

INTERVIEW WITH
General William H. Simpson

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg
Oral Historian

on

March 15, 1972

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



Simpson, William H.
OH-314

Gift of Personal Statement

GENERAL WILLIAM H. SIMPSON

to the

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Signed William H. Simpson

Date: July 28 1975

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Date: August 6, 1975



This is an interview with Gen. William H. Simpson done in the General's home in San Antonio, Texas, on March 15, 1972. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn P. Burg of the Eisenhower Library.

DR. BURG: General Simpson, let me ask you this question first: when did you first meet General Eisenhower?

GEN. SIMPSON: Well, I was trying to think. I think the first time I really recall knowing and meeting him was in 1928 when I was a student at the Army War College and he and I were in the same class there. Now if I'd met him before that, it was just in passing; I don't remember it. But that's when I really got to know who he was.

DR. BURG: Now in 1928 what were your respective ranks? Do you remember, sir?

GEN. SIMPSON: Well, we were both majors.



DR. BURG: I see.

GEN. SIMPSON: I was a major. You see, I was class of 1909 at West Point.

DR. BURG: Right.

GEN. SIMPSON: He was class of '15, six years after me; so I

didn't know him there.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And our trails I don't think had crossed before that. I don't recall it at all.

BURG: All right then, let me ask you this: had you had actual combat experience in World War I?

SIMPSON: Yes, with a combat division.

BURG: With infantry?

SIMPSON: The 33rd Infantry Division.

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: Went through the war--World War I--with the 33rd Infantry Division.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: National Guard outfit. But I started out as an aide to the commanding general, and then went on through and finally wound up just as the war ended as chief of staff of the division.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And so I went through the whole period with that infantry outfit.

BURG: Then you had also gone to the Command and General Staff School in the 1920s..

SIMPSON: Yes, I went through Benning in 1923, graduated in '24, and then went direct to Leavenworth. Graduated in '25. And I'm not sure, but I think General Ike was '25 or '26 there. I'm not sure.

BURG: Very close.

SIMPSON: And then we both wound up in the Army War College. He was infantry, too, you see.

BURG: Yes, by then.

SIMPSON: I know the chief of infantry told me that he was trying to get a kind of special hand-picked group of infantry officers through the War College so they could go on to the General Staff, which I did. And I think Ike went with the assistant secretary of war on procurement or something at that time. I'm not certain.



BURG: Yes, yes.

SIMPSON: When he graduated? Didn't he?

BURG: He did.

SIMPSON: From the War College.

BURG: And then--

SIMPSON: 'Course, he was around Washington there.

BURG: Right. He went with Douglas Mac Arthur as sort of an aide--

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right.

BURG: --to him at the time of the Bonus March.

SIMPSON: Yes, yes, that's right. He was there then. That was later on, let's see, about '32 or '33, I think.

BURG: Yes.



SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: Now, General, who was it that told you that it was a hand-picked group that went to the War College the year you

and Eisenhower went?

SIMPSON: The Chief of Infantry. He was Major General Robert H. Allen, I think--

BURG: All right.

SIMPSON: --who became chief of infantry about the time I graduated from Leavenworth, '25 or '26.

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: He was an instructor at Leavenworth the year I was there, and that's where I met him. And--

BURG: Presumably Eisenhower would have met him there too, do you think?

SIMPSON: Well, I'm not sure. I think he Allen had left Leavenworth maybe just about the time I did. I graduated in '25, and he left there just about that time--

BURG: O.K.

SIMPSON: --to be chief of infantry.

BURG: All right.

SIMPSON: Now whether he'd known General Eisenhower any where I don't know. But for some reason or other I met him Allen. He'd been, I think, a regimental commander in some division in World War I.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And he talked to me about my experience over there with the 33rd, you see.

BURG: Yes.



SIMPSON: And I think maybe that's how I happened to be attracted to his attention.

BURG: But a hand-picked group of men all infantry--as much as he could make it infantry.

SIMPSON: His allotment, don't you see.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And so I think General Eisenhower and I were on that list, although he didn't go on the General Staff. I mean he had a similar job, don't you see.

BURG: Right, right.

SIMPSON: You see we had chiefs of branches then: infantry, cavalry, and so forth. And it paid. And I think they had a proportionate allotment maybe of infantry, cavalry, and field artillery officers on the General Staff. At least its chiefs tried to make it that way.

BURG: Yes, yes.

SIMPSON: And that's the way that came up.

BURG: I recollect that his [Eisenhower's] going to Leavenworth had to be connived at.

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: He hadn't gone to Benning.



SIMPSON: He was in the doghouse with the chief of infantry's office, he said. I don't know why. They wouldn't--oh, yes, they wanted him to go to Benning--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --you see. The procedure was if you tried to go to Leavenworth, which I tried to do when I came back from Europe in 1919--the first class at Leavenworth was 1919 and 1920--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And I applied to go to Leavenworth, and I got turned down by the chief of infantry office because they said, "We have an infantry school. You ought to go there."

BURG: Combat on the western front wasn't good enough training for them.

SIMPSON: No, that's right.

BURG: Oh, boy.



SIMPSON: Well, I was glad I went to Benning; but also it was a good thing for General Ike to have such a marvelous course of training under Fox Conner, which was not only equivalent to and better than Benning but maybe better than Leavenworth too--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --except that you should have it on your records.

BURG: Did you know Conner personally, General?

SIMPSON: I met him; that's all. I never served with him, but I met him once or twice in passing. That's all.

BURG: Now did General Eisenhower ever happen to speak to you about his experience with Conner?

SIMPSON: No, I didn't know anything about that 'till I read his book. You know--

BURG: At Ease.

SIMPSON: --At Ease.

BURG: Now let me ask you this: had you ever heard of Eisenhower prior to that first meeting in 1928? Was he an officer of any reputation? I guess this is what I mean.

SIMPSON: I think he was, but you see he served here as a youngster--

BURG: At Ft. Sam Houston?



SIMPSON: --at Ft. Sam Houston. I don't know what outfit it was. Was it the 9th infantry or what regiment? Let's see, that was '16--

BURG: May have been the 19th Infantry Regiment.

SIMPSON: What'a that?

BURG: May have been the 19th Infantry.

SIMPSON: Yes, it may have been. I've forgotten.

BURG: We'll check that.

SIMPSON: And I was, let's see, at that time--'15, '16--yes, I was in Mexico and on the West Pacific Coast. And then '15, '16--that's right. He was the class of '16.

BURG: '15, sir.



SIMPSON: '15 I mean. Yes. I was on duty at both El Paso and Presidio of San Francisco. I didn't run across him down there at that time. No, I'd never heard of him, but I'm sure he had built quite a reputation for himself as a youngster.

BURG: All right, now, let me ask you this then, General: what kind of man was he, as you recollect now, in 1928 when the two of you served in the War College together?

SIMPSON: Well, I tell you, he impressed me this way. He was a jovial--I say jovial--he was easy to talk to, and in a group he stood out because he always had something to say about whatever was being discussed--

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: --in a very intelligent manner.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And, as a matter of fact, one of his classmates, General [Paul J.] Mueller, who is dead now--Mueller, M-u-a-double l-e-r: called him "Miller"--

BURG: All right.



SIMPSON: --one time said, "If you want to know anything about anything in the military or most any other subject and Ike's around, ask him."

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: Very well informed.

BURG: Mueller was looking back--

SIMPSON: That's right, yes.

BURG: --at the class and the experience of the class.

SIMPSON: That's right, you see.

BURG: And he still felt that way all--

SIMPSON: That's right, yes.

BURG: --those years later.

SIMPSON: Now I knew him there in the War College. He was six years my junior. I ran around with--well, they had a lot of senior officers in my class. We had colonels. We had a very senior colonel as president of the class--

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: --and lieutenant colonels. And I don't remember what proportion of majors were there. I don't think we had a single captain then. And Ike was one of the lower ranking people. I was six years ahead of him.

BURG: Right.



SIMPSON: Mainly my friends were older people. He went along with the younger group there, and we didn't become very closely associated. But in the classroom and, oh, at lunch time we'd get together occasionally; and they had a--I didn't play baseball-- but they did have baseball out there and things like that. We'd get together in groups. And a number of times I was in a group with Eisenhower, and he always impressed me. Very intelligent, alert, quick, you know. And always interested in whatever subject came up. He had a marvelous mind really.

BURG: Gave you the impression, General Simpson, that he kept reading?

SIMPSON: That's right, yes, indeed.

BURG: Continued to study?



SIMPSON: That's right. And I don't know. It seemed to me he and I struck with just a faint kind of accord there because I was quite surprised really that later on, when he got command over there--you know, the Supreme Command--he mentioned my name a couple of times as one that he would like to have come over there.

BURG: Good.

SIMPSON: One time in a letter I found not long ago he wrote to General Marshall: "I'd like to have somebody like Simpson or [Courtney Hicks] Hodges, or Hodges and Simpson--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --come over" for, you know, one of his commanders.

BURG: Right.



SIMPSON: And so that association we had there at the War College, although not too close, was the beginning of a kind of mutual friendship in a way.

BURG: Good. Now it's asking a great deal, General, of anyone, but do you remember the names of two or three people that he seemed to pal around with there at the War College? You're probably going to remember your own friends.

SIMPSON: Well, that's right. I really don't.

BURG: Yeah.

SIMPSON: No. But I do remember him in the light I've told you.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: He impressed me very favorably.

BURG: All right. Now you thought a moment ago that his general reputation in the army by 1928 was probably a pretty good one, considering the fact that you're dealing with a major.

SIMPSON: That's right. For example, I'm sure that when he was here as a second lieutenant with this regiment he made a very favorable impression--quite a name for himself. Then apparently he was--I don't remember the sequence--but he was in Panama two or three years there with Fox Conner--

BURG: Yes, sir.



SIMPSON: --as his executive or something. I've known a number of officers that kind of stood out, don't you see--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --in whatever group they were in--their regiment, or--

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: --where they were serving.

BURG: Men who showed promise early in their career.

SIMPSON: That's right, exactly.



BURG: I had a question here to ask you. Had you heard any place that he had been more or less marked for advancement? Well, actually, General Allen indicated this to you.

SIMPSON: That's right. And then I heard this too that--well, let's see. He attended Leavenworth a year or so after I did. I don't recall. I graduated in '25. He must have been '26 or '27.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: I think.

BURG: That's right.

SIMPSON: And I heard this: that Eisenhower had come out one in his class. Now that marked him right there.

BURG: So that word was common around the army?

SIMPSON: That's right. That would go around, don't you see. So by that time he definitely had established himself, don't you see.

BURG: Yes.



SIMPSON: When he graduated from there, that mark was, well, a very distinguished mark for him. I don't know how he got acquainted with Mac Arthur, but the fact that he came out one at Leavenworth might have been one thing that made Mac Arthur look at him very carefully when he encountered him.

BURG: Right. And it seems to me that General Eisenhower was working for Maj. Gen. George Van Horn Moseley?

SIMPSON: Yes. Moseley was Deputy Chief of Staff with Mac Arthur.

BURG: Yes. And I think that General Mac Arthur saw him Eisenhower under those circumstances.

SIMPSON: Well, that could be.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: That could be.

BURG: O.K. And we've already talked about Allen. Does anyone else come to mind from those pre-war years? Do any other names come to mind of people who may have talked with you about this?

SIMPSON: No.



BURG: You know how sometimes you'll gossip about--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --who's going where and how.

SIMPSON: No, I don't recall.

BURG: O.K.

SIMPSON: Right.

BURG: O.K. Now between that first meeting in 1928 and your arrival in the European Theater of Operations do you remember any other meetings that you had with him?

SIMPSON: Now, let me see--'28. Well, when I graduated in '28--let me just talk myself back into remembering something.

BURG: Good.

SIMPSON: I was assigned to the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department General Staff.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And I spent four years there. I was trying to think. I remember General Charles P. Summerall was chief of staff; General MacArthur was chief of staff; Moseley was his deputy. I remember seeing General Eisenhower two or three times very briefly, though not too much, in those four years.

BURG: Would you see him at the office?

SIMPSON: Pardon me.



BURG: Would you see him at the office? You'd be in his office or in the area--

SIMPSON: Yes, I think it was, and maybe once or twice at a social party. We used to have a lot of receptions and things

at the War College club and elsewhere in Washington there.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: Not too many times; just very few.

BURG: Did your wife know his wife, General?

SIMPSON: Only just casually, like she did the wives of the other people in the class.

BURG: O.K.

SIMPSON: We had this system there: they had one big party right shortly after my class got there; we lined up the whole class around this big ballroom, and each person went around and shook hands with everybody else--with his wife, you know.

BURG: I see. This was for reunions of your class--

SIMPSON: That's right.



BURG: --your West Point class?

SIMPSON: I don't recall that my wife and Mamie became very close at all then. They had very friendly relations here when I had the 4th army before I went overseas. Mrs. Eisenhower came here

and spent, oh, a couple of weeks I think.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: One time she was about to move in; well, no, that was about the time I went overseas, I guess. My wife wrote me and said, "Mamie Eisenhower--I've invited her to come and spend a week or ten days with me. And I think she's going to do it." Then she wrote back and said, "Mamie changed her mind and went somewhere" or something.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: They became very good friends then, but I don't think though before hand.



BURG: O.K. Well, that's good to know too. So that would take us up into the mid-'30s, actually.

SIMPSON: Yes. You see, I left Washington in '32. I stayed there from '28 to '32. And then I went to California on ROTC duty at Pomona College.

BURG: Oh, you were a tack there?

SIMPSON: Yeah, that's right. I was the PM, Professor of

Military Science and Tactics--

BURG: Yes, right.

SIMPSON: --at this little college. Do you know where Pomona College is?

BURG: Yes, indeed I do.

SIMPSON: They had a small unit there, and I was a major with one captain and a sergeant--I think--running this unit.

BURG: About three years duty?

SIMPSON: Yeah, I was there four years.

BURG: Four years?

SIMPSON: Yeah. I rode out the Depression there.

BURG: Right.



SIMPSON: And, of course, I didn't encounter Eisenhower at all during that period. While I was there, that's when--in '32 or '33--they had the riot in Washington.

BURG: The Bonus March?

SIMPSON: And then he went out with Mac Arthur, you see.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And I read about that, and I remember I went to an American Legion meeting. A fellow got up and just blasted the heck out of Mac Arthur, you know--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --for running those poor veterans out of Washington.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And I got up and said a kind word for him.



BURG: Yes, we run into that all the time in working this period.

SIMPSON: Oh, yes, very resentful--especially some of these legionnaires at the time.

BURG: Now Eisenhower went out to the Philippines following his stint with--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --with Mac Arthur.

SIMPSON: That was while I was in California--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --that he went to the Philippines, and he was out there four or five years, you see.

BURG: Right. Now he came back--I think it's about 1939. Were you still at Pomona then, or had you moved on to other things?

SIMPSON: I left Pomona in '36 and went back to the War College as an instructor.

BURG: Oh-ho.



SIMPSON: And he was in the Philippines then, I remember.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: You know that. But I didn't see him at all. The friendly contact we had as students together at the War College was my main contact with him. And it remained on a--well, much to my surprise--a much more friendly basis than I realized, don't you see.

BURG: Neither one of you men had actually been with troops for some period of time.

SIMPSON: Well, my tour with troops is a funny thing. You see, I got to be a lieutenant colonel in World War I--temporary--while I was a captain.

BURG: As he had done?

SIMPSON: As he had. Then I was demoted in 1920 and was a captain about a month and promoted to permanent major. And I was a major for fourteen years. He was about the same thing, don't you see.

BURG: Sounds like the post-Civil War Army, doesn't it?



SIMPSON: That's right. And so when I finished Leavenworth, this same General Allen, who by that time was chief of infantry, assigned me to one of the nicest jobs I think a major could have: command of the 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry at Fort Washington, Maryland--little post--

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: --down the river.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: Now as a post commander, I was detached from my regiment. I was my own boss and everything.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And this was a special strength battalion. We had about six hundred men in it, you see. A regiment only had about a thousand men.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And that outfit, although down the Potomac River at Fort Washington almost opposite of Mt. Vernon--

BURG: Yes.



SIMPSON: --took the place of what the 3rd Infantry does in Washington now. It was a ceremonial outfit--

BURG: Oh, I see.

SIMPSON: --and all that sort of thing. Yet it was up to full strength with hand-picked officers--a real combat outfit, don't you see--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --as well as a show outfit.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And I had two years duty with them, and went to the War College. And when I got through, I said, "Send me back to troops." They said, "You've had it. No more troops for you."

BURG: Really, sir?

SIMPSON: So when I finished the four year tour at the General Staff, I did the same thing; and they told me the same thing. They said, "No. No more troops for you. You either go on National Guard or ROTC duty." And I said, "Well, how about duty of either kind in California." And they said, "Well, the only vacancy we have for a major is at Pomona College." And I said, "Well, what's the job?" And they said, "Well, you'd be the boss." I said, "All right, let's go." So I went out there for four years. Now that's the only troop duty I had for those fourteen years.

BURG: And then back to Washington, D.C.?



SIMPSON: Back to Washington as an instructor at the War College, you see.

BURG: But he [Eisenhower] at that time comes back, and he did go to troop duty out on the West Coast?

SIMPSON: That's right. That was about--let's see--

BURG: '39 and--

SIMPSON: --about '39 or '40.

BURG: --'40.

SIMPSON: I pried loose from the War College. Well, I finished my four year tour. I was offered a regiment after I had been there two years--I was still a lieutenant colonel--but the commandant wouldn't let me go. He said, "No, you can't. You can't go. You're doing more important duty here training the future command and commanders and staff officers of the army than as a regimental commander." And I said, "Well, General,"-- this was General [John L.] De Witt, who had been the quarter-master general--



BURG: I remember his name.

SIMPSON: He said, "Well, I don't agree with you." I said, "General, if I don't get command of a regiment, I'll never have a chance to be a general officer." That was almost a must--

BURG: Yes, yes.

SIMPSON: --you see. And he said, "Oh, no, I don't agree with you on that. You can't go." Well, finally I got loose in the summer of '40. I came here to command the 9th Infantry at Fort Sam Houston, and about three months later I was promoted to a brigadier general.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And I remember this. Ike was then, I think, with some outfit in the Pacific coast.

BURG: He was with the 3rd, I think, out there. Fort Lewis.

SIMPSON: I was promoted in September of '40 to brigadier general. I stayed here until April of '41; and I was suddenly



assigned to command Camp Wolters, a replacement training center. And about that time Eisenhower came here as chief of staff of the 3rd Army under General Walter Krueger.

BURG: So you kept missing one another.

SIMPSON: That's right. The next time I saw him that I can recall after these two or three brief contacts there in Washington--after we graduated from the War College--was on the Louisiana maneuvers, in September of '41. I was commander of Camp Wolters--brigadier general--and I got permission to go down to the maneuver area in Louisiana where the 3rd Army under General Krueger was in maneuvers against the 2nd Army under General Ben Lear.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And so I had been there, oh, a day or so. General Krueger had been the division commander of the 2nd Division when I came here as a colonel. I had met him overseas, incidentally, when I was chief of staff--just after the war ended there--in the army of occupation in Luxembourg.

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: My division was part of the army of occupation of Germany but stationed in Luxembourg. Krueger was a lieutenant colonel, and so was I. He was G-3 of the 6th Army Corps, I think it was, also stationed--well, if it wasn't in Luxembourg, very near there. And he used to come over to see the division, you see.

BURG: Near Coblenz?

SIMPSON: What's that? Yes, somewhere there.

BURG: Yes, it's 1919, 1918--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --'19.

SIMPSON: And so I got acquainted with General Krueger very, very nicely there. And he'd asked for me to come down here as his chief of staff of the 3rd Army before he got Eisenhower, see.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And I didn't want it. I went to the Chief of Infantry, and I said, "Look, I don't want to go down on this thing. I



want this regiment. I've got to have a regiment." And he said, "Well, I'll see if I can fix it up." So he did. And they got my orders issued to come to the regiment, so that took General Krueger off my back.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: But anyway I came here and went to Mineral Wells and went down to the maneuver area. I went to call on General Krueger; and Colonel Eisenhower came in, and I greeted him and chatted with him for a few minutes there.

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: Now things were moving fast for him after that and for me too.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: I went back to Camp Wolters and--

BURG: Had you come down as an observer, General Simpson?

SIMPSON: Yes, just an observer.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: I was living in some place for observers there. I remember running into General [Lesley J.] McNair. General McNair was running these maneuvers. He was in command of the ground forces.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And a friend of mine, (Brig. Gen. Charles P.) George, came to me one day. He was a good friend of McNair's. He said, "I happened to be at lunch with General Marshall and General McNair, and they mentioned your name. You're going to be promoted to major general shortly and get a division." And that was right after I saw Ike down there; and, sure enough, in October that happened. Well, you see, Pearl Harbor came.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And that's when General Marshall suddenly ordered Eisenhower to come to Washington. Had somebody phone down here: "I want General Eisenhower up here right away." You see.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And when he got up there, he said, "Now, look. You go out here, and I want you to come back in four or five hours



with an estimate of the situation and your recommendations and the course we ought to follow in the Pacific."

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: Remember that?

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And that's what I read about.

BURG: Now Eisenhower had just gotten his first star, evidently because--

SIMPSON: That's right--



BURG: --of his work during the maneuvers.

SIMPSON: --he had just been promoted. I think he was a colonel there in September--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --and was made a brigadier general shortly after that. Right here--they had their offices of the 3rd Army down here in this tower building, (Smith-Young Tower).

BURG: You remember the caption of the picture. It showed him--I think in Life magazine--and they called him Colonel D. D. Ersenbean.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: Which I suppose broke him up completely.

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right.



BURG: Now did you hear any comments at that time made about him? You were told about yourself?

SIMPSON: Yeah, right. Well, of course, I was a little bit out of contact with my contemporaries 'cause there at Mineral Wells I had 21,000 replacements under my command.

BURG: Where is Mineral Wells, too, sir? We'd better--

SIMPSON: Mineral Wells is a little town about--well, you know where Ft. Worth is? It's about thirty or forty miles from Ft. Worth.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And a little town--then about four or five thousand people; and I had this big camp of, oh, two or three thousand officers--about twenty one--two thousand men there. But the next ranking people were way below me and none of my contemporaries.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: But the few people I did talk to about him--oh, sometimes people from here would come up or I came down here. Well, Eisenhower was Mac Arthur's right hand man in the Philippines.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And therefore he was in line to get this promotion and was chief of staff of the 3rd Army here under Krueger. Then when we heard about his being brought up to Washington--that wasn't too well known, but I heard about it--there was no surprise among the people I talked to about that.

BURG: So you were talking to people around Ft. Sam Houston or Camp Wolters?



SIMPSON: That's right. I came down here occasionally, and, you know--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --and that sort of thing.

BURG: Let me ask you this, General--and this may be a little bit difficult to answer, but I'd appreciate your frank answer--when these things were discussed, was there ever any resentful comment from any of the people with whom you discussed this? Did anyone feel that here was a man getting an undeserved post?

SIMPSON: No, I don't recall hearing that at all. And later on, you see, he was kept there. After he made this estimate, General [George C.] Marshall kept him there and--



BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --put him in the Operations Division.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: Or it was the War Plans, wasn't it?

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And Operations took it over.

BURG: Yes, it became OPD.



SIMPSON: That's right. And then he went on from there; finally, you know, took the invasion. Really, I've heard very little critical comment. Personally I was delighted. I wrote him every time I heard anything about his doing something; I wrote him a little note you see.

BURG: Oh, you did?

SIMPSON: Yes. And--

BURG: There's a--

[Interruption while cassette is being changed]

BURG: You had just said that you had heard surprisingly little criticism of Eisenhower's rise in '41. You did hear some, however. Do you remember what form it took, General?

SIMPSON: Well, it was very little. I don't remember. Well, I heard really very little criticism of that.

BURG: Would you say, sir, that it was unusually little for--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --the army of that day?

SIMPSON: Yes, I think so.

BURG: But in many cases you heard about other men who had risen--you heard them criticized--

SIMPSON: Yes, I had.

BURG: --in one way or another?



SIMPSON: For example, I heard--we'll go way back--an awful lot about General Pershing, you know.

BURG: His rise?

SIMPSON: Jumped from a captain to--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --brigadier general--

BURG: I see, yes.

SIMPSON: --in the old army, and some of the older officers were still "b-aching" about it when I came in you see.

BURG: That's what I had in mind.

SIMPSON: And I was a youngster, don't you see.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: I heard nothing like that about Eisenhower.



BURG: O.K. That's good to know. Now let me put this question to you: when you got to England--when you came over to the European Theater--by then he had been in the North African--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --operation?

SIMPSON: And I saw him over there briefly.

BURG: Before he went to Gibraltar?

SIMPSON: Yes. In 1943 I was commanding the 12th Army Corps at Ft. Jackson, South Carolina; and I got orders--and this was about April, I think, of '43--I got orders to go over to Africa on a tour of observation for our information you see.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And I took one of my aides with me and flew over there, and General Eisenhower had his headquarters at Algiers.

BURG: Right.



SIMPSON: I had to fly, you see, by way of, oh, that place in Brazil (Natal), then over to Dakar, then over the hump to Marrakech ? and then up to Algiers. When I got there, I went in to see General Eisenhower; had a nice visit with him a few minutes. He said, "Now I'm going to give you a command car, and I want you to go out to Tunisia and visit George Patton." See he and Patton--

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: --were good friends. And Patton and I were classmates at West Point.

BURG: I hadn't known that.

SIMPSON: He'd been turned back to my class from the previous class, but he spent four years in my class. We graduated together and were very good friends. So I was delighted. I

went up there and visited with him. Then I came back to Algiers and spent a day or so there. I saw General Eisenhower twice, I think--just brief calls on him--and chatted with him.

BURG: In the chats, General, can you recall anything he may have stressed to you? You, commanding a corps in the States--

SIMPSON: Yes. I do not recall very much about the gist of our talk. It was of a general kind of a nature. There was one thing that we discussed that he seemed to be concerned about, but I can't remember what it was. It was not too important now.

BURG: Dangerous for me to put this--

SIMPSON: Yeah.



BURG: --into your mind, but was the subject training?

SIMPSON: Well, yes, he mentioned something about training too.

BURG: He became quite a bug on it--

SIMPSON: Yes, I know.

BURG: --I recollect.

SIMPSON: Right. And, you see, in my visit up there to Patton I visited the 9th Division and the 1st Division under General Terry [de la Mesa] Allen.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: I tried to visit one of the armored divisions and almost got killed doing it. Went up there to their headquarters one day, and we drove up to this place. Had a guide. I was in a command car.

BURG: Yes.



SIMPSON: Drove up there, and nobody there. They'd moved. And my guide--some officer--was with me, and I was sitting in the back of this car with him beside me, I guess. And he said, "There's nobody here." And we got out to stretch our legs, and just as we got out of the car a machine gun burst hit the back of the thing right where we were sitting. Went right through.

BURG: Good Lord.

SIMPSON: We just missed it by thirty seconds. I think it might have been a sniper or somebody hiding in some bushes there.

BURG: General Eisenhower may have told you in Algiers to keep your head down. That may have been the important thing.

SIMPSON: But anyway I visited these outfits, and I also visited one or two regiments there. And I discovered this: that those troops weren't too well trained when they went over to Africa.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And that's one thing we did talk about.



BURG: Right. Now had he replaced General Lloyd R. Fredendall?

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: Just before that?

SIMPSON: Just before.

BURG: So your conversations didn't include anything about that? It seems to me that one of things that irked him about Fredendall was the headquarters was tucked away in a gulch carefully--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --way back.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: And I think that distressed the general.

SIMPSON: I've forgotten now. There wasn't too much discussion about Fredendall as I recall.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: I think I saw Fredendall there in Washington just before I went over there.

BURG: So he had come back.

SIMPSON: Just come back.

BURG: Right. Now was there anything in your mind, General Simpson, to make you think that Eisenhower had asked that you be one of those sent over to take a look, or do you suppose the orders were issued by Marshall or--

SIMPSON: Well, no.

BURG: --came out of the Pentagon?

SIMPSON: There were other corps commanders that were--

BURG: All right.

SIMPSON: --three or four others, I think--were ordered over about the same time I was. It was just a general--well I don't know. Maybe he said, "Better send some of these corps commanders over here to take a look." I don't know. But it was a kind of a general order. I don't know whether all corps commanders went over or not, but I know there were three or four of us.

BURG: And the next thing you knew you were being taken over to England--

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: --with your unit--

SIMPSON: Yes.



BURG: --which was ultimately renumbered, I believe.

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right. Then after seeing him there, the next time was--you see I brought the 4th Army here and took over from the 3rd Army, which was commanded by General Courtney Hicks Hodges, in January of '44.

BURG: That is here to Ft. Sam Houston?

SIMPSON: I had this 12th, you see. I came back from Africa in May, I guess, of '43. And I had that army corps there until about September, I think, when I was then assigned to command the 4th Army in California.

BURG: Oh, in California.

SIMPSON: And along with that I was promoted from two-star to three-star, lieutenant general.

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: Well, I went out and took command of the 4th army. Oh, the troops--there weren't too many; two or three or four divisions out there. That was '43. Pearl Harbor had already, you see, come along before that. And 'cause I went out there, now I often get mixed up. I went out in command of the 35th division two or three days after Pearl Harbor in '41, you see. And then this was my second trip back.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: Then I came here in January of '44 with the 4th Army; took over from the 3rd Army which took off overseas, and that's where General Patton met them and took command.

BURG: So the 3rd leaves Ft. Sam Houston--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --the 4th comes in.

SIMPSON: And then that was about the middle of January, and about a month or six weeks later I got secret orders to activate the 8th Army here to go overseas. So one day I activated the 8th Army and took command of it and turned over the 4th Army to--well, I had the two of them really here. And then I flew over to London in May--

BURG: Of '44?



SIMPSON: --'44. I arrived there on the 13th of May. Thirteenth was my lucky number all through the war. More things happened to me on the 13th--lucky things like that.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: I thought it was lucky to arrive in London in wartime-- you know, going over to command an army on the 13th of May. And when I got there, I called up and talked to--I think it was Bedell Smith. I said, "How about seeing Ike?" He said, "We're too darned busy now. You just sit tight, and Ike will see you pretty soon." Well, the next day I got secret orders--the 14th--to report to General Eisenhower at St. Paul's School on the 15th. Now St. Paul's School was a school that the great Field Marshal [Bernard Law] Montgomery went to school at, and they had taken over this school. So I arrived there at nine o'clock as ordered. This was a secret order delivered to me by--I was at the Grosvenor House Hotel--by an officer. I got there at about nine o'clock and went into this big auditorium with a stage up there.

BURG: Was this in the morning, sir?



SIMPSON: In the morning, nine o'clock in the morning. And I sat right next to (Gen. George Patton)--four or five seats back from the front seats--and up here on the stage was an outline of the whole Normandy coast invasion, all drawn out to scale up there--

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: --on this stage just like a regular theater stage.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: That had been prepared by then General Montgomery. All the high commanders--the British, the Allied Commanders, and our own--were there: [Omar N.] Bradley, Eisenhower, Montgomery with his army commanders--

BURG: [Miles Christopher] Dempsey, I guess would have been there.

SIMPSON: Dempsey and [Henry Duncan Graham] Crerar. You know those were the two--

BURG: Crerar is Canadian.



SIMPSON: Those two British armies. The second British army. And the Canadian army. Our admirals and the British admirals--the whole works. All the high command was there including Churchill and [Jan Christiaan] Smuts from South Africa.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And so Ike got up and called us to attention. He said, "we're going to have a briefing on the invasion of France." Very historic thing.

BURG: It was actually about two, three weeks--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --ahead of the event.

SIMPSON: It was the 15th of May as I recall.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And it was set up for the 5th of June or something; and then actually it took place on the 6th, remember--

BURG: Right.



SIMPSON: --after the postponing.

BURG: Were the unit lines marked--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --on the map?

SIMPSON: That's right, yes.

BURG: The beaches they were to hit?

SIMPSON: That's right. The beaches were outlined. Oh, it was a grand terrain job they did there. It showed the obstacles out there in front and all that. Montgomery as the ground commander got up, you see, and talked about the thing. And then he called on Bradley, who commanded the 1st Army, and Dempsey, the 2nd Army, and they talked. And then the Navy got in on the thing and the rest of it. It was really a very historic thing.

BURG: Now at that moment George Patton was going to command a unit that actually didn't exist, that would feed false radio--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --signals.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: Did your 8th Army actually exist as a group of divisions then?

SIMPSON: Well, no. You see I was there only with myself and about ten of my staff.



BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: The advance party I had.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: The 8th Army was right back here at Fort Sam Houston, you see. I had activated the headquarters here, you see. And the 4th Army was right along side of us and stayed here when they left. But the 3rd Army headquarters had arrived in England, and Patton had taken it over. They were out at Knutsford [Cheshire], England, where he made that talk about--what was it that got him in the doghouse?

BURG: That Britain and the United States would have--

SIMPSON: Russia-- [was omitted]

BURG: --yes, would have to rule the whole thing.

SIMPSON: I visited him there after this briefing. Well, anyway, this briefing went on for two or three hours from nine till about twelve or twelve-thirty. Then they knocked off, and we were all invited to have lunch with General Eisenhower. And I remember this: I went up and greeted him. That's the first time I'd



seen him, you see, since I arrived two days before.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And he immediately turned around and introduced me to Montgomery. He said, "I want you to meet one of my newly arrived army commanders, General Simpson."

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And that's where I first met Montgomery. And we all sat down at a big table there for lunch and had lunch, and then the party broke up. And so that was the next time I saw him after this African thing.

BURG: What did he normally call you, General?

SIMPSON: He called me Bill. Lots of my friends in my regiment and everything called me "Simp." And a lot--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --of them called me "Big Simp", because when I joined the regiment there was another Simpson about half my height--

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: --class of 1904 at West Point. He became "Little Simp," and I was "Big Simp," you see. But Ike always called me Bill.

BURG: How did some of your friends also call you Hood?

SIMPSON: Yes, yes, they did. Right. That was my name at home here. You see, I'm a native of Weatherford, Texas. And my family called me Hood (my middle name) because I was named for my grandfather Hood. My mother was a Miss Hood, and my grandfather was a rather prominent lawyer in those days and a judge and that sort of thing. So I was Hood at home.

BURG: Not related to John Bell Hood?

SIMPSON: No.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: No. Well, very distantly, so my grandfather said. Maybe it was a very, very slight relationship.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: Well, anyway, then the next time I saw him after that



briefing I called out and set up an appointment. I saw him three or four days later. I went out to his headquarters there in London. And he saw me this time. When I came in, he greeted me very nicely; and he said, "Now look. I want to sit down with you and discuss who your three corps commanders will be in your army."

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And he said, "Do you know how many corps are there back in the States?" And I think I answered, "Nine." I knew the names of all of them, you see. I had been corps commander there myself--

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: --the 12th Corps. And he said, "Well, call off the names." So I started out. I've forgotten now who they were, but I called out a name. He said, "Well, I don't like him. Just forget about him." And the next name. "Well", he said, "I'll put his name down." And out of the nine, we wound up-- he said, "Well, I'll take four, these four. Now you take your pick of any three of the four."



BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And he--

BURG: Was that unusual, General, to have it done that way?

SIMPSON: Well, in a way it was, and in another way I think I might have done the same thing. He was apparently very positive because I know there were two of these people that he said he didn't want that I knew. I said, "Well, look, Ike, I don't agree with you about that. I think very highly of these fellows. I don't think you've seen them lately, have you?" And so forth. He said, "Well, I don't know, but that's the way I feel about them."

BURG: General, when the transcript comes back to you, those nine corps commanders will be mentioned in it. Would you see if you can get their names and tell us in your editorial comment who the men were he didn't think he cared for and who the men were that you were supporting?

SIMPSON: Well, I'll try to see if I--

BURG: Might have to check your records.



SIMPSON: Yes, right. I'll see if I can remember that. NOTE: I still cannot remember those names. July 15, 1975. W.H.S.

BURG: It would help us a great deal--

SIMPSON: Yeah, sure.

BURG: --if you could do that.

SIMPSON: Right.

BURG: So you picked then three corps commanders--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --and they were satisfactory to him?

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: And then did you see him again, or was it a period of time before you made your next contact with him?

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: I suppose--

SIMPSON: Well, I'm trying to remember. You see, the invasion was coming along.



BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And it wasn't long after that that he moved down from London to the coast.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: In the headquarters there I think I went to see him twice out there. But it was very close together. And I think the last time I saw him was when he asked about these corps commanders. Maybe it was the only--the one--time. I didn't see him again because he was too busy--

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: A--although I stayed on in London. And let's see-- trying to think. I went on later and visited after the invasion. I went over and spent about two weeks with the 1st Army headquarters with General Bradley. But I don't remember seeing Ike then. I think the next time I saw him was--my 9th Army--oh, yes! I forgot this. The first time I saw him he said, "What army have you got?" I said, "The 8th Army." He said, "My goodness we can't duplicate the famous British 8th Army. I'm going to send a message to General Marshall and recommend a change." And the next day he called me up. He said, "You're now the 9th Army



instead of the 8th."

BURG: I noticed that you had been renumbered--

SIMPSON: Yeah, that's right.

BURG: --and I thought, I'll bet that's why.

SIMPSON: Well, that's the way it happened.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: Now let me ask you this. I think we'll just put this in here. Either in Africa or now that you've arrived in England did you discuss him with George Patton, your classmate? What was Patton's opinion of him now that he was seeing him under a little different circumstances--

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: --than in the late '20s--

SIMPSON: Well, I tell you I--

BURG: --or right after World War I?



SIMPSON: Later on I saw George Patton after my army became operational there--occasionally. Well the first time was shortly after the capture of Brest. I had moved up into Luxembourg--Belgium. I got orders to report to General Eisenhower at 1st Army headquarters some place in Belgium. I went up there, and Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, Hodges, and myself were there with our aides. And I arrived there about four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Hodges had his headquarters staked out there somewhere, but he also had a big French chateau--or it looked like Belgian chateau--three story building--where he had his mess. They said, "King George VI is coming tomorrow about ten o'clock to make a call." And he wanted to meet General Bradley and the three army commanders that were up there next to the British, you see.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And so that was the next time I saw him there. And Bradley, Eisenhower, Patton, Hodges, and myself--I think that was the group--the five of us had dinner together there--very informal, very nice, very pleasant. And later on we said, "Well, let's go to bed. We got to get up with the King tomorrow." And I went up on the third floor where my room was and went in there, and



I hadn't any more than gotten there when in walked George Patton who was just across the hall from me.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: We were pretty good friends and had been at West Point. He said, "Let's have a visit." I think maybe we had a drink of cognac or something. I'm not sure.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And he said, "You know, it's a funny thing. You and I here now. We were at West Point together. Here we are commanding armies." And he said, "You know, you and Hodges and I are older than either Eisenhower or Bradley, but we're going to do an awful lot of fighting for them."

BURG: Interesting.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: Very interesting.

SIMPSON: He had no bitterness about it. He talked to me either that time or another similar time like that about the slapping incident, too, you know.



BURG: I was going to ask.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: But you detected no rankling, no--

SIMPSON: No, not a bit.

BURG: --no bitterness at all about that?

SIMPSON: No bitterness at all. The only remark was, "Well, we older fox are carrying the ball here as army commanders for them."

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: You see.

BURG: Because you two were of that earlier class?

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: Now Bradley spoke of his embarrassment at finding George Patton now under him--

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right.

BURG: --after having been under Patton a little earlier.



SIMPSON: Yeah. Bradley was a grand person too, you see. I reported to him. I didn't know him hardly at all. I couldn't recall having met him frankly.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: I don't know whether I had or not till I reported to him there in London. He had command of the 1st Army. This is before the invasion, you see.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: I arrived there, as I told you, the 13th of May. And a few days later he came up from Bristol, and I went over to see him. He was awfully nice. He said, "You're a much older man than I am. I hope you don't mind serving under me." I said, "None whatever. And I--

BURG: Very good.

SIMPSON: --assure you of my full cooperation."

[Interruption]

BURG: Well, we are talking about General Bradley and his kindness to you in being concerned over the fact that he was younger.



SIMPSON: Well, he just made that remark, you know, to me, which was very nice I thought.

BURG: Indeed it was.

SIMPSON: It was. It gave me a chance to say, "Well, no. I have no feeling whatever, and you can count on me to give complete loyal support to you at any time." Don't you see.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And that's the way it worked out.

BURG: How did you feel about Bradley and Eisenhower--the working relationship that they had as you observed it?

SIMPSON: Oh, it was very close, very fine.

BURG: The two men seemed to complement one another--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --as far as you could tell.

SIMPSON: Yes, very much so. It was a good combination.

BURG: Now there was at least one time of anxiety and strain



for Bradley, and this is the incident where General Montgomery--

SIMPSON: Oh, yes.

BURG: --had you and Hodges attached to him.

SIMPSON: Yeah, right.

BURG: Would you comment on that for me, General?

SIMPSON: Well, it was unfortunate in a way that it worked out that way, but it kind of surprised me in a way. On the other hand if you stop and think about it, it wasn't. I think Eisenhower may have been in his position there as commander-in-chief with our Allies--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --you see. And, after all, General Bradley's headquarters had to move back with them where they were. They were up there in Luxembourg.

BURG: So you feel it was a decision that had to be made?

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right.

BURG: Now if I'm not mistaken General Montgomery in one of

his books or at some point almost quoted you and General Hodges verbatim as saying, "Well, thank Heavens, somebody is giving us some orders!"--as though the two of you were falling upon his neck and thanking him for saving the day. Now is that your recollection of your attitude at the time that Montgomery took your two formations over?

SIMPSON: Well, no. I don't think that came from me. It might have come from Hodges. I'm not sure. But I don't think it was meant as any special criticism, either, of Bradley, except maybe of relief that contact had been made. I don't know.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: But that's General John W. Leonard arriving.

BURG: Oh.

SIMPSON: I'm sure.



Interruption (General Leonard dropped in to visit Gen. Simpson)

SIMPSON: I mean one or the other. Is that what he said?

BURG: Yes. The way he put it he linked the two of you, if I remember correctly--Simpson and Hodges. Their attitude was one

of "well, thank goodness, now somebody is giving us some orders." And I wondered whether you were really as short on orders as all of that.

SIMPSON: Well, I wasn't. Really, I wasn't. Except that, well, you see, I was in line right next to him [Montgomery] between Hodges 1st Army and the British over here. They were right next to me.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: And, incidentally, that junction there is where the German generals tried to get Hitler to change his mind and let the attack take place there.

BURG: I wondered, Why not strike on the line between 21st Army group and you?

SIMPSON: That's right. There was a gap there, you see. And some of those German generals brought it up, but Hitler said, "To heck with it," see. And that's exactly what happened in 1918 there when they destroyed the junction of the British 5th Army--



BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --and the Belgian Army. It was the same darned thing.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: But anyway I got this order one afternoon or one morning-- I've forgotten--to report to Montgomery at Hodges' headquarters some place there in Belgium. I've forgotten the name of it now.

GEN. LEONARD: Spa is where he was originally.

SIMPSON: He was at Spa. I went to see him at Spa the day before. Got up at one or two o'clock in the morning. He said, "I've been trying to get in touch with Ike and Bradley and ask them--one of them--to order you to turn over a division to me." I said, "Hell, you don't have to do that. What do you want?" He said, "I want a division." Well, I turned one over to him right away without any order.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: So then I drove over to the headquarters and arrived there; and Montgomery was there, and he said, "You're under my



command, operational command." And that's the first I'd heard.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: But I didn't make the remark. Must have been Hodges if it was made.

BURG: Yes, if--

GEN. LEONARD: Doesn't sound like Hodges.

SIMPSON: No, it doesn't.

GEN LEONARD: He never made that remark.

SIMPSON: I don't think he made it.

BURG: It didn't sound like it to me.

GEN. LEONARD: No, Hodges never made that remark.

SIMPSON: No, I don't think either one of us did it.

BURG: By the way, I might say that the third voice now on the tape is that of General John W. Leonard, who's helping us out here for a moment.

GEN. LEONARD: Oh, is there a tape on?



SIMPSON: Oh, yes.

GEN. LEONARD: Well, I can tell you, as long as it's in there, that I've known Courtney Hodges since 1915. I was in Mexico with him, and I was in World War I with him. He had a battalion and I had a battalion with the 6th Infantry. Matter of fact, I was in his battalion for a while as a company commander.

BURG: I see.

GEN. LEONARD: And then he got executive officer of the regiment. I was with him then and many times between the wars. He would never make a remark like that.

BURG: Well, wasn't the 2nd Division a part of his command? One of the divisions that held as the "Bulge"--

SIMPSON: Yes.



BURG: --sank in?

SIMPSON: That's right. It was.

BURG: Maybe it's my natural pride in my division--I was with it after the war--but they took pains to show us what our units had done during the war. My division headquarters company--it was one

of those on the shoulder of the Bulge. It's hard to believe that with his divisions holding and staying in line and hanging in there that the commander of the army was all worked up. But don't you believe that that's pretty much what we might expect from Bernard Montgomery on occasion?

SIMPSON: Certainly. Yes. He was a very pompous guy.

BURG: Yes, yes. But you had met him briefly there in England.

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: He was not a stranger to you.



SIMPSON: Well, no. I'd met him briefly there, and he'd been by to see me two or three times, you see. Eisenhower had promised Montgomery that at one time before crossing the Rhine--somewhere in there--that he'd be given a full American army of twelve divisions. And that's when I was moved up from where I was between the 3rd Army and the 1st Army. I was suddenly picked up--I was there in Arlon, Belgium--and put up in a line between the 1st Army and the British. And I think he must have known maybe I was scheduled to do it. I didn't know it, you see, until this "Battle of the Bulge" thing. Well, anyway I was

sitting in my headquarters there in Maastricht, Holland, one day when my aide came in and said, "Field Marshal Montgomery is outside here and wants to see you." I said, "For God's sake." And I went down and brought him in, and we visited for a few minutes. He didn't even remember having met me at this luncheon there that time I told you about for the briefing.

BURG: Right.



SIMPSON: And finally he came to the point. He said, "Do you know the reason I came to see you is to see if I can't get some coffee from you?" He said, "The British Army don't have any coffee. They have tea only."

INTERVIEW WITH
General William H. Simpson

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg
Oral Historian

on

November 5, 1972

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



Gift of Personal Statement

GENERAL WILLIAM H. SIMPSON

to the

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Date: July 28, 1975

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Date: August 6, 1975



This is an interview with General William [H.] Simpson being held in San Antonio in General Simpson's apartment in the Menger Hotel, November 5, 1972. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg from the Eisenhower Library staff.

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GEN. SIMPSON: When the "Bulge" started, my army was mainly in Holland there with my headquarters at Maastricht, Holland. And I was between the British on the north or on my left and the 1st Army on the right, south of me there.

DR. BURG: But you had been further south in the line?

GEN. SIMPSON: Yes, I had been before that. I started out way up. My 9th Army became operative. I took over the siege of Brest. The 8th Army Corps was left there by General [George S.] Patton's army when he went on through on beyond Paris, you see.

DR. BURG: Right

GEN. SIMPSON: That was after the St. Lo breakout, you see. He went on as fast as he could in a marvelous dash across France there, you see.

DR. BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: So he sent one corps to capture Brest, which at that time we thought we'd need as a port. And it was to be a

primary port. Incidentally, I landed there with my division going over to Europe in 1918--World War I.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: Brest was a fine port. And it had been a German submarine base, you see, before.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: Well, anyway, I became operational there and captured Brest finally after terrific fighting house to house. There was a German paratroop division there with between thirty and forty thousand Todt workers that were rounded up into Brest there.

BURG: And that's T-o-d-t?

SIMPSON: T-o-d-t. And they put up a terrific fight there in the city of Brest. Outside there's a big city wall around. Defending this was General [Hermann Bernhard] Ramcke, a fanatical German general who obeyed orders literally from Hitler not to surrender and so forth.

BURG: Was he an SS, General?

SIMPSON: I think he was a Wehrmacht general. I'm not sure.

BURG: Oh.

SIMPSON: He was one of the fanatic, old time people. Anyway he took his paratroopers and put them around in little small groups supervising--four or five paratroopers looking after one or two hundred Todt workers to whom he gave rifles and told them to get out and fight. And he also told them if they didn't fight he'd have them shot.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And they put up a terrific fight there, you see.

BURG: With nothing much in the way of heavy weapons?

SIMPSON: Well, not too much but enough in fighting from house to house and with this big wall city around there. We just had to blast our way through those houses to get going, you see. Finally we closed into the wall and then scaled the wall and went in and took them. But we were slowed down too by ammunition that had to go up--well, we had to almost stop fighting for a while because we got our ammunition from the bridgehead--

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: --the beaches there around with these LST's. And it was in short supply. They finally had to stop giving us ammunition of all kinds--artillery, machine gun, and even small rifle ammunition--in order to send it on up to the front where Patton was going and the 1st Army were fighting up there, you see.

BURG: So most of the ammunition was being diverted east?

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right. And the railroads hadn't been opened, you know. With just a limited amount and so forth, it was a very strenuous period. Well, finally, we captured Brest in September--latter part of September--and I was transferred up into the line in Luxembourg in Belgium between the 1st and 3rd Armies. And I made plans to, you know, to advance up and cross the Rhine toward Coblenz when suddenly I was transferred from there into Holland between the British Army and the 1st Army, you see.

BURG: And this was in November?

SIMPSON: That was, well, that was in October that I was transferred up there.

BURG: Well before the "Bulge."



SIMPSON: Yes. And so I went in. As a matter of fact, I had the 8th Army Corps under General [Troy H.] Middleton that captured Brest. It was transferred with me up into this line. And, incidentally, the one thing that delayed me a lot there was that most of--I had, oh, I think, three divisions in that 8th Army Corps, three or four. The other divisions scheduled for my army were either in England or if they had come across were in the bridgehead there. They had taken all of their trucks to form the Red Ball Express--

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: --to carry ammunition and supplies up to Montgomery, who was operating up there in Holland to capture Amsterdam, you see.

BURG: Or Antwerp?

SIMPSON: Antwerp, I mean. And so here I was in this sector, the very sector that the Battle of the Bulge took place in-- went right through there, don't you see?

BURG: I see.



SIMPSON: Bastogne was right near where my headquarters were and that sort of thing.

BURG: So the attack came within the zone of your army boundary?

SIMPSON: That's right. Yes, right through it.

BURG: And you had then on the line only a portion--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --of the army?

SIMPSON: Yes. And it was spread out. It was very dangerous. I told my staff when I suddenly got orders moving me out of there, "Thank God, we're getting out of this place." The rest of my army hadn't come up yet. But after I got over into Holland I began receiving my divisions, you see, and I think I had ten or eleven divisions when the Battle of the Bulge started. As a matter of fact, we made an attack there in, oh, early November--I guess it was November 4th or 5th--to advance to the Roer--R-o-e-r--Roer River and had just about made it shortly before the Battle of the Bulge started. And then the Battle of the Bulge started, and the main drive was through this area I had left, you see--



BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --Luxembourg and Belgium. And a day or so after it started, of course, that bulge drive cut the right of the south part of the 1st Army--that corps that took over when I had left there, I guess--and that separated the 1st Army and my army from Patton down below under the 12th Army Group. And so General Eisenhower put the two armies, the 1st Army and my 9th Army, under Field Marshal Montgomery's operational control.

BURG: Taking them away from Omar Bradley?



SIMPSON: That's right. That left General Bradley with just the 3rd Army. And, incidentally, that was the beginning of quite a lot of ill feeling between Montgomery and not only Patton but Bradley, too, especially.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: You're familiar with that probably.

BURG: I remember one of the last things we talked about-- General Leonard had joined us--in my last interview with you.

SIMPSON: Yeah

BURG: I mentioned to you that there was a story that circulated that either you or Courtney Hodges had said when Montgomery took you over, "Oh, marvelous. It's wonderful to be under somebody's direction now."

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: And both you and General Leonard knew you hadn't said it--

SIMPSON: No.



BURG: --and you very much doubted that Courtney Hodges had said it.

SIMPSON: Yes, I did. Right, really.

BURG: Well, I believe this may have been a story that Montgomery or people in Twenty#One 21st Army Group--

SIMPSON: Exactly, exactly, yeah.

BURG: --they had spread that story.

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right. As I recall, after the Battle of the Bulge ended, Montgomery had a very pompous kind of a press conference. I don't remember what he said, but he apparently took full credit for the Battle of the Bulge and was indirectly, at least, critical of the American effort. And it made General Bradley furious. He told me not long after that that he was just waiting for a chance to tell Montgomery off. Now whether he ever did or not I don't know. But I know this: he came up to my headquarters once or twice there at Maastricht with General Eisenhower to confer with Montgomery.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: That started a lot of ill feeling there--very, very strong.

BURG: You were there when those meetings took place?

SIMPSON: Well, I didn't attend them. A couple of times they came to my headquarters at Maastricht. Montgomery's headquarters were about, oh, thirty or forty miles away--I've forgotten--some Netherlands town. And they'd drive. I'd give them transportation,

and they'd drive over there to see him. But--

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: --I was never in on one of those conferences.

BURG: Right. And they never talked with you when they came back?

SIMPSON: No, they never discussed just what went on there at all with me.

BURG: But you had a fairly good idea how they felt.

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: Had you sensed anything about the coming of the "Bulge" while you were in Holland? Before it happened was there any activity in front of your army that led you to think something might be afoot?

SIMPSON: Well, no, no, nothing special. It came as quite a surprise to me and to all of us really, although I know this: that I was quite happy to leave that area--the way I was holding it up there. It was, oh, about a hundred miles wide, I think,



with a couple of divisions stretched out there, and I frankly couldn't help but think back to World War I where the Germans had put on a secret attack. That was--I've forgotten--maybe in April.

BURG: March?

SIMPSON: March or April.

BURG: March, 1918.

SIMPSON: '18. And they destroyed the British 5th Army--

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: --and part of the Belgian Army there, you see.

BURG: [Gen. Sir Hubert] Gough's army I guess it was at--

SIMPSON: Yeah. And here I was sitting in an army headquarters with just one corps in there--very lightly held. Those Germans are always past masters for surprise attacks, you know.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And so I was glad to get out of there, but I don't recall any concrete information that that thing was going on up

there. They did it awfully well, you see. It was cold and freezing and all--bad weather.

BURG: Right. What was your reaction when you heard that the attack has struck? What was your immediate reaction? Do you recollect that?

SIMPSON: Well, of course, I was way over at the flank, don't you see.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: We had just finished this attack closing to the Roer River, and I was in the process of reorganizing, really. The 7th Armored Division was out on the flank, and the 2nd Armored Division I was pulling out of the front line into reserve. The 30th Division was pulling out into reserve; and I had already told General [Ernest N.] Harmon, who commanded the 2nd Armored Division-- I said, "Now I want to organize these three divisions and whatever else is back here in reserve into a counterattack plan, and I want you to reconnoiter the Army area and fix up a counterattack plan for me."

BURG: Was that with regard to your own--

SIMPSON: For my own area. That was all, you see.

BURG: Pardon me, General. Were you organizing a counterattack plan--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --because your own operation--

SIMPSON: That's right. And that was before the Battle of the Bulge, really.

BURG: Yeah.

SIMPSON: It was just a safety precaution. And good tactical procedure.

BURG: So you thought your attack might cause an attack against you?

SIMPSON: That's right. Because here was my army, and right here with quite a gap between us and the British Army. That's the kind of thing that happened over there in World War I.

BURG: They hit right on the hinge.

SIMPSON: That's right. Right there. And that's what I was thinking about, not about the "bulge" at all.



BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: If they were going to plan an attack, that would have been a good place to try. And later on I read two or three times that some of the German generals tried to get indirectly--I don't know whether it was directly or not--to Hitler to change the plan from where it was there in the "bulge." They actually wanted the attack put through that area instead of the "bulge" area.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: You see?

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: But he wouldn't listen, you see.

BURG: So you were set for what made sense to you: an attack at the juncture point between your army--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --and the British Army to your north.

SIMPSON: That's right.



BURG: Actually they struck not against your southern flank but against the southern flank really--

SIMPSON: Flank of the 1st Army.

BURG: --of the 1st Army.

SIMPSON: Yeah, on my right, and in that very sparsely held area that I just left before.

BURG: Right. And instead of having the advantage of confusion between British communications and your communications in 9th Army, they struck between two American groups.

SIMPSON: That's right, exactly.



BURG: But as a result of that then, you were put under the operational control--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --of Montgomery.

SIMPSON: The attack was on the 16th of December. General Hodges' headquarters was at Spa, Belgium, and to my right and my south and

a little bit to the front from where I was here in Maastricht, Holland. And the attack took place on the 16th of December and the first night of the attack General Hodges called me up, and he said, "I don't want to talk over the phone, but can you be up at my headquarters here tomorrow by 5:30?" And I said, "Yes, I'll come up." Well, I had to get up about 2:30 in the morning of 17 December and travel in a jeep and so forth, and I did take an armored car along as a kind of protection, you know. I didn't know what we'd run into. I was stopped a number of times by our own people because, even right from the start, the report got out that the Germans were masquerading as Americans.

BURG: Yes.



SIMPSON: Well, anyway I got up there about 5:30 and went in to see General Hodges; and about that time they brought in a German major-- a German staff officer: a major or lieutenant colonel; I've forgotten which--who had a map of that whole German plan of attack.

BURG: Oh, he did!

SIMPSON: We took a look at it, and I think that was, as I recall, about the first real picture we got of what was going on. Hodges, of course, was in pretty bad straits because his people were falling

back then from the closing in by the Germans which caused a gap in his line. And he had to leave Spa, Belgium, I think that same day. I left shortly after seeing the map. Anyway, I told him, "Well, I think from what we see here I don't feel too much alarmed. We're going to have to do some hard fighting, but I think eventually we'll stop this thing."

BURG: Did the map carried by the German officer show the general objectives--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --of their attack?

SIMPSON: As I recall, it was kind of an outline thing, but it showed the bulge that they planned to make and a general picture of at least the major units--the armies and corps, you know. I don't know whether it broke it down by divisions or not, but it was a pretty good figure.

BURG: I see. But it did give the military units that were taking part in the attack?

SIMPSON: Yes, right.

BURG: At least a corps?



SIMPSON: Yes, the major units.

BURG: Now how about us? Did it show us on that map down to division level, let's say?

SIMPSON: Well, I don't recall just how far it went that way. I just took a glance at the thing; and, of course, they took it on, and I left shortly after that.

BURG: Did either one of you officers think that this might have been a plant?

SIMPSON: Well, no, I didn't think so at the time, and I don't know what the people who brought this officer in and caught this map thought about it. I think they captured him, you know, in a manner that would indicate that it was the real thing. I am sure General Hodges did not think it was a plant.

BURG: I see. But having seen that, you were not quite so doubtful of the outcome then?

SIMPSON: No. I knew we were in for some terrific fighting, of course.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: When I got in to see Hodges, he said, "I've been trying to get in touch with General Bradley or General Eisenhower, and I can't reach either one of them." And he said, "What I wanted to ask them is to order you to turn over a division to me." And I said, "Hell, you don't have to. I've got the 30th Infantry division in reserve here; if you need it, I'll turn it over to you right now." Which I did. You see, then after that--

BURG: This was the 30th Infantry Division?



SIMPSON: Yes--I turned over, oh, eight of my divisions to the 1st Army and held with I think three divisions that I had left plus a couple I took over from the 1st Army that they left in place over there.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: But that was my contribution to the "bulge." I just sat there in Holland holding where I was, and this thing took place, oh, south of me, you see, on my right.

BURG: So the first division that you gave to Hodges you gave him on your own authority?

SIMPSON: Yeah, I did. That's right.

BURG: Now those other four divisions or so--were those given to Hodges by orders of General Montgomery?

SIMPSON: No, no. They came, well, mainly through Bradley, I think, Yes.

BURG: Before you were placed under Montgomery?



SIMPSON: Before. It was, let's see, 20 December, that I got orders suddenly that I was under Montgomery's command and to report to him at 1st Army headquarters somewhere in Belgium. I've forgotten where it was. They fell back, you see, from Spa, Belgium. And I went over there in the afternoon and reported to Montgomery, and he took over the two armies right then.

BURG: Now you reported to him personally?

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: What can you tell me about making that report to him? What was his reaction? What kind of spirits did he seem to be in?

SIMPSON: Well, he conducted himself very well, I thought. He was cool and calm about the thing and very definite about what he wanted done. What he did was a very good thing I think. He took-- they took--General Joe [J. Lawton] Collins. I've forgotten. Was it the 7th Army Corps he had over there? Whatever corps he had, Collins had fought, you see, under Montgomery when Montgomery was the ground force commander at the invasion and the bridgehead. Joe Collins' corps had captured Cherbourg, and did very well. So he [Montgomery] especially asked Hodges for Collins. He said, "I would like very much to have him." And then he took, let's see, the 2nd Armored and a couple of my divisions and formed an army corps on the flank of this "bulge" that was coming down there. And, you know, I always felt that if he had been just a little bit more bold than he was that he could have waited and attacked the shoulder of that thing like Patton did coming up from the other side and done a lot more damage. As it was, they became involved head-on and really stopped the German advance before it got to the Meuse River. But anyway that was a splendid idea, I thought, that he form this corps over on the flank, and eventually they stopped the drive. But in the meantime, up there in Holland, were three or four British divisions in reserve and



only one, I think, that ever fired a shot--I don't know how many they fired. There was one division that he brought down and deployed or put it in the path of this drive on the Meuse River. And so that's another criticism I had of the British. They had three or four divisions up there in reserve, but they were between them and the Channel. They weren't used.

BURG: Do you suppose that if the German drive had gotten closer to Antwerp than it did that he'd have thrown them in?

SIMPSON: Well, yes, maybe--probably so. He was, of course, naturally quite concerned about their closing into the British Channel, don't you know.

BURG: Yes, right. Now you think too it might have been better if he had taken this army corps that he created and perhaps held it back a bit?

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right.

BURG: Not used it quite so soon--let the attack's momentum--

SIMPSON: Yes, that's right. That was my--

BURG: --die.

SIMPSON: --feeling. Right. I might have been wrong about it, but that was my feeling.

BURG: Was it your thought that ultimately Patton from the south and you and Hodges from the north might have been able to pinch them off inside that "bulge?"

SIMPSON: Well, not my army because I was, you see, holding this--

BURG: Still?

SIMPSON: --flank with five divisions dug in defensively, and I wasn't in on it at all.

BURG: Yeah.

SIMPSON: But these others just happened to be two or three divisions I turned loose there to form this army corps. But that was my feeling. We might have done more damage had we attacked like Patton did--more on the shoulder than they did there.

BURG: But what happened was that instead of coming in from the shoulder and striking them in the flank--

SIMPSON: Yes.



BURG: --the troops were thrown in in front of them?

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: And so you slow and you blunt the offensive.

SIMPSON: That's right, that's right.

BURG: But I suppose then that you use up your own men. They're fatigued; their ammunition runs low.

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: Now they cannot effectively counterattack?

SIMPSON: Yeah, right.

BURG: So instead of being able to chew off big chunks of that German attack, why you finally stop it and--

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: --throw it back out.

SIMPSON: Right. It was successful--what happened--all right. I've never made a study of the thing enough, but that was my own feeling about it at the time and still is really. But

maybe the circumstances were a little bit different from the way I visualize it now.

BURG: Have you read John Eisenhower's The Bitter Woods?

SIMPSON: I have the book, and I've never finished it yet.

BURG: I haven't finished my copy either.

SIMPSON: Right.

BURG: I was going to ask you if you knew what his--

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: --feeling was about it.

SIMPSON: I wanted to look and see if he--

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: --had gotten into that.

BURG: Now did you get to Montgomery's headquarters that day at the same time as General Hodges. Did the two of you arrive--

SIMPSON: Well, it was at General Hodges' headquarters that he



[Montgomery] asked me to meet him.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: He came over from Holland there to wherever it was there in Belgium--some little town or little place. And we met there and discussed the situation and made this arrangement for my taking over--well, I took over what was left. I think there were two divisions in Collins' corps that were in line there that were transferred over to my army, you see. And he, [Montgomery], oh, yes, he did send one of those British divisions over to near my headquarters and put them under my command in reserve.

BURG: In case you needed them.

SIMPSON: Yeah, in case I needed it if an attack had been through there.

BURG: Do you happen to remember the number of that British division?

SIMPSON: I think it was the 51st Highland. I'm not sure.

BURG: Oh, yes, yes.



SIMPSON: I think so.

BURG: Yeah.

SIMPSON: It was there, oh, for five or six days--maybe a week--and then they moved it off some other place.

BURG: Right.

SIMPSON: Right.

BURG: Well, we'll be able to check that.

SIMPSON: Yeah, right.

BURG: Is it fair to say, General, that to your knowledge neither you nor Hodges nor Montgomery were panicky about the situation?

SIMPSON: Oh, yes, yes. Nobody was panicky about it. And, of course, it was a time of great stress, you know, because the 1st Army had fallen back and it was a surprise all the way through.

BURG: Now did you get any messages that came either from Bradley's or Eisenhower's headquarters that indicated that anyone there in those two headquarters was panicked?



SIMPSON: No, no, I don't recall exactly. But everybody was confident, you know, and cool, and they met the situation very well I thought.

BURG: All right. Now as far as your army was concerned was there any kind of attack made against the front that you were holding?

SIMPSON: No, no.

BURG: No diversionary attempts?

SIMPSON: No, none at all. We know now they didn't have anything left because they threw it all into that "bulge" thing.

BURG: Right. So, really, they were holding very lightly--

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: --in front of you.

SIMPSON: Yes, right.

BURG: But under the circumstances you didn't feel that you could try to probe that until--

SIMPSON: No, no.



BURG: --the other thing was--

SIMPSON: Actually, what I did was--with this all this fighting, you know, going on and because that German advance lasted several days before they kind of ran out of gasoline and all the rest of it down there--what I did was direct my people to dig in and hold defensively--prepare. We didn't know whether they might bring up some reserves from some other place and take a crack at us there.

BURG: Yes, they might have tried to expand the shoulder--

SIMPSON: That's right, yeah.

BURG: --and drive it on.

SIMPSON: So I had my people dig in real defensively; and we could have taken care of ourselves, I think, very well if we'd have had an attack there.

BURG: Now was it your thought later on, General, that Eisenhower had made an arrangement with Montgomery to give him an American army and that you had been moved up there alongside the British for that purpose--



SIMPSON: I think so.

BURG: --before the "bulge?"

SIMPSON: I think that was it. I don't recall. Nobody ever said anything to me about it, but I know Eisenhower. I think, in his book--I don't know--

[Interruption]

BURG: You think that both men, Eisenhower and Bradley, and, perhaps, Montgomery, all mention it in their--

SIMPSON: I think so. As a matter of fact, that was during the period that Montgomery was really kind of a thorn in the flesh to General Eisenhower. You know, his big argument was he wanted to command all the ground forces, American and British. He felt that the ground forces should be under one command like a field force. And he wanted to be it.

BURG: Of course.

SIMPSON: See, that would have meant three American armies and one British army and so forth. His idea was that GHQ under General Eisenhower was too far back to handle such a thing. And Eisenhower

said, "no." He didn't agree with that, don't you see. Anyway, he Montgomery also kept saying he wanted to make a drive up there through the northern part of Holland and on north of the

Ruhr ~~Roer~~ toward Berlin.

BURG: One narrow front--

SIMPSON: Narrow front, don't you see--

BURG: --versus that broad front.

SIMPSON: --and hold on the others. But Eisenhower said, "No, I want to push all along the front."

BURG: Did you feel any sympathy for Montgomery's view with respect to that narrow front?

SIMPSON: Well, not too much. But--

BURG: What I've not been able to understand fully is why he preferred that to a broad front?

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: The story is that he felt that concentrating the effort--

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: --would crack through.

SIMPSON: Yes, he did.

BURG: But it seems to me that that broad front stretches the Germans about as thin as they could be stretched.

SIMPSON: Exactly, exactly. The other point of the argument is this: had they realized we were holding over here and concentrating for a drive, they could have concentrated opposite us, you see.

BURG: Yes, yes.

SIMPSON: We hadn't crossed the Rhine either.

BURG: Now you had not moved through the Siegfried Line either, had you?

SIMPSON: No, not entirely. No, we hadn't.

BURG: So you weren't really sure how stiff the resistance would be there.



SIMPSON: Yeah, right. Now, of course, Patton said, on the other hand, that if when he was stopped up there--oh, wherever he was there in France when the Red Ball Express was formed to send all these supplies up to Montgomery--

BURG: Oh, yes.

SIMPSON: --Patton said if it had been left with him he could have gone on to Berlin, you see, on that same theory of "keep making a drive." That was earlier. And there's some people I've read here since the war who seemed to have agreed with him that he might have made it that way, but I don't know about that.

BURG: That would have been merely a narrow front with the Americans--

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: --in charge.

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: And then the arguments apply--

SIMPSON: Yeah, right.

BURG: --that we would use against Montgomery's doing the same thing.

SIMPSON: Sure, exactly. But somewhere in the line--I don't know how it happened, don't recall now--General Eisenhower did assure Montgomery that he would turn over an American army to him; and I think that's where my army came in, you know, being a new army. I think when Bradley--now I don't know: if I ever see General Bradley, I'm going to ask him or maybe take a look and see if there is anything in his book about it--but when General Bradley learned of that, that's when my headquarters were transferred up next to the British. Mine would be the newest army. I don't blame him. He had the 1st Army and the 3rd Army. They had been fighting, you see, two or three months more than my army--much more operational, much more experience. And that's how I happened to be up there, don't you see. And as it was, when the Battle of the Bulge was over, I was left under his command.

BURG: You were left under Monty's command?

SIMPSON: Monty's command.

BURG: Was Hodges 1st returned to Bradley?

SIMPSON: Yes, returned to Bradley.

BURG: Now was your army left under Montgomery's command for the remainder of--

SIMPSON: Well, it was left until shortly after we crossed the Rhine. I crossed the Rhine under his command.

BURG: Under Monty's?



SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: What was your feeling when you knew that the Rhine had been crossed further south by American armies while you gentlemen were all getting set to cross it?

SIMPSON: Well, it made me mad as hell, I'll tell you, because what happened was this: shortly after the Battle of the Bulge Montgomery was fighting down between the Rhine and the Meuse River coming down this way; and I was close to the R-o-e-r River. I got up a plan to attack and close to the Rhine, and--

BURG: How much distance would that be from the Roer River to the Rhine?

SIMPSON: Well, it would vary as I remember it: oh, probably thirty or forty--maybe up to seventy-five, eighty--miles as you went up north there.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And the Germans had those dams--six or eight dams--well to the south of this little old Roer River. R-o-e-r River was just a little stream; that ran through a valley right along my front, running almost north and south and not quite parallel to the Rhine because it closed into the Rhine somewhere there. I've forgotten the exact topography now. So the big question was whether the Germans would blow those dams up and flood that whole valley.

BURG: I see.

SIMPSON: And there was quite a to-do about trying to capture those dams. They tried to bomb them: the British dropped bombs on there trying to let the water out and that sort of thing. But never was successful. And it wasn't till, oh, later on that we really captured them. But the Germans blew the "pin-stops" [discharge valves]. There were five or six dams there, and they



all could turn water into the last one. That one emptied into the Roer River. Well, they blew the "pin-stops" just before my attack was to take place. And this little stream--little, oh, river: maybe twenty or thirty or forty feet wide--began to rise, and the water became much swifter. We didn't know whether it was run-off or whether it was from the dam. Well, it came just before my army was to make the attack. Finally--I think it was about twenty-four hours--I had to make a decision by 4:00 o'clock--4:30 or 5:00 o'clock--today whether to halt this jumpoff to take place, say, 3:00 o'clock tomorrow morning. And then this word came in about this stream being in flood. And, well, I had the engineers all along watching the thing, you see, because even with that small stream there we had to put footbridges across and that sort of thing for the infantry. And if the water from the dam really flooded it and I had some people across there, they'd be cut off from our supplies; and the Germans might attack them over there. It was quite a problem. Well, I had quite a time deciding whether I was going to let that attack go the next morning or postpone it. And so it was one of the tough decisions I had. Finally, when I received the report that it was still rising and the speed of the water was dangerous for these footbridges, I said, "All right, we'll postpone this attack for

twenty-four hours." By the next day the river had overflowed its banks. It was clearly dangerous to try to go across, so I postponed this thing until we could really decide when it was going to come down. Well, anyway, finally the water went down; and we went across, and my army closed to the Rhine. It was the first Allied Army to reach the Rhine. And shortly after we got over there I discovered a place right near the southern edge of the German industrial Ruhr, a very good place to cross the Rhine. Had I been under General Bradley, I would have just sent a division over there just like that. But being under Montgomery--right from the start he made it very plain that if he had a plan to do anything he didn't want anybody to do anything that would interfere with that plan, you see.

BURG: No improvising.

SIMPSON: No improvising at all. That's another thing I didn't like about him. He's a great commander and all that, but there was quite a difference from the way we operate.

BURG: Was there a bridge at this point?

SIMPSON: No, there was no bridge there, but there was a canal that came down. The diagram was something like this: if the

Rhine River is here, this canal came along almost parallel and then emptied into the river here.

BURG: On your side of the Rhine?

SIMPSON: On my side of the Rhine. And you could load boats out of sight of the other side. These assault boats could go down and cross the river. You could get into the river without being seen, and, besides, patrols over there showed there was no enemy there anyway.

BURG: What was the far shore like? Flat or--



SIMPSON: Well, there were no buildings, no towns right just across. It was just south of--I've forgotten--one of those well-known German towns there on the edge of the Ruhr and not an ideal place to get across, but I think all we had to do was just walk across. But when I went especially up to talk to Montgomery about it, he said, "Well, you get across, what can you do?" He just practically turned me down completely, you see. Well, within a week or ten days later--whenever it was--suddenly they get the Remagen Bridge, and everybody piled across. I could have been over there a week or ten days before, don't you see.

BURG: His fear was that you would get over there and then opposition would build up and it would be difficult to supply you.

SIMPSON: That's right. He couldn't visualize a change of-- actually, we worked for a month planning his crossing of the Rhine, you see. And he didn't want to interrupt that. Well, we could have piled across there just like they did at Remagen Bridge and built the pontoon bridges in a hurry and all that sort of thing. I had the bridging available, and--

BURG: So you could actually have brought your army across too.

SIMPSON: That's right. And so could he. I think he missed a great opportunity there. And I've got a book here. Let's see, Montgomery of Alamein [either The Montgomery Legend or Montgomery: The Field Marshal]. Is that it by [Reginald William] Thompson?

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: He's very critical about that same episode. And so you asked how I felt about the Remagen Bridge. I was delighted to see it, but I was kind of sore because I had a great chance to get across there myself.



BURG: Now when Montgomery said, "Well, you get across and then what are you going to do?", what was your response to that?

SIMPSON: Well, he just said, "What can you do?" I said, "Well, we can go across and just keep going. We'll build bridges and make the whole effort across there." Of course, here was the German Ruhr, up here, you see? And his plan was to cross north of there, you see. And it would have been a complete change from the plan that he was making in great detail, you see. But the same way when Patton went across--he sent a division across down there somewhere--and the same way with the Remagen Bridge: they got across and just kept going. They built up rapidly, don't you see.

BURG: Yeah. Now before you went to Montgomery you already had patrols across the Rhine--

SIMPSON: Yeah, right.

BURG: --looking for German opposition.

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: And those patrols told you there was very little.

SIMPSON: There was nothing over there to give us hardly any resistance at all. It was up in the German Ruhr and up to the north there where we finally did cross that they had a lot of anti-aircraft stuff and that sort of thing. But, anyway, that was it, and we sat tight. Oh, two or three weeks later we went across with his plan, don't you see.

BURG: Yes, yes. More the master of the set piece, isn't he?

SIMPSON: Yeah, that's right.

BURG: Has to have it all lined up the way he wants it--

SIMPSON: That's right.



BURG: --and will understand it. Well, there's been a lot of controversy about the decision not to go to Berlin.

SIMPSON: Yes.

BURG: And we all know that General Eisenhower's idea was that that terrain had already been assigned to the Russian zone--

SIMPSON: Yeah.

BURG: --and he did not wish to move in there. And I guess there

was a certain amount of fear based on intelligence reports that there was an Alpine redoubt being constructed.

SIMPSON: Yes, I think that had a tremendous influence on General Eisenhower. I'm not sure, but I think it did.

BURG: Well, as an army commander on the spot and across the Rhine-- were you now out from Montgomery's command by the way?

SIMPSON: Well, you see, I crossed the Rhine with two divisions initially. The German Ruhr is right here; and there's a river called the Lippe River, I think that runs into the Rhine; just north of the Ruhr. Now up in there near a little town called Wesel is where the British crossed, and I crossed down south of there with two divisions. And so with those two divisions I built up. And one of my army corps took part in capturing the German Ruhr and encircling that Ruhr pocket of about 300,000 Germans under General feldmarschall Walter Model.



BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: You remember that?

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: The 1st Army sent the corps up, and we surrounded them. Well, now, while that was done, I took the other two corps, got across the Rhine, and headed for Berlin and--

BURG: Under directions to do so?

SIMPSON: Well, yes, because Montgomery--you see, I crossed under his command--he said--his order was--"We'll cross the Rhine; and we'll play around on the plains of Germany; but we will go as rapidly as possible for Berlin." That was his objective.

BURG: Was that a written order to you, General, or--



SIMPSON: Yeah, that's right. That was the objective. So we took off that way, and my army advanced very rapidly and ran away from the British and everything else. We went about, oh, a hundred miles or so--hundred and twenty miles--in eighteen or nineteen days. It was really a very rapid advance. So we got to the Elbe River and got across the Elbe with a bridgehead about, I think, April 11th or 12th. And that little bridgehead was knocked back; but the 83rd Division came along, got a firm bridgehead which we enlarged to about thirty square miles--I think--got a pontoon

bridge across, and were planning to build another one that night. And on April the 15th I got a message in the morning from General Bradley, who was at Heidelberg. He asked me to get in a plane and come over and see him right away. He had something to tell me. When I got there, he said, "Well, you must stop on the Elbe. You can't go into Berlin."

BURG: How far was Berlin from where your leading units were?

SIMPSON: Well, around sixty miles. Well, the north corps was about fifty-three miles from Berlin and was there at Magdeburg. It was about sixty miles--just about the way we had been going--about a day's march really. And this bridgehead was opposed by kind of a crust of newly formed outfits that were putting up some opposition; but with another pontoon bridge and another division or two across, we could have broken through. I think we could have been in Berlin in twenty-four hours. But I said, "Well, where did this order come from?" And he said, "Well, from General Eisenhower." Well, my orders were from Bradley. You see, I was transferred from Montgomery's command about April 4th after we crossed the Rhine on March 23rd--I think it was. And my people finally got loose and started advancing around, oh, April 1st or 2nd. And about April 4th I was suddenly ordered

relieved from Montgomery's operational command and put back under Bradley's. There was no change in orders; we just kept going. And I was very anxious to capture Berlin, and I knew nothing about this. General Eisenhower nor Bradley had told me anything. General Eisenhower, I think, had decided sometime before he wasn't going to try to capture Berlin, you know. I knew nothing about it till this April 15th when Bradley told me. And so I was quite disappointed over that, really; but still I understand now that the zones of occupation had been formed already.

BURG: But you didn't know that--

SIMPSON: I didn't.

BURG: --until you were told.

SIMPSON: I knew the zones had been, but I knew nothing about this other thing--that we would hold off and let the Russians come in there and take the town.

BURG: How close were they? Do you recollect?

SIMPSON: Well, they were pretty close. They were over on that-- was it the Oder River? They were only thirty or forty miles from



Berlin, but they had halted there and had been halted for some time. And as it was, I could have beat them into Berlin if I had been allowed to go. But still--

BURG: You're firmly convinced in your own mind that had you been released to go you could have gotten there before the Russians did?

SIMPSON: Oh, yes, easily.

BURG: Now wouldn't resistance have stiffened up against you as you got closer?

SIMPSON: I don't think so. What was left of the German armies were over there against the Russians except this little crust that was around me, and a good part of that was pulled away about the time I was halted. And--I don't know--I had a feeling that maybe the Germans might have welcomed--what organized things was left. They were in terrible shape, you know. And with Hitler there and that--well, it wasn't long after that till he committed suicide, you know. They were in chaos, really--almost.

BURG: How about your units that were right up there on the Elbe? Did they also feel that they could do it?

SIMPSON: Oh, yes, yes, indeed. I had--let's see--I had six or seven divisions on the Elbe River there; the 2nd Armored Division; the 30th; the 83rd had the bridgehead; and the 35th. I had two army corps there and was in very good shape to have gone on and made the advance. But you see with the occupation having been decided by that peculiar outfit that did it, you know--and that's one of the amazing things to me about this war: how a group like that without consulting--I don't think Eisenhower knew anything about it till he saw the plan--how such a thing like that could happen I don't know.

BURG: Your feeling was that there should have been no no line so far west or--

SIMPSON: Well, my understanding of that occupation--the way Germany was occupied and with Berlin in there and all that--was that it was done by a group of people in London--just who they were I don't know--and finally came on down as a directive, I think, to Eisenhower. And I don't know--I haven't really gotten into that--I don't think he was consulted. That's my own feeling about it. But when it was once decided, he accepted it, you see. And then the other thing was--there were two things--that way back in--



let's see, this was April; I think back, oh, maybe in March; possibly before we crossed the Rhine--the question of Berlin came up. Eisenhower asked Bradley what he thought about it. And I think maybe that was after this occupation thing had come out too; I'm not sure. But anyway Bradley remembered the terrific fight we had at Aachen where the Germans made a stand there.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: And he said, "Well, I think to capture Berlin might cost us a hundred thousand casualties. It isn't worth it." We were out to destroy the German army. Now that's always our doctrine in our army: to heck with capitals and so forth; get the enemy's army, and you've got everything, don't you see.

BURG: A Ulysses S. Grant philosophy.

SIMPSON: Yeah, that's right. Same thing. And that was our doctrine and our teaching at Leavenworth and the War College and all that sort of thing. And that's what Eisenhower was thinking about too. When he got word--that was where this redoubt comes in--that the remnants of the German army might hole in in the Alps.



he wasn't too keen about taking a loss of a hundred thousand troops or a lot of troops in Berlin where eventually you turn it over to the Russians--a good part of it--anyway, don't you see.

BURG: Yes.

SIMPSON: So he wanted to make sure that that redoubt thing wouldn't take place. So he said, "All right, halt on the Elbe, and we'll let Patton go on over in that direction," you see.

BURG: Right. But your personal feeling was that your 9th Army could have got to Berlin?

SIMPSON: Yes. Had it been allowed to, I'm positive it could.

BURG: Now you had food and fuel and ammunition?

SIMPSON: That's right.

BURG: Your tanks had been on a drive. Were they still in condition to--

SIMPSON: Yes, sir, we were in good shape all the way through. Let's see, who was this famous advisor to the president?

BURG: Harry Hopkins?

SIMPSON: Hopkins. He made a statement that we'd outrun our supplies and all that sort of thing. Well, he didn't know what he was talking about because my army was in good shape, the supplies were in good shape, and we could have gone right on to Berlin and put up a darned good show. We'd crossed the Rhine there and built bridges across. I had even railroads coming down into my area, you see, carrying supplies. And I had--I don't know how many--these big ten ton truck companies--hundreds of them--with supplies. And we had advanced very rapidly; but we had maintained our equipment, and we had good supplies there.

BURG: And your losses in vehicles and men had been light--

SIMPSON: Yes, very light.

BURG: --on the drive to the Elbe?



SIMPSON: That's right. The resistance was sketchy, don't you know. The Germans were disorganized all the way through there.

BURG: And at the Elbe there was nothing in front of you at all?

SIMPSON: Well, yes, we had this--

BURG: Or very little?

SIMPSON: As I say, we were west of the Elbe on the west bank, but we had a bridgehead across there with one pontoon bridge across and another one to be built that night and another corps up, oh, about twenty or thirty miles to the north getting ready to cross that same night with very little opposition up there. So I think we could have plowed across there within twenty-four hours and been in Berlin in twenty-four to forty-eight hours easily.

BURG: Now would you have seen any problem as you came up on Berlin in contacting the Russian troops? Do you suppose there could have been incidents of the two armies clashing?

SIMPSON: Well, there might have been if we had gone on into Berlin--if we'd have gone up there and crashed into the city itself--because the Russians might have come in to meet us there. And we would have had to have been on the lookout for something like that.

BURG: Right. But, basically, you don't think it would have cost the hundred thousand casualties that--

SIMPSON: No, I don't, no.

BURG: --that they thought.

SIMPSON: Not at that time; the situation had changed. But still that's all conjecture now. It's water over the dam.

BURG: Sure.

SIMPSON: The decision was made to stop there, and--I don't know-- I think maybe Eisenhower was right under the circumstances the way it was to decide what he did decide. The one big thing about it in my opinion is that if we ever get mixed up in another big war we ought to have a political section with the GHQ that would be looking forward into what the political situation might be later on, don't you see.

BURG: Was it your feeling that the British did a better job in this respect than we did?

SIMPSON: Well, I think they did, but they sure as hell slipped up on this thing here because this occupation of Germany--now maybe that met with their approval, I don't know--but the occupation of Germany--the way it worked out with these [zones] and with the damned Russians coming in there the way they did--you see, it was just made to order for them in the final analysis to close in there and take East Germany and Poland and the rest of it. I don't know.

It seemed to me like the Allies, the British and ourselves, slipped up on that occupational thing. And I've heard that Roosevelt at one time drew a line at what he thought the occupation should be that was quite different from the one that came out. But it was just a line. He said, "This is the way I think it ought to be." And I don't know. I've heard it got lost in the file somewhere.

BURG: Was it your view, General Simpson, that you should have pushed on, on that broad front, until you were in contact with the Russians wherever that occurred?

SIMPSON: Well, yes, under certain other circumstances, but not with this picture here. I think we did right to stop there on the Elbe, really, you know, because had I advanced into Berlin even with very little loss we'd still have had to pull back and let the Russians come in there, you know. As it was, they occupied about half of it.

