, always through--

BURG: General Bull or--

NEVINS:--General Bull or General Whiteley. You see, they were there too.

BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: You asked about--you started to ask about officers I had. I had ninety-six officers under me when I had the two sections, and in the operations section I had two outstanding--well, I'll say three outstanding officers--: Colonel C.R. Kutz of the American Army and Colonel Lt. Col. M.D. Molloy and Colonel Lt. Col. J. H. Alms of the British Army. All three were fine staff officers. Actually, the only one of all the officers who served with me in either of those divisions that I've kept in contact with in either of those sections was Colonel Molloy. I correspond with him, and he has visited the States two or three times and always looks me up. We met a good many times. He's the Chairman of the Board of a large company that manufactures emery stones and grind stones and things of that character.



BURG: I see.

NEVINS: And he has some offices--sales offices--in the States and in Mexico and various other countries. Has a big dealing.



BURG: Now let me ask you this: From Granville out--breaking out--Paris on out towards the Rhine, does anything stand out in your memory from that period that relates to your duties? Were your duties fairly routine as far as you saw them through that period?

NEVINS: Well, they developed . . . quite a good deal. Of course, we began establishing missions as soon as we could. We had one in Paris, and soon we had one in Brussels. And we established one in Norway and one in Oslo and one in Copenhagen. The results were my children: I had to supervise those people. And so, things changed quite a bit.

BURG: What kind of task did they have?

NEVINS: Well they had charge of the personnel, and in Paris, for example, I think at one time--I'd hesitate to tell you how many hotels we had occupied and how much personnel we had then. And, of course, there were an tremendous number of problems that

always had to be taken care of: supply, transportation--

BURG: Now these were like extensions from SHAEP?

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG: Sort of contact points--

NEVINS: Contact points, yes, at the various places.



BURG: So these people would work with the governments, whatever governments--

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG:--existed in these areas?

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG: Had that been envisioned, General? Had that been seen ahead of time?

NEVINS: Oh, yes. One of the main jobs for McLean and his planning staff was jobs of that character--what to do when we liberated Paris and so forth. And they worked hard at it.

BURG: So there was one kind of change in your duty as the war moved east. Do you think of anything else?

NEVINS: No. Of course, there were always changes. We moved east several times. We moved from Granville to Versailles and from Versailles to Reims and from there to Frankfurt. And there was always the change of the situation. One of change from battle to occupation and so on.



BURG: Now let me ask you this: You were in headquarters, you were in SHAEF during the period of the Ardennes--

NEVINS: Uh-huh.

BURG: Can you tell us a little bit about them--the reactions within headquarters as you saw the reactions, as you saw the men?

NEVINS: Well, it was my view of it that it was a very common reaction. The General--Eisenhower--saw to that. He wanted no flurry about the thing. He announced even at first that it might be a cause for some optimism, really. Wasn't very nice for the troops that were overrun, of course. That was a damned hard deal,

but he always felt that there was now probably an opportunity to deal a severe blow to the enemy. And that did happen. And he impressed everybody with the idea that there was no doubt that we would hold and also that there was probably an opportunity to cash in on this thing--which there was. And he was never worried about that like he was in North Africa.

BURG: Uh-huh.



NEVINS: Because he had battle trained, seasoned troops and he was confident.

BURG: So confidence was the thing that you observed--

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG:--during that entire period?

NEVINS: Yes.

BURG: You saw no sign of hesitation or worry in the people with whom you worked?

NEVINS: No, none at all.

BURG: Do you have any comments about Montgomery's actions at that time?

NEVINS: Well, as far as our advance was concerned, he was very good. General Eisenhower ordered a portion of Bradley's 12th Army Group over and turned them over to Montgomery--



BURG: Uh-huh.

NEVINS: The Sixth Army ed. note: actually, the Ninth Army under-- my memory fails again--but, oh, I know him, I see him every winter in--

BURG: Lt. Gen. William Hood Simpson?

NEVINS:--San Antonio. Simpson.

BURG: William Simpson.

NEVINS: Yes. And because of the fact that the some forty or fifty mile wedge driven there separated part of Bradley's force and the communications were difficult, those forces on the north were turned over to Montgomery. And he praised them highly. They fought

well for him. And the only fly in the ointment was that he then developed the idea that General Eisenhower should appoint a ground force commander who would operate between him and the two army group commanders that were yet in that area and then, of course, also between him and the 6th Army Group under Gen. Jacob Loucks Devers. Of course, he would be the ground force commander.

BURG: Yes.

NEVINS: And General Eisenhower didn't agree with that idea. He didn't want anybody between him and his army group commanders at all--at least he didn't want Montgomery there anyway. And so Montgomery grew a little hard to handle, and there came a time when--after the bulge had been reduced and the troops returned to Simpson and the rest of them returned to Bradley--that Montgomery grew hard to deal with. He enlisted the support of news media to further his idea that there should be a ground force commander and also that the Eisenhower plan of advance on a broad front should be changed and that the advance should be made on a narrow front on the north which he would head. And, in other words, he would head the main effort, and I was suspicious



of his motives. He may have believed that was the best strategy-- probably did--possibly did, anyway. But he was always going to make the main effort just as he had tried to set up in Sicily. Well, this opposition to the general plan became so bad that General Eisenhower was on the point of sending a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff asking for his relief, and his--Montgomery's-- chief of staff--

BURG: Brig. Francis Wilfred De Guingand.



NEVINS:--fine officer--got news of this disagreement and this terrible situation from liaison officers in Bradley's 12th Army Group headquarters, the British liaison officers who were always stationed with him. And he made a flying trip to headquarters and contacted Bedell Smith, and they were worked in pretty close harmony. And Bedell--

(Interruption) Reel #2

NEVINS:"...General Eisenhower and Air Chief Marshal Tedder are drafting the message now." But he De Guingand got the attention of General Eisenhower and Tedder and persuaded them to hold up, telling them that he could straighten out Montgomery--that Montgomery didn't really understand the seriousness of the situation.

And so they agreed to withhold that message, and he went back and just openly told Montgomery he would certainly be relieved if the message went to the Joint Chiefs because no one would be willing--not even Churchill--to support him if General Eisenhower couldn't get along with him. And so he sent a message to General Eisenhower saying that he hadn't understood the situation and that he would cooperate to the maximum and signed himself, "Your obedient officer" or something to that effect. And that saved him. And it also stopped the quarrel, the dissension, the struggle to organize a ground force commander, and also this business for a narrow front.



BURG: Do you recollect anyone in SHAEF headquarters who defended Montgomery during this period of time?

NEVINS: No, I can't. Actually Tedder and Whiteley were real annoyed with him. And I'm sure they thought that he had been slow and that he had been hard to get along with and uncooperative.

BURG: So among British officers that you knew there was no great tendency to defend him but rather to think that he was probably wrong in--

NEVINS: I think so.

BURG:--persisting this way.

NEVINS: I believe they'd agree to that.

BURG: Let me ask you this, then, General: In that final period of time when the decision was to turn south into the mountain stronghold rather than to advance further on Berlin, how was that decision received at SHAEF?



NEVINS: Well, that was a decision made at SHAEF, and that was received, of course, very well because the whole thing was complicated at that time by the fact that this allied commission had agreed upon zones of occupation.

BURG: Yes.

NEVINS: And the American zone was--two hundred miles west was the limit. The eastern limit of the American zone of occupation was two hundred miles west of Berlin.

BURG: Right.

NEVINS: Had the Americans gone in and taken Berlin, they would then have had to retreat--to retire--two hundred miles to get in

their appointed zone. And General Bradley and General Eisenhower estimated that it might cost fifty thousand casualties to take Berlin and what would be the point. Churchill wanted it done, of course, but for prestige reasons. But what would be the point of spending a lot of American and British lives to take a place and then give it up?

BURG: Now here, again, were the British officers in SHAEF in agreement with this decision or did you hear it argued?

NEVINS: I never heard it argued at all. As far as I know they were agreed.

BURG: And did you ever hear any reaction filter back from British units up there to the north with Montgomery? Was it their view that they should drive on Berlin?

NEVINS: I don't know about that. I never heard anything.

BURG: So any controversy about this that you knew of came later on, after the event. In SHAEF it wasn't--

NEVINS: Yes, of course. Mr. Churchill wanted the allied forces--



the British and the American forces--to take Berlin for prestige reasons and not the Russians, but I'm not sure that we could have beaten the Russians there. I think we might have been able to if we'd heaved ho, but they were much closer to Berlin than we.

EURG: Right. Well, then, what was your concluding service? As the Germans surrendered, you were still with G-3, SHAEF?

NEVINS: Yes, I was with G-3 and we had an office in the I.G. Farben building in Frankfurt. And presently General Eisenhower went back to the States, and Bedell went back to the States. General Joseph Taggart McNarney took command; and General Bull became Chief of Staff; and I became his G-3. And I stayed on there until August of '46, I believe. And then I was ordered home. But it was quite pleasant service there. It was quite different. We had again established a mess at about nine kilometers outside of Frankfurt, and with General Bull and General "Quinney" Brown and three or four Colonels we occupied a very fine place. And the chief duties were just those incident to the occupation. We always got a regular letter from the Russians objecting to the conduct of the troops adjoining them, and we would



have to try to placate them. And Bedell Smith called me in one day--and that was before he went home--and suggested that I see what I could do about stopping this regular letter from the Russian main headquarters--it was just tiresome--and persuading them to let the adjoining division and corps commanders settle their differences. So I wrote to Russian headquarters and suggested that we get together to confer on this matter either in Frankfurt or in Berlin--whichever they chose. And they said they would like to come to Frankfurt. They wanted to see things there. So a couple of the general officers--one a lieutenant general and one an interpreter--came down to confer, and we talked for a while. I submitted the idea to them that we had no similar letters from the French or from the British--this was an American headquarters, you see--and it was because the commanders of the forces that were in contact settled their differences themselves. So they confided amongst themselves and questioned me as to what matters could be settled by the adjoining commanders. And so I produced a couple of the Russian letters, and I said, "Almost all of these matters--forays into Russian territory, drunkenness, fights, and so forth--ought to be settled by the local commanders." Then they



went into executive session again, and they said they would have to have a list--a complete list--of the matters that could be settled and we would have to agree on it. So I said, "All right. I'll consult the American commanders--Bradley's headquarters--, and I'll consult the British and ask them for their recommendations. And I'll prepare a paper on it and forward it to you, and by an exchange of our opinions no doubt we can make up an agreement. And so that being the case, I think we might as well go to lunch." And they said they agreed, and we had a very nice mess there with plenty to drink. And I furnished them some drinks and bid them good-bye. And I got this thing--this paper--completed within ten days or two weeks and forwarded it to them, and to my knowledge no answer has ever been received.



BURG: Not a word.

NEVINS: They wanted to disagree. They wanted to complain.

BURG: Now did General Eisenhower have any final conversation with you before he left to come back to the United States?

NEVINS: I don't remember anything in particular. We probably did have a dinner together, but that's about all. Things were settled

down pretty well.

BURG: Now you said you came back in August of 1946?

NEVINS: Yes. Then I was ordered to the Operations Division, War Department General Staff again. And I didn't like the duty there much. I don't like the Pentagon anyway--officers running around with a bunch of papers in their hands and going for coffee breaks and not doing much, accomplishing much--, and I didn't visualize the service thereafter would be nearly as interesting as the service I had had. And so I put in a request for retirement. It had to be approved under a regulation that had been passed, because I served in World War I, and they had that provision. But General Eisenhower was Chief of Staff at the time, and the letter came to him. He called me in and said he thought I was making a great mistake, that he could guarantee me a promotion, and I ought to have at least two or three stars before I left the service. But I had made up my mind that I should retire. I thought that I could find things to do that would supplement my retired pay and establish some sort of an estate at the present. At the time I retired, I don't suppose I had more than a thousand dollars



to my name and a Ford car--something like that. I was generally in the same position General Eisenhower was in when he left the service and went to--

WICKMAN: Columbia.

NEVINS:--Columbia. And I remember he joked about calling Mamie out to point out his new Chrysler Imperial. Said there were the results of thirty years service. I thought I could do that, and as a matter of fact I have. I'm not too affluent, but I've always had a job. And I worked various sundry jobs after I got out and had something to do and income for I think twenty-five years--probably maybe more--after forty-six, after 1946.



BURG: Right.

NEVINS: So I did retire and I would have liked to have had another star or two.

BURG: Well, John, this was the point that I particularly wanted to bring the questioning to. Do you have anything further that you'd like to ask?

WICKMAN: No. Did they pick up on the other one where they picked up the General's next contact then with General Eisenhower in SHAPE?

BURG: I don't recall how good the Edwin [editor's note: Ed Edwin, an interviewer for the Columbia Oral History Project] material was on SHAPE. He covered the period here in Gettysburg fairly well, as I remember, but --I'm sorry--I don't know about the SHAPE period.



WICKMAN: Well, I was just curious about the time from the time he retired until General Eisenhower came up here.

NEVINS: Oh, yes. Well [in] one of the first positions I had, I was employed to revise the campaign for United Funds in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

BURG: Yes.

NEVINS: So I went out there and worked on the revision of those plans for three or four months, I guess. But about that time I got a letter from General Eisenhower saying that he had been

requested by Doubleday to write a book on his memoirs and he would do so if I would come and help him with the factual statements-- checking factual statements. You see, I had been with him throughout the whole thing. And so I told him I would like to do that. And so I resigned from my job there and was employed by Doubleday and Company and worked in Washington with offices in the Pentagon, again furnished by the Historical Division, who cooperated with me. And I checked the factual statements made. Of course, I didn't have any part in the composition of Crusade in Europe, but I checked the maps and checked the factual statements and wrote the footnotes. And checked the maps and names, and military unit and so forth. And we--General Eisenhower and I--went over the manuscript together. And I was pleased that no real mistakes were discovered. As far as I have ever heard, there were only two objections raised to any statement in Crusade in Europe. One was by one of the division commanders in the Battle of the Bulge whose division was overrun. And General Eisenhower had written they were forced to retire in confusion, and the division commander said there wasn't any confusion! That didn't worry me much. But the other mistake was a rather interesting one. He said that there had been no casualties due to the employment of mustard gas. I didn't even check that.



BURG: Oh, yes.

NEVINS: I thought that was surely correct.

BURG: The affair in Italy.

NEVINS: But the navy objected to that because when the Nazis bombed the port of Bari they injured a ship carrying mustard gas, which burned some of the navy boys. But I didn't know about that. As a matter of fact, I didn't know there was a mustard ship aboard.

BURG: Yes.



NEVINS: But that worked out all right. I didn't think that was a very bad mistake because the mustard was never really employed in action.

BURG: Sure, sure.

WICKMAN: How long were you at this then down in the Pentagon-- working on Crusade?

NEVINS: On what?

WICKMAN: How long were you working on Crusade?

NEVINS: I don't know exactly--a year and a half or two years.

Then in the next duty I got, General Eisenhower had been asked to head a panel conducted by the Council on Foreign Affairs in New York on aid to Europe; and he agreed to that, providing the panel would secure an economic, a political science, and military advisor. And they agreed to that. So he got in touch with me immediately and asked me to come and take the military job. So then I was employed for two years or so with the Council on Foreign Affairs. And I contacted the planners and so forth in Washington who were handling the "aid to Europe" matters and was able to write a paper or two--present a paper or two--to the panel, which was a very distinguished group of men.



BURG: Right.

NEVINS: And they had scientists like Isidor I. Rabi, and they had a few military analysts like the one who writes all the time-- I can't think of his name--and important business men--economists. And it was a very interesting and nice time.

BURG: Now was this then followed by service in SHAPE? Was that your next--

NEVINS: No. This was after I had retired.

WICKMAN: What did you do after that then, after that period of time was over?

NEVINS: Well, I was working with the Council on Foreign Affairs when General Eisenhower was ordered to--

WICKMAN: NATO.



NEVINS:--to Paris--NATO. And he had bought a farm out here, the farm that you are going to visit this afternoon. And so his leaving, of course, terminated the panel's work and also terminated my job--or would terminate it in a few days. He hadn't gone yet. And so he asked me if I would like to go down and run the farm for him and occupy his house. And I said that I didn't know anything about farming much. I had been raised on a farm, but other than that, naturally, I didn't know anything about present-day farming. "Oh," he said, "you can get necessary help." And so I talked to Mrs. Nevins, and she rather liked the notion. So the first of April in sixty-one--guess it was--yes, six--

WICKMAN: Fifty-one.

NEVINS: Fifty-one, yes, fifty-one--we drove down to occupy a

motel room for a night or two and then went in--moved into--the house, the old brick house.

BURG: Yes.

NEVINS: And we stayed there until General Eisenhower wanted to begin building a new house on the same ground. So then we moved into town, and shortly after we moved into this house. We have been here eighteen years. And it was a new house when we moved in. No one else has occupied it. And I still ran the farm and the herd of Angus and did so until I suppose I was about seventy-four or five--something like that. And then General Eisenhower wasn't feeling too good and too well, and he said he thought we ought to tidy up his affairs and we would sell the Angus herd. But he wanted to do it quietly, and so I just let it be known around the various groups of good Angus herds that he would sell. We sold the herd advantageously, and sold it for some ninety thousand dollars. We sold some animals separately for about twenty thousand dollars. In addition we sold the principal herd bull which we had purchased. He had cost twenty



thousand dollars for a half interest, and we teamed with another breeder to form a one third interest, which we sold--that is our sixth and his sixth. And we sold that third interest for sixty thousand dollars so that our share was thirty thousand and a profit of ten thousand, and we still retained a third interest of the bull which we later sold for sixty-five thousand dollars. So that brought in ninety-five thousand dollars to the cause. But then I decided that I'd had about enough. I was getting-- I don't know--about seventy-four or five, and I'd been working quite a long time. And also the interesting part of the farm operation was gone. The decision then was to just buy feeder cattle, and feed them throughout the year, sell them in the winter, and then buy a new group and feed them. That wasn't so interesting, so I asked General Eisenhower to relieve me and he said that was all right.



WICKMAN: Well, I was curious. While you and Mrs. Nevins were up in the farm, then, the General went over to NATO. You didn't see him then till he came back.

NEVINS: Yes, he invited us--me--over there, and Mrs. Nevins and I

flew over on the Columbine and returned on a navy vessel which he had arranged, having stayed there for two weeks. We had a grand time. I saw him both at home and in his office. And it was there that he was being besieged to run for the presidency, and he was making up his mind about it. They had a guest there--I'll tell you his name when I can remember--my vague memory--who ran the McNaughton syndicate--Mr. Charles McAdams. Maybe you know who that--

WICKMAN: No.

NEVINS: I can't think of it immediately, but this chap says, "Look"--I heard him talking to General Eisenhower, saying-- "Look, you don't want to get in this kind of a rat race. I'll guarantee you a hundred thousand dollars a year for one article a week, and you can hire yourself a good writer or two and take it easy and pleasantly. And you don't want to get in that rat race." But I knew General Eisenhower wouldn't accept that because he didn't fear the campaign at all. But soon, then, he came on back.

WICKMAN: So that was your only contact then with him until he was President and then moved up to the farm?

NEVINS: No, I was still occupying the farm prior to his going to



NATO, and afterward I was still occupying--oh, yes, he went back to Columbia.

WICKMAN: Right.

NEVINS: Oh, yes. And he was at Columbia, and he called me up one evening and said, "Could you arrange a picnic--

(Interruption)

NEVINS: But he called me up and wanted to know if I could run this picnic for a sizeable group, and I said, "Yes, sir!" Of course, you never say "no" to him, or at least I don't. I said, "We don't have any nice lake here with a shady, grassy shore; but we can run it--sure we can put on a lunch." And he said, "Well, I'll give you a definite call in a few days." So he did. He called me up and said, "We'll have this picnic on the"--I think he said the 13th of April. I don't know which year that was.



WICKMAN: We can check that back.

NEVINS: Fifty-two I guess. I don't know.

WICKMAN: Fifty-two.

NEVINS: Fifty-three, maybe.

WICKMAN: Fifty-two.

NEVINS: I don't know. And so I said, "Well, how many will there be, General Eisenhower?" And he said, "Well, I think there'll be at least a hundred and fifty delegates and alternates and at least a hundred and fifty correspondents and photographers and so forth, and there'll be some special guests. And," he said, "I should think there'll be a minimum of three hundred and fifty." And I said, "Well, I actually would be more interested in a maximum." He chuckled about that, but he said he couldn't give me any maximum. He said he thought I ought to arrange for plenty of reserve food. And I think we had about four hundred and fifty Pennsylvania delegates to the Republican Convention and the alternates and their wives and children and some special guests. And we had a very successful meeting--one of the few times that General Eisenhower congratulated me with a good deal of enthusiasm for something I did. Usually in the Army you do all right if nobody objects.

WICKMAN: You're even, huh?



NEVINS: But he was very happy about that, and he, of course, convinced the Pennsylvania delegation of his candidacy.

WICKMAN: Well, after he became President I've just been curious about your role here. You were on the farm, but you didn't have to arrange every visit, did you? They more or less took care of themselves when they came up with their own staff from the White House. I mean their--



NEVINS: Oh, we had a competent herdsman who knew how to handle highly bred Angus cattle and knew how to fit them for show and--

WICKMAN: No, I meant your role in relation to the General's visits here when he was in the White House. Did you--

NEVINS: Oh, when he was in the White House?

WICKMAN: Yes.

NEVINS: Oh, he usually invited me out and--

WICKMAN: You didn't have to get involved, you didn't--

NEVINS: Oh, no.

WICKMAN:--plan it.

NEVINS: I didn't do--I had nothing to do really with the staff-- recommendations to make, or anything of that kind. I was down at the White House quite frequently, and I was also out here frequently, especially when he had visitors like Montgomery and others.

WICKMAN: Bradley.



NEVINS: And then I also was up at Camp David many, many times for overnight stays and dinners.

WICKMAN: In the post-presidential period when he was working on his books, did you get involved in that too--

NEVINS: No.

WICKMAN:--like you did in Crusade?

NEVINS: No. He had both John Eisenhower and Kevin McCann, and I think Kevin McCann--I never did know exactly what his status was,

but I have surmised that he was employed by Doubleday and did a good deal of spade work for General Eisenhower on books like At Ease and, well, his two White House books--

WICKMAN: Mandate for Change and Waging Peace.

NEVINS:--and then his later book, At Ease. And I hope he didn't have much to do with In Review. I didn't--

WICKMAN: No.

NEVINS: That was just--

WICKMAN: Actually, I think there's really very little of General Eisenhower in that; this was something that Sam Vaughn concocted.

NEVINS: At Ease was nice.

WICKMAN: Yes. Well, I can stop at that point.

BURG: Thank you very much, General Nevins.

