



INTERVIEW WITH  
Henry J. Matchett

by

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Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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Henry J. Matchett  
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This interview is being conducted with Henry J. Matchett, Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Retired, at his home in Port Hueneme, California, on July 22, 1976. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are General Matchett, Mrs. Matchett, and Dr. Soapes.



DR. SOAPES: First of all, General Matchett, would you tell us where and when you were born and about your formal education.

GEN. MATCHETT: I was born in Toronto, Canada, on January the 7th, 1891. My people moved to Minnesota when I was about three years old. I attended school there, including the University of Minnesota, in the class of 1913. In 1913 I went to Alaska, up in the Klondike, with a mining company, was there for about two years, came back, and joined the Minnesota national guard when they moved to the border in 1916. While down there I took an examination for the regular army and, having passed that examination, I stayed in the army until my retirement on February the 28th, 1950.

DR. SOAPES: Your major field of study at the university had been in engineering?

GEN. MATCHETT: That's correct.

DR. SOAPES: In World War I, did you see service overseas?

MATCHETT: I was a first lieutenant and a temporary captain during World War I. I went overseas shortly before the war ended as an advance party from my division. But I saw very, very little service over there. I was there when the war did end. Then I returned and followed the usual procedure of army officers in various stations. Went to the infantry school at Fort Benning; the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth; then I spent four years as an instructor in tactics at the infantry school. And, following other assignments, I went to the War College and graduated from the Army War College in 1940. I was serving in the War Department general staff as a deputy G-3 in the training section and very much dissatisfied. I wanted to get out of Washington, get away from there. I wanted to get with troops. But they wouldn't let me go. One day shortly after the operations in North Africa, General [Omar] Bradley was on a trip back to Washington, and he asked me if I wanted to go as chief of staff with the 5th Army Corps in England commanded by General [Leonard] Gerow and I said, "I certainly do."

He said, "Can you get away? Will they let you go?"

"Well," I said, "they told me that if I got a good assign-



ment they'd let me go," and so I went to my commander and got a release and went over to England and joined the 5th Army Corps as chief of staff under General Leonard T. Gerow. That was in early part of October, 1943.

SOAPES: I'd like to back up for just a bit on your duties while you were in Washington. Could you give me a brief sketch of what you did while you were there before you went to General Gerow.

MATCHETT: I was in the G-3 section of the War Department and there were two divisions. One was organization and the other was training. I was chief of the training section, which involved, of course, the combined training between the ground forces and the air forces, because the air forces at that time were a part of the army--publication of manuals, allocation of training sites, and training aids, so forth.

SOAPES: And you found that to be tedious work that you didn't really enjoy or--

MATCHETT: Well, I wanted to get back with troops. I wanted to get away from the staff business, and of course I ended up as



the staff officer eventually anyway.

SOAPES: When you went over to Europe with Gerow, would you tell us something about the principal personalities that you came into contact with there besides Gerow.

MATCHETT: Well of course I had never known Gerow before that and he took me on as his chief of staff upon the recommendation of General Bradley. I became very fond of General Gerow eventually. And I had some contacts, of course, with the 1st Army commanded by General, oh, who is it, [Courtney] Hodges. And then, of course, contacts with the British also, because we were occupying British territory and we used some of their facilities for our training, particularly the assault center on the west coast of England which had been set up for combined training and then on the area around Slapton Sands where we had a rehearsal of the landing.

SOAPES: Could you tell me what your initial impression of Gerow was?

MATCHETT: Oh, I'm very fond of Gerow. I liked him very much. He was a man that I could argue with and he would listen to my



side of it. Of course he made his own decisions, but he was easy to serve with and very considerate for others. I was very fond of him.

SOAPES: When you reached this assignment, what was the condition of the unit in terms of its training and readiness for combat?

MATCHETT: Well at that time there was only one division in England. That was the 29th Division which had previously been commanded by General Gerow prior to his promotion to a corps commander. That was the only division there. So we had sort of a triple task while we were in England. We had the building up of the completion of the corps, troops coming to England. We had the working out of the plans for the invasion and the training of the troops in England. Now with General Gerow's concurrence we set up in our command headquarters a deputy chief of staff for the planning. Then we had of course the deputy chief of staff for operations. So I had two colonels as deputies under me, one for training and one for the planning of the invasion. Colonel [Benjamin B.] Talley, I think he was later made a general, commanded the planning phase, and Colonel [Karl



E.] Henion was for the operations. Now Henion had been chief of staff prior to my arrival, but Gerow was not satisfied and so he relieved him and I supplanted him. And Gerow told me at that time, "If you don't want to keep Henion you let me know and I'll transfer him out."

So I told Gerow, "I'll take him, accept him as my deputy." So he stayed all during the war then as my deputy. And that was a real good setup.

SOAPES: In the process of training and the rehearsal that you did have for the invasion, what were the major problems that came up?

MATCHETT: Well of course in the matter of planning, probably one of the most difficult problems was we never knew from day to day just exactly what shipping we would have. And of course our planning was contingent upon what space we would have for shipping. And that fluctuated due to the schedules of building ships in the United States, and due to losses by submarines and so on. In the matter of the training itself, I wouldn't say any particular difficulties.



SOAPES: When you had the rehearsal, did you run into any unexpected problems there?

MATCHETT: No. No, we did not. But I know that the 7th Corps did. The other corps had a ship sunk by German E-boats. And in that sinking they lost a lot of men. They lost a lot of men from the 1st Battalion of the 8th Infantry which was a battalion that I at one time as lieutenant colonel had commanded. But we had no particular difficulties on that.

SOAPES: What I would like to do now is to focus on the time of D-Day and you're ready for the invasion and go through in as much detail as you can remember--I realize we're going back over thirty years. But in those last couple of days before you launch the invasion on June 6th, if you can give me as much as you can remember from that.

MATCHETT: Well it took about a week's time for us to load the ships for the invasion. We loaded from those hards and then the initial people put on board ship would have to stay there in that harbor for about a week before the invasion. General Gerow and I went down on the 3rd of June to get on board the Ancon, which was the command ship of Admiral [John L.] Hall who



supported us on the invasion. Now as the troops arrived before embarking on these ships, they were taken into a large tent in groups of about a hundred and fifty, maybe two hundred. And in that tent there was a large relief map, and then it was pointed out to them from that relief map exactly the spot where they were destined to land in France. Now that was the first time that those troops knew exactly where they were to land. Of course they knew they were going to land in France but here was the exact spot. Then they were taken from that briefing, given a big meal of steak and whatnot. And I recall vividly one soldier who could see the humor of the thing. He looked at the meal and he says, "Well," he says, "they're fattening us for the kill."

But anyway, then we marched them on board ship and there they had to stay. Now we were there on Sunday, and we were scheduled to land on Monday, and, as you well know, the time had been selected so as to correspond with the low tide at daylight. Because early in March, I think it was, aerial photographs had shown these underwater obstacles and the only way we could really destroy them was to get them at low tide. That Sunday the chaplains travelled all around these ships holding religious services, and I think probably every man on



board ship took communion that Sunday. And some of the slower-moving vessels had started out Sunday night, and because of the storm they were called back. Then on Monday morning, which would be the 5th--that was the day originally scheduled--on Monday morning there was a conference held on board the Ancon, the command ship of Admiral Hall, and at that conference was General Bradley; General [Clarence R.] Huebner, who commanded the 1st Division that was to make the landing; my boss, General Gerow; Admiral Hall, who supported our operations, and Admiral [Alan G.] Kirk who was chief of all of the American naval forces in that area. Considerable discussion was held as to the advisability of going the next day or further postponing the landing. The problem was that if we'd postponed it still further, we would probably have to postpone it for two weeks in order to get the same conditions of tide and daylight and it was manifestly impossible to hold those men cooped up on board ship for two weeks. So we'd have to let them ashore with the possibility of a leak. So the recommendation was made that we go ahead on the 6th. Now Admiral Kirk formed a message that was sent from there to Eisenhower at his headquarters ashore recommending that we go ahead. Now, of course, Eisenhower had



had recommendations from the 7th Corps, he had recommendations from the British, and the weather, and so on, but I'm talking about the recommendations he got from this group, and I say that was prepared by Admiral Kirk. Now I might state that all that section of England was sealed off by the British and nobody was allowed in or out. And they handled the matter of the secrecy on the loading of the shipping. So on the morning of the 6th, we took out.



SOAPES: I would like to stop here for just a minute and ask you about the tone, the attitude of the people.

MATCHETT: Well, I'll say it this way. We had been very busy for about eight months, working seventy or eighty hours a week with all the minute details of this planning operation, changing around and training. And as far as I'm concerned, and I know many, many others the same, we felt relief that that planning was all over. Now we were going for record. And there was uttermost confidence on the part of all that we were going to succeed. We didn't have any doubt about it. We were sure we were going to succeed. And we were glad to get the problems

of the planning over and get down to the actual operation.

But on the morning of the 6th, due to ground haze, due to fires that had been started ashore by aerial and naval bombardment, we weren't able, even with high-powered glasses, to see very well. Now we kept the command ship about ten thousand yards off shore because we were fearful of German long-range artillery, which we thought was located at Pointe du Hoc. We found out later that there were no artillery there. But anyway, that kept the command ship far enough away from the shore. So about nine o'clock in the morning, I think it was, Admiral Hall and General Gerow, like any commander, the reports that they got were unsatisfactory; they were not good. And we had on board ship, just below decks, a relief map of the shore of France. We had in front of that a long desk, and at that desk sat the operations officer and the G-3 for the corps and the operations officer for the air and an operations officer for the navy. Messages were posted, after being decoded, were posted on the side and they were marked on this relief map. On the deck above there was a duplication of these messages but no relief map. And there was Admiral Hall and his chief, General Gerow and myself. Now these messages were very



discouraging. Admiral Hall, General Gerow both became quite nervous about the damned thing. So I was ordered to go ashore to get a first-hand report of the landing, so I took the Admiral's gig and went ashore. Now the landing had actually started about 6:20 and I got ashore probably, oh, around about 10:00 maybe. Well of course there was an awful lot of death and destruction and a lot of dead bodies and so forth. And I had to wade ashore, and in wading ashore I came under artillery fire. Small arms fire had stopped and, in trying to duck some of that, I fell down and was into the water and was of course wet. I got ashore and I talked to a General [Norman] Cota--he has since died. Did you ever interview him? --

SOAPES: No, we have papers from him.

MATCHETT: He was a very, very close friend of mine.

SOAPES: He was?

MATCHETT: Oh, yes. We served as captains together. So I talked with him behind a tank for quite a while, or a little while. Then I saw that the American troops were beginning to



rise up over the crest of the hill and so I talked to one wounded soldier and I will always remember this. He had been carried out on a stretcher and stopped for a rest, and I said, "Soldier, where'd they get you?" He said, "Sir, they got me in both legs, but I'm going to get out of it and I'll be back with the outfit." So that, coupled with what else, I was very confident that you can't beat that kind of spirit. So I went back and made my report to Admiral Hall and General Gerow and then later on about dusk that night, why we of the Army went ashore to stay. Now that is about the sum and substance of it.



SOAPES: Okay, that's very good. It's a good picture for us to have. Now, I'd like for you to take us as you began to move toward Hill 192 and St. Lo.

MATCHETT: Well of course at the end of the first day we were a long ways short of the objective that we'd set. Our plan called for certain lines on certain days and we were way short of that. And we had to get more ground in order to make space available for the troops that would land the next day. We didn't want them all jammed in on the beach. Now the next morning, that would be the morning of the 7th, General Huebner, and he has

since died, too. Did you ever interview him?

SOAPES: No.

MATCHETT: He was a great soldier. He was a man that had a great record during World War I as a lieutenant colonel. Had a great record in North Africa and Italy and a very experienced soldier. Very well qualified. But just about daylight on the 7th, we had a little short telephone line, ran from our little command post over to his headquarters about, oh, less than a mile away. That's the only signal communication we had. Our phone rang and he said, "Henry, this is Hueb." That was his nickname he went by. He says, "We're being attacked all along our front by infantry and tanks." Oh, Lord, we're going to be back in the Atlantic in no time flat now. So of course, I reported it to Gerow, and we sent down and we got the cooks, and the shore people and everybody up to the front line. Well, we weren't being attacked by infantry and tanks. Somebody had heard some truck going by or something and they'd made that report. And that was just one further example that on a battlefield you just cannot believe the things you hear. Rumors--it's the greatest place for rumors in the world. But here was a very,



very capable, experienced soldier that had fallen prey to that rumor business. And thank goodness it was a rumor.

Well, anyway, our biggest struggle had been on the beach itself. Now we advanced along fairly progressively for a while, and then we had to stop. Bradley had directed that we not take any further action.

SOAPES: About when was this?

MATCHETT: Well, I don't remember the date. But we had to build up our reserve of ammunition. We were only supposed to reply in case of attack. In other words he didn't want us to take in any operation that would get us involved with too serious an operation with a limited supply of ammunition. Then we were in front of St. Lo. And the 7th Corps commanded by General [J. Lawton] Collins was actually in front of St. Lo; we were on the left. And the 30th British Corps was on our left. Now one of the troubles that we had there, we had advanced faster and farther than the 30th British Corps. One of the things that disturbed General Gerow was we were up here and the 30th British Corps here, so there was a chance for them to attack us in front of the British. And of course we wanted the British



to come up abreast of us, but we didn't command the British. And they were in front of Caen. General, later Field Marshal, Montgomery, of course, was in command there. And so we were in front then of Hill 192, that you mentioned at the dinner table. You surprised me when you mentioned that, too. And then the Second Division, commanded by General Robertson, Walter Robertson, made an attack there but they didn't succeed. They were stopped cold. And I went to investigate that thing, too, but no success. And then Bradley ordered the assault on St. Lo, and that was made by the 7th Corps and we were protecting their left flank, that was it.

SOAPES: We were talking earlier about the significance of Hill 192. That it was a dominant terrain feature, wasn't it, in that whole area?

MATCHETT: That's right. But it didn't appear that way so much from our side. I didn't realize the importance of that Hill 192 until afterwards when we actually got up on there and then I could see. It was sort of a gradual slope up here and then a drop off on the other side.



SOAPES: The official army history in talking about these first few weeks, first few months in France, mentions that the troops ran into problems like how to handle the hedgerows, sunken roads--

MATCHETT: Oh, yes, yes.

SOAPES: Had they had adequate training to deal with these?

MATCHETT: No. No. No, that's a good question. As I look back at it, that is the only flaw that I would say in our preliminary planning and training. We didn't visualize the problems that those hedgerows would present to us. That's in the matter of training. In the matter of supply there's one problem that was overlooked, too. And that is we didn't have any food for the prisoners we took. So the German prisoners that we took were held around there in an open field for, oh, probably two days without any food. But nobody cared too much, you know. Well, to go back to those hedgerows. As the tanks hit the hedgerows, you know what they are, don't you?

SOAPES: I have a little bit of an idea, but you might describe them for us.



MATCHETT: In that section of France there are very small fields, just a few acres, and then they built it up around the edge with dirt instead of a fence. And then they planted bushes and young trees and so on in those hedges. Now when the tanks struck those hedgerows, they'd climb up that way.

SOAPES: Almost vertical.

MATCHETT: That's right. Instead of going through, they'd go up. Now the underside of the tank is vulnerable. There's not much armor plate there. And as a result, when they go up on the hedge, the Germans would hit them underneath and destroy the tank. Now there was a sergeant and I don't remember his name but I think it's around someplace [Curtis G. Culin, Jr.] that conceived the idea of putting prongs on those tanks so instead of climbing up the hedge they'd go through. And he went down with Gerow, got authority from Gerow, and he went back to the beach. And he got some of the underwater obstacles that the Germans had used and he welded these prongs onto a tank. And so Gerow saw this and he sent for Bradley and he had Bradley come down to see it, how this thing worked, and then Bradley got ahold of Ike. Then Ike came down and they had



another demonstration of it. And I believe that sergeant got some kind of a decoration, which he rightly deserved. But that permitted them to go through those hedgerows.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: Were there any particular problems with the sunken roads?



MATCHETT: Well, we had some problems with those all right, but not too bad. It wasn't like Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo where the sunken roads defeated him.

SOAPES: After St. Lo, I think that's about August, isn't it?

MATCHETT: Yes, late July, wasn't it?

SOAPES: Late July or early August.

MATCHETT: Yes, that's right.

SOAPES: What about your supply problems up to that point? You mentioned the one of feeding the troops. Were you getting adequate supplies by that time?

MATCHETT: Yes, we were. We had some problems with getting sufficient maps, but when we started moving, moved too fast, we didn't have maps up-to-date, and so we had some problems there. We didn't have too much serious problems though on supply. Of course the army is charged with supply and not a corps.

SOAPES: Did you have dealings with the Redball Express?



MATCHETT: Well I know about it. No, I had no direct dealings with it. Of course I know what the Redball Express was. But I don't need to go--you know--

SOAPES: Yes, I've interviewed the man who was running that. Now after St. Lo, you stayed with Gerow until he left the corps?

MATCHETT: No. No, I stayed with Gerow until we get up to Germany, and Gerow was ordered back to United States to testify in the case of those--Pearl Harbor, because Gerow had been in the War Plans Division at the time of Pearl Harbor. He had followed Eisenhower there. And he was ordered back to appear before a committee of Congress to testify on that. And so when he was ordered back, we thought the war was over. And while he was gone, a General [Walter G.] Layman who had been in command

of the European Replacement System died with a heart attack and so I was ordered to Paris to take his place.

SOAPES: How did you feel about that move?

MATCHETT: Well, it was a stupid move. I shouldn't have stayed there. I could have gotten out of it, but I didn't do too well. Gerow then later asked for my relief from there, that he wanted to assign me to plan the occupation of Berlin. And so he asked for my assignment to that. And General [Albert E.] Brown blocked that. And I wanted to go, too, back to Gerow, but I was blocked and didn't go. Then later on Brown was transferred and so now I felt I could get away again. I'm always trying to get away from something. [Laughter] So then I went up to Gerow's headquarters that time--I've forgotten the name of the place where it was--and I said, "I now can get away and I'd like to come back with you." Well he said, "I am going to assign you to command the area in Trier, Germany." There were three provinces in Germany there. So I went down to Trier and took command of a conglomerate number of units, odd units, that commanded that Trier district. I had two Belgian battalions; I had one French battalion; and I had a lot of engineers and



artillery and so on, to command that. And I commanded that area until the decision was made at higher headquarters to turn that over to the French. And so then when I was ordered to turn that territory over to the French. Then I was ordered up to Berlin as the operations officer to set up the defenses of Berlin. So I flew up to Berlin--I remember it was the day after the 4th of July--on the 5th of July, in '45. So I flew to Berlin. And then I stayed in Berlin until after the Potsdam Conference. And Eisenhower was ordered back as chief of staff of the army. And I got a telephone call, stated that General Gasser, back in Washington, wanted my assignment there as his deputy, and if I wanted to go, why, make me available and if I didn't want to go, they'd tell them I wasn't available. So I said, "Well, the war's over and my wife's back in Washington; I want to go." So I came back to Washington and back for another tour on the War Department general staff. That was my third tour in Washington.

SOAPES: I'd like to back up just a little bit. The Ground Forces Reinforcement Command--was that involved with sending troops back over for duty in the Pacific?



MATCHETT: No. Well, wait a minute, no. No, because I wasn't with it at that time; I had gone by that time.

SOAPES: I see.

MATCHETT: We had eleven depots in Europe; three in England with a branch office in London and we were supplying replacements for all of the divisions in Europe. Now later on it became involved in maybe sending troops to Pacific, but I had left it before then.

SOAPES: Did that bring you into direct contact with major commanders like [George] Patton and [William H.] Simpson and--

MATCHETT: Yes it did. Because I was supplying replacements for the 6th Army Group which was [Jacob] Devers, of course, and for the 3rd Army, and 1st Army, 9th Army.

SOAPES: What were your major problems?

MATCHETT: Well, there were several there. I would say a lot of it was due to the fact that the commanders that we had in that area were not as good as they might have been. They had been washed out of certain combat commands and assigned back



in there on training centers, and they were a little weak.

SOAPES: What rank were these people?

MATCHETT: Colonels, most of them. I mean each depot was commanded by a colonel and of course they had many subordinates under them. All told, they ran probably seventy, eighty thousand troops all together and maybe more. But they had a lot of trouble with the training of those troops and with supply problems. Well, let me illustrate it this way: A soldier is fully equipped and sent out to be a replacement. Well, his underwear gets dirty, he won't wash it; he throws it away and says, "Oh, they didn't give it to me." Something of that kind. But I think they have changed the setup now. The setup should have been changed so that those supply depots came under the army commander because we had to go to the army commander to get truck transportation to move. We didn't have the truck companies. But I think that all of those depots instead of being concentrated as they were then should have been parceled out under the army commander so that Devers and Patton and Simpson and all the rest of them had their own.



That was what I felt very strongly should be the case, and I think that's been done in the present setup, though I'm not positive.

SOAPES: Did you have enough contact with people like Patton to gain personal impressions of them?

MATCHETT: Oh, yes.

SOAPES: I'd like to have your personal impressions of Patton.

MATCHETT: Well of course we knew Patton, you know, over in Hawaii years ago. He was a major when he first went over there, and I was a captain. I'll say this much about Patton: Foot soldiers liked him very much because Patton, while he would raise particular hell with his subordinates, he would not let anybody else do so. He backed them up. Backed them up to the limit. And he drove them hard, but lots of them are very, very fond of Patton. I had a very, very close friend in the army, one of my closest, a General [Willard S.] Paul who commanded a division under him, and he just swore by Patton. But Patton went on the theory, you know, that sweat is a lot cheaper than blood. And he would drive them hard.



SOAPES: Do you think the image that's been made of Patton recently-- we had the movie and all--is it an accurate image?

MATCHETT: Yes, I think it is. I saw it; I thought it was very good, too. Yes. You know down through Sicily, so I'm told-- I didn't see this myself--General [Ernest N.] Harmon, one of his division commanders, thought he was driving them too hard. So he went to Patton, told him. He says, "General," he says, "you're asking more from these troops than they're able to do. You're driving them too hard."

Patton says, "Who do you recommend as your successor?"

[Laughter]

SOAPES: How about Simpson?

MATCHETT: Oh, yes, Simpson, "Big Bill," yes. Is he still alive?

SOAPES: Yes, we've interviewed him.

MATCHETT: Have you?

SOAPES: Yes. I haven't done it myself.

MATCHETT: Yes, well he was an instructor at the War College



when I was a student there. Oh, yes, I think he's a top army commander. Of course his army didn't see the service that some of the others did, but I thought he was a very, very capable, top, army commander. I rate him very high. Very high.

SOAPES: What about Devers? You mentioned you did know him.

MATCHETT: Well I didn't, you see Devers commanded the 6th Army Group, was over in the other part, and I didn't have too much contact with Devers, but I have always understood and heard, very capable individual, though I didn't have much to do with Jackie Devers.



SOAPES: Now Bradley was in your chain of command on a--

MATCHETT: Yes, he was the army group commander.

SOAPES: Your personal recollection of his major traits.

MATCHETT: Well, Bradley was a very capable general. I served with Bradley in Hawaii. I served with Bradley at Fort Leavenworth. I served with Bradley at Fort Benning. I served with Bradley in Washington, and his first wife lived with my wife

during the war, and I saw him over there. But he was very easy to get along with and very, very capable. It's just unfortunate that he's gone so haywire now, but--.

SOAPES: When you went back to the War Department, and this was during Eisenhower's tenure as chief of staff--

MATCHETT: That's right.

SOAPES: What were your duties?

MATCHETT: I went back first as a deputy for the War Department Manpower Board. That was commanded by a General Gasser, Lorenzo Gasser, who is now dead. Then he retired and I became head of it for quite a while myself. Now I don't know whether there's any such organization in the War Department anymore or not. Probably not. But that War Department Manpower Board was set up to comply with what we called the Byrd Law. Senator [Harry] Byrd from Virginia was the author of an act of Congress which specified that the number of civilian employees--which had grown to tremendous forces--would be decreased each month, and they set up a schedule. They set up a definite schedule for each department--the War Department--and it covered the



Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, and all the rest of them. And to make sure that the law was complied with, the secretary of the army established this board. The chief of staff appointed the board, but the board reported to the secretary, not to the chief of staff, so that the law was complied with, the number of employees. Kenneth Royal, at that time, was secretary of the army. Stimson had retired. I guess Kenneth Royal is dead, isn't he?

SOAPES: I believe he is.

MATCHETT: Well, he, in my opinion, was a very capable individual. He was a big-shot Democrat from North Carolina and later headed the Democrats for Eisenhower for President. And I think they wanted him to run for governor, but he wouldn't do it. But whenever we went to him about any of our problems, he was a very, very capable individual. Oh, for example we were required to reduce the number of civilian employees. What some agencies would do, they would reduce the number but they would reduce the number of low salaried and keep all the high salaried, which of course was theoretically complying with the law but it was defeating the intent of the law. So when I



explained that to Kenneth Royal, why he laid down his own rules that they would do it by grade. And then of course they were discharging civilians and putting soldiers in to take their place, and Royal knocked that idea out in a hurry, too. So I was very fond of Kenneth Royal as secretary.

SOAPES: Did you work closely with Tom Handy?

MATCHETT: No. No, I didn't. Tom Handy, of course, was the chief of the operations section of the general staff and the only man that--I knew him of course, but I didn't work closely with him. And John Hull was his deputy. But Joe McNarney, who was the deputy for Marshall, I had more dealings with him. He was sort of a hatchet man for Marshall. And I think he was a classmate. In fact I know he was; he was a classmate of Eisenhower's, but went in the air force.

SOAPES: Your impressions of Eisenhower as chief of staff.

MATCHETT: Oh, yes, he's tops. When he was chief of staff of the army he periodically, not daily or weekly or on any schedule, but periodically he would get certain people in this activity or that or some other activity, he would invite them



up to his office for lunch. I went up there on one occasion on manpower problems. And then he'd have the lunch served up there and then you sit around and discuss informally all of the problems. But he had a close relationship with the people which he maintained.

SOAPES: What about the tone or the spirit of the staff during his period there?

MATCHETT: Well I don't know how I can add any more to that than I've already said.

SOAPES: It was a work atmosphere--

MATCHETT: Oh, yes.

SOAPES: I'm wondering about his style as an administrator in terms of, did he delegate a great deal. Did he say, "This is your shop, run it." Or did he look over your shoulder--

MATCHETT: No, no. No, he delegated. Incidentally his G-3 is in Washington. His former G-3 and I don't know whether he's in too good shape mentally or not either. And that's--

MRS. MATCHETT: John Bull?



MATCHETT: Yes, Pinky Bull. [Lt. Gen. Harold R.]

SOAPES: Pinky Bull, yes, we've been working with him.

I wanted to back up just a bit: You are in Berlin towards the end of the war.

MATCHETT: That's right.

SOAPES: What were your duties when you were there?

MATCHETT: I was the operations officer. General Parks was the first commander of the Berlin district, and I was supposedly to go up there as chief of staff, but, due to some changes, that didn't materialize, and I ended up there as the G-3 or the operations officer setting up the command.

SOAPES: Your principal problems that you dealt with?

MATCHETT: Well, it was just a matter of the training of the troops and laying out for the defenses if we had to take care of any. But I wasn't there too long. I went up there on the 5th of July and right after the Potsdam Conference I left and came home.



SOAPES: Over lunch you mentioned to me that you had known Marshall.

MATCHETT: Yes, I did.

SOAPES: And you were telling me that he was a difficult person to know.

MATCHETT: Yes, that's correct. Yes.

SOAPES: What was the extent of your contact with him?

MATCHETT: Well, I was an instructor at the infantry school at Fort Benning, and incidentally at that time I was serving under Joe Stilwell, Vinegar Joe as he's commonly called. And Stilwell was the chief of section; Marshall was the assistant commandant. So I saw him there, not too much. My wife will say you never could tell whether he was grinning or smiling. But he was a hard man to understand. And when I was acting G-3 of the War Department, when we had that intercom business, you know, and he'd get some idea and he'd call up and if you didn't have the answer just like that, why there was something wrong. But he's a hard man, for me anyway, to get along with. And Ike was easy to get along with.



SOAPES: Easier in the sense of more relaxed?

MATCHETT: That's right. That's right.

SOAPES: More empathy with people?

MATCHETT: Yes. And more understanding of the human element, which Marshall did not understand.

SOAPES: Mrs. Matchett, I understand you knew Mrs. Eisenhower, still do.

MRS. MATCHETT: Love her to death.

SOAPES: Can you tell me when's the first time you remember meeting her?

MRS. MATCHETT: Yes. I can't remember really the year, but we had a mah-jongg group and then I was in charge of two theaters downtown and I thought we should have an extra one so that in case I was called out I had a big list of helpers, but you never know. So they said that Mamie Eisenhower loved mah-jongg so they asked her to come in and we all, during the war years, were together. Now this is, I think, something that people don't realize about her. We'd be playing mah-jongg. Maybe



Mrs. Gasser wouldn't hear from her husband for a while. We had two daughters over there, too, you know--maybe we wouldn't-- and I've heard that the Germans had bombed the Red Cross thing and that was my oldest daughter there. So naturally you're not, you know, just too happy, so you sat there and played a little mah-jongg. Who would sense that somebody was worried? Mamie. And then she'd look around and she'd say, "What have you got in your icebox? What have you got in your icebox?" And then she'd say, "Come on up to the house tonight and we'll have potluck at the Wardman Park." So she'd go up and she'd get a little organ, little piano and play, we'd sing. We spent our time together; we felt just as close as you please. There are four of us left now. Three of us really in that group; the rest have all gone. That's what Mamie said. So every time I've been back and we've seen her or talked to her ever since. And on my birthday never has failed, I get this lovely birthday card from her. But then after that when the men came back, you see, we continued our little mah-jongg. The men wanted to play bridge; they had a full foursome. And Ike says, "Only, let's not go out to eat because I never can eat, you know, because there'd be, you know, wants my



autograph and everything." So we'd have little homecooked meals and he loved it. And I made one very fancy dish one night and Ike took it in the bedroom. When the man came out with his plate, he said, "Can I have some more stew?"

And Mamie said, "Stew! Ike, for goodness sake. That's not stew; that's a wonderful dish."

And he says, "Mamie, when I tell anybody that it's a good stew, I am giving the greatest compliment you can imagine." And that's exactly what he meant.

And then once on his birthday, we have some pictures of that, he had a great big roast beef and Mary Littlejohn was in her evening dress and my evening dress. When he came up he said, "I have a treat for you." So he gave us this bone to cook, to gnaw on. What are you going to do? You've got this evening dress, you're going to gnaw on the bone, if he tells you to gnaw on the bone. And that was the night he had sauerkraut, too. Henry doesn't like sauerkraut but he loved sauerkraut that night.

MATCHETT: Yes. Ike loved to cook, you know. Did you know that?



SOAPES: No, I didn't know that.

MATCHETT: Oh, he loved to cook.

MRS. MATCHETT: Oh, yes. He made sauerkraut, now that's not easy.

MATCHETT: No, that was one of his specialties, sauerkraut.

MRS. MATCHETT: Sauerkraut and stew and this, of course, this roast beef.

MATCHETT: And soup.

MRS. MATCHETT: And soup! Well, we have his recipe for soup. Wonderful. But, oh, those are the two greatest. So Mamie to me is one of the finest characters I really know, and one of the most sympathetic and loyal and loving, all of that she is. But when she was here in '52, you know, she was up on the podium with Ike, her mother, the Douds--we know them too--they were down there and we were down there. All of a sudden she spotted us down there, you know, and she came over, you know, and here she leaned down, you know, kissed us both. Her friendship was true and always has been, and so was Ike's.



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SOAPES: Did you have much contact with her during the White House period?

MRS. MATCHETT: Yes, we were up there.

MATCHETT: Not a lot.

MRS. MATCHETT: No, because we were gone, you see. They went to--

MATCHETT: We were out here.

MRS. MATCHETT: They went to New York.

MATCHETT: But every time we went back to Washington we saw them.

SOAPES: I see.

MRS. MATCHETT: We were up there and they were up on the third floor, had a great time up there. And she took me through when the Queen was there and her mother took me through and you saw where she had fixed up for the Queen. Well, it was a lovely, lovely friendship and I'll always think I was a very fortunate person to have known them both so well.



MATCHETT: Maybe you have heard the accusation made by some people, they did during the campaign and so on, that Mamie was an alcoholic.

SOAPES: Yes, I've heard that.

MATCHETT: Now you know there could be nothing farther from the truth. Now every time they came to our house, you know, we'd have cocktails. Ike always drank a scotch and soda, but I would make some old-fashioned. And Mamie would always tell me, "Make it light, and a lot of fruit." And I'd do that up with a lot of fruit and a very light one and I never could get her to take a second one.

MRS. MATCHETT: A tablespoon

MATCHETT: That's not the attitude of an alcoholic.

SOAPES: No, it isn't.

MRS. MATCHETT: She couldn't, she had this heart condition. Dr. Snyder warned her very much against it, so "You want to have a coca-cola with me?" or "Will you have a drink with Ike."



SOAPES: Did this heart condition greatly restrict her activities?

MRS. MATCHETT: Yes it did. You see she had, what is that fever?

SOAPES: Rheumatic?

MRS. MATCHETT: Rheumatic fever when she was a child and in fact one of her sisters died of it. And so it did, it did in many ways. And then she had this inner ear trouble. Sometimes she'd stand up at the Wardman Park, "Help me." So we'd have to go up and help her down because she'd get dizzy.

SOAPES: You said you knew the Douds.

MRS. MATCHETT: Yes.

SOAPES: Could you tell me something about them. I don't think I've ever run into anyone who did know them.

MRS. MATCHETT: They are the cutest darned couple you've ever seen. Do you like little stories?

SOAPES: Sure.



MRS. MATCHETT: All right. He had little kind of white hair, this little fluffy white hair, you know. And she was adorable. Well one night we thought we'd like to take them out for dinner but Ike would never go out on account of this eating out. So he went on a trip one time and so I said, "How about having dinner with us down at this steak house or roast beef house?" The Douds, the Gruenthers, and Mamie and ourselves. So we went down there. They call him Pupah, P-u-p-a-h, Pupah, that was her father. And "Mim" was her mother. So Pupah sat over here on the right and I had somebody else here on the left and he said, whispered to me and he says, "You know I'm on your right, don't you?"

And I said, "Yes, I do."

He said, "Don't you listen to anything down there; now you just pay attention to me."

I said, "Don't you worry, I'll pay attention to you."

He says, "What have they got for dessert?" [Laughter]

MATCHETT: He's supposed to be a diabetic and not supposed to have it.

MRS. MATCHETT: I said, "They have cream of coconut pie, and



lemon pie, cream of lemon."

He says, "You order the cream of coconut."

I said, "Oh, okay."

"And I'll order the lemon."

And so we had our dinner, and pretty soon he had this pie put in front of him. And we heard the ohs and ahs going on down there and he says, "Pay no attention to them at all." And so I didn't look down that way. I just looked at him and paid more attention to him. Then when he got through with his pie, he reached over and changed and took my pie. So he had two pieces of pie. And by that time, we got through with that, Mim came up, she says, "Ah, you don't know what you've done to me tonight," she says. "He'll be awake all night. The terrible thing you did, Pupah, to take two pieces of pie. You shouldn't even have had one." Well the next morning she called up, she said, "You know Pupah slept like a baby." [Laughter] But they were a great couple, great couple.

