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Jacob L. Devers  
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Jacob Wevers  
Donor

October 30, 1978  
Date

James B. Rhoads  
Archivist of the United States



November 15, 1978  
Date

This is an interview being taped with General Jacob Devers in General Devers' home in Georgetown, Washington, D. C., on August 19, 1974. Present for the interview are General Devers and the interviewer, Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: General Devers, you've told me that you were born in York, Pennsylvania. May I ask you the year?

GEN. DEVERS: Yes, 1887, September 8, 1887.

DR. BURG: And the kind of education that you had, sir?

GEN. DEVERS: I had a state public school education, ended up by graduating from the York High School, and went direct from there to West Point.

DR. BURG: What kind of activities did your father do?

GEN. DEVERS: My father was a jeweler of Sievers and Devers. Mr. Sievers was an elder jeweler and together they owned a jewelry shop. I think Mr. Sievers must have taught my father everything he knew. I've always said my father was the best jeweler and watchmaker in York, Pennsylvania. He got mixed up a little bit in politics but he was a Mason. My grandfather on the Devers side was a blacksmith. He was the best blacksmith there; I've seen fifteen, twenty mules lined up in



his blacksmith shop, mules that had been shipped in by freight from Missouri, unloaded not far from my home, and then driven out into the countryside for distribution. My Grandfather Devers was a very straight six-footer who used to see that I went to Sunday school every Sunday.

BURG: What drew you to West Point, General?

DEVERS: Well, I was interested in athletics. I played basketball on my high school team and I was captain of the team. I was in the debating society. Actually I was just a lucky guy. I was elected president of my class in York High School. While I was trying to push the older man for president, the girls in the class turned around and elected me. I inherited those responsibilities without really wanting them or knowing much about them. So I had to take them in stride. I read the Philadelphia Inquirer, and of course I was interested in football. I was the quarterback on a team of much larger men than myself. That was very difficult I guess, but it didn't seem to bother me and I didn't get hurt. I don't quite know how I got by with that. Reading about the Army-Navy game in the



Inquirer really got me. Charley Dailey who had been quarter-back for the Harvard team for four years went to West Point. He was the class of 1905 and he was running through the Navy like nobody's business. Also I had been reading Kit Carson books, Kit Carson and the West, Kit Carson the Scout, Kit Carson at West Point. I told my father I'd like to go to West Point. He said, "Well, we'll see what we can do." Some time later he came home one day and said, "I can't get you an appointment to West Point but I can get you one for Annapolis." My response to that was, "I don't want to go to Annapolis; I don't have any desire to go on the water; I've read all the heroes of the Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea." My opportunity to go to West Point developed because the two men previously appointed by my Congressman had failed and he was looking for someone who gave promise of staying there. I didn't think I could pass the examination, but I had a year to get ready and I went to work on it. I thought I'd get low marks in English so I wanted some special instruction in English. Fortunately for me, a good teacher from New England had come to teach English in York High School and that was a



good break for me.

I guess I just had a lot of energy. I was always willing to compromise to get a gang together to play something. As I look back on it now, I think that that energy and that capacity for compromise when compromise was constructive must have come to me from my ancestors. I like team play, and I got along all right with the older kids as well as the younger kids. Anyhow, we weren't heroes or star ballplayers but we did pretty well. And I got my appointment to West Point.



BURG: What year did you arrive at West Point?

DEVERS: June, 1905.

BURG: So you were graduated by the time Eisenhower got there.

DEVERS: Yes, but I taught his class. Eisenhower's class was '15, you see, and I went back in '12 to teach math. I didn't teach Eisenhower because I had the last two sections and he was about the middle of the class as I remember, he and [Omar] Bradley. I got to know Bradley quite well because of baseball. I really didn't know Eisenhower. They talk a lot about a knee but I don't remember seeing him on the football field. I did see Bradley. He was quite a good baseball player; he played

left field, and I was in charge of the team.

During those years another man came into my life in the form of a coach for baseball. The class of 1908 was graduated in March of 1908, so from January on there was really no first class; my class was the first class because we were getting ready to graduate. Baseball didn't start 'til April. I was able to make shortstop on that team, and we got a terrible beating by the Navy. My class didn't think too much of the coach; so, coming back from that game we convinced our officer in charge to find a new coach. He got Sammy Strang Nicklin. Well, Sammy Strang Nicklin had been with the Chicago team, and he also was with Muggsy McGraw in New York. He was quite a character. His brother was in the Army; I didn't know that at the time. Anyhow, he came to West Point. That fellow could sing grand opera and he could drink a lot of beer. He was something; he whipped us into a team. We went down and we beat the Navy just as badly as they had beaten us the year before. Sammy Strang won eight straight Navy games. As long as I was there he was head coach at baseball. When I went back in '12 he was still there. I was in charge of the base-



ball team so I saw a lot of Sammy during this period. A lot of problems came up--the mess was very formal; the senior officer at the bachelors' mess in Cullum Hall sat at the head of the table, and you had to be in there in proper clothes promptly at six o'clock. If you came in late you had to go up to the senior officer and go through formalities, and I got Sammy into that mess. I was married and so I didn't eat at the mess, but I arranged for Sammy to eat there. Although he had a good background and came from a fine family, he sometimes ate with his knife. So they fired him out of the mess and I thought I was going to lose my coach. I decided to go right to the topside on that one; I didn't get to the superintendent but I got to Colonel Carter, the executive officer. He promised he would take care of it but he didn't do it. So I went to Sammy, and Sammy Strang said to me, "Jake, don't worry, I'll go out to Hermie Meyer's little log cabin on the lake. I'll stay out there and I'll fish and don't you worry." Meyer was a classmate of mine who played first base. That's how we settled that. Then I became interested in finding out where Sammy got all the wisdom he displayed in his coaching





methods. He did a lot of things that certainly had me thinking. One day when I was in the library I discovered that Sammy had charged out every book on psychology that that library had. So I began to read psychology and to talk to Sammy about it.

BURG: You were back there then as second lieutenant.

DEVERA: Yes. I was back there teaching math, in charge of the baseball team, and head coach of the basketball team. Sammy had definite convictions about college players, and about ways to beat the other team. He gave us special training in bunting. When he selected his teams he always looked for men that were fast on their feet. He gave special attention to left-handed hitters, whether they had played baseball before or not. Charlie Gerhardt, a very young fellow, little but quick as lightning, was a good basketball player. Sammy put him on the baseball squad. I told Sammy that Charlie never caught a ball. He just said, "Oh." I went out to see what was going on. He had Charlie, who was left-handed, hitting in a cage. Then he sends him to third base. All



Sammy told him was "Now you go out there and, when they hit that ball at you, get in front of it. If you don't catch it, it'll hit you in the face--and the second time you will catch it." Then he showed Charlie how to go to the right, to the left. He did the same thing with George Smythe later. And those two fellows got to be the best hitters around the place. They were quick, and they knew when to steal bases. And that's the way we beat the Navy--we'd beat them by one run. We'd out-bunt them.

Education is a combination of experience and responsibility. You don't get much out of college unless you're properly motivated. A military school like West Point seems to me much preferable to a university or a college. All the contacts, studies, and work and teamplay there were combined and coordinated so we got to know each other and we had to work together in ways that offered valuable experiences that I used later in handling men. Here's one example: We had a great pitcher, Bob [Robert Reese Neyland, Jr.] Neyland, class of '16. As a plebe he went out on the mound, and he threw a fast ball with a big curve but he thought it was a straight ball. I didn't



know any different either at the time. That ball never was straight. A fast ball always has a bounce, but you can't consistently throw fast balls. You have to have a change of pace. Sammy Strang put Bob Neyland in as a plebe. I remember it was in April, and it was wet out there. The other pitcher went bad and Sammy said, "Now don't throw that side-armed curve, they'll knock it out of the ball park." So Bob Neyland goes out there and he does pretty well for a couple of innings. Then he throws that side-armed curve and I think Colgate knocked it out of the park; that cured Bob Neyland. By the time Bob was a first classman, he had won twenty-two games in two years without a loss and was captain of the team. Two weeks before the Navy game, Fordham was coming up there to play us. We'd beaten them the two preceding years, but they were a great team. Sammy Strang said to me, "Jake, it doesn't matter if we lose one game."

I said, "Hell, we want to win them all, don't we?"

He said, "We have to win only one, the Navy game, and we're made."

I said, "I guess that's true but I'm for winning them all



and I don't know about this other business."

"Well," he said, "we're going to lose that Fordham game."

I said, "Why?"

He said, "You see that fellow, Bob Neyland, out there? Look at him. He isn't doing anything that I've told him to do." Then Sammy sent Neyland out to the outfield to catch fly balls for exercise. Sammy was hitting the ball for Neyland to catch. He hit it so Neyland had to run like hell but could never get to it. Saturday Bob was working, and he was sweating a little bit--he couldn't get his ball over the plate in practice. In the second inning Fordham landed on Neyland but Sammy didn't take him out of the game. I said, "Why don't you take him out? Hell, we got the Navy coming up next week."

He says, "That's the reason I'm not taking him out. I'm going to work the hell out of him today, and it'll make a Christian out of him."

When Sammy finally did relieve Bob, I said, "Look! He's not coming to the bench."



Sammy said, "I know. He's going to go right over to third base and be the coach over there and in the meantime he'll be doing some tall thinking. Now watch him." And that's what Bob did. And two weeks later we did beat the Navy.

We always scouted the Navy about two weeks before the Navy game. We'd go down and scout the Navy, and they'd come up and scout us. We went down on the west shore to Hoboken, across the river to 42nd Street, stayed around there, then caught the midnight train to Baltimore, and down from there on the short line. Well, I was a young second lieutenant and I got my expenses, and I was keeping strict account of everything. When we left the ferry we'd walk up 42nd Street towards Times Square. Sammy knew everybody and everybody in all those bars knew Sammy because he had been with the Muggsy McGraw team--and he was quite a fellow. He started singing! Gee! Did I drop behind him! I was in full uniform. I surely didn't think he was going to catch the train--but he did. We got down there to Annapolis and of course they met us, took us to the mess, and gave us cocktails. I didn't drink any, but



Sammy did. I was getting nervous. The game was on and I knew it. About the sixth inning I was kicking him on the knee, "Come on, we got to get out of here and look at this ball game." Well, we got out about the seventh inning. And all during that conversation they had been asking us questions and he had been answering. He had said, "My lead-off man, he can't hit a little curve on the outside corner and the other one can't hit a fast ball inside. "But," he said, "this Leland Hobbs, our clean-up man, can hit the ball, good or bad. He's going to knock it through your blooming old disciplinary barracks out there." Well, going back on that train, crowded with girls going back from the dances, old Sammy started singing. Everybody stopped to listen, and then Sammy turned to me and, "Jake," he said, "you think I'm giving away secrets to the Navy."

"Giving away secrets!" I said, "God dang it, you told them the truth from the beginning to the end!"

Well he said, "That's the strategy. Tell them the truth and they don't believe it." Well, now that isn't a bad thing to remember. And it worked.

BURG: An ex-pro ballplayer who was checking out all the



psychology books in the West Point library about what--1910, 1911, in that period of time?

DEVERS: Yes, that's right. I went back there in '12--well, it was '12 to '16. This was 1916. And if you'll look at the picture of the baseball team of '15, you'll find a hell of a lot of men who later on became general officers. I was in charge of that team, and Sammy Strang was there, and there is a good picture of that team. I had one but I think I sent it to York. Almost every one of those men on that team made general officer during the war.

BURG: Now, you, yourself, graduated in 1909 and I believe you said earlier, before the interview, that your first assignment was with an outfit at Vancouver Barracks.

DEVERS: Yes, I wanted to get into the field artillery but I thought I didn't stand high enough. So I decided that if I could get a little higher rating in military efficiency I could make it. One of my classmates, Eddie [Edwin St. John] Greble [Jr.], was a star football player. His father was a field artilleryman and I felt I had to beat Eddie to get into



the field artillery. I was trying in the riding hall to get higher marks in riding, and things of that sort. And Joe Stilwell was helping me in every way he could. I made it into the artillery. The two below me got it, too. But I wanted to get as far away from the east coast as I could get. I had never been west of the Adirondacks. I'd really never been outside of York, Pennsylvania, except to go to Baltimore once--twice, maybe--and to Philadelphia; my father did take me down to an Army-Navy football game. So I selected an outfit that was way out on the coast and it happened to be the 4th Pack Artillery. It was a regiment, less one battalion, from the 4th Pack, commanded by A. B. Dyer.

BURG: And you were single at this time.

DEVERS: Oh, yes. And scared to death of everything. I had trunks with uniforms, and that was quite a trip to go out there to Walla Walla, then down the Columbia River and get off at Vancouver Barracks. That was an infantry post, the 1st Infantry was there, and this 4th Artillery outfit. And when I got there I found out we were going to be transferred





to D. A. Russell in December and made a regiment, and that there was a battalion coming back from the Philippines, the 2nd, which was going to replace us at Vancouver, which it did. And so we went east and I landed in Cheyenne in December in a hell of a snowstorm. That was quite an experience because I was the junior second lieutenant of that regiment for two years, and boy! I got all the jobs--even to looking out for the colonel's dog.

BURG: Let me ask you, this is the first time that you've really come into contact with the enlisted man in the regular army. What was the quality of those soldiers?

DEVERS: Well, it was volunteer army and everybody drank too much, including the officers. But those soldiers were hard. On payday they were all drunk and downtown and someone had to go get them and bring them back. The officers of the infantry particularly would go to the club in the morning. The sergeants would handle their drill out on the parade ground. I decided that I wasn't going to drink at all. I just decided that if you take one, it'll lead to two, and I didn't know what I could handle so I was just going to say,



"No," and I did. I thought I might lose some prestige but I could make it up in other ways which I did because I was always available and I was always willing. I tried to do what was the best. I didn't always succeed, but I tried.

BURG: Was there any ill feeling from your brother officers?

DEVERS: Not at all. In fact I'm the guy that saved them many times by taking them home and putting their heads in a tub of water. I found out how to sober people up.

Only four days after I arrived there, there was a big reception at the club for some Japanese commissioners that had come over from Japan. In those days they served punch, and they really doctored it. On my way to this reception-- (my uniforms hadn't even arrived and I was in civilian clothes)--just as I got to the club there was a dog fight between an infantryman's bulldog and Colonel Dyer's shepherd. I was trying to separate them and the colonel was standing up there giving everybody hell. I just barely had met him. Fortunately somebody knew enough to go and get boiling water off the stove, bring it out and pour it on their noses. I



grabbed the tail of one and somebody grabbed the other, and the colonel said to me, "You take that dog down there, the bulldog, and get it off the post by midnight." Well, hell! It wasn't my dog. But I had to find out whose dog it was. And I did.

You asked me about the enlisted men. I learned a lot about them. We packed mules and we worked hard during the day. That sobered those fellows up and kept them going. Then for three or four days after payday you just didn't have anybody to groom your mules or do other necessary choses so you had to do them yourself--and you soon learned. Also you helped officers who got into trouble. The cavalry officers sweated it out by galloping their horses. I don't know what the infantry did. They lived way north of us. When we got to Cheyenne, I used to have to go down there, and Cheyenne's a pretty rough town. There was a good theater there, and the shows would come through from Chicago on the Union Pacific, and always stop off in Cheyenne on their way to San Francisco. The officers would go down to see the play and entertain the girls before their train left by taking them out to the post to a dance.



In my work with the pack outfit I had to learn to throw all the hitches just as the enlisted men did. I had worked at this a little at West Point. In doing this you have to lift a side of beef and a bale of hay up on a mule. Well, I wasn't that strong; those enlisted men were all six feet and I was five feet ten and a quarter. So I went over to regular drill and the enlisted men were my instructors. They took me right through the thing properly, and I learned all the hitches. But when it came to that side of beef and that bale of hay, I said to myself, "I'm up against it; I'm not going to tell these guys I can't do that; I can't give up! They're watching me." I could feel it. I had done a lot with those fellows. I had played baseball with some of them. We had three teams there, the 11th Infantry, the 9th Cavalry, colored, and the 4th Artillery--and they were real ballplayers. The 9th Cavalry had a center fielder who was as good as Ty Cobb. He used to slide into second base just like Ty did--and I was at shortstop.

BURG: Feet up and the spikes out.

DEVERS: Spikes out! So when it came to lift my side of beef I listened how to do it. And they said, "Now you think you



can't do that, but there's a skill to this." So I got under that damned thing and water was rolling off my face. You know those fellows never let that thing fall down; when they thought I was going to fail they helped me, and I got the side of beef up there. Pretty soon I got the hang of it and I'd get away with it.

BURG: Pretty important then, General, to be a particular kind of man when you dealt with them.

DEVERS: And then we were always short-handed. We never had a full complement of men but we had a full complement of mules. Since I was a second lieutenant I had to take the stables of a lot of those officers that couldn't get up in the morning early enough. I say a lot because I took theirs quite often in addition to my own. But I found out that the only way to get manpower was to go downtown and bring those drunks home. It was about three miles and we brought them back on streetcars or in dougherty wagons and turned them over to their first sergeants who put them in the guardhouse to sober up. But Jake Devers never did that with his men.



If I had a man that was sober, he would take the drunks over and put their heads in the damned watering trough, and that sobered them up. That was the method I used to have manpower at breakfast the next morning. Well, all through my life I've been trying to get a hundred per cent fighting at the front lines; in the war I did it. I did it with the 85th and 88th by putting replacement battalions behind those two divisions from which they could draw troops as they needed them. When I was commanding NATOUSA, [North African Theater of Operations, U.S. Army], a supply element with that African theater, I had selected my own deputy down there, Tom [Thomas B.] Larkin, who was about the finest that there could be, an engineer officer, whom I had known from the days when I was Chief of Staff to the Commanding General of the Panama Canal Zone. I didn't have to tell Tom Larkin to do anything; he knew how to do the necessary thing ahead of time and he knew me and he and privileges to do it; he didn't have to come and ask. So we saved all that damned paperwork. But now history doesn't have that paperwork and everybody wonders how in the hell you did it. Well you did it because Tom would go and do it and tell me



what he had done so I could coordinate it. He just didn't make mistakes. I had told him, "If you make mistakes--it's just like playing a game, you can't win making mistakes. Don't make too many of them."

BURG: So your idea, General, is that you kind of learned this technique as a young battery officer. It was more important to you to have those men present for duty the following morning, not in a guardhouse still drunk.

DEVERS: That's right. You needed manpower, you had to have manpower. The other thing I learned as a young man out there--every Friday you had to write out a schedule for the next week. Well, you had a detail going out Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday to the quartermaster's place under somebody else. So you'd end up having ten, fifteen, or twenty men instead of a hundred men. What the hell do you do with twenty men? I could teach them to pack those mules and to groom them. So I would take them out on the drill field--and in twenty minutes I could determine whether or not they were proficient.

[Interruption]



DEVERS: I would say, "Now you're a signal man. You go out there on that hill and, when you see the major coming, you signal me and we'll all get back on these guns in a hell of a hurry because he may not approve of what we're doing. I'm not going to ask any questions because maybe the major wouldn't know the answer anyway because the colonel is ahead of him." I learned something about command--your trouble always comes from what the guy above you is going to say--so don't let him know what you're doing 'til after you do it. Maybe that doesn't always work too well--but it worked well for me. Well--this got to be a hell of a good game, and that major knew it and I knew he would because he was a hell of a good major. And he approved of it all, in a way. You could see sometimes that he'd try to outwit us, but we'd beat him at his own game. This was my way of doing things. We didn't have too much imagination in our troops. We could march; we could take care of mules. We had to march, you know, and each man had a pack on his back, and he walked and led a mule, and his feet got sore. I would make non-commissioned officers dismount so the men with sore feet could ride. And if I made





the non-coms do that, I had to do it myself. I was always bringing up the rear eating that alkali dust because I was the junior. These things all worked because they made sense.

BURG: Were you second in command of that battery, General?

DEVERS: Yes. There were only three of us officers for that Battery. [Henry L.] Newbold who had been a TAC at West Point was a widower, I guess; anyhow, he was a ladies' man and he wasn't around much. But Lesley McNair was my first lieutenant. He had just come from the Ordnance; he was brilliant, that fellow. I was the second lieutenant in his battery and I had a lot of other duties. Pretty soon the post commander sent me up to be assistant to the executive officer of the post. I was sent up there to be the signal officer and the engineer officer for that big Francis E. Warren Post. It was D. A. Russell in those days. And I had to learn all about running a switchboard and everything else about the telephone system, because there were so many damned complaints about communications. I went up and took over the switchboard for a week. It didn't take me long to find out what was wrong.



We didn't have sufficient personnel on the switchboard. I hired additional operators and then convinced my superiors that was what had to be done. That psychology of Sammy Strang's had taught me that there's a simple way to do everything. When you have a problem, there's no use butting your head up against a stone wall. Figure it out--make the correction--and then go tell the colonel what you've done. Don't ask him first whether your plan is okay. You can't convince him. You've got to accomplish it successfully to prove your point. And you're not cheating. I never cheated, and I never lied, and if I was wrong I took my medicine, and I was sometimes wrong. Anybody that accomplished much is bound to be wrong sometimes.

BURG: What would you say, General, was the hardest kind of problem that you had to face as a young officer in a battery in those days? What turned out to be most difficult for you personally?

DEVERS: Well, I don't think there was anything that was too difficult for me there as long as I had enough men to work with. Your



duty is spelled out for you; you know how to do it, and you can do it. You just have to keep in good physical condition and be able to do the job and not fight it. I never liked to walk, and I had to do a hell of a lot of walking. I learned to walk not two and a half miles an hour like the infantry did, but four miles an hour, because when you're leading a pack mule it's good to step out briskly and get where you're going. A great pack master, old man Dailey, a rough old fellow, came out to Cheyenne from Washington, D. C. I was detailed to go around with him because I was the junior second lieutenant, and I learned a lot. The mules got bunches from our aparejos. You see we had fitted those aparejos to the mules. Too much pressure on one spot developed a bunch. By taking the hay out from underneath you could relieve the pressure and then load the mule and go on again. Then I talked to the doctor about the men. I said, "When the soldiers get blisters on their feet what we have to do is relieve the pressure that's causing the blister." Well, I was right--and then I learned how to use adhesive tape to prevent the friction. We had some pink stuff--I never could remember the name of it--we dabbed on the mules, but we



had to be careful when we put those aparejos back that we had removed the pressure or a big festering hole would develop. Some of these things I learned at West Point when I was working with a horse outfit there. We went to summer camp and I was always one of the officers with Colonel [William P.] Ennis. There it was a question of the horses' getting sore necks from the collars. I learned that if we marched a certain length of time (generally three days) the horses were going to have sore necks if they had no relief. Well, Dailey verified this. He spelled it out one night around the campfire telling old stories about packing, and of course I was listening.

"Don't go the fourth day, or you won't have any mules." If you're going to start a march you go five miles the first day, ten miles the second, and fifteen miles the third; but don't try to go fifteen miles the first, second and third days or you're in trouble. So threes became my principle: three deep in football, three deep in baseball--I stuck to threes all through my life when it came to backup and reserves.

Instead of other rules, this was for me a simple rule and I just had to find a way to carry it out.



BURG: So you had a man there in Dailey, a man who sounds like an experienced campaigner--

DEVERS: He was an experienced packer of the old school of the quartermaster pack trains, and he knew all about mules. I found out that when a mule began kicking someone around all you had to do to gain the confidence of that mule was to show him a little kindness--maybe feed him a little sugar once in a while. Then you could go and show an enlisted man that that mule wouldn't kick you. He would even let you pick up his hoof. What's more this made the soldiers respect you a little more. I also learned a lot from Colonel Ennis at West Point. He couldn't let anybody hurt any animal. He was very strict about the handling of animals. One day he told me to go in and pick up the hind leg of a horse that kicked. I said, "I'm not going to do that, Colonel Ennis. That horse will kick me all the way out of this stall. You can go in there because you're bigger and you have a good reach. Furthermore, you have been working with that horse. Anyway--I know I'm yellow. I'm just yellow. I acknowledge it." Well, he respected me for being honest, and then he taught me what to



do. All of these were minor problems. I never had any really difficult problems except during the war, and I had some then.

BURG: But at this stage it sounds to me that, well, we can call it psychology and some of it came from the books and some came from your own observation; a good bit of it is what we know as common sense.

DEVERS: Yes, common sense experience. The problem's there. You're going to have to march thirty miles that day. How do you march thirty miles?



BURG: And learning from the experiences.

DEVERS: And learning from the experience. You can't force anything through by issuing an order. You can't order troops not to get trench foot. You issue extra socks so they have a change or they'll put the wet socks back on again.

BURG: But your idea is don't issue an order that says, "The troops will not, repeat, will not get trench foot."

DEVERS: It just doesn't work.

BURG: How long did you do that duty, General, did you say about three years?

DEVERS: Well, I graduated in June of '09. I reported for duty on September 1st, 1909, at Vancouver Barracks, Washington. In December of that year my regiment, the 4th Mountain Artillery, less one battalion, was ordered to Cheyenne, Wyoming, where it was joined by the missing battalion, and thus became a complete regiment. In December 1912, I was ordered to West Point.

BURG: You were called back at the time you thought by the professor in mathematics?

DEVERS: I was called back. I was assigned to his department to teach math. It was the middle of the course, December. The middle of the course covered convergency and divergency of series, and probability and chance. I hadn't known too much about those things when I was a cadet, and now I was expected to teach them. The new instructors who came back at that time arrived in early December and we all had to go to school. Colonel [Charles P.] Echols was our instructor. When



we went to class he gave each of us a card with a problem on it. We had to go to the board with the pointer in the proper hand just as the cadets had to. That way we kept two days ahead of the cadets. Mine was the next to the last section in math, plebe math, and a classmate of mine, [Harold E.] Miner, taught the last section. Miner was a better mathematician, at least he stood ahead of me, and he was a good instructor. Generally those last two sections got found in math because every week the cadets with the lowest grades were moved down and finally ended up with us. I was determined I wasn't going to lose any of my men. I got along fairly well. Then one week Colonel Echols started coming and taking my class. He took over and I sat alongside of him. I had the book and rated the cadets. Echols did this for five days. On the fifth day, after the cadets were dismissed he put his arm around me as we walked toward the door, and he said, "Devers, I think you think that I think you're a poor instructor and that's the reason that I'm in here." He said, "That's not the case at all. Each of these eight men you have in your class has some physical defect. Only one man in the class is





worth saving. You're doing everything you can, and they're doing better than I thought they could."

BURG: All eight.

DEVERS: All eight of them. But Echols had said, "That one man is worth saving." That man was Oliver Oliphant, the great football player, and I was working like hell on him. He'd played four years at Purdue; then he came to West Point. He was our star in those days, and the rules allowed us to play him. He marched his section there. It was prompt. Everything military that he did was done properly. We gave extra instruction to most of my men, and I encouraged them to take advantage of it. We saved all of them, and some of the others, too. This taught me something. You need standards, but you have to be flexible. Another thing--I don't believe in putting anyone in the guardhouse. I don't think the guardhouse does any good unless a man intends to commit murder and can't be controlled any other way. You have to find some other way to solve the problem. As for the men that used to cause me the most trouble--I'd find something that they were



interested in and get them started on it. They always worried me. If you try them, you take all your time with courts and paperwork and all you do is build up a traffic block that you can't lick--so there's no point in going that way. When a man thinks you're interested in him he'll almost always be loyal to you. But I don't think you can change men without a constructive, continuing relationship. I don't think you can rehabilitate them otherwise. I wouldn't be three or four months away from a set-up before every damned one of the men I had helped would go bad again. I know because I followed up on them.

BURG: Well, it's a philosophy I happen to follow myself in school teaching. I wanted to handle it in that room; they never went to the principal's office. He didn't know anything about it; I knew and I would handle it and I would try to handle it as rationally as I could because, again, there was no point in using a paddle on a kid. If you couldn't reach his mind then there was something wrong, I felt. A paddle wasn't going to solve anything.



DEVERS: That attitude is the only one that'll work. You take a youngster to the principal and he'll want to know why the hell you're bringing that problem to him. George Marshall expected you to be able to solve your own problems. I never took a damned one to him. As a matter of fact, I was his trouble-shooter, as you will find out if you look through that record. I was trouble-shooter for [Douglas] MacArthur in athletics at West Point. I never served with two greater men. They operated alike except that MacArthur seemed much warmer. But deep down George Marshall was warm, too. I don't give Ike that kind of credit. In my opinion Ike didn't compare with these two men yet he did some great things in his life. When he was faced with decisions that had to be made, he made them. And I knew he was going to have to decide when to cross the channel and then stick by that decision. I was wondering whether he was going to do it, and he did it under the most difficult circumstances. I think if you'll dig deep in the papers, you'll find that the handling of personnel is the key to everything. That's what I'm trying to say here. You put a man on a job, let him run his job, and let him know that you're going to back him up, and these men--Marshall and MacArthur--gave me responsibility and then backed me up.



I didn't serve under Eisenhower enough to know whether he operated that way.

I was in charge of fiscal affairs at West Point in August of 1939, and my tour was up, really. It was the end of my third year and they sent me to Panama as Chief of Staff of the Panama Canal Zone. And without going into details, I found a lot of bad things down there--things that I had to do something about--but I had a lot of good help.

BURG: This was the period just before World War II? 1939.

DEVERS: That's right. We were on the war footing after I got there. It would take a month to tell the whole story. Anyhow, I did pretty well down there. On the transport going down to Panama, I met Clay Stayer, a medical officer, colonel. Although he had been General Marshall's G-4 when General Marshall was Commandant of the Infantry School, Stayer was a medical officer and there were hospital troubles in Panama which I had to straighten out.

The Panama Canal Department in peacetime was commanded by a Governor-general, an Army engineer, whose duty it was to



operate the Canal. Then there was a Commander of Troops, usually a major general of the U.S. Army, who commanded the troops protecting the Canal. Under peacetime conditions the Governor-general, for purposes of protocol, was the senior. War-time footing reversed the seniority and the Commander of Troops became the superior. This caused many protocol problems.

We were also expanding, building quarters and hospitals and we had to get the medicos straightened out. One morning on the transport Clay Stayer and I had been talking about people and we got on Joe Stilwell who had been an instructor for Marshall down at Benning. I said, "I see Joe is coming back from China and he speaks all those languages. He ought to stay over there."

And Stayer [Brig. Gen. Morrison C. Stayer, M.C.] said to me, "I'll bet you he doesn't retire. I'll bet you that the first general officer that Marshall makes will be Joe Stilwell."

"Well," I said, "Joe seemed to be in disagreement with some of the things General Marshall was doing at the Infantry School."

"Yes," he said, "but Marshall liked that kind of business."



By golly, we go to look at the bulletin board and there it is, Joe Stilwell was made a general officer. I had met Marshall once when he was Commandant of the Infantry School, and I was sent down as the third pencil pusher for the training section of the office of the chief of field artillery. I had the gunnery department. Then I had been sent up to the chief's office and that's where I got working with [Adna R.] Chaffee, writing textbooks; he was the G-3 of the general staff. But anyhow, suddenly I'm made a general officer out of nowhere and I was the youngest. Of course that put me ahead of a lot of fellows who thought they ought to be promoted. My promotion was a surprise to me. I still don't know, but I suspect that Marshall had sized me up somewhere, and some of the people in Washington did it, and there I was. VanVoorhis [Maj. Gen. Daniel VanVoorhis] who was my commanding general, got word that I could stay in Panama because we were on the war footing. Well, two days later I got secret orders to report to Washington. I called up and tried to find out what the hell this was all about. They said, "Transport coming in and you're to take the first transport." We had one day so we



packed up and went back to Washington. When we came into New York harbor a young aide, by the name of Drumm, arrived on the pilot boat. That's the way he caught up with me. I'd never seen him before and he handed me a letter from General Marshall. I opened the envelope and the message was three lines which read, "Dear General Devers: The detail for which you have been ordered back to Washington no longer exists. Yours truly, George Marshall." Then he had added a postscript: "The aide will explain."

BURG: Good thing he put that in. Was that '40, when you were coming back here?

DEVERS: Yes. I was on that transport out there in the deep waters. And I just sat down and laughed. General Marshall told me later that [Henry H.] Woodring who had been Secretary of War for some time decided that he had to have a young brigadier general to be a liaison between him and General Marshall's office--an impossible idea, and General Marshall told him so. But he insisted; so I was selected. And while I was on my way back to fill the job Henry L. Stimson became Secretary of



War and that was the reason the job no longer existed.

BURG: He wasn't going to put up with that.

DEVERS: When I went to report to General Marshall, he said, "Devers, I'm going to put you in command of the Military District of Washington with offices downstairs." He added, "You're going to get a lot of odd jobs. In addition to your duties in this command, you'll be representing me and the Secretary of War at various public official functions."

I said, "Yes, sir, but I have to get settled."

I found an apartment. Within twenty-four hours I was given responsibility for providing security for the whole government here in Washington, including surveillance of entrance to all public buildings. I had been to the War College; I knew a study had been made of this kind of business, and I had a small staff down there that happened to be pretty damned good. I had inherited them, and I didn't know a damned one of them. I called them in and I said, "Now, here's what we have to do." We read the order over carefully and I said, "Here's what I want done. I want you to go down





to McNair,"--or it wasn't McNair then,--"the War College and find this study. Get the summary. Don't go trying to start something new. Get the summary, and bring it up here; we'll send in a report of how we're going to do this, if it's possible." Well, boy, it was possible. It wasn't perfect but it was possible, except that we needed sixty-five thousand dollars to provide the necessary tools for producing proper identification.

I put that report in the out-basket so that it would go through channels instead of hand-carrying it upstairs. I said, "Now we'll try this out." For final approval the paper had to go to Bill Bryden, a field artilleryman who was Marshall's executive, and a very fine officer. I followed it up every morning. Well, that paper had landed on the desk of a sergeant major who had the money but didn't want to give it up, so we put it in the bottom of his basket. About the fifth day Bryden called me up: "Where's that report?"

I said, "Haven't you received it? You should have had that four days ago. It left this office four days ago. I know where it is. Do you want me to go get it?"



"Yes," he said, "and bring it up here." So I went back and took it off that guy's desk and took it up there. We did pretty well with that project because it had been carefully worked out. All we had had to do with that report was bring it up to date. You can't accomplish anything when too many people are saying too many "noes." You need people who will do what [Gerald R.] Ford asked: compromise, coordinate,--

BURG: Cooperate, conciliation. You've mentioned the War College; let's move backward in time just a bit. I note your service with field artillery throughout the period of the 1920s. I would like to ask you in the first place about the Command and General Staff School. You were there '24, '25, and then later at the War College, '32, '33. Let me ask you about your Fort Leavenworth experience before we move further into World War II. Was there anything unusual about your selection to that or did it come along about the time you had expected it?

DEVERS: Well, I had served my tour at West Point and I was due for assignment, and I guess my name was up on the list.



Generally they sent officers who were slated for Leavenworth to the Field Artillery School first, to prepare them for the course. In my case they didn't do that; they sent me direct. So I was going to have to compete with all those engineers and everybody out there at the school without having had any instruction--no previous specialized instruction at all.

BURG: No recent branch school experience at all?

DEVERA: None. So I wrote the Infantry School and found they had some kind of printed course down there. I got that and I studied that before I went to Leavenworth. But I really went there cold. My name begins with "D" and one of the fellows was named "Doc" Cook [Gilbert R.]. I don't know whether you ever heard about him. Anyhow, "Doc" Cook was the class of '12, a great football player at West Point, and I knew him well. He was one of the best instructors the Infantry School ever had; he was great on strategy and tactics. He and I happened to be in the same section at Leavenworth. So I used to pick "Doc's" brain all the time and that way learned a lot. When we were solving problems, I solved them my way and I always got



a higher mark than "Doc" Cook. He never could understand that, and I said, "Well, Doc, you go by the book but I just try to solve the problem." And my way worked. That, of course, gave me courage and helped my morale. I graduated there with a distinguished rating; I wasn't number one, and I hadn't expected to be; but I've never been more than a third down the class. Anyhow I did very well there, and I used their principles in the war. My staffs were all organized according to those principles, updated. And if you look at that record you'll see that I had every job in the world, and for every one of them I had to organize a staff and I had to select personnel. I didn't always have the personnel that I wanted because I made a practice of leaving some personnel behind to carry on what we'd been doing. I would take one or two with me, usually my aide, although I sometimes even changed aides. I think I could have had [Alfred] Gruenther and other fellows of that calibre with me; I knew them better than Eisenhower did and they turned out pretty well. But I didn't do too badly because they also missed a lot of good men like Larkin, for instance. John C. H. Lee was a classmate of



mine, graduated from the engineers. [George S.] Patton as I said was a classmate; he graduated below me. [William Hood] Simpson was a classmate; he was third from last and yet he and [Alexander M.] Patch were probably the best army commanders of the whole damned crowd. When it came to making decisions and judgments, those fellows made them and they made them right. And Simpson [Gen. William H.] could think ahead of time, and he didn't talk too much either; that's what I liked about him.

BURG: As you look back at the Leavenworth experience, let's say during the course of World War II, was there anything about your Leavenworth training that you felt did not measure up to your needs during World War II? Is there any way in which they failed?

DEVERS: No, no, that training furnished everything I needed. I might finish that Leavenworth thing though. General [William J.] Snow, the Chief of Field Artillery, came out to Leavenworth to talk to all these field artillerymen, to ask them where they wanted to go for station. You sort of had a privilege really. And General Snow was quite a fine fellow



and gentlemen and I was one of the first ones that got selected because I was available that morning and I went in there to see him. And he said, "Devers, where would you like to serve?"

[Interruption]

BURG: You were talking about General Snow offering you the opportunity.

DEVERS: "General Snow," I said, "I think I ought to get some national guard and reserve experience. I know the Field Artillery all the way through and all their guns and everything, and I'd like to be stationed in the East because that's where my home is, and all the things that I'm interested in are all in the East. But there's one place I don't want to go--I don't want to go to the Field Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. My wife just won't like that, and I'm trying to please her." Well, what happened? The first guy that gets orders was Devers--and he gets ordered to Fort Sill! General Snow knew this at the time but he didn't tell me. I was sent to Sill to head the gunnery department. And two days after my



orders came out to go down there, I called my wife up from the school and I said, "Now you get over your crying; we're going to Fort Sill." I got a letter from Colonel [Charles D.] Herron who had been president of the class of senior officers being graduated that year at Sill. He's one of the great officers in my life. He had been an infantryman and at his request had been transferred to the Field Artillery. Fay Prickett, [Maj. Gen. Fay B.] a field artilleryman, was in that class, too. And the class concocted a letter and sent it to me to tell me what a terrible department the gunnery department was, what was wrong with it and that it needed complete revamping. I read that letter and I just sat back and laughed and I said, "My gosh, I always get the bad jobs. Now what am I up against? Who is down there that selected me for this job?" Well, Bill Ennis was down there as commandant but I didn't think he had anything to do with it. When I got down there I found fifteen of the finest instructors I had ever come in contact with. I had the gunnery department for four years and that's when we revamped many of the techniques of teaching field artillery gunnery. I knew some of those brilliant young officers but not many. I



started out with them. I'd never had gunnery instruction at the school and now I was the head of the department--and here were these experts. Well two of those bright young instructors were Stanley Ott and Garner Helmick. And they were good; they were brilliant. I used Helmick to write the regulations, [AR] 430-85--the one they had was terrible--because he had that ability. His father had been a major general, graduate of the Military Academy, but he was a graduate of the Naval Academy. And Stanley Ott had come up through one of the civilian military courses (we didn't have ROTC then). Now, about three months ago I went out there to Sill and the Commanding General of the Field Artillery Center is Major General David Ott and his wife is Joyce Helmick. Stanley Ott's son had married Garner Helmick's daughter! Those kids had been one and two years old in the days when I took charge of the Gunnery Department. I never went back to any place that made me feel greater satisfaction and pride. David Ott is running the school now--and that school is splendid--and I know all the other schools must be on that same level. They're doing the right thing in instruction. The post was clean, and it's been run just the way it ought to be run.





BURG: Now was Sill the branch school that you should have gone to before Command and General Staff?

DEVERS: Yes. In the first world war, I came back from the Hawaiian Islands on special orders to help organize that school. It had been running for a few years on a small scale but now it was to be expanded. I was made assistant to the executive officer, [Maj. Gen. Rene E.] DeRussy Hoyle. We were running that school on a shoestring because we didn't have enough instructors, we had big classes, and we had no reserve instructors. If somebody got sick, DeRussy Hoyle would call Jake Devers and I would go over and take the class for three or four minutes, discover somebody in the class who knew enough about the subject to instruct them, turn it over to him, and proceed to another assignment. So I had a lot to do with getting that school going. I was ordered over to the war just as the Armistice came--and that's the way that I left.

BURG: Now you're back there again after Command and General Staff as director of the department of gunnery. In the training that you were doing, were you training them on 155s or 75s?



DEVERS: We were trying to find a system of fire--Colonel Ennis was a great man in this business and he was always after me saying that we were too slow firing, and that we weren't doing as well as the school of fire had been doing before. Well, I found that McNair had been down there and he had kept records on parchment of all the students' firing and these were filed in the library. I went over and got the records of some of those fellows that Ennis was talking about. I discovered that we were doing better than they had done. I stepped things up so that we improved our time in everything by just changing some of the commands, eliminating the stuff that worried people and taking the phi, alpha, and beta out of the commands. Nobody understood Greek anyhow. I had a lot of help from men like Ott, Ted Brooks, Garner Helmick, and Beukema [Col. Herman], who later became a professor at West Point. We conducted classes for instructors on Saturdays which was the day off for students. I had people detailed to some out with particular problems to test our techniques and prove our capability under pressure. You never knew who was going to get the problem to solve until your name was drawn out of a hat.



BURG: So, General, if I understand you right then, what you're working on here is, for example, the amount of time it takes to come into battery, get on your target, lay on your target, and get your round off, or how fast the gun can be served but accurately, how fast you can switch targets.

DEVERS: That's right. All those things we had to build on, and we laid out out there in the reservation two hundred by two hundred and one hundred by two hundred squares and put dummies in them to see how fast we could get on that target and what were the results--

BURG: What were your bursts doing?

DEVERS: We inflicted enormous numbers of casualties on those dummies--ample proof that our bursts were effective. We brought in a light plane and we had single-engine planes there; we flew at night and dropped flares for night firing. We had to have ladders placed on the caissons to observe our fire because we didn't have a helicopter. The problems that came up forced us to find other methods. If you'd talk to the instructors who served under that regime, I think they'd all



agree that the tremendous effectiveness of artillery fire was developed at that time. We also improved the guns; we got the 105 howitzer; the three-inch gun went out. I used the mountain gun which I had to begin with, and put it on a half-track to get self-propelled artillery training before we got the tank to put the 105 howitzer in. I was experimenting all the time. I fired the gun so fast down there it took the paint off the dog-goned things. We were always after a fuse that would burst the projectile at the proper height over the target to accomplish maximum effect. Vannevar Bush's research group produced the proximity fuse which we used during the war.



BURG: That proximity fuse.

DEVERS: --proximity fuse. We were always trying to clear a crest with flat gun trajectory and that's always difficult to do and you make errors. Considerable errors occur whenever you have to go in the tables for sines and cosines to correct for atmospheric conditions. Some of our students came up with suggestions--and we worked with all kinds of gadgets which finally ended up with a computer. We had to have regu-

lar organizations down there that could handle survey instruments to assist in locating our positions. Now this is all simplified by the use of airplanes, helicopters, and computers. You know just where every gun is so you can locate it accurately on a map, and you don't have to worry about human mistakes.

BURG: All right, let me ask you, it seems to me that it would have been quite easy for all of you gentlemen to have been doing this work with an eye to what had just happened in World War I, the British experience and our experience and laying fire for advancing infantry barrage, box barrage, all of this. But I'm getting the impression that the lot of you were not looking backwards at all, but rather that you were looking towards whatever might be coming up ahead.

DEVERS: We weren't looking back at all; we were always looking ahead. We didn't believe in all that waste of ammunition on barrages. We knew as long as we brought fire down in a two hundred by two hundred area the enemy would get out of there right away or anywhere our fire would land. So we had to get that fire down from all directions and we did it. They



did it in this war, I know because I followed the action of the artillery like nobody's business. And I was always for six-gun batteries because that gave us more fire power but you also have a logistic problem here of ammunition. You burn up your ammunition pretty fast if you don't plan carefully--an awful lot of ammunition was wasted. You never found any artillery dumps that had to be moved forward because the ammunition wasn't fired. You found plenty of infantry ammunition, but you never found any artillery ammunition. When you say eight rounds per gun per day you have to stay in that limit because you can't supply more. When I took command down in Africa after Eisenhower got out of there, I was sick to start with for about two weeks with the flu, and I was just getting over it when suddenly my chief of staff told me one morning the British had run out of twenty-five pound ammunition and the Americans had run out of 105 howitzer ammunition. I said, "Run out?"

"Yes," he said.

I said, "Get my plane ready. I'm going over there and find out what the heck's going on." And then I told my G-4-- "You get the British to go down in the desert--I know they have a lot of ammunition down in the desert. Get the planes you



need in there and bring that ammunition up for the British; and issue the orders to Mark Clark over there in Italy to pull his anti-aircraft, put them in the field artillery positions and use his projectiles to take over the functions of the field artillery 'till we can get ammunition for the field artillery." And I said, "We'll have ammunition from the States in there in about fourteen days." And we did; we flew some of it in; we brought it from the States. I believe that my previous background and experience were invaluable. My athletic training on the football field and on the baseball field served me well. In making judgments you can't be thinking of something else; you've got to be thinking of what you're doing. You have to like your job, or you should be put somewhere else. Give a man a job he likes and he performs it well.

BURG: In your work there at Fort Knox, you mentioned putting a 105 on a half-track--

DEVERS: Seventy-five, pack artillery.

BURG: Oh, you put a seventy-five pack--



DEVERS: Yes, because it was smaller, you see, and you could throw it together and mount it behind the seat. And we trained with that 'til we could get a 105 howitzer on a tank chassis. I had found Ted Brooks, one of my gunnery instructors, in General Marshall's office. I had flown into Washington, gone down to the G-3 section, and said, "Ted, would you like to come down with me to the Armored Force: I need an artillery commander. The one I have down there is a nice fellow and he can command a corps artillery, but he isn't the kind of man I want for that job."

He said, "Yes, you bet I'd like that."

So I said, "Well get your desk cleaned up; I think you're going to get some orders." And I walked down the hall into General Marshall's office, and told him what my problem was.

He said, "Well, whom do you want?"

I said, "I want Major Brooks; he's right back there in your G-3 section."

He said, "You can have him."





Boy, I went out of that office to Bedell Smith and I told him. Bedell Smith called up Ted Brooks. I walked down the hall and there's Ted with his hat and coat on, on his way home. He got down to Knox before I did. And the next morning General Marshall called in Bedell and said, "I want to see Major Brooks."

Bedell Smith said, "Well, you gave him to General Devers yesterday."

He said, "I know I did, but he's bound to be around here, isn't he?"

He said, "No, he'd down at Fort Knox."

BURG: Fast action.

DEVERS: Then I asked Brooks whom he wanted, and he wanted Willie [Williston B.] Palmer. So we flew over to Bragg, and I knew Willie Palmer could be gotten away from that place, and that's the way we got the artillery section of the Armored Force started. Between them they selected three or four other people, and that's the way we got the self-propelled artillery on the way for the Armored Forces. Now McNair had



decided that the gun was going to be the artillery piece, not the howitzer. He said the gun made a larger noise. But when I came in there, for the Armored Force, I got General Marshall to let me make the decisions for my Armored Force, and I didn't take the seventy-five millimeter gun except for my light tank later on, the 76. I took the 105 howitzer. And then I went after a projectile. What I had in my mind there is that I just couldn't understand how the Germans could overrun the French 75,-that was a fine little gun,-and get away with what they did. And then it suddenly occurred to me they didn't have a projectile to shoot at a tank with a seventy-five millimeter gun; the shell wouldn't do anything; it would bounce off. We had to have a penetrating fuse and so we went to work on the problem. We haven't got it to this day; we haven't got the projectile we ought to have for the tank. They think they have it solved now. Maybe they have but I don't know because I'm a bit out of touch.

BURG: Would that seventy-five millimeter gun, the French 75, would it have had the velocity, General, to put a projectile through?



DEVERS: We thought so at the time. You have to have very high velocities, you know, to penetrate a tank. And you have to fix charges; hell, they went through everything. I struggled after the war trying to get a projectile, because I've always said the value of the tank was its fire power and its mobility; and if you put those big guns up there and took away the mobility--what the hell good was it? And they'd always throw back at me the 88, the German 88, which stopped the British in the desert. Well, I said, "Good God, the British 88 is a fine gun but it's too heavy for anything."

BURG: The German 88.

DEVERS: --German 88. I said, "If you're crazy enough to get under fire with that it's going to kill you, because it's got the range, the accuracy." But they have to get it where they can fire at you. And the British are trying to go in there with tanks with fifty-seven millimeter guns, and they'd never get anywhere near an 88. The way to handle an 88, if you're under that fire, is to stop your tanks, pull back and send ten men around to the rear of it, and the Germans can't



turn it around soon enough. They can't pull it anywhere; if they put it on a tank the clutches all go out; it's too heavy. You have to balance the weight in your tanks, and this is what I did for the Armored Force. I went down there to Fort Knox and listened to them all talk for about forty-eight hours and then I called in about three or four other people and we made decisions. I said, "Here are the facts; now I'm going to make the decisions." We debated it for awhile. I got in touch with Detroit. Mr. [Henry] Ford invited me up there to lunch and got Mr. [Charles E.] Wilson of General Motors--Charles E. Sorenson represented Ford because Mr. Ford was an old man at that time--and K. T. [Kaufman Thomas] Keller, President of Chrysler Corporation, known as "K.T.", was there and they gave a luncheon around that big round table in Ford's office. Had a very pleasant lunch and we talked about a lot of things, and then they began to pop questions at me, "What do you want? That's what we want to know, what do you want?" And I told them what I wanted: I wanted a power plant in a tank with eight hundred horses.

"Why did you select eight hundred horses?"



Well, I said, "I think you fellows can get eight hundred horses in nothing flat if you go at it, you know, and work together. I've got to go thirty-five miles an hour and I need eight hundred horses to do it. And don't ask me the technical questions about it. I have a man here who can talk the mathematics of this thing." Then we got down to business. I said, "We want a light tank, fifteen tons, and a medium at thirty tons, and a heavy, if you ever get it, can go as high as sixty tons. But I want thirty tons and fifteen tons, and I want a seventy-five millimeter gun in the light tank, and it's got to have at least four hundred horses so we can move it." All we had on the light tank at this time was a thirty-seven millimeter gun which was useless. There was no turret at all on the medium tank. It had a three-inch gun on the side, the muzzle of which had been shortened so it wouldn't hit trees. That shortened muzzle cut down the muzzle velocity. And the one thing you want is high muzzle velocity in order to penetrate armor.

The armor on our tanks was bolted into place, and I very soon found out that every time one of our tanks was



hit by a projectile those bolts would pop out. They really went to work on this problem in Detroit. K. T. Keller said, "What we have to do is weld these things." I didn't sit in on what they did; they said, "We'll handle it." And they did. And then after this I went around and looked at the plants. K. T. Keller called in welders from all over the country; their motor people got together, and they came up with a method of welding that they could operate within a reasonable time. Then the question was, how do you test all this stuff? Well, I went out to Cadillac. They wanted to sell me a Cadillac engine.

BURG: For your tanks?

DEVERS: Yes, for the light tank. I said, "If you get a Cadillac engine, it's like a Swiss watch: if it's good it's perfect, but one out of ten is perfect and the other nine have trouble all the time. Besides they haven't got the horsepower."

Well they said, "We're going to put two of them together we'll give you the horses you want."



And I said, "Good, that's something to start with. Now this is the problem, can you do it?"

"Yes." The fellow running Cadillac then was a German; he had been a German submarine captain in the first world war. He had a young fellow working for him by the name of Cole, who is now President of General Motors, Ed Cole, very young. And he said, "We'd like to have you send some sergeants up here to assist us in arranging the interior of the tanks.

I said, "You'll have three sergeants up here tomorrow; I'll select the right ones for the job."

When we got to testing I said, "I want you to send Ed Cole down to me." So they did; they sent Ed Cole down to me and he stayed there for about two months. Well, we tested the light tanks out. We had, I believe, three different types of engines to test. And we had about fifteen tanks. We ran those tanks from Elizabethtown down to Louisville, about thirty-five miles, on the concrete at night because then the traffic was very light. And in the daytime we went off the main roads onto the reservation where we could test the tanks in the dust and mud and on uneven terrain. If a tank broke



down, we wouldn't let them monkey with it except to see whether or not it would start. They had walkie-talkies at that time and Cole would go right out there and take a look at the problem. If it was a real problem he put the tank on a transporter and transported the damned thing to Detroit. Otherwise a sharp mechanic might get out there, muddle around, correct the problem temporarily only to have it go bad again.

BURG: The crew couldn't have done that?

DEVERS: No, the crew might have kept the tank running for awhile but we wouldn't have found out what the problem was. Pretty soon we found out that the steel, supposed to be the same in all tanks, coming from different factories wasn't the same. They found that they had to treat the steel to get this horsepower we were after. We never got eight hundred; we got four hundred horses. But we won the war with the M-4 tank, there's no doubt about it. We found they had to treat the steel with shot. I say we--I just listened--but this is what Detroit did.





BURG: You mean, in effect to anneal it to get it to a particular strength.

DEVERS: Well, yes, so it would do its job and be the same and it'd take the heat. Then when I got to England I found out that the British couldn't build engines that could take the seventy octane gas; the engines got too hot and went bad because their steel didn't stand up. So we had to build all the engines, really. These are little things that you have to do right quick with the telephone. You don't write a hell of a lot of letters; the engineers write enough of those.

BURG: Now on those light tanks, you spoke of perhaps three different types of engines. Was one of those the radial engine, aircraft-type engine?

DEVERS: That's what we started with. That was the radial engine, a hundred and twenty-five horses, which came from the air force, and they could step that up to a hundred and seventy-five and they couldn't go any further. So seven million dollars, which would be seven billion now, had been spent to build a big factory, Guyverson in Dallas. The factory was



built to make Guyverson engines of the proper horsepower but they didn't succeed. A radial engine would have been ideal if we could have gotten it because it's air-cooled and run on Diesel fuel.

BURG: And mounted horizontally.

DEVERS: Well, no, it was a radial arrangement. Also, we had to decide between gasoline and Diesel fuel.

BURG: Which we would go for.

DEVERS: Yes. I said, "I can make a decision but you fellows up in the ordnance and the quartermaster have to do something about it, too. You tell me that if I use Diesel fuel instead of gasoline I can go twice as far on the same volume--that's fine. But what you don't tell me is that the Diesel engine is so heavy that the weight of the tank is increased so that I can't get the mobility I want."

Also I suggested holding a meeting in Washington with the experts on fuel, and I sat in the back of the room listening. But pretty soon I was up in the chairman's seat. We



had brought in drivers of Greyhound buses, which were run on Diesel fuel over the Rockies. We learned that they had stations at intervals along the route where they cleaned up Diesel engines in dustproof rooms. Well, we couldn't do that in the Army.

BURG: Had somebody said, "Well look at the Greyhound bus people, they're running their buses left and right."

DEVERS: Sure, somebody had made that statement. At the time I hadn't even known there were Greyhound buses with Diesel engines in them. But when I heard that, we interviewed those drivers without delay.

BURG: Your reaction then was: Let's get the men who run those buses right here. They can tell us.

DEVERS: They gave me and my group a great deal of information. I had some very good officers in that school down there at Knox. Henry [Maj. Gen. Stephen H.] had organized the school and it was a fine one. That's one thing in the Armored Forces that I inherited that was right. The pedagogy was sound. The course



was divided into successive six-day periods. If a man got sick in the middle of the week you didn't fire him because he didn't pass at the end of the week. If he had a personality and some qualities of leadership, he was sent back and given a second chance. Most of them made the grade. You had to fire only the bad ones. Well a lot of credit goes to Steve Henry and his group. But Steve tried to do too much himself. He wanted to sign all those damned papers for graduation every week. Well, two hundred papers are a hell of a lot of papers to sign every week. So I prevailed on him to delegate that chore to someone else. I'm very grateful to that crowd. He had Joe [Brig. Gen. Joseph A.] Holly over there, an infantryman, who was also a capable officer, an expert on engines, and understood the workings of the Armored School. And then we had Sereno [Brig. Gen. Sereno E.] Brett, of the Infantry, who was a top tanker but he was inclined to drink too much. I'd seen a lot of him before I went down there. General Marshall had told me he was drinking too much and to do something about it. So I gave him a chance; I got him promoted and he was my chief of staff. Then I sent him out to a division as a general officer but later on he slipped by the wayside.



BURG: What was Brett's first name again?

DEVERS: Sereno Brett.

BURG: I've seen that name before.

DEVERS: I'm sure you have because he knew as much about tanks as anybody.





INTERVIEW WITH  
General Jacob Devers  
by  
Dr. Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian  
on  
November 18, 1974  
for  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

This interview is being taped with General Jacob L. Devers in General Devers' home in Georgetown on November 18, 1974. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff, and present for the interview are General Devers and Dr. Burg.

DR. BURG: When we were talking last, we were talking about your time with the 9th Infantry Division, and the next thing that I wanted to go to because I think we covered that, was the period from April of 1941 to May of 1943 when you were Chief of the Armored Forces at Fort Knox. Now we did talk a little bit about that in our last session but we didn't really have much chance. I'd like to ask you how you came to be assigned to that duty. Did you ever find out how you were picked to go down there?

GEN. DEVERS: Well, I can give you some idea. First, I want to tell you that my papers are all at York, Pennsylvania. And the man who is writing my biography is Colonel Thomas E. Griess, head of the Department of History at West Point. I can't tell you too much now because that would be taking away from what Colonel Griess will be covering.

DR. BURG: Yes, all we need really is for you just to give us an idea because you and I will really get a little deeper when we talk about your period overseas, World War II. But I did



want from you some sketchy idea about the Armored Forces.

DEVERS: Well, I don't mind telling that. I've told it other times. You want to know how I got command of the Armored Forces?

BURG: Yes. How did they pick you for that, Sir, because, to my recollection, you hadn't had experience with armor?

DEVERS: I'll never know how they picked me for it. But I knew more about armor than either Patton or Eisenhower knew. George Patton was interested, of course, because he was Cavalry and Armor meant mobility. But I was detailed at one time in the Chief of Field Artillery's office after I had the Gunnery Department at Sill, and for a year I was detailed along with an officer from the Infantry and an officer from the Cavalry to go up to State, War, Navy Building and work on textbooks under the G-3 who then was Colonel [Adna] Chaffee. Up there on that planning staff was Snitz Gruber--Edmund Gruber. I considered him one of the smartest officers I knew of on strategy and tactics; he spoke German and he translated German--and he was a Field Artilleryman. I had known him at West Point, so every morning I'd get up there very early because





he was always early in his office, and I'd talk to him half an hour about various things. We often talked about tanks because they were coming up in regulations, and a group was about to be organized down at Fort Eustis in Virginia. Snitz said, "Well, you can't write anything about strategy or tactics with a weapon that you don't have. You don't know what its characteristics are." So I followed it from that time in the Chief's office. And whenever they had anything on tanks over at Aberdeen I was the one they sent over--I was about the third pencil pusher in the Chief's office--and I don't think General Marshall knew that. Have you talked to Tony [Anthony C.] McAuliffe at all?



BURG: No, not yet. We haven't.

DEVERS: Well, he knows a lot about these things that I don't know because he was the young officer who worked pretty closely with Bedell Smith. They were in a car pool that came down to the headquarters every day. All I know is this: I was down commanding Fort Bragg, and I had the 9th Infantry Division in training and building up that post. Everything was just clicking like nobody's business, and I got a fine reputation out of that from everybody in North Carolina and from everybody else

because of the way we did the job. I had been there about a year when the question came up: Why couldn't the French seventy-five stop those German tanks? I thought I knew--that French seventy-five didn't have a projectile.

One morning the 'phone rang, and General Marshall said, "I want you to go down to Fort Knox, Kentucky; fly down there today and look that place over and then come up here and report to me what's wrong." And he added, "They'll be expecting you." Well, I flew in to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Now I really think I was sent down there because they were having trouble; they didn't know whom to send down there. I had been successful at every job that General Marshall had given me, I guess. They said, "Devers got everything straightened out down at Bragg;" (this is what I've been told by Tony McAuliffe so I guess it's true) "and that's going fine; why don't we send him down there?" I imagine Bedell Smith must have suggested it to General Marshall--I don't know. But General Marshall, when I reported to him--well, I told him exactly what was what. When he called me up he had told me that Chaffee was sick, had a tumor of the brain and was leaving the command and going to a hospital, and probably wouldn't live long. But he hadn't said that he was



going to give me command. I found out in a hurry that it was a mess at Knox. I won't go into that too much--but they just didn't have a tank that could go on the battlefield.

BURG: Now prior to your taking over the 9th, you had gone out to Aberdeen and you had watched some of the proving that had gone on out there.

DEVERS: I had gone out there and I knew Sereno Brett who was the big tanker; he was a major in the Infantry. And I knew Chaffee; I had talked to Chaffee. In fact, when they talked about where they were going to go to put the Armored Force in being, I suggested Fort Knox to him because it was available--and you could get land out there. Anyhow, Chaffee was a fine officer. He was the one General Marshall selected to go out there and put that thing together.

BURG: Was that Adna?

DEVERS: Adna Chaffee. They had a regiment in being, actually, I guess, at Knox and one down at Benning, and the Cavalry and the Infantry were fighting about who manned what. If you had a tank you had to be in the Cavalry, I think. In other words,



who was running this show? Anyway, Cavalry officers were put in command of the regiment down at the Infantry School, and Infantrymen were put in command of the regiment at Knox. Now whether or not Chaffee did that on his own to break down this thing, I don't know, but it was a hell of a good idea. And so, when I took over the Armored Force, there was in addition a pretty good research unit going down at Eustis, and Colonel Van Voorhis of the Cavalry commanded it. Van Voorhis had designed a patch for the Armored Force.\* I went down to Eustis three or four times from the Chief's office because I was interested in the assignment of the finest artillery officers to that research unit. They were dependent on fire power, mobility, and putting it together, and this was the next step. So I knew a lot about the officers that I had had down there. I suppose in that year I absorbed more than they knew. I don't think anybody in the service knew how much I knew. And I don't think General Marshall or anybody else knew--even I didn't know how much I did know--but when I found that mess I knew how to go to work on it. And I did it.

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\* The colors--red, blue, and yellow, were symbolic of the three arms--Artillery, Infantry, and Cavalry--which were the main elements of the Armored Force.



BURG: At Know when you got there one of their problems you suggest was just inadequate tanks--not adequate to the job they had to do.

DEVERS: They had no engine that could drive a tank that had enough horsepower. They were working on a Guiberson, a new radial engine which was fine except that it didn't have enough horsepower. So I had to step in there, and I had to find out where we were going to get an engine with sufficient horsepower to drive a tank of at least thirty tons. They were still worrying about the advisability of substituting rubber for steel tracks in order not to tear up the roads and, at the same time, gain greater mobility.

BURG: We had passed over the Christy suspension system, hadn't we?

DEVERS: Well, we had it; we hadn't passed over it because Brett thought that the Christy System was the one we ought to have. And he was Chief of Staff down there for Chaffee.

BURG: I see. And he was in favor of the Christy System.



DEVERS: Yes, sir, he was in favor of it, and he was the one I consulted most. His trouble was that he was drinking too much and General Marshall knew this and gave me certain instructions about letting Brett know that he did know it. But I handled him. I didn't put him on the wagon; he was fine while I was in command and I wanted to promote him because I felt he was the soundest man in all the tank business. And he was. He went with the 5th Armored Division when we organized it, and he went out to Cook. He got into trouble out there and went to the hospital and never came back. So that's what happened to him. But he certainly knew all about tanks; he knew about firepower from the Infantry viewpoint.

The other thing is--at Knox they had a fine school, and Steve Henry ran that school. It was the best school that I'd ever seen because Steve Henry was an engineer and knew a lot about tank horsepower; and Joe Holly, his chief assistant, was an expert in this field--and yet they were both infantrymen. So the first ones I called into my office were the ones that knew most about this. But I found the two functions there--the Infantry and the Cavalry--were fighting, and the situation was bad. I got ten anonymous letters about that dang thing.



And I read all those letters, but I destroyed them. I had to move people out of there. However, the G-4 section was in excellent shape; it was commanded by a Major Barr; he later became my Chief of Staff--David G. Barr. I had a lot of good things there, but they had to be put together.



Mr. Ford invited me to lunch in Detroit, and he had present K. T. Keller of Chrysler and [Charles] Wilson of General Motors-- and he had Sorenson representing Ford who was pretty old at the time--for the purpose of finding out what the hell did we want. We sat around a round table with their engineers, and I had one or two guests. We had a very pleasant luncheon, and after lunch they put the thirty-six dollar questions to me and I answered them. I answered them! I said we had to have a power plant run on Diesel fuel if possible, because it seemed to be the fuel that would give us the longest range with the same volume of fuel--with eight hundred horses; and a medium tank weighing thirty tons, no more; a light tank of fifteen tons; and when we got to the heavy tank it would be sixty tons. I just gave them outside figures like that. They held up their hands and said, "General, you can't get that in five years."

I said, "Well, you all have to get it in one year, and that's the reason I'm here." The result was that they formed a team. Now that's all pretty well written up in some books by S. L. A. Marshall. He can tell you a lot about what they did--but I had spoken out there--and that's in textbooks; if you want to run that down I'd advise you to go to see Marshall. They did form a team--they worked together and, at the same time, they went on with what they were doing in their other efforts of research. General Motors put two Cadillac engines together and gave us the light tank right away.

BURG: Not Diesel.

DEVERS: No, it wasn't Diesel; it was seventy octane. But I had to decide this fuel business, and this was a Quartermaster job. Everybody told me that Diesel was the thing, and frankly I just didn't know what it was. So I said, "Well, they're driving busses over the Rockies and they're using Diesel fuel; where did they get their engines?" They had to have very heavy engines and that would put too much weight in the tank. I had to make a decision and I made it. Then they went to work, and we got four hundred horses; we didn't get eight hundred, but





we got four hundred. Today they have about twelve hundred. They worked it up. But the war was really won with those M-4 tanks.

Well, I was interested in mobility, too. I'm an athlete and I think like an athlete and I knew that one way to win a game is to have fellows that run fast.



BURG: Well, when you got down there in 1940, the tanks that were there at Fort Knox must have had very small guns.

DEVERS: They had thirty-seven millimeter guns in that light tank that could run around like a horse. But what good is a thirty-seven millimeter gun when they're talking about the British getting licked out in the desert by the Germans with an eighty-eight millimeter gun?

BURG: Yes. You had Stewart tanks probably in 1940. Remember the very light Stewart with a thirty-seven millimeter gun--

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: --and probably riveted armor.

DEVERS: Well, everything was riveted. That's one of the things that came out of this thing. I sat down with K. T. Keller and he called an old German in to his office before we went to a meeting. And I said, "Hell, these rivets would bounce out if you hit that tank, and people would be killed because of these damned rivets popping out."

They said, "Well, if we're going to do anything with this, and get into any real production, we've got to find how to weld steel." They called in four or five of the top welders in this country to Detroit and they all went to work in one shop and came up with a new way to weld. That was all done there. I can't give you the details, but the story must be somewhere in that city because we sure got welded. Then we found out that steel made in different shops did not have the same characteristics. So we ironed out things like that. In other words we had to treat steel to make it resilient and hard enough, and England couldn't do that.

BURG: Plus a similar process I think for the armor plate itself to harden it enough.

DEVERS: Yes, all of those things came out. And I used to know more about it than I know now, but that's in general what happened.



BURG: Well, General, on the tank weapons, that was right down your alley, too. You were getting reports from the western desert that the British tanks were coming up against those high velocity eighty-eights; were you able to do much about that in that period, '40, '43, while you were Chief of Armor?

DEVERS: Well, I couldn't do anything about the British.

BURG: No, but about us.

DEVERS: But I knew what we were going to do. We had to start with something so we started with self-propelled artillery. I took the half-track and put the mountain gun on it so it fired over the seat to start with. And I said, "Eventually you'll probably use the same weapon that the tank uses. You'll have a tank, and your gun will be in that tank, and you may not have a turret so you'll have plenty of firepower for your artillery because you can put the weight in the gun (which would otherwise go into the turret) and thus increase its muzzle velocity and range. I laid down all those principles to start on. I got Ted Brooks. I came up to Washington and stole him out of General Marshall's office, and he got Willie Palmer who is now



dead. They got together and I told them how to start. I said, "Now, Ted, we have no self-propelled artillery; it's towed artillery. If we're going to get self-propelled artillery, we must have the right guns." They had taken a three-inch gun and sawed the end off of it and put it on the side of the tank and called it the Grant Tank. Hell, it took away the muzzle velocity.



BURG: That's the one where really you had a restricted traverse out of that--

DEVERS: Well, you did, but when the gun stuck out in front of the tank you didn't hit trees--that's the only reason they had. So we had to get a good turret with a gun in it. We had to get the weight down to thirty tons. And it was quite a job.

BURG: Well, of course, the Grant, it didn't have a three hundred and sixty degree rotating turret; it just had that pulpit thing off to the side.

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: Oh, sure, of course.

DEVERS: Well, that's the best we had. The British, they didn't have anything either. They had a fifty-seven millimeter gun which tried to knock out an eighty-eight. Hell, the eighty-eight--to this day they talk about the eighty-eight. Well, the eighty-eight was really a very fine gun--a great gun--up to ten thousand yards.

BURG: Anti-personnel, anti-tank, anti-aircraft.

DEVERS: But it was too heavy. They couldn't make it mobile. All their tanks got stuck going up a hill; they had no clutches that could make them go; it was just too heavy. And I said, "Well, to hell with an eighty-eight millimeter gun; that's an obsolescent gun; it's going out and we'll probably get a ninety-two or something that'll be a different kind of gun--smaller, weighing less, that we can put in a turret." And that's the way we worked through the gun scheme. I decided that the artillery gun would be the hundred and five howitzer, not the seventy-five gun but the hundred and five howitzer.

BURG: I see. A multi-purpose kind of weapon.



DEVERS: I made them go to work on improving the fuses, because that gun, that howitzer, you see, that came over--

BURG: High arching shot.

DEVERS: High arching shot and you just crushed everything, and if you'd shoot this way you'd hit the hill. With guns you ricochet. McNair, under whom I had been a lieutenant, had gone for the gun deal rather than the howitzer.

BURG: That older seventy-five millimeter gun that the French had had in the first World War.

DEVERS: Oh, we had a French seventy-five and then we finally got our own. I had been through all that at Sill in the Gunnery Department, so I knew about the guns.

BURG: That's pretty much line-of-sight, isn't it? You don't have the high trajectory plunging--

DEVERS: No, it's a flat trajectory. We had a four point seven but it was too heavy, and the French had a hundred and fifty-five gun and a hundred and fifty-five howitzer and they were two



pretty accurate weapons, but they were pretty heavy and lost a lot of mobility.

BURG: Yes. Now let me ask you, when you came up with the idea of tank destroyers by mounting a gun in a half-track chassis, when you first came up with that idea, were you suggesting they put a seventy-five in that? Was that all you had available?



DEVERS: Yes. What I wanted to do was put a gun in some vehicle that we could move around fast and develop our tactics and techniques and have something to train with that interested the men. We had the projectiles for that; we had a lot of seventy-five millimeter mountain guns. I had served with a pack outfit, so I know all about them, and we packed those all through the mountains on mules. Well, all we had to do was to take the gun and the carriage and mount it on a half-track. The half-track was a bad vehicle because it took too much to maintain it.

BURG: It did, and pretty thin-skinned?

DEVERS: Thin-skinned, and it was always out of order, and we had to do something about that. Well, we got rid of it finally and went to a tank and the jeep.

BURG: Later on our tank destroyers then were--

DEVERS: Well, now tank destroyers are different. The idea of tank destroyers came from some ambitious people down in McNair's office--I was dead opposed to that business. I said the best tank destroyer is the tank itself.

BURG: I see. I'm sorry--

DEVERS: And we had been all through that, you see.

BURG: I had the impression that you had suggested it.

DEVERS: McNair finally put those officers in command. They came up to see me and I gave them a damned good station [Ft. Hood, Texas] which I had built for the Armored Forces. I intended to send an armored division down there, and I gave them all the information we had. I said, "Now go see what you can do. You're not going to get anywhere in the war, because those big guns won't do any good; the enemy would out-maneuver them and knock them out." And they never did get anywhere. They got some tank destroyer guns as they call them, but the tank destroyer is the tank itself. You have to get the right projectile. We





went through fixed charges, and that wasn't easy. I don't think they really have a projectile yet that they can fire from these guns. They have a good ninety millimeter gun which is not too much bigger than a seventy-six--it's just longer, but it's not heavy. We've learned a lot. After I retired from service I found that Fairchild could weld aluminum to steel and they had a patent on the process. We were able to develop a light rifle and to decrease the weight of the tank.



BURG: And still have armored protection.

DEVERS: And have everything you need. Well, those things were worked on and a lot of progress was made. I'm not too much in touch now. That was twenty-five years ago.

BURG: I was going to ask you, too, General, in order to help you straighten out matters at Fort Knox, did you bring in other men? Now you found some pretty good men already on the scene.

DEVERS: Well, I kept what I had. I had the best of the Cavalry that wanted to be there, but the Chief of Cavalry was against tanks. And he was a great friend of mine. Johnny Herr, much senior to me, but I had played polo with Johnny and I knew him pretty well.

BURG: What was his last name, General?

DEVERS: Herr. He was a great fellow, but he couldn't see tanks at all. He was still horse. There were a few infantrymen and cavalrymen whose attitude and motivations weren't the best. They didn't trust each other, and I had to move some of them. The artillery was in the middle. I had to move some artillerymen because we needed people that drove ahead and made decisions on the ground and told me afterward--men who were not afraid to get on with the job. You can't spend a lot of time writing a lot of letters and hope to get things done. I brought Brooks down to run the artillery side of it. He brought in some youngsters from the ROTC at Yale or at Princeton; they all had served there. I picked up Willie Palmer; I found he was commanding a training center somewhere, and Ted Brooks suggested him, so I picked Palmer up. It wasn't hard to get these people; they wanted to come there, but they weren't getting much encouragement from their chiefs. Now [Creighton W.] Abrams, who turned out to be the greatest tanker of all time, was with the 4th Armored Division; he was a captain at Pine Camp. I went up there and saw him, and we used his talents to a great extent all the time before and after and during the war.



BURG: So a lot of these men that you brought in were men whose careers, in a way, had been sidetracked; their chiefs didn't want them going into armor.

DEVERS: They wanted them to stay with Cavalry and to stay with Infantry. As for the Artillery, I knew them so well I could dig them loose and I knew the Field Artillery office, and I could get help there. The big thing is that I reported direct to General Marshall.



BURG: Well, that was what I wanted to ask you about next.

DEVERS: He was a genius.

BURG: I imagined that you had gotten a great deal of help in prying these people out of Infantry and out of Cavalry.

DEVERS: Well, I didn't have to pry them. All I had to do was tell General Marshall I wanted them and where they were, and I didn't go out and do a raid on anybody. I flew a lot in those days with a single engine plane, and I got around a lot. Most of the troops were in the east--on this coast. I did a lot of things I wouldn't do now; I don't know how the hell I got through with it. I didn't have too much trouble there.

I had Scott who commanded the Corps; I kept Patton; I sent Patton first from the division and then to the corps and then we got a second corps. I had Maj. Gen. Alvan C. Gillem of the Infantry down at Polk. He was all right--and Johnny Walker was down there. There were a lot of people who, as soon as they were given responsibility, were just topnotch. Any time I wanted anybody from the various branches, I always got them because I went to General Marshall.



BURG: Which Scott was that, General?

DEVERS: Charles Scott, C. L. Scott. He was senior to me. He had been with this unit, and he was not too well. He was a splendid man and a splendid soldier. I put him in charge of the training center down there. If it became necessary to move anyone I found a better place for that person, of if, in conversation, I found he wanted something that was possible to obtain, I got it for him. A few of those fellows drank too much--maybe ten or fifteen of all ranks. But, on the whole, I had splendid young people there.

BURG: Was it your opinion that Scott's age and perhaps his health kept him from being maybe as aggressive as you wanted?

DEVERS: Yes, and I don't think General Marshall felt that he could go on. But he did a great job down there with that training center, and I was well satisfied up to the day he died. I sent him out to the desert on an inspection trip to find out all he could about tanks because he was that kind of man; he could do that. And that pleased him very much.

BURG: Now, would you ever during this period of time in your life as Chief of Armor, would you fly up to Washington, D.C., and confer with General Marshall on matters relating to your operation?



DEVERS: One of my aides was an excellent aviator and we had a single engine plane; we flew to Washington at least twice a week. General Marshall had to move the Chief of Ordnance.

[Interruption]

BURG: And your pressure may have had something to do with it.

DEVERS: General Marshall didn't know me until I started with him after I was brought from Panama--you have that on tape-- I was given the Military District of Washington; then he put

me on the board for selecting our naval bases--with Admiral Greenslade. Before I had really finished those jobs I was sent down to Bragg, and I got everything running down there pretty well. When I first went in to General Marshall's office, he said to me, "Come in here and sit down in that chair. If somebody is here, you sit down. You may learn something--and when I'm ready to talk to you I'll indicate it." So I didn't have to go through Bedell Smith. I didn't have to sit around. I would fly into Washington at seven o'clock in the morning and go direct to General Marshall's office where I always found him hard at work. He would tell me to go see Mr. [Henry L.] Stimson who wanted my point of view about the Armored Force. Stimson had been getting his information from Patton via [John] McCloy. George Patton was a classmate of mine and I knew him well. I was senior to him in my own class. I went down and visited him at Fort Benning, Georgia, in his own home which he had built in the forest. Patton was a good soldier, but if I was giving credit to anybody I'd give it to the 4th Armored Division that led the Third Army into battle. And I'd give Abrams credit--and credit to a fellow by the name of Clarke, yes, Bruce Clarke, for always having a hundred percent at breakfast.



BURG: So 4th Armored was the spear point.

DEVERS: 4th Armored Division was the spear point of the Third Army. They were the ones that got things done. Of course, there were others that helped. At the Bulge, there were other armored divisions with a whole lot of armored people running around loose in there trying to find somebody to give them directions.



BURG: But there was one man with a little greater flamboyance than the rest.

DEVERS: Well, they knew what they had to do; they had a job to do and they had to do it. Really the 4th Armored Division's history is a remarkable book because it records names and accomplishments--even the rescue of Patton's son-in-law. And those fellows are all alive. In fact they had a convention here in June and I was the principal speaker; they were all right there and they're still plugging away.

BURG: Now, General Devers, do I understand you to say that you had to get some things straightened out with George Patton in this period 1940, '41? Now given the fact that other commanders

did have some problems with him, can you enlighten me as to what it was? Was there a disagreement between you as to what you were doing?

DEVERS: Well, I just told you the Armored Force didn't have anything so, in order to decide what we were going to have, naturally I asked all those fellows to get a report in to me in forty-eight hours on what they thought we ought to have. Then I consulted with them in my office personally or, if I was traveling, I would stop and talk to them. I took only two weeks to do this.



BURG: To try to get it in hand once General Marshall sent you down.

DEVERS: It would have taken months to accomplish by writing. We had to go to the Chief of Signal Corps; we had no communications worth a damn. I had personnel but I had to find where it was and how to use it. I did that through the school. I had a division at Knox so I used that as a training division and I sent all my cadres out from that division. In this way I avoided disrupting other divisions by taking their personnel



to form cadres for new divisions. That's one reason the Armored Force was as good as it was. Another reason was that I was very careful in the selection of the commanding officers. The 4th Armored Division was commanded by [Major General John S.] Wood, one of the greatest leaders in the Army. If you read his biography, which has been written but not published, you'll find that he was relieved after a certain battle. I believe the book is coming out that Hanson Baldwin got together; I hope it will show Wood to be one of the great leaders of this war. He's the one that took to the air when others wouldn't, gave directions, told his division what to do--and to this day if you talk to any 4th Armored Division man he'll tell you there was no commander like P. Wood.

BURG: You used that division at Knox; you brought into that division--

DEVERS: I didn't use that division; that division--the 4th Armored Division--was up at Pine Camp; I just went up there and got information that I needed. I never took their top men out of there. There's a way of doing things without disrupting everybody. I think I was able to do that. I got my staff--



Chaffee really didn't have a staff down there--he just had a Chief of Staff and a G-4, and he had a school, but he didn't have a G-1; his adjutant general was doing that job; the decisions were coming from an aide of his because Chaffee was a sick man. If he had been a well man, he'd have been one of the great leaders of this war; he and [Jonathan] Wainwright were classmates, and they're both from old Army families.



BURG: But Chaffee was in the throes of this tumor, off and on.

DEVERS: Off and on, and somebody found this out. I think Tony McAuliffe can tell you more about this than I can, because every now and then he has mentioned this to me. I should have talked to [Harold] Bull when he was G-3 to Eisenhower. He has apparently been trying to tell me something for a couple of years. I just haven't pushed it until recently, but now he doesn't want to be interviewed. Bull was on Eisenhower's staff. He had a hard time up there, and some of the plans they made were changed. I know this because I had to go up and take a beating, knowing when I went I was going to be licked. But we did the job anyhow. We did it with what we had.

BURG: You were telling me about George Patton. Evidently he was one of those who was telling you what he would like to have.

DEVERS: Well, George Patton wasn't telling me anything, but he was writing little notes to Secretary Stimson.

BURG: He was!

DEVERS: Yes. There was talk about replacing the steel on the tracks of the tanks with rubber. Mr. Stimson called me in to talk about it. He was great. Mr. Stimson was one of the finest men I ever dealt with. I used to have a lot of fun because when I went in to see him I was always prepared. If I didn't know an answer, I'd say, "Mr. Stimson, I don't know; I'm going to Detroit, and on the way home I'll get the answer; I'll be in here day after tomorrow and I'll tell you." And I was able to do this. Well, frankly, I went down to Ft. Benning and I told George I was coming down to inspect his command. He had a house, he lived out in the woods with his wife--and I knew the children; we'd been together at Ft. Myer--I'd commanded the 16th Field Artillery at Myer--and he was the Executive Officer to the Commanding General, Kenyon Joyce. He was



also Master of the Hounds at Warrenton. I played polo. I played a lot of polo with George. So I knew him well. I had known him as a cadet. He was the highest ranking, not the senior officer, but the one that got in the parade most because he was the adjutant at West Point, and of course very much senior to me for I was a buck private in the rear ranks. I didn't have much to do with him then because he was a bit taller and in one of the taller companies--I was in the medium. But after we graduated, I kept moving around. And suddenly it comes out in the paper that I'm commanding the Armored Force. I laughed when I read it, and I said to myself, "I'll bet George will have a hard time about this."

It's a funny thing, too, my boss in Panama was Van Voorhis; he came down there to take over while I was Chief of Staff. I had a lot to talk over with General Van Voorhis. He didn't know me very well. I said, "I'll bet old man Van Voorhis is laughing." We used to talk about how the Germans overran the French with their tanks. And I used to say, "Oh, I don't think the French knew how to use their own seventy-five millimeter guns--or they didn't have any projectiles to destroy tanks." I saw a lot of Van Voorhis later; he was always a great friend of mine.



BURG: So when you went to Patton you were going as a man who had known him for a number of years.

DEVERS: Yes, and I went to dinner there. We had dinner with another man there, an old Cavalryman. When he left, and George's wife started to leave, I asked her to stay. I said, "I need a judge in here. George and I are going to settle some things right here, and you know George, and I know him." They had a big open fire. And so I said, "Now, George, I have your recommendations and we've given them all careful consideration." Then I went on, "I don't give a damn who commands, but I'm the commanding officer right now, and I'm going to command, and I'm going to make the decisions, and here they are." Now I said, "You went this way; we want to go a little differently than you do. You're too much of a horse cavalryman. I'm a little more on fire power." I gave him all the facts. I said, "Are you going to play ball or aren't you?" And he stood up and said, "Yes, boss." And that was the end of it.

BURG: He did!

DEVERS: Sure. He was a good soldier--always was.



BURG: But he actually stood up and threw a salute, and I suppose smiling, grinning at you.

DEVERS: Sure.

BURG: Was there any more of this business of going around you directly to Stimson?

DEVERS: No, he never bothered me, but he got worried. When he was sent out to command the Armored Force in the California desert he thought I was behind it. The Saturday Evening Post wrote up all the general officers, and when they wrote up Patton, they had a lot of swearing in there, and I wouldn't let them publish it. So he got suspicious and I just told him, "Well, George, I'm not interested in what you think about this. I'm just interested in this command, and I'll be daggoned if I'm going to have the mothers of these kids thinking that we have a commanding officer who uses such profane language." And that straightened that out.

BURG: He had given that kind of an interview then, to the Saturday Evening Post people.



DEVERS: Well, they had been down, and he was colorful, you know, and when he was on the defensive he really swore, and he had a squeaky voice when he did it, and that was when he was at his worst.

BURG: Now, General, in '42 was it [Major] General [James E.] Chaney who was in command of that group in England---

DEVERS: I don't know about Chaney. [Charles] Bolte knows all about that. Bolte was over there.

BURG: He and I have talked about this--

DEVERS: Chaney was sent home. Eisenhower had been there and then had gone to Africa. [Frank M.] Andrews had been in there to command. When he flew into a mountain I was suddenly picked up to be in command.

BURG: Now when they put you in there, they were taking you from For Knox, in '43?

DEVERS: Yes--in May of '43.

BURG: Now, as you say, that came out of the blue.



DEVERS: Just like that, bing!

BURG: Now how were you told that, General? Did you get a call from General Marshall?

DEVERS: Yes, sir, always got a call from General Marshall at seven o'clock in the morning. The phone rang and I said, "This is General Devers." It came through the switchboard.

And he said, "Is anybody listening on this phone?"

I'd say, "Well, if they were, they're off now, General. They know what their orders are. We can talk freely, I'm sure." So then he'd just say, "Get in the plane and come up here. I'm going to do so and so; it's a secret, don't tell anybody."

I had a problem because the Derby was about to be run. I had helped them put the Derby on in Kentucky during the war because I thought it was good public relations, and I got away with it. So I had to slip out quietly. General Marshall sent a plane down for me; mine was in the west. With the help of my wife I sneaked out. The visitors suspected I was going somewhere but they didn't know where. After reporting to General Marshall in Washington, I flew via Iceland where I dropped the mail and made an inspection--then down to London.





BURG: So you got a call at seven o'clock in the morning, and, I suppose, headed immediately for Washington.

DEVERS: Well, I left the next day. I had one day to close out at Knox. I had to have a day there. I had to decide whom I was going to take with me, and that had to be secret. They all had to sneak out at night. And when I got to England, there was no staff there because most of them had been killed with Andrews in that crash. But there were a few officers there. I never had anything to do with kings and queens and prime ministers, so I was green as hell. I found a good English aide right away who helped me out with protocol.

BURG: Who was that, General, do you remember?

DEVERS: Yes, Campbell. He was with the Grenadier Guards, a colonel. And I guess he wanted the job.

BURG: What was his first name? That's probably something we can chase down.

DEVERS: He was called Johnnie Campbell.

BURG: Is he still alive?



DEVERS: I think he is. I get a Christmas card from him once in a while. He had a little trouble with his family and he wanted to stay with me. I took him into the south of France and the British came there and took him away again; so he had a rough time. He was very helpful to me.

BURG: May I ask whom you took with you from Fort Knox?

DEVERS: Earl Hormell. He could tell you a lot because he flew me, in good weather or bad. We didn't have any instruments. We had to go through the clouds and fly west 'til we found a hole and then go down when we thought we were over the mountains. And, if we couldn't recognize the ground after we got under the clouds, then we flew west 'til we hit the Mississippi. We knew which way the water was flowing and then we'd fly north 'til we hit the Ohio--and then we knew where Fort Knox was. Earl Hormell can tell you a lot. And the other aide was Shumaker. He lives in Pennsylvania. He's got a farm near Mechanicsville--has a son who is a Captain in the Judge Advocate General's Department. He lives right out here in Springfield, Virginia. He's on duty here.

BURG: What was Shumaker's first name?



DEVERS: Edward E. Shumaker.

BURG: Both of these men West Point graduates? No, one man was from--

DEVERS: Neither of them was a graduate. I had had Gene [Eugene L.] Harrison, who is down in Clearwater, Florida, and Mr. Stimson took him away from me; so I ended up with these two. Well, I had those two and a public relations officer, [Tristram] Tupper. Now Tupper is a brother of Mrs. Marshall. I didn't know this at the time. And he had been with the New York division, and had written a lot of books. I was trying to get a public relations officer and Searles recommended him and sent him to me. When General Marshall found it out, he called me up right away. Well, I said, "General Marshall, I didn't select him because he's related to you in any way. I just need a public relations officer and if you think he won't do the job, why I'm after another one. I'm only thinking about getting proper public relations because I realize how important it is."



BURG: So you took those three men with you.

DEVERS: I took those three; that's all I took with me. And I left my Chief of Staff behind--Dave Barr. He's dead now.

He died last year. I would have taken him, but I had to leave somebody behind who knew just exactly the way the Armored Force was running. I recommended Gillem come up and take it; he was in the Armored Force and commanded the Corps. Patton, you know, had gone over to Africa. Gillem brought his whole staff to Fort Knox. I didn't know this because I was so busy getting settled in England. And General Marshall told me I had to have an Air Force officer for my Chief of Staff, and really gave me his G-3, Idwal Edwards. He lives right out here in Arlington. And Edwards was fine.



BURG: So Gillem took over for you at Knox?

DEVERS: He took over the Armored Force under McNair--they broke it up some months later and did a lot of things to it that I wouldn't have approved of if I had been there.

BURG: So you left Barr here to help Gillem.

DEVERS: I left Barr to make the turnover to Gillem. It happens that Barr and Edwards were friends--I didn't know this--and I had to have a Deputy Chief of Staff in England--and I always let the Chief of Staff select his assistant. Edwards said, "Well, I want to get Dave Barr."

I said, "Well, he's free and, in my opinion, you couldn't choose a better man. I'd get him." And so Barr came over there as the Deputy and when Eaker and I were ordered down to Africa, Edwards wanted to go back to the Air Force to be with Eaker. I said, "All right, I'll take Barr as my Chief of Staff." So I took Barr for the rest of the time until I came to Washington and then I made him G-1 in order to get personnel straightened out. Then he was sent overseas to Korea.



BURG: So actually, although you left Barr behind, you got him back later.

DEVERS: He came back that way.

BURG: Now, General, you had one day preparation and then you went to Washington, D. C. Now I presume that you would then have a conversation with General Marshall.

DEVERS: I went to dinner with him the same night I arrived in Washington, and we had a conversation the next morning for about an hour and a half. General Marshall told me his ideas and strategy. I understood what he was saying and how he felt because I was in thorough accord with his thinking.

BURG: He clued you in on what he wanted you to do when you got over there.

DEVERS: He said that things were not what they ought to be and that there were a lot of things to be done over there. He said, "You've been very successful in the past. Just keep me informed." So we corresponded, "Eyes Only." Marshall would write: "Devers' eyes only." I would write: "Marshall--eyes only." He went over there to England eventually. I made a particular effort to get him over there because the British were very much for George Marshall. They always wanted to talk to George Marshall--not to Roosevelt--but to George Marshall. He was a power with the British because he was very straightforward. And he always backed me. I didn't make many mistakes really.

I had a mess in London. In a way I was the Mayor of London for quite a while. We had so many young aviators over there, and so many black men. We had one division, the 29th. And then I brought the 5th down from Iceland, and made a Corps out of it. It was predominantly white. We had some white Military Police, but all the longshoremen were black. There were some very difficult problems. I had many dealings with Mr. Attlee.



BURG: Clement Attlee.

DEVERS: So I learned a lot about the British and I worked well with them. I knew more about their G-2 than almost anyone did. We had a lot of people roaming around there from all of the other countries of Europe. As for the Americans--there were about two hundred left over there from firms in this country--in a way, I guess you could call them G-2 people for their firms. We had to round them up and get them into service. I got in touch with the top man--in British Intelligence, "Mr. Big." Very few persons knew him by his own name. I didn't have to go through Churchill and his staff--I could deal directly with the British Intelligence. I felt that I was very successful in London. You see, you have all these problems of human relations. I had a wonderful Red Cross crowd there, run by Gibson from New York and his wife. The Ambassador was a fine man, and he had a damned good assistant over there--Wallace Carroll.

BURG: The Ambassador at that time was [John G.] Winant?

DEVERS: Winant. I was very fond of him and he liked me. I sat up many a night with him. He was always worrying whether the President was going to keep him on or fire him. He'd always



look at the New York Times, or the London Times, at that little black block up in the right corner of the first page which was vacant unless there was something important happening. That's where I found out that I was going to Africa.

BURG: You saw it in a little box in the London Times.

DEVERS: In a box in the London Times.

BURG: Well, let me ask you, General, going back just a bit in time, because I wanted you to talk about the Armored Force and your work there--when we entered the war in 1941. You were at Fort Knox; the Louisiana maneuvers were several months in the past; you probably were aware that Eisenhower had begun to--  
What I had asked you prior to that was in 1941 in December, early December, when the Japanese hit us, Eisenhower was pulled out of Texas and sent to--



DEVERS: I didn't know anything about that.

BURG: You didn't know that had happened?

DEVERS: He was [Walter E.] Krueger's Chief of Staff down there at the Louisiana maneuvers, and I didn't even see him there.



Eisenhower had Gruenther down there then, too--Al Gruenther. I suppose Tom Handy would know about that. I never could get Tom Handy to talk to me. Tom Handy knows an awful lot about me and what happened to me, on the side, because I never knew why I was called up and given these jobs. I just went out and did them, and I didn't get into any trouble doing them. So I guess that's the kind of fellow General Marshall wanted. I considered him a genius because he and Stimson certainly straightened out the War Department organization. They had a lot of ruthless fellows working for them like [Lt. Gen. Joseph T.] McNarney and a fellow by the name of Nelson--and they changed and reorganized various departments.



BURG: How about [Lt. Gen. Brehon B.] Somervell? Would you put him in the same--

DEVERS: Well, Somervell was a selection that I would have made. He's the one man I was glad General Marshall put in there. The day he took over everything changed. I give Bill Somervell one hundred percent.

BURG: Leroy Lutes thinks very highly of Somervell and, as you know, worked with him as his deputy, so that would be his judgment, too, I'm sure.

DEVERS: Sure. I didn't know Somervell was going to get that assignment. I had been talking to General Marshall who had a way of putting things together. I went up to Washington and had a time with Mr. Stimson. He was talking about these chiefs. Somervell was made. I read it in the paper. That same morning about ten o'clock Somervell called me up and said, "I'd like you to come and talk to me. I've got this job and I'm organizing it." I think Mr. Stimson must have told him to call me up. When I went up there, Somervell took me off to a room where there was one of those daggoned recording machines which I had never seen before. He started it. It made a lot of noise--and then he asked me some very critical questions. I said, "Bill, I just recommended you put all this motor equipment into one place--Quartermaster Corps or Ordnance--and the quicker you do it, the better. Transfer it out of this city and away from the staff and put it where it belongs."

And he said to me, "Whom would you select?"

And I said, "I'm not going to answer that. That's your job." He insisted. I've had a lot of people ask me for advice--so I said, "All right, I'll be Bill Somervell for two minutes: I'd give it to the Ordnance, and I'd put it in the Detroit-



Chicago area. I don't know the details; somebody may have a better idea. Is that enough for you?"

"Yes," he said, "that's just what I want to hear."

Bill Somervell was a great selection.



ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

GEN. JACOB DEVERS

on

February 4, 1975

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library  
Abilene, Kansas



This tape is being done with General Jacob Devers in General Devers' home in Georgetown, Washington, D. C., on February 4, 1975. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff. Present for the interview are General Devers and Dr. Burg.

DR. BURG: You and I were talking about your period in London between May and roughly December of '43 when we last talked.

GEN. DEVERS: Right.

DR. BURG: And you had just been assigned to go down and take over in North Africa. And what I was going to ask you: I was going to stay in London for just a few moments and ask you how did that come about? How were you informed and what was the reasoning behind it? You had every reason I suspect to think you were going to be in London for a while when you went over there and now comes this change down to Africa.

GEN. DEVERS: Well, I don't know how I come out on these damn tapes!

DR. BURG: Well, you come out like an articulate and informed man.

GEN. DEVERS: I was sent to London just out of the clear sky. I guess I told you that--



BURG: Right.

DEVERS: --how I was sent there, because of Andrews' flying into a mountain with most of his staff in the plane--Iceland.

BURG: Precisely.

DEVERS: So I went to London cold with very little experience with prime ministers and certainly British chiefs of staff and kings and queens. I had to form a new staff, complete.



BURG: And you were only able to take two or three men with you as I remember.

DEVERS: I could have taken anybody but I was leaving a big command and I had to leave some behind. I told you how General Marshall gave me my chief of staff, didn't I?

BURG: Right.

DEVERS: Edwards. So I had a chief of staff who was already over there. I had a man who was taken away from me very shortly after I got there and made chief of the signal corps--what the

hell was his name--and I took a public relations man, Tupper--

BURG: Tupper, right.

DEVERS: And then I took my two aides with me. And that's all I had when I started there so I had to build up. Building the staff wasn't too hard although there was only one officer that really knew anything about what was going on there. That was the man that they'd left behind--oh, what is his name? He's right here in Washington now. Anyhow, I suddenly got orders to send him back to the States, and I just wanted to get this on a firm plane. I notified him that he was going back--and he thought I was firing him, you see. So I had a problem there. I said, "Look, I'd keep you if I could. You're the only man that knows anything about what's going on here. Edwards is new. You just told me they're not very well organized because they've already been picked over and the best have gone to Africa with Eisenhower." I knew I had the bad eggs, if you want to look at it that way. And I couldn't do anything about it. "But I want you to know that I like you and I'd like to keep you." So he went back to the States. Now, when I met Edwards, Eaker came into the picture because Eaker was the Army-Air Force general



commanding the Air Force and they were just starting to implement daylight bombing, which the British didn't think they could do. And we were just beginning to get the bombers. I came in right at the start of the build-up for the daylight bombing and I inherited a Miss Jaqua, J-a-q-u-a, whom they had left behind outside my office door--as my receptionist I guess you'd call her. She was a wonderful girl, and she'd been there for a long time.



BURG: American girl?

DEVERS: American girl from California and she had been working for some organization in the business field--very quiet girl. I mention this because later on she went down to Africa but not with me. She went down with Ira Eaker. I wanted to make a change. I had found that a man wanted to go out there. The first man to come in that door was Ira Eaker; he'd never met me, but he'd been told by Edwards, "Look out for this man Devers; he's tough on airmen." We sat down and had quite a talk and I realized his problems. I went out almost immediately and looked over his situation. Now he was dug in in concrete



underground--had a fine setup. I said, "Well, Ira, you're dug in here as though you're going to fight the Russians or somebody else after the war."

BURG: This was his operations room, his war room.

DEVERS: His operations room. I found out that we had to build about 120 airfields. We had some but none of them had long enough runways to store all the planes that were coming out there. He had it pretty well planned when I went over. We became fast friends in forty-eight hours, and to this day we're just as close as we can be because we had real problems to solve together. Every time planes were sent out on daylight bombing missions you weren't sure who was coming back. I don't think there's a finer man in the world than Ira Eaker. I don't know why he was never made a four-star general. I consider him the man that carried the heaviest load by far for the Air Force at that time and later. He went down to Africa and became the commander of the Air force in Africa under the British commander Jumbo [General Sir Henry Maitland] Wilson. Eaker was under me in London because he was Army-Air Force. In Africa, I became the deputy to Wilson.



BURG: I might ask you too, was it true that you were tough on airmen?



DEVERS: No, I wasn't tough on airmen. I had good discipline with my airmen and I appreciated them more than anybody else did. I was very well informed concerning Air force matters. I was way ahead in my thinking about the use of airplanes and I asked for and was given a young fellow by the name of Lee from Arnold. He was a young colonel. I had him promoted to brigadier general because I needed a man to run the air for the Armored Force and I needed light planes. Edwards was Marshall's G-3 in the War Department. While he [Edwards] was on a trip to England to see what was going on, George Marshall called me in and asked me whom I was going to have as my chief of staff, because the chief of staff that had been there was dead. Marshall said, "You've got to have an airman." I wasn't really close to any man in that category. So he said, "Take my G-3. Go out there and tell them to keep Edwards over there." So they did.

BURG: So Marshall's the man who set it up so you could have Edwards.

DEVERS: I think that's the way Eisenhower got Bedell Smith, too. They don't tell it, but that's what I say. Marshall told Eisenhower, "Now you take Bedell Smith over there with you as chief of staff." George Marshall was a genius. I don't care what anybody says, he was a genius. He had to make changes. He fired every chief of service; he had to. He took the best man he knew--Eisenhower--and sent him to London, and [Mark] Clark with him. He believed in Clark because he thought Clark was the only man who knew anything about amphibious landings. I know that because he talked to me about amphibious landings.



BURG: And he felt that Mark Clark was the--

DEVERS: He's the only one that had ever experienced amphibious maneuvers.

BURG: At Fort Lewis?

DEVERS: At Fort Lewis. Bill Morris--he's dead now--told me that once when he was a G-1 for Marshall he went in with a list of officers to send to Hawaii. At the top of that list was Mark Clark's name, and General Marshall crossed it out. "Don't

send him," he said. "Send him down to McNair." So McNair had to take Mark Clark, and that was tough on McNair because Mark Clark had brains enough, but he was very difficult.

I finally got a staff going,--I was in England. Also they had just organized a new staff under [Frederick Edgeworth] Morgan.

BURG: Oh, yes, the COSSAC (Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander) staff.



DEVERS: And the only one they had left over there, and he's been selected to go with Morgan was--well the man he had as his deputy.

BURG: It would be Ray Barker.

DEVERS: Ray Barker was a very nice officer but not a very strong character in my opinion. But he did a good job there. I'm not going to take anything from him on that. He'd been left behind, and was available, and he had good contacts with the ambassador there in London--

BURG: John Winant.

DEVERS: Winant. Winant was not sure of himself because he didn't know whether Roosevelt was going to leave him there or not. He was always looking for that little square up on the right hand side of the front page of the London Times where there was always something about one of the President's aides who was doing so and so. He said he had no power to get Roosevelt votes and so he wasn't sure of his job. And it worried him. I spent a lot of time with Winant. At night he'd send for me after dinner, sometimes before dinner, and we'd sit there and talk. Those were very difficult times.



Well, anyhow, I settled in very rapidly with the air force. I worked hard with them and we got our staff built up. Idwal Edwards said he had to have a deputy, and I said, "Well, whom do you have in mind?"

He said, "I want Dave Barr." Well, Dave Barr had been my Chief of Staff in the Armored Force so I knew he couldn't have selected a better man. I learned they had been close friends; so that's the way Barr came back to me.

BURG: Because Barr was one of the men you'd had to leave behind--

DEVERS: I left him behind thinking Gillem would use him, but Gillem wasn't using him. He took his own staff to the Armored Force. Barr was free to come back to me.

Now we had to work with Morgan in furnishing him personnel. I was very anxious to get fine personnel. He didn't have a strong staff. I didn't feel that Ray Barker was a strong man, but anyhow he was a good planner. We worked closely and Morgan had to work with me. I soon learned that Mr. Churchill was interfering a lot and dominated wherever he could, but Morgan was a strong character. I also made friends, or they made friends with me-- I don't know which--but anyhow I became devoted to Dickie [Louis Francis Albert] Mountbatten and [Marshall of the Royal Air Force Sir Charles] Portal. Dickie Mountbatten was the youngest man on that staff. He was a lieutenant general and a rear admiral and everything else--



BURG: And air vice marshall and what have you.

DEVERS: Air vice marshal--and Portal was running the air force for the British. Ira Eaker was working closely with him.

BURG: Those two men, Portal and Eaker, got along well.

DEVERS: Very well. So that when I had to go before the British chiefs of staff I had two friends, Mountbatten and Portal, there that always helped me out. I was better informed than most people thought. I'd had a lot of experience, and I had the capacity to restrain any outward show of anger. Those two would always help me out. Whenever they thought I was disturbed by those meetings they always arranged to ride back with me to my headquarters and discuss the proceedings.



BURG: They would.

DEVERS: Yes, sir. One or both of them would. And they'd tell me what I ought to do.

BURG: On the British joint chiefs, who was most likely to disturb you?

DEVERS: Well, I had more confidence in Nye, their deputy chief-- than I had in the chief of staff.

BURG: That would be [Field Marshall Sir] Alan Brooke.

DEVERS: I didn't think Alan Brooke had too much capacity. He was thinking too much of Alan Brooke and what he was going to do. He was working under Churchill so I assumed that that was the problem. The trouble was coming from the top side.

BURG: Alan Brooke was only the mouth piece.

DEVERS: Well he had to do it and he didn't always like it; so that showed up once in a while.

BURG: I see.

DEVERS: Orders were coming, you see, from Washington where the combined chiefs of staff met and came up with certain things. The way the British worked--this I learned right then and there--was that they had a lot of young secretaries who always sat in on those meetings. They made a digest of what took place and they'd put out a mimeographed sheet with all the decisions made in a conference with thirty-five people in the room. You had to read that thing carefully and know where the commas were because if you signed it, then you were committed.





BURG: Then it actually did become a decision, once it had your name on it.

DEVERS: It was a decision, so you had to read those very carefully. Fortunately, I had Dan Noce, an engineer officer. He lives right out here in Virginia--I think you ought to talk to him.

BURG: How does he spell his last name?

DEVERS: N-o-c-e. Daniel Noce. He's just an hour out of here toward the mountains. He was good with the English language and he was more careful than I was.

Now that meant I had to work with Morgan's crowd and we worked and they drew up their plans and we helped them and Morgan kept me fully informed. In fact I think he violated his instructions sometimes, from top-side: "Don't let Devers know this." What I'm leading up to is, I came to the conclusion that the British didn't intend to cross that English Channel unless somebody took some positive action. They were stalling all the time. Not Morgan, his planning staff were going a house afire. And so somewhere in the archives there ought to be a



cable which will verify the truth of my statement. I sent a cable back to Washington "Eyes Only." And in it I said to General Marshall, "You'd better come over here and sit in on these things and get the feel of things. I don't believe that they will cross the English Channel." A book entitled Top Secret was written by a fellow on my staff in which he said I slapped the Prime Minister on the back and told him, "Oh, that's a mill pond. You can cross it anytime at all," and that Churchill had said, "We'll have dead bodies floating down the English Channel." Well, there isn't any question that Churchill said that, but Devers never said those words to his face although I may have said them in talking to my staff.



BURG: But never to the Prime Minister--I can't imagine.

DEVERS: --You can't imagine anybody doing that kind of a fool thing. To make a long story short, General Marshall didn't come. He sent Henry L. Stimson, and he couldn't have sent a better man. I went to great lengths to get Henry L. Stimson set up properly. He'd been over there to settle naval affairs some years before as Secretary of State and he had lived com-

fortably--so I tried to get the same villa for him but I couldn't get it. I got one like it with a stream flowing by, and cows in the pasture. He had arthritis, very badly. He was all right in the morning. He had a sound mind, and he's the finest man I ever worked with--Henry L. Stimson. I think he was the greatest civilian in this war. He and Marshall really worked together and were loyal to each other. I heard them speak to each other when Stimson left the job; so I know. I knew that they had to select a commander, and they weren't doing it. And I knew it couldn't be Devers--



BURG: For that cross-channel attack.

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: If there was going to be a cross-channel attack.

DEVERS: Yes, it had to be Marshall in my opinion. And I made that very plain to Mr. Stimson. That's all a matter of record and history.

BURG: That was your opinion. It had to be Marshall.

DEVERS: That was my opinion. I said, if it wasn't Marshall, it had to be Eisenhower. And I said it had to be an American, because there's no British commander that hasn't been at Dunkirk and the British didn't think you could cross that English Channel. We had to get somebody that believed we could do it. Furthermore, they went over with the idea that they were coming back. When we went, we had to think of only one thing--we were going to stay. And we had to impress that thought on our staff. There could be no thought of the dangers and obstacles. It just had to be done. That's the reason I said it had to be an American commander. The British were thinking about the past. I was interested in getting the commander over there, getting him into this planning. It couldn't be Marshall because Mr. Roosevelt needed him. So it had to be Eisenhower. If it had been Marshall, I'd have stayed in England. Since it was Eisenhower, I didn't know what he'd do. And nobody told me what they were going to do although they had made the decision.

BURG: You never heard.

DEVERS: I never heard it until one of the British generals



there in logistics, I forget his name at the moment, said (everything was top secret, you know) "Well, I'm sorry to hear you're going to leave us."

I said, "Am I? Where am I going?"

He said, "You're going--don't you know it?"

"No."

Well, when I picked up the paper, there it was in that little corner.

BURG: In the little box.

DEVERS: And then I got a cable very shortly afterwards giving me my orders; so that's the way I went down to Africa.

BURG: Now while you were in England, would you say that then the two major jobs that you had to cope with would have been your work with Ira Eaker and your work with the COSSAC planners? Or should we add to that a third element, bringing in of strength in anticipation of the cross-channel attack?

DEVERS: Well, I had to be thoroughly familiar with the cross-



channel planning and Morgan kept me that way, orally. Because I had to see that supplies went to the right place, and that the troops came in in the right order. We had a job. And we did it and did it well.

At the staff level, I had to support Eaker with his air force, and 120 air fields had to be built. That goes over in John C. H. Lee's territory, but we had brought in a separate man to run it. I told them to put concrete just at each end and gravel in between, but the tires couldn't take it so that was not a good idea, but we had to build all those air fields, and that was a hell of a job. Planes that were crippled never seemed to go back to the airfield from which they came; generally they landed in some other airfield, where there were not the proper facilities to repair them. We couldn't take the airplanes to the factory and the factory couldn't get to the airport. We had one crew for each plane--we needed two pilots and a co-pilot and a half for every plane--we had to determine just what was needed to keep a plane in the air--all of which Ira Eaker's fine young staff worked hard on.

We got Arnold over there in a hurry. He realized he would



have to triple his training program in order to keep the planes flying.

We'd have crew members come back with their fingers knocked off because the heating system in their plane had failed and they had had to fly at a very high altitude. Or the oxygen would give out--we had a problem with that. So we had to have emergency oxygen cases, and they'd be knocked out by the flak. That air force kept me very busy. Also, I was virtually the mayor of London. I had all these supply people coming in unloading ships and I was the overall commander there. But Admiral [Harold] Stark was much senior to me. We met every day. He was always worried about convoys. He had a good staff and we worked closely together. No two persons worked closer. Fighter planes were transported on top of tankers. The difficulty arose because the unloading of the tankers took place where we had storage facilities for the gas--and the fighter planes had a different destination. Unloading both these cargoes could not be accomplished quickly enough to permit the ship to make the convoy which took fourteen days for the round trip.



BURG: They were carrying the aircraft as deck cargo on tankers?

DEVERS: Yes. So Stark would call me up and say, "Which do I unload--the airplanes or the gas?"

I would say, "Gas. That's going to take time." And so back to the States they would go with sixteen fighter planes, and Arnold would give us hell because we hadn't unloaded the planes. We had no way to unload them except by losing a ship out of convoy. Those were the difficult problems and those were the decisions that I had to make; of course, I always went along with Stark's recommendations. But I had the responsibility.



BURG: So General, there would be times when actually deck loads of aircraft would have to be returned to the United States if you were to turn that ship around--

DEVERS: That's right. And when the ship arrived back in the United States they wouldn't take the planes off; they loaded more gas, sent the tanker back, and then we would try to find some way to get the planes off. And finally we solved that other problem--we got mobile repair shops.



BURG: For the air corps.

DEVERS: For the air. Now while all that was going on, we were getting a lot of longshoremen, the majority of whom were black. All our maintenance people coming in were black. They handled the equipment, piling it and stacking it, getting it in order so that it could be distributed to the troops, when the troops needed it. That was quite a problem. I suppose [Leroy] Lutes might have given you something on that because he was involved with it to a great extent. I had the problems of keeping the traffic running, and handling blacks and whites.

There were incidents, you know. You'd have white MP's stopping a convoy run by blacks and that would provoke an incident. As a rule, I didn't try anybody; I don't believe in that. I had a good crew that knew how to handle incidents. Sometimes I had to handle them personally.

BURG: Would you, for example, go to the MP battalion's commanding officer and straighten him out?

DEVERS: No, I didn't have to do that. I had a good one. He



just died recently--lived up here at Leesburg, [Charles] Bolte I guess must have talked about him. He was a good MP, and he came in to me with his problems the first day and laid them on the table, and I okayed every damn one of his solutions and said, "Go to work and if you need any help, I'm going to give it, because we've got to police this city. All our young men are coming over here, all these fliers are coming in here, finest young men we have in our country and they aren't fully trained to fly those bombers; they had to land on a little island called Ascension in order to refuel. An experienced fighter pilot would go up from Ascension, intercept the group and lead them in.



And so we were learning and we were not as well trained as we ought to be for the job we had. But I have to compliment everybody. Believe me, they really got down to it. These young fellows worked hard, and when they were off duty, they played hard. Now I don't want to go into that too much; I just had to settle it. Mr. [Clement] Attlee, who was a deputy to the Prime Minister and handled all these civil affairs, would send for me and he was delightful to work with. The problems

were easy to state but damned hard to solve.

BURG: I'll bet.

DEVERS: Another thing I inherited there was fun. The Red Cross was run by a Mr. and Mrs. Gibson from New York State; later he ran a ski resort up in New Hampshire. They really knew their job--the Red Cross was under his direction. He was a fine man. He came over to see me with all his troubles, and I soon was able to help him with the American Ambassador. We had to work with personnel, because there were problems with blacks and whites--venereal disease, black babies, and white babies, and so forth. I got to know pretty near everybody from the topside down in London. The big thing was intelligence. I'd found out who Mr. Big was--



BURG: Oh the British side, General?

DEVERS: Yes. He ran the whole damned intelligence system from one little room. Nobody really knew the complete picture but him, and I got in to him. He needed help. I sat down with him, and I said, "My people seem to be crossing you up a little bit."

He said, "Yes. You have about 200 free lancers over here that aren't even in the service." They were over in England representing American business interests; so we rounded all of them up and gave them definite instructions. We straightened out the intelligence business, because we had some new communications equipment. He said, "Nothing can get on or off these islands without my knowing it."

"Well," I said, "We're getting a lot of stuff off that you don't know about because you can't break our code unless we give it to you."



BURG: Now he was a civilian head of the intelligence--

DEVERS: Well he was in uniform; they were all in uniform. But they ran the business. He was a very intelligent man, too, and when you have an intelligent man you can always find a working place in the gray area. It's very easy for you to give when you're the big fellow, and he let me in on his complete set-up.

[Interruption]

BURG: Now you were saying that you functioned like that until Donovan's O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services)--

DEVERS: Donovan came over there, you know, Wild Bill Donovan. I happened to know him.

BURG: From the first World War?

DEVERS: Well I'd met him up in Bedell Smith's office in Washington when I was trying to straighten out Armored Force matters. Bedell said "When you can't lick 'em--join 'em;" so I knew what was going on there. Will Bill Donovan was trying to do a job but he was crossing up all our intelligence and crossing up the British, and he was writing memoranda with all the "whereas'es" and "wherefore's" and legal terms. So we had to get him straight. And I did that in England. I got very unpopular with him. He went down to Africa and worked with Mark Clark, and we lost a couple of agents in France because of his operations.



BURG: You saw him in London and tried to explain the situation--

DEVERS: Well, we had to explain things to him and he acknowledged

that he couldn't come in there and work separately. He had to join.

BURG: But he was a little unhappy about it.

DEVERS: Well, I guess so. He was very quiet--but he was a very keen worker, that fellow. By that time I knew him well enough to talk to him firmly. I just had to say no to a lot of things he wanted to do that couldn't have been done. It's much easier to say yes. However, when we got straightened out, we knew what we were doing. Then suddenly I got my orders and Bedell Smith came up there, but I never saw Eisenhower at all. Never saw him. He never came to London while I was there. He by-passed me. I would like to have talked to him, tried to, but it didn't work.

BURG: You must have passed, General, with him coming back to the States--

DEVERS: Yes, he'd already gone back to the States when I got down to Africa.



BURG: --in late December of '43.

DEVERS: --I think I left the first of January or the second to go to Africa, and I really had the flu; I was sick. When I got down to Africa they were talking about Anzio. They were having all kinds of problems and the Prime Minister was down there living in the Taylor House.

BURG: In Algiers?

DEVERS: No, he was at Casablanca, just outside of Casablanca. I'd been in that villa when I inspected the British 8th Army. So I'd slept in the same bed that Roosevelt and the Prime Minister had slept in and used the deep well bathtub, marble, in the Taylor House. We had problems there, problems with the weather, and difficulties in the procurement of landing craft. The British, of course, were in command; they controlled the transport. The American admiral--Admiral [Henry Kent] Hewitt--was under the British, commanded the American naval forces and was in charge of putting my command ashore in the south of France. He was great.



BURG: Hewitt or Hewlett?

DEVERS: Hewitt, H-e-w-i-double t. Just died here about a year ago.

BURG: Now General, I was going to ask you before we take a closer look at North Africa just one or two questions about England. About how frequently were you called before the British joint chiefs or how frequently did you meet with them?

DEVERS: Well, I think you could say I'd average once a week.

BURG: And where were those meetings held?



DEVERS: At their headquarters; I forget what the number of the building was. But they always sent one of these young officers up to get me at my headquarters and brief me on what I was going to be up against when I got there. That's about the only warning I had of what was going to happen.

BURG: You kind of heard the agenda--

DEVERS: I didn't have much to do with them, you see, except



when something came from Washington or they wanted something done in England. If the combined chiefs of staff met in Washington and made decisions or wanted answers, within an hour or an hour and a half after that meeting closed in Washington, the British chiefs of staff would know it or at least the secretary would have it in mimeographed form. Nobody ever notified Jake Devers so I didn't even know what the policy was, and they were going to bomb those oil fields in Bulgaria. They sprung that on me at seven o'clock in the morning. They wanted to take three of our bomber squadrons out of there and take my air commander--Ira Eaker--at a time when we had just started daylight bombing. Wasn't a more fool idea thought up in the world. They were suddenly going to take these men, ship them down to North Africa as a base from which to bomb the oil fields in Roumania.



BURG: And Eaker with them?

DEVERS: They wanted Eaker with them, and that was just absurd. Of course, Ira was warned and he tipped me off. He didn't want to go and he briefed me enough so I could talk

intelligently in the staff meeting. I opposed that move and I was supported by Portal and Mountbatten. They pointed out that that would mean we'd have to stop daylight bombing. First place, it would take three months to do all this,--to get organized, move all the equipment down to the desert, and meanwhile take care of what was going on where we were. And all it was going to do was cause a diversion which could have stopped the cross-channel operation. That's the way I was thinking, and I won the battle. That's written up to some extent in the last Marshall papers by [Forrest] Pogue.



BURG: Now General, we've seen that certainly the British joint chiefs were able to reach out and call you to one of their sessions; did it ever work in reverse where you had an opportunity to say, "I'd like to come before you."?

DEVERS: Well, I could do that. I never had to do it and I was trying not--

BURG: You never did.

DEVERS: --I didn't want to stir up anything. I had all the

problems I could handle, and I was getting help. I was finally getting some personnel and breaking them in on the job. I was bringing new personnel in; getting settled over there in a city like London. I had a corps--it was the Vth Corps, and I had to send home the Corps commander because he'd been in trouble with the people ahead of me and they had so recommended. He'd been drinking too much. He had the 29th Division. The 5th was in Iceland and I finally brought that one down to help us out a little bit on troop strength. I got a new commander for the 5th who was Irwin [Major General Stafford LeR. Irwin], and I got a new commander for the 29th. Gerow was given the Corps. He had been commanding the 29th. I put Gerhardt in command of the 29th.



BURG: That would be Charles Gerhardt.

DEVERS: Charles Gerhardt. Now those were the only two divisions that I had there and all the rest were service troops.

BURG: Had you known Gerhardt?

DEVERS: Yes, very well. He'd been a cadet and one of my great

basketball players, and I suggested that the football people take a look at him for quarterback. They said he'd be killed. I said, "Killed hell. When he sees they're about to kill him, he'll put the ball down and they won't even tackle him. He's too smart to allow himself to be roughed up that way." I knew Charlie Gerhardt.

BURG: He had a reputation of being a pretty feisty--

DEVERS: He was a great baseball player, too; he was quick, you know. But he got a little cocky and got in trouble. Because he was a cavalryman, the infantry didn't think he could command an infantry division. He did some funny things, with his cockiness, but he was all right with me. He knew me well. I gave him a mission to go down to meet Mrs. Astor, because he was going to be stationed in her political subdivision, and to make friends there because his division would probably be one of the cross-channel divisions. I said, "You go meet her, call on her; give her anything she wants if you can because she's quite an influential person and she thinks soundly." He did all those things; he had tact. He did the job while I was there and



I always liked him because he was a winner. He was criticized, but all that criticism was not justified.

BURG: Did you ever find yourself at the joint chiefs in a face-to-face confrontation with Alan Brooke--Field Marshal Alan Brooke?

DEVERS: I wouldn't say that we ever had a confrontation.

BURG: Now, when Morgan would keep you informed, let me ask you just about the physical arrangements of that. Would General Morgan give you a call, General, or would he drop by your quarters?

DEVERS: No, he came over to my office. We always had to be careful how we talked. He never sent me any letters except when he wanted personnel, and he generally talked to me about that and drafted them. He had a very difficult job and I knew it.

BURG: You bet he did.



DEVERS: I appreciated it and he knew that he had to tell me certain things or he wasn't going to get any cooperation, or thought he wasn't. So that's the way we worked it out. I don't think the British blocked me--I don't know whether they ever did--but somebody did somewhere. You're bound to make a few enemies. I don't believe in irritating people. I just don't. I don't think that gets you anywhere.

BURG: Now, so far, it sounds to me as though you had considerable respect for Freddie Morgan.

DEVERS: I did, yes. I respected and trusted him and I think he trusted me.



BURG: And the kind of work that he was doing?

DEVERS: He had a tough job. In fact I talked him into going to the United States and presenting the problems to the combined Chiefs of Staff.

BURG: Over here. That was when Morgan was here for perhaps six weeks.

DEVERS: I said to Morgan and the senior American commander on his staff, "Now what you two have to do is go over and present your plans. The thing for you to do is go over and sell yourselves. I can't do it." I had already warned the combined Chiefs of Staff what I thought was going on.

BURG: Had you heard that those two men for quite some time, I don't know how long exactly, had traded one of the tunic buttons. Barker had given him an American tunic button; Morgan gave him a British one and they were wearing them. I think the bottom button on their tunics for as long as they could get away with it was sort of a sign to one another that they were together on this and--

DEVERS: They worked very well together.

BURG: They surely did.

DEVERS: Yes. No doubt about it.

BURG: Now I'll ask you one final question about London: Did you ever hear any of the British commanders, their top-ranking



officers, voicing any fear of the cross-channel attack and basing it on what had happened to them in that earlier war on the Somme, for example, in front of Ypres, where there'd been such enormous bloodlettings? Did they ever hark back that far, or were they just more concerned about what had happened at Dunkirk and places like that?



DEVERS: Actually I think their military people thought soundly on the fact that we had to cross the English Channel, but they couldn't say so because the Prime Minister wouldn't--that's the feeling I always had, that he was the man to worry about. So they had to be careful in this situation, but they did want to command any operation. We were going to have the most troops in there and I felt very strongly that we had to have an American commander. I even went so far at one time as to say, "There's no British commander that can command this because I've yet to find one that thinks it can be done." Now that's the way I used to state that thing.

BURG: Now you never encountered Bernard Montgomery though. The timing was wrong--



DEVERS: I had nothing to do with Montgomery.

BURG: The timing was wrong for that. He had come up about the time you were going down to Africa.

DEVERS: He came up after I left London. He came up there about the same time Eisenhower did. I didn't have any trouble with Montgomery. I had to work with [General Sir Bernard] Paget. And I don't think Paget liked Montgomery. Paget was commanding the home troops and he was a pretty good commander. We got along well together. He had his problems, and I know he was kind of disappointed that he wasn't getting into the war because he was one of the older commanders.

BURG: He was commanding the forces that Britain had retained in England.

DEVERS: I never had anything to do with Montgomery.



BURG: I get the impression that he felt it could be done although he, too, wanted more forces in the landings.

DEVERS: Well I'd met Montgomery for the first time Christmas

Day in 1942 out in the desert when I went up to his headquarters at Marble Arch. Alexander was commanding that theatre in Africa but Montgomery was commanding the advance at Marble Arch.

BURG: Out in the western desert.

DEVERS: Western front. I went to Marble Arch and spent two or three hours talking to Montgomery about his command, how he handled his air, and his command post. I had wanted to take one of my officers with me but the aide whom they had given me, a bright young man with one of those monocles...

BURG: Would that have been Colonel Campbell?

DEVERS: No, it wasn't Campbell.

BURG: No, I'm sorry, that's right; it's too early.

DEVERS: Too early.

BURG: 1942, surely.

DEVERS: This fellow was smart, and he said, "General, I wish you wouldn't make that request of me. My boss is," he said, "you'll



have to excuse me, my boss is a peculiar fellow and if I go and make that request, he's liable to make you wait an hour before he sees you."

Well, I said, "Forget it. I don't want to cause any trouble." But I said, "I can take another officer when I go to see his air officer." Their headquarters were very close together. I talked to Montgomery quite a long time, and he told me how he was running things and how we was running the air force. I asked the questions and I was very careful how I asked them. Then I went to talk to his air officer, and his air officer told me how he got along with Montgomery. He wasn't an easy man to deal with, you see.

BURG: That's what I understand.

DEVERS: Montgomery assumed he was doing everything, but his air officer was doing what he could within his capabilities without saying what he was doing. In my opinion the air officer gave me the correct answers. We didn't have much experience in this field.

BURG: Yes. I wonder if you weren't talking to a man called [Air Vice Marshal Sir Arthur] Coningham.



DEVERS: Yes, Coningham was the air officer.

BURG: Yes.

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: Because Elwood Quesada, Pete Quesada thinks very highly of Coningham.

DEVERS: Well, he was a very fine officer.

BURG: All right, now, when you went down to North Africa, having had that problem of bringing aides over from America, how did you do bringing anybody down to North Africa with you?

DEVERS: Well I took my staff, my personal staff with me.

BURG: And who would that be, General?

DEVERS: My two aides, Shumaker and Hormell, and Tupper. Miss Jaqua who was my receptionist went down, but she went down with Ira Eaker. And I took Dave Barr as my chief of staff because Idwal Edwards wanted to go with Ira Eaker. Ira had already had his orders; he knew he was going to go. And he'd gone



down and made a reconnaissance and he had picked out a fine headquarters in the old English gardens over outside of Naples. A very fine fellow by the name of Jackson from Washington State was his supply man and he was a go-getter. He set up Ira's headquarters in great style out there. And when I went down as deputy I had to go where my chief was, and he was in Algiers.

BURG: This was Jumbo Wilson.

DEVERS: Jumbo Wilson. They were all dug in over there in a fine quarters. So I had to find quarters, too. But I had to fly across the water to Naples to get anything done. Of course, at the start, the first month, January, we were involved in getting ready for the Cassino affair.



BURG: January of '44.

DEVERS: I actually was sick in bed in Algiers with a high temperature, and they wouldn't let me out of the room. They let people come in and talk to me, but I finally got shed of that and then the Prime Minister called a conference up in this Taylor villa. I remember that distinctly, and the VI Corps with Lucas in command

was going to do the Cassino job. I knew of Lucas; he was a field artilleryman, but I hadn't met him, and he didn't come with the staff to the conference. The staff was headed by a man named Hill, I think, a very young officer. They were planning for the Cassino attack and they had problems. They had problems in transport, and a shortage of landing craft. They were arguing about these things and I was listening because I was new. Churchill was there with his chief of supply and his son.

BURG: Randolph.

DEVERS: Randolph. And Bedell Smith was there; he'd been left behind, hadn't yet gone to England. Junbo, of course, was there with his chief of staff--Cameron, I think his name was--and it was quite a meeting. I called it a council of war called by Churchill; he had no business calling that. They were trying to figure out how they were going to do all this, how they were going to get transport for the landing--and I got pretty well worked up about the thing. I simply said, "Well, this has to do with my command NATOUSA. That's the supply end of the operation. We're going to land at Anzio. We're not going to turn loose any transport until we get all the supplies we need up on that landing. Those ships can't be taken away on an hour's notice and sent out to India or



somewhere else. They're going to have to stay there. And I'll tell you this: I've been informed how many tons have to be unloaded per day; I'll manage with the transport I have. I'll take that responsibility, and those ships are going to stay there." And I won that argument.

BURG: Your concern was that in order to get everything onto the Anzio beachhead, you were going to have to make those ships make several trips. You couldn't have them drop a load and then be assigned elsewhere in the world.

DEVERS: Well, no, we had to be sure that we were going to sustain that. I went and talked to the longshoremen and told them that if, when a ship went up, it was unloaded quickly and efficiently that would not mean they would have to make an extra trip. They could just go on schedule. But we were going to have to shuttle. You see, if you sent a ship up there and they were efficient with the job and came back promptly, they might have to make an extra trip. And that was a tough place. They didn't bomb us too much but they surely tried.

BURG: The beaches, I guess, and the roads offshore were within range of German artillery fire.



DEVERS: Well, airplanes, too. They hit one of our cruisers up there, a part of our protection forces. Every time I went into that area--I used to fly up there and, of course, flew in from the sea--I was always fired on or some shells went over our airfield as we landed. Someone would come out in a jeep and say, "For God's sake, jump out of there, and get in here, and let's get out of here."

BURG: So you were under direct observation on that field where you landed.

DEVERS: Well, they knew what was going on and we had to be careful. Maybe we hit the timing wrong. I never thought they could see us, but they seemed to get those shells in there to scare the hell out of you. What I wanted to do was build up some morale. That's easy when you make a definite deal and stick to it.

BURG: Yes. Yes, I see. Had you ever met Jumbo Wilson before?

DEVERS: I had just met him in England before I went down to Africa. He'd been up there when he knew that he was going to





get the command. I had been with him and his chief of staff, I think, for a couple of hours but that was all.

BURG: Now, how did he impress you when you first met him, General? When you had that first conference with him?

DEVERS: Well, he was a very fine gentleman to start with-- a good soldier and he spoke quietly. He was always a soldier and gentleman. And I think he was by far the best British general in the whole damned war.

BURG: Really?

DEVERS: Because he had a lot of experience.

BURG: He was an older man than you, was he not?

DEVERS: Much older. Much older than all the others. But he'd been out in Syria; he knew all the political figures in that area. And if they'd followed his advice, they'd have been better off. We wouldn't have had all that trouble with Tito.

Jumbo was very smart handling me. I know when I have a good commanding officer. I served under Marshall. Wilson never



wrote an order telling me that I was to do a certain thing or that my duties were to be so and so. His chief of staff tried to get that sort of thing running but Wilson would call me in and say, "Jake, will you do so-and-so? I can't do it. I can't trust the French. They let me down in Syria and I just wouldn't be fair." He said, "You can help them out. You know what we have to do up there. Afterwards if you want to talk about any of it when you are thoroughly familiar with it, come on in." --That's the way he handled me and I'm going to tell you we did things that nobody knows were done. We got the Poles straightened out because we operated that way. Clark commanded the Fifth Army--it was always Clark's Fifth Army. Actually his staff was the real thing. He was smart, too, but he was always irritating the British by claiming their troops wouldn't keep up on his flank. These things came back to Jumbo Wilson; so he talked to me about them. I said--I never called him Jumbo--I said, "Well, Marshal, you have to forgive Clark; we've got to use his mind. He's got a good mind. And the members of his staff are absolutely sound. I know Gruenther and I know Saltzman, his deputy, and his G-1, G-2, G-3 right down



the line. He's got a crack staff up there. Keyes is a good commander of that Corps; he does a good job. I know most of the division commanders, and we have good troops and I'll get that criticism of the British stopped. Just tell Brooke, 'Don't feel hurt.'" You see the British had green troops down there, too. They came from the British Eighth Army. And then they had Indian divisions, South African troops, and a Canadian Corps. We had troops from all over the world on that front. Wilson sent me out to inspect them. And when the Poles arrived, he sent me up to work with the Poles and the French. We had a French Corps. So I was a busy young man, but I could handle it. I commanded NATOUSA, and I improved the efficiency there. I found Larkin in the theatre and available. I had known Tom Larkin in Panama and I told Dave Barr, "Get Tom Larkin down here for my Deputy. He's an engineer and he's got brains; he's quiet, and we'll get the job done." Well when I picked Larkin I picked the world's best man in logistics.

BURG: Did Clark pick his staff or was his staff--

DEVERS: Well, I think he picked Gruenther. I'm sure he did--



BURG: That was a darned--

DEVERS: When the Fifth Army was organized for the landing at Salerno in Italy, Clark picked Gruenther and Gruenther probably picked the staff.

BURG: That's interesting to know.

DEVERS: Charlie Saltzman was a classmate of Gruenther's. He had been in civilian life, but he was a graduate of the Military Academy. To this day I count Saltzman as one of my best friends. I had a little trouble with Gruenther because he got to be an Eisenhower man--and Clark was spoiling him.



BURG: Spoiling Eisenhower?

DEVERS: No, spoiling Gruenther.

BURG: Spoiling Gruenther.

DEVERS: Well, they did a lot of fool things that need to be checked up but--

BURG: Now, later on, we'll probably be talking about that. Did you and Field Marshal Wilson, in that meeting in England, did you sort of come to an understanding of how you were going to work together?

DEVERS: No, not a bit, it was just a social meeting. Drank a little tea and--

BURG: Just getting to know one another a little bit.

DEVERS: --and, "See you in Africa."

BURG: Now, in Africa, I suppose that's where you sort of worked things all out.

DEVERS: Well, he knew I was going to be busy with supply. The air force was all under Eaker now and Eaker reported directly to Wilson instead of through me, but I supplied Eaker because it was army-air force. And Ira and I worked closely together so we had no problems there.

BURG: That was a fortunate thing, as a matter of fact, that the two of you--



DEVERS: And I got along pretty well with most of the staff, Jumbo's staff, except his chief of staff. I had to be careful there. I had a British aide, Campbell, that you spoke about--

BURG: He'd been a Grenadier Guardsman.

DEVERS: --Grenadier Guardsman and he worked closely with me. I took him into the south of France, and that chief of staff of Jumbo's came up there and took him away from me.

BURG: Oh, it was Cameron--Cameron who latched onto Campbell.

DEVERS: Cameron. Well, he didn't want Campbell up there telling me things and keeping me informed. You have to know what's going on behind the scenes in these things. You can't be surprised and make the right decision all the time. You have to be thinking ahead of time.

BURG: Was it ever your impression that Cameron, who was Wilson's chief of staff, was he one of the British officers who found it difficult to work with American officers?

DEVERS: Well, I don't know that he found it difficult but he



was always suspicious, you know. He was a little man in my book.

BURG: I see.

DEVERS: But his G-4 wasn't. Because when they wanted something they had to come to me to get it, most of the time. So they worked pretty close, the British were pretty shorthanded in supplies and things. Most of it came from America.





ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

GEN. JACOB DEVERS

on

July 2, 1975

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library  
Abilene, Kansas



This interview is being taped with General Jacob Devers in General Devers' study in Washington, D. C., on July 2, 1975. Present for the interview are General and Mrs. Devers and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: General, when we last conversed we were talking about North Africa and we were talking about re-equipping the French which I think was one of the first responsibilities that fell to you when you went down there. Now may I ask, in case I did not last time, the scope of the re-equipping. Was this in the realm of giving them armored vehicles, small arms artillery, the whole spectrum of military equipment, or could it be that it was more confined than that?

GEN. DEVERS: The officer in charge of that project had already started and they were being given the real equipment, that is enough so they could start to train. They rotated the equipment among the units to speed things up. I didn't see too much of this training because the French were in the back areas of Algiers and I was very busy in the early days traveling across the Mediterranean until we moved to Italy. But it progressed well and when I did look into it, I was very satisfied with what was being done. Of course, they were struggling to become used to their new commanders. We had the free French as well



as all the French who escaped out of France--anybody they could pick up were in that group. Also the French had a corps of three divisions gaining experience in action under the command of [General Alphonse] Juin, whom I considered one of the great French commanders in Italy.

BURG: And that's J-u-i-n, isn't it?



DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: Now that group was actually getting combat experience.

DEVERS: Oh, yes, they were fighting with the Fifth Army as a corps. Of course, hospitalization had to be thought of; we'd improved that as much as we could, and they were well staffed.

BURG: And the units back in North Africa were training with our regular first-line equipment.

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: The latest tanks and--

DEVERS: Well, as much as we could give them.

BURG: Now those units were to become part of your command, too, weren't they?

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: So you had great interest in seeing to it that they indeed were trained well.

DEVERS: Yes, and the corps that was with the Fifth Army was going to be pulled back and given to me to go into France under the French command so that the Fifth Army would have no French troops in it.

BURG: I see. But you would have been given some combat trained French veterans.

DEVERS: We planned to send them out of the line just as soon as we broke through at Anzio, which we did.

BURG: Now did any of those men pulled out of the line from Fifth Army come back and assist in the training so that--

DEVERS: Well, yes, they ran their own show and I don't know the details of this because I didn't speak French. Oh yes, they had fine liaison and they really worked with us. I had no problem with the French. I suppose part of that was due to the fact that--you know Roosevelt was the liaison officer,



Teddy Roosevelt. He was the liaison officer with the French corps. And while he was a kind of nuisance in some ways, he was very useful because he spoke French well and they all liked him. And he stayed with them as long as they fought in Italy. He was with that French corps. And so he helped them a lot before I got down there. I didn't know him very well.

BURG: I regret to say I hadn't even known he'd been with them. I knew him from the Normandy affair.

DEVERS: Yes. Well, he was pulled out and sent to England and was with one of the other divisions. In fact he went with the 1st Infantry Division, I guess.

BURG: Yes, with Terry Allen. Well, one of the things I was going to ask you, you've actually answered. It seemed to me that one of the essential things you would need would be very fine liaison with heavy, large French units attached to you.

DEVERS: That's right. Well, we had it. They were pulling some of their key men out of that outfit and promoting them, you know, into the commands just as we would do. Well, we pulled them out early in the battle in Italy just as soon as



we got a chance and gave them a chance to recoup. And then, of course, there's a lot of wasted time--who's going to command them--they had [General Jean] deLattre [de Tassigny]; we wanted Juin, and General Marshall came down and looked me over about that time and we tipped him off. We finally got straightened out. We took their commander--deLattre--but Juin became the chief of staff to DeGaulle.

BURG: I see. As part of a deal, General?

DEVERS: And he remained chief of staff with DeGaulle all the rest of the war. So we had pretty good liaison. DeGaulle, you know, was a good military man. Whatever they said about him politically wasn't bothering me, because he knew his stuff in the military sense and he was very cooperative. I had no problems with him at all. We discussed things through interpreters. He always improved what we were trying to do, because we didn't know everything, either.

BURG: It's interesting that you had that kind of relationship with him, one that you obviously found quite satisfactory.



DEVERS: Yes, it worked, too. Because he was having trouble with the higher command, he was glad to get somebody down below that had the same problems and wanted to get the job done.

BURG: Now, I was going to ask you something that I suppose is quite natural to ask, and you may not be able to tell me. How did these French troops, operating in Italy--how was their morale, General?



DEVERS: Well, I always considered their morale--it's pretty hard when you don't understand the language--but wherever I inspected in their hospitals, and I always spent a great deal of time inspecting the troops at the front and in the rear echelons and the hospitals--they were fine. Now they had problems. Their troops came from French colonies, Tunisia, Algiers--and they spoke different languages; and the Ghoums had 3,000, I think. They have their own women all carefully trained to go with these men into the field--they're kept in the back areas. And they have good discipline. Eisenhower never really believed in them. He didn't think the French were doing the best they could. But I thought they were because, well, the Senegalese, for instance, can't fight in winter weather and

we couldn't possibly have clothed them properly, so we pulled them out of line, took their equipment from them, and gave it to other units after we got into France and just rested them in the back area; and, when warm weather came again, we put them back in the line. We did a lot of things like that.

BURG: You had to make special adjustments in other words.



DEVERS: Yes. And the food situation wasn't easy either because their great trouble was the French didn't want to have any service troops. They wanted us to do all their service for them and that was the last thing we were going to do. So I had to convince them that they had to have trained service troops. They had to have pretty good men working with this problem because they had difficulties getting food. I had a lot of good people, I must say, that could speak French, because we couldn't have solved our problems otherwise.

BURG: They didn't want just a short-tail, they wanted no tail at all, or rather they wanted to lengthen your tail as far as supplies.

DEVERS: Yes. They got as much as we could give them.

BURG: Were they content with American rations, General, or did they--

DEVERS: No, they weren't--they got their own rations. But we had to assist them. My supply people in NATOUSA had that responsibility. I don't know what Lutes tells you on this, because Lutes, of course, was back in the United States, but he must know some of the details. He worked directly with Larkin who was commanding NATOUSA.

BURG: He and I are just now coming up on late 1943, early '44. Now, am I right in thinking that, basically, as far as weapons and ammunition would be concerned and perhaps even uniforms, that is American material.

DEVERS: Well, the uniforms were all French.

BURG: Oh, they still had those.

DEVERS: They dyed their own uniforms. Whenever we captured Germans, we would turn everything over to the French that they were able to use.

BURG: Even German weapons?



DEVERS: Well, yes, we gave them some German weapons 'til the ammunition ran out. They wanted to fight. That's what they wanted to do; they didn't want to go around and serve food to people; they wanted to fight, and they did it fairly well.

BURG: So very clearly the French units that you're describing to me at this stage in the war are nothing like what we have read of the French Army in 1940.



DEVERS: I don't think so. I think they did the best they could for me. As for their landing, everybody's scared of landings. They'd never made an amphibious landing. So we tried them on the island of Elbe, and they did pretty well. But we ran into an awful lot of strength on that island that we didn't know was there. We told them there were only 3,000 Germans over there, but there were more nearly 6 or 7,000. But they did the job. I don't know what went on politically or any of the background--but deLattre was a great orator. And he worked his men to death. He'd hold staff meetings 'til midnight. Then he'd go to sleep and they had to go to work to carry out his orders. So I stepped into this. I said, "Look, your whole staff's dead and you're sitting around here telling me what must be done and they can't do it." And they heard it. So that French staff was on my team, too.

I always felt that I was fortunate in having men on my staff like [Henry Cabot] Lodge, for instance, who spoke French perfectly, and who understood the French. He also understood the military as well as the political situation and he had selected good men to help him. Our liaison men in every division were the American officers who spoke French fluently. All those things helped. My attitude always was, you don't say no-- they always wanted more than they could get, and I'd have to step in and have some very important meetings with deLattre and he'd get mad, mad as hell. But Lodge always was able to handle it in a way that kept it from boiling over. I had to write some letters which I understand are now coming to light, letters which I'd forgotten. In any event deLattre and I got along well. I remember one encounter deLattre had with General Marshall when Marshall visited his headquarters. They were jumping on Patch for not giving the French the proper supplies. Patch was commanding that outfit. I was the deputy commander for the British Commander, Jumbo Wilson, but Patch was commanding that initial landing. I insisted that he was the commander. He took command when the French came ashore. Up to that time [Lucian] Truscott was the commander, and of course the Navy put us ashore so they controlled the landing through the Navy commander. And



if the beaches were changed, they were changed by Navy command, not by us. That's what happened to [John E.] Dahlquist, by the way, who just died.

BURG: Yes, I noticed in the paper.



DEVERS: And I happened to be flying overhead with Eaker, piggy-back with his aide. The air officers were in the air over me and we were all along that front of the Riviera in that landing. Of course, I was pretty familiar in those days with the locations of the units and I was able to be in the proper headquarters at the right time. I always felt that the decision that you make at that time was the important one. See Truscott's got great responsibilities, keyed up, he's a great fighter, his emotions are at the top, and boy when somebody doesn't do just as he ordered, he takes a pretty dim view and if you're built like a fighter you over react. But this time he didn't, because I stepped in at the time and said, "Dahlquist didn't have anything to do with that. The Navy man made that command of changing from one beach to the other." You see?

BURG: Put Dahlquist ashore at a point where his men weren't trained to be.

DEVERS: Well, where he wasn't supposed to be, but he went there because that beach was clear of hostile fire and the other one where they were to have gone was under very heavy fire. Well, as I said, they landed right where they were needed when we got the big break-through and we went up the Napoleon trail toward Grenoble. So that's the way things worked.



BURG: Now, deLattre made the mistake shortly after the landings of griping about Patch to General Marshall?

DEVERS: He didn't gripe shortly after the landings. He griped about Patch some months later when Marshall came over. I didn't stop it; General Marshall stopped it. And, boy, General Marshall lit right into deLattre. I was helpless. I was about to say something, but it's pretty hard to do. And Bullitt was there, now aide to General deLattre, Bill Bullitt. But General Marshall did the right thing at that time.

BURG: He slapped deLattre down.

DEVERS: Oh, yes. He said, "I'm tired of hearing you complain about these things."

I told him, "We gave the French all their share and a little more, too. This is just an emotional outbreak, General Marshall. We've been successful up to this point, so I think we ought to quiet down on it." And we did.

BURG: Let's drop back to North Africa long enough for me to ask you: Was any of that southern France--

[Interruption]

BURG: Now we were back in North Africa and I wanted to know if any of the southern France invasion planning had been done before you got there or whether you arrived in the middle of that? I'd like to know exactly what the situation was when you arrived there to join Jumbo Wilson.

DEVERS: As you know, my orders were a surprise and I left England, I think, the first of the month, the first of January, and I got to Algiers and I was sick with the flu. So I had ten days in which I was bedridden under the care of a nurse, trying to pick up the odds and ends. There was a lag of ten days. After I got over that, it was another ten days before I felt I could travel across to Italy to see what was going



on. Now you have these facts. Patton was under arrest in Sicily; he had the Seventh Army; the Seventh Army had done some preliminary planning. The engineer of the Seventh Army was Gar [Garrison H.] Davidson. He knew all about that planning; apparently he had been in charge of it. Eisenhower had relieved Patton of his command, put him under arrest, and then had given the command of the Seventh Army to Clark who commanded the Fifth Army. So Clark was commanding the Fifth Army and the Seventh Army and it was kind of a mess. Bedell Smith was still there and he told me how it happened. Well, then I went to work to get it straightened out. Now, there are a lot of things that might have gone on, but the real facts of the case are this: In this interval Eisenhower asked for Patton in England; I was glad to let him go. It let me out of a problem with him and I hadn't been able to go see him because I'd been sick. I told him Eisenhower wanted him in England. So I said he could go, and he could take all his personnel but no equipment. He was going to take all his equipment, this special equipment they had. I said, "No equipment--and I'm keeping Gar Davidson. Gar Davidson stays and is going to be with the new Seventh Army because he will carry on the planning."



Now that's how far the planning was. They had an outline; they had a pretty good idea; they had another name for it, I forget what it was. But they had a good start and I wanted all that there and I was building up a plan. When this happened, to give you an idea what the thinking was, the first man to come in my office was Gar Davidson from over in Sicily. He said, "I know what went on here. My brother-in-law had something to do with this." That was Al Gruenther, who was the chief of staff of the Fifth Army. "I want to go with Patton."

I said, "Gar, you were head football coach at West Point when I was graduate manager of athletics and I've selected you, and you're not going to go. You're going to stay here and tie this plan in and after we get it going and I know what's going on, if you then think you want to go, you can go." Well, he stayed with the Seventh Army the rest of the war and was very valuable. Gruenther had nothing to do with it. Well, there had to be a Seventh Army commander. And you're going to see this in other papers, so there's no reason why I shouldn't say what happened. I sent a cable to General Marshall, "Eyes Only." You know how those work.

BURG: Right.



DEVERS: And I said, "I have to have a commander for the Seventh Army. Clark is commanding both the Fifth Army and the Seventh Army. He can't command two armies, and I'm not too well pleased with what I see in the Fifth Army. But he can do that job. I need a commander for the Seventh Army. I would like to have either [William H.] Simpson or [Courtney] Hodges, both of whom I know are available."

Back comes a cable almost before I sent that one off and Marshall said, "You have to have a commander for the Seventh Army who has been blooded in war, who's had experience in combat, and there are only two of them: Patton and Clark."

This is just the way things work. Well, I slept on that. That's one point I remember, because those were pretty tough problems for me. Furthermore, I had a lot of other things bothering me. So I told Dave Barr, my Chief of Staff, "Dave, I'm going to sleep on this one. When I come in tomorrow morning we'll find an answer. In the meantime, you think where I'm going to get a man that's had any combat experience whatsoever. All of them are in England now; those that got it at Guadalcanal and other places--I don't know where they are." I went home and slept. On my desk in the morning was another cable. It said, "The IV Corps has been ordered to your headquarters."





And I said, "Who the hell commands the IV Corps?"

And they said, "Sandy Patch."

Then I said, "That's my man!"

What I didn't know was that Sandy Patch had had a little trouble with Gen. Marshall and wasn't sitting too well with him, but Marshall gave him to me right quick. I solved all those problems by telling Patch he could keep all his staff, that he'd get Gar Davidson, and I would give him anybody on my staff that could assist him. So we built that staff up and later they got rid of [Willis D.] Crittenberger up there, and I took him and gave him the IV Corps. I told him to bring in any staff he wanted, and gave him some officers whom I thought were suitable.



BURG: So you just fell into Patch.

DEVERS: Just the way it happened at breakfast.

BURG: Broke just like that.

DEVERS: And Sandy proved to be a great army commander, if not the best.

BURG: And Hodges and Simpson both went into Northern Europe--

DEVERS: Yes, and they'd have done a good job for me. Simpson, particularly, would have done a good job for me, because I know him. I knew him then and I know him now. And Hodges, I knew Hodges very well, too.

BURG: I never knew that it had happened like that, just out of the blue.

DEVERS: Well, that's the way the facts are. That's history.

BURG: What had Patch done to anger General Marshall?



DEVERS: Well, some little thing you know on the way to Guadalcanal. I don't know what happened. I never asked him.

BURG: And he never volunteered to tell you.

DEVERS: No. See, he went out to Guadalcanal and he fought that battle at Guadalcanal. He was sick a lot of the time because Sandy had a weakness for pneumonia. He generally had trouble in the bad weather. So when I got him, I assigned a medical officer to him and told him, "You stay with Patch and don't let him do these things and keep him going." He had had Joe Collins out there in Guadalcanal and I don't think they got along together too well. But Patch proved all right. He

brought his staff and we built the staff up from people that I picked up here and there and that he had picked up.

BURG: Who are the men that particularly stand out in your mind now as--you've got Patch and both you and Patch are also accumulating others--the men who are especially vital in that thrust up into southern France.

DEVERS: Well I don't know that I can give them. I can give you--



BURG: Some I knew, of course, because Dave Barr mentioned--

DEVERS: Patch, of course, brought his IV Corps staff with him. So he had a chief of staff and all personnel he wanted. Crittenberger came down; he brought Lodge with him and some people that he had had on his staff in England when they turned his corps over to another officer who had been blooded in the Pacific. All through the command are friends, you know, and fine young officers that they'd picked up, and I approved all of them. I had no problems there.

BURG: No bad apples in that lot.

DEVERS: No bad apples, no, sir. I knew who the bad apples were and I'd get rid of them in a hurry. There weren't many. And the Fifth Army had a good staff. They had a top-notch staff and Gruenther was a top-notch chief of staff. [Geoffrey B.] Keyes was a good corps commander in the Fifth Army. Clark is smart; he's his own worst enemy and he still is, I guess. Anyhow--his problem was just his personality; Clark criticized the British and did little things that irritated them.

BURG: I see. He had the facility that Bernard Montgomery had for irritating people.



DEVERS: Well, I don't think Clark irritated them like Montgomery did, but he would say things that others picked up, repeated, and made worse.

BURG: I see.

DEVERS: Gossip. Jumbo Wilson was thoroughly familiar with all this.

BURG: He'd been down there throughout all these years.

DEVERS: Yes, and he talked with me frankly.

BURG: Did he really?

DEVERS: I always considered him one of the better British officers in the high command, and I still do. He handled me just a hundred percent right. He never gave me any written orders; he didn't even give me written orders through his chief of staff. He simply talked to me; I knew what he wanted and I did it. I had the energy in those days and I got out and did it. He had trouble with the Poles, and he sent me up to straighten it out. Well, I went up there, took a good interpreter, and got along fine.



BURG: General Devers, you described Jumbo Wilson as one of the better of the British high command. Would you rank any of those officers, those high-ranking British officers, above Jumbo Wilson, and may I ask you why?

DEVERS: Well, I don't think you can do that. I think that he fitted in that command down there very well because he'd been fighting with Auchinleck in the desert; he'd been sent to Syria and the French let him down in Syria. He had a weakness. He said frankly to me, "Devers, that's a French problem and I

can't handle it. I don't like the French and I don't like anything they do. You go up and do that. You know what we want to do." And I'd go up and do it. I knew exactly what he wanted to do, and I'd consult with him on it and he'd say, "Fine."

BURG: Had Syria soured him, General Devers, or did it go back earlier than that?

DEVERS: Very much earlier. But he felt that the French had let him down in Syria, too. He was a very calm fellow. He sat on the island of Crete, up on a hill--the story is told--and the New Zealand commander, what's his name?

BURG: [General Bernard C.] Freyberg?

DEVERS: Freyberg. Freyberg had the New Zealand division on Crete; they had been taken out of the desert where they'd been successful and sent to Crete. The Germans dropped in there out of the air, had them on the run, and the British were retreating from the island of Crete. Jumbo was sitting on a big pile of baggage--they always have a lot of baggage--and the troops were going by. Freyberg was worried like the devil, and he



looked up, saw Jumbo and said, "What's General Wilson doing up there?"

An aide said, "He's reading the history of the mosquitoes on the Island of Crete."

Well, that just shows how calm he was. He knew all the political figures in that part of the world. He knew the Yugoslavs--who could handle them, how they could be handled. He had that touch that other commanders--Montgomery, for instance, didn't have. He also knew his British commanders, and he did well with them. He didn't have too strong a chief of staff, but his logistic people were top-notch.



BURG: I don't recollect Wilson's chief of staff by name.

DEVERS: I think it was Cameron.

BURG: It may--

DEVERS: No friend of mine.

BURG: Was Cameron a Cold Stream Guard or--Grenadier Guards?

DEVERS: I don't know.

BURG: Well I can check out Wilson's chief of staff in Wilson's memoirs, I guess.

DEVERS: Yes, you can.

BURG: Now, do you happen to recall Wilson's impressions and opinion of Harold Alexander?

DEVERS: I think he had a high regard for him.

BURG: Did you share that view too, General Devers, from what you knew?

DEVERS: Yes, I did. We had Lemnitzer over there as a liaison officer and Lemnitzer was top-notch in this job. He still is top-notch in dealing with people.

BURG: Lyman Lemnitzer.

DEVERS: Lyman, yes. He'd been with them all along as liaison from Wilson to Alexander, and Alexander had a good staff. The trouble was that their division commanders had very little training in commanding infantry divisions. They were signal officers experienced in communications rather than in command.





BURG: Oh, really? In the British units?

DEVERS: In the British units. You see they were all short of leaders. They picked people that were pretty good, but they were totally lacking in experience in combat, so they had a weakness there.

BURG: Fascinating, General, because, you know, one of the criticisms often voiced about us was our lack of experience like that.

DEVERS: Yes, well we lacked a lot of training, too. The British are difficult at times, but they're pretty fair if you stick with them.

BURG: Now, General, while we're on the subject of British commanders, there is one man who has always interested me-- later became Lord Alanbrooke. Did you come into contact with him?

DEVERS: Yes. He was chief of the British staff all the time I was in England. And he had a deputy by the name of [General Archibald] Nye. Alanbrooke was Churchill's selection and Nye



came up through the ranks. Buy Nye was one of the most brilliant men I ever dealt with. He kept me informed about a lot of little things in the background that I appreciated and needed to know.

[Charles] Portal who had the air--

BURG: Oh, yes.

DEVERS: He was outstanding. He and Eaker got along fine together, and I got along well with both of them.



BURG: We've heard many fine reports of Portal.

DEVERS: Oh, he was fine. And the other one was Dickie Mountbatten. To this day you won't get a better man. When I'd get caught up with the problems I had and worried about one or the other of them--either Portal or Mountbatten--would ride back with me in my car to my headquarters and tip me off as to the best solution.

BURG: With that kind of men working with you, then, things went better for you in London, of course.

DEVERS: Sure, they had some respect for me, and Dickie Mountbatten still has. He's been interviewed I think by Tom

[Col. Thomas E.] Griess. He went out to India, you know, with Spec Wheeler and I thought that was a good choice. They were great friends.

BURG: Yes, China-Burma-India Theater. He was supreme commander.

DEVERS: So I didn't have all negative things. As a matter of fact I was never very suspicious, although my staff was to some extent.

BURG: Of the British?

DEVERS: Well, yes. My staff was always saying, "Somebody's undercutting you." Or, "You better write a letter," or "You ought to do this." Well, I'm just not constituted that way but I had to come to the conclusion they were right, and now I know they were right in lots of things. And it distresses me.

BURG: There were some problems then--there were cases where British officers--

DEVERS: Well I won't say just British, American officers, too.

BURG: Oh, well, yes.



DEVERS: Of course I didn't see any of the French. The French were short of officers except [General Jean] deLattre [de Tassigny] and DeLarminat. Oh, I'm a great admirer of DeLarminat. He was a Free Frenchman. DeGaulle gave him a corps and Bethouart got the other corps and--

BURG: What was that last name, General?

DEVERS: Bethouart. B-e-t-h-o-u-a-r-t. He's a very fine officer and he's still around; and so is Montsabert, but Bethouart had the other corps and he was a good man and very reasonable. But when we landed in the south of France, the first thing deLattre did was to relieve DeLarminat of his command. And I found that out within a couple of hours of our landing.



BURG: You mean they actually had just gotten on the beach and he relieved him?

DEVERS: Yes. And I caught deLattre in the headquarters. See we were driving for those ports. I knew what General Marshall wanted and what we needed--we needed ports. They didn't have any ports up north. When they got in the "Bulge" if it hadn't

been for my ports in Marseilles-Toulon and the line of communications that we built up there, they'd have been in a hell of a fix. Sixty percent of the supplies to support the "Bulge" came through the southern ports. I know a lot of background on that. I caught deLattre just as he was going upstairs with that little cap that he slept in and I brought him down and he wasn't too alert. I got a lot from him because I had Lodge with me. I said, "What's going on here? Why are you going upstairs? You ought to be out there with the Senegalese. You ought to be taking them right now and you would have a big jump on everybody. Keep going." I said, "Here you say I don't give you proper objectives for the great and fine army of the French. Now you have it. Go do it." And boy he did it! They went to work and--



BURG: He was going to sleep regular hours.

DEVERS: Yes. He had issued his orders and the staff were to get the details. This wasn't unusual, but--

BURG: Well, why had he relieved that commander, DeLarminat, General? Was there really a good cause?

DEVERS: I said, "You've just relieved a corps commander. Who'd you put in command of that corps now?"

He said, "Montsabert." Well Montsabert was commanding the 1st Algerian Infantry Division and he was a good officer and I knew he could command that corps.

So I said, "All right, that's fine. What'd you do with DeLarminat?"

deLattre's answer was, "Oh, he's down there politicking; he isn't fighting." Well DeLarminat was a very quiet, thorough officer; he was Free French--they didn't like the other French. We had that little problem. I won't say that hurt the morale, it didn't. But if you'll remember, later on when DeGaulle split the French army in two with his political business, the man he assigned to carry out his purposes was DeLarminat who finally killed himself because he couldn't go along with DeGaulle. I'd seen DeLarminat. I always called on him. He fought the battle of the Atlantic for me which relieved the port of Bordeaux, and finally got [General Jacques] LeClerc to go down there with the 2nd Armored Division and use his tanks as artillery to support that effort so that we could open the port.



BURG: Did you think that deLattre had sufficient cause for relieving DeLarminat?

DEVERS: Well, no, when you're dealing with emotions you can't understand what's going on without knowing what went on in the past. Maybe years before as a second lieutenant something had happened. Who knows? I knew that DeLarminat was a hell of a good officer and when I heard that DeGaulle had assigned him to take up the Maquis with his headquarters at Cognac, that was a good deal for me. I sent Lodge over there, a good French-speaking officer, to help him and we picked up a lot of people for him. I don't have all the details of how it was done. You just have to trust people.



BURG: But you seemed to have figured that DeLarminat would be taken care of and given--

DEVERS: Well, he was taken care of.

BURG: Equally--

DEVERS: It had already been done. And I don't know why or the background for it.

BURG: But I mean you were not concerned about DeLarminat's career, his having been relieved--there were other things that he could do.

DEVERS: Sure. We needed DeLarminat. We needed all the French we could get. And deLattre needed people that could work with him. But I couldn't do anything because DeGaulle was taking care of him.

BURG: It would be especially difficult to do it with an ally.

DEVERS: Sure.



BURG: Now let me ask you this, General. As you all got ready for southern France, can you think back now and remember what were the major problems you felt you were going to face in making that landing? I mean were there any things that were outstanding in your mind as worry areas, potential trouble, aside from the fact of German resistance, of course.

DEVERS: Well, we had that pretty well planned. We used every port in Africa and Sicily and Italy. We had convoys coming out from all over that Mediterranean on pretty tight schedules. And I flew it ~~for~~ two days because we had to start some of them



two days ahead of time. We had to fool the Germans as to where we were going and so we took Genoa--made them think we were going to Genoa. Then we had to get the Air Force to bomb accordingly. We knew that the one armored division that the Germans had was on the wrong side of the Rhone and was going to cross and come back up there; so we made a great effort as if we were going to land over near Spain and kept that division immobilized and it worked. Then the French got worried about the big guns on the islands guarding Toulon and Marseilles which were to be captured by the Special Service Force; so we trained that Special Service Force to capture the islands. The man who had commanded the Special Service Force was now commanding the airborne effort on that landing. I picked up all the gliders, people trained for airborne operations who had been fighting as infantry--I pulled them all out. We knew that the troop carriers that were in England weren't being used; they had done their job. We got them down to Italy. That was Ira Eaker's job. He assigned them to airfields around Rome. Then Vesuvius erupted and damaged a great many gliders--we had to repair all the glider wings. Oh, we had a hell of a mess down there, but we finally got them all assembled. I'm



a little hazy on who commanded the troop carriers--Williams, I think, and I gave the commander of the airborne, the one who had commanded the special service troops--

MRS. DEVERS: Frederick?

DEVERS: Frederick. General Frederick. I assembled Eaker, Williams, and Frederick and their staffs in a resort town just outside of Rome. I turned the Special Service Force over to Ed Walker. I got Eaker to step up his bombing of the guns on the islands because the Navy was worrying about them. And, of course, if you drop a big bomb near those great big guns, it tips the concrete a little bit, and they can't fire the damn gun; they can't traverse. They did a great job with that bombing. The convoys were all on schedule. I flew piggy-back. I knew where they were. I wanted to check up and see whether things were moving. Believe me, the Navy did a great job, too, under [Vice] Admiral [Henry K.] Hewitt and his staff. We acted as a team. The reason we did this bombing was because the Navy wanted it, and Ira was quite willing to do it. We didn't have to argue about one thing. We did it. So if you ask about morale, morale was pretty damn high. Those fellows



were never turned down and they knew their job and we had a lot working for us.

BURG: So your ships had to be assembled from ports all along the North African shore.

DEVERS: That's right and then they had--

BURG: And Italy, Sicily--

DEVERS: --the island of Sicily, Italy.

BURG: --brought up there--

DEVERS: Brought up and then directed towards the Riviera.

BURG: So that was a much greater distance really than the cross-channel distance.

DEVERS: Oh, much.

BURG: And with much more time for discovery. You could have been discovered at almost any time.

DEVERS: That's right. Somebody was working on that problem-- and trying to confuse the Germans and it was pretty well done.



BURG: Has anyone ever done a book on that?

[Interruption]

DEVERS: I don't think anything's been done on it. I'm not sure. Seaman, when he was an instructor at Leavenworth, wrote up the logistic side of this at one time. But I haven't read enough on this.

BURG: Neither have I. But it struck me that I'm realizing the enormous distances your convoys had to move.

DEVERS: We had good weather. That's a big help. Big help. And we also had a special way of unloading our liberty ships.

BURG: You mean at the beaches themselves?

DEVERS: Yes. We ran those liberty ships into the beaches and we ran three DUKWs up on each side, each port. Each port had a net that could load two and a half tons, lift it up and drop it into a two and half ton DUKW, which proceeded to the shore, hit the sand, let the air out of the tires, cross the sand maybe fifty yards, hit the hard road, pumped air back into its tires, and took the cargo up to the dump where it



was supposed to go. Meanwhile, when we had succeeded in advancing say twenty miles further, we just rolled those DUKWs on up to where the troops were.

BURG: So you were dropping off the cargo net with its cargo in the DUKWs and detaching.

DEVERS: Yes, and then picking up the net and transporting it to where it was needed without handling it two or three times.

BURG: So you didn't unload those nets at all.

DEVERS: Well, we unloaded them at the proper places and we soon had German prisoners to do it. And here is one of the secrets of all this business. How did we get those supplies across the Durance River? The bridge was gone--all the bridges were gone. We ran the railroad trains up to the river. We had engines and freight cars. We dropped those nets with their two and a half tons into the freight car and ran the train up to the site of the bridge, picked up the nets with their two and a half tons of cargo, put them into other DUKWs that crossed the Durance River and then transferred them again to a freight car to travel another two hundred miles. These



are ways you have to improvise to get supplies to your fighting units. And I had [Brigadier General] Carl Gray. He had been sent down to help Eisenhower in Africa. I think he's a great guy. He was a football player and you couldn't lick him. He'd been a railroad man before he was born, he said, but he never worked for his father who ran the Union Pacific. He knew almost every section head on the railroads in the United States and he had them all over Africa running the railroads. I sent a cable to him when we went into Lyon and said, "Where the hell are you? Are you in that private car down in Italy? You ought to be up here; we have troubles. We have a railroad center all messed up here and you have to straighten it out."

He said, "I'll be up there in two hours."

And he flew up from Italy. My staff and I worked all night with him.

He could call a section head up and say, "Get down to the Durance River. You know where to get your crew." And get that bridge on the way." And that's the way we did it.

Dan Noce who lives right up here in the mountains at Washington, Virginia, and who had been on my staff in England went down to Africa and became the G-4 for Jumbo Wilson. One



day in the staff meeting I said, "I want every DUKW." I knew about DUKWs because I'm the one that started the development of DUKWs when I had the Armored Force at Knox. It was rumored that they were going to close the factory down. So I got a cable off to General Marshall and I assume that they didn't close down the factories. Anyhow, we picked up all the DUKWs that we could get. Then we had nobody to drive them. The 2nd Cavalry Division was to be sent down there and we were going to break it up to make service units out of it, but it hadn't arrived. We were training with DUKWs and Dan Noce said, "Why don't you take the people in the hospitals that can drive a truck, but can't walk, and we'll train them and they can take over these DUKWs." And he said, "We can get enough officers and more to do this." And that's what we did. We had three crews assigned to each DUKW in order to keep them running 24 hours a day--seven hours operating, one hour for maintenance, and turn over to another crew. We kept them rolling and you can bet those DUKWs were mothered like no child was ever mothered. And we had only one that sank in that landing. Now it's true that the weather was fine; that helped. All three of that crew went out



and helped raise that DUKW, so we really didn't lose any of them.

BURG: They salvaged it.

DEVERS: Salvaged it. In the meantime Churchill was over in Italy with the Fifth Army trying to get all these landing craft tanks to send them out to India. After the landing, he was to get some of these things. Well, I said, "You don't get them 'til I get through with them." We kept everything we had going full tilt.



BURG: He wanted some of your DUKWs.

DEVERS: He wanted my DUKWs and he wanted the landing craft tank. It's these little things that count. And when you talk to Lutes, see what he says. I've never talked with Lutes. He doesn't know these facts I'm giving you, probably, but Dan Noce does.

BURG: I want to ask you--Dan's last name?

DEVERS: Noce, N-o-c-e.



BURG: N-o-c-e. Because I don't think we got that on tape the last time. I think this is rather remarkable; it's such a simple solution to load those DUKWs off the ships out there in the water by simply dropping the cargo and its containing net and just let her go.

DEVERS: That's right.

BURG: And then take it ashore and take it to the dump.

DEVERS: And you have to plan this and train with it months ahead of time, which we did. I'm not saying Jake Devers had all these ideas, but he was the one that got them going or approved them, or took his ideas to somebody else and got a better idea along the same lines and put the two together. So a lot comes with these quick, sound decisions--making decisions at breakfast, I call it. Just as I feel that a fighting unit that has the main attack ought to be a hundred percent perfect at breakfast. Most units have a lot of absentees. Some are absent without leave, some are sick, and you go into battle with about seventy percent strength. Nobody can tell me that that didn't go on during the war, but I believed in having replacements



behind the units to fill up the vacancies. The same principles apply where the wounded are concerned. They aren't always badly wounded. They have to go back, and they go through the stations, as you know. But when they heal up they are sent right back to their unit. They want to go. You don't even have to tell them. Hell, sometimes they'll even desert the hospital to go back. That's all I want--I want them in there fighting.

BURG: So you followed a principle of trying to keep your leading elements supplied with replacements so that--

DEVERS: At full strength.

BURG: Always at full strength.

DEVERS: They were built up before night, as soon as it could be done. I believed in that, and I believe it today.

BURG: And also good for the morale of the men who are still there who didn't get wounded because they don't keep seeing the gaps widen.



DEVERS: The 4th Armored Division, Abrams fought his 4th Armored Division. He led that point always. He's responsible for the success of the Third Army.

