

INTERVIEW WITH

Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Betts

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



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This is an interview with Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Betts, done in General Betts home at 650 Independence Ave., SE, on October 18, 1973, in Washington, D.C. And present for the interview are General Betts and the interviewer Dr. Maclyn Burg from the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: General, I would like to start by asking you where your education gathered?



GENERAL BETTS: Well, it was sort of world-wide. I was born in Baltimore on June 14, 1894. My father was basically a salesman; he was in insurance all the time of my young life, and he moved around a great deal. I recall living, at the age of about three, first in Pittsburg, then we went to Eire, Pennsylvania, then we went to Scranton, Pennsylvania, then we went to Richmond, Virginia, and then my father was offered a sort of a mission to Japan. Well, there was a question of--the Japanese were regaining their autonomy, so to speak; extraterritoriality had flourished there. And in the course of reasserting their sovereignty, why the Japanese were beginning to think about their own insurance companies, which naturally were in--the foreign insurance companies were already established.

BURG: I see.

GENERAL BETTS: So my father was sent over there to try and make

sure that the Mutual Life Insurance Company could stay installed in Japan. In that he failed, chiefly because the company was rather stupid about the whole thing. They wanted to bring all the premiums home to the United States, keep all the profits in the United States and, of course, the Japanese wanted--they knew about insurance and they realized it was a great gather of capital, and they wanted to spend it in Japan as they saw fit.

BURG: Uh-huh.



BETTS: So the thing failed. He came back and was still with the Mutual Life for several years in New York. And then, after awhile, he left Mutual and took a job with the Sun Life Insurance of Canada in China, in Manchuria to be precise, so we went out to China for three years.

BURG: So you had been in Japan, and back in the States--

BETTS: Two years in Japan, three years in China; in the course of all this, I was going to school just as if I were an army brat. A year in a school was pretty good.

BURG: Right, right.

BETTS: And when we came back from China, which was in 1912, I was old enough to go to college, and I went to the University of Virginia and spent four years there and graduated in 1916.

BURG: What had you majored in there, General?

BETTS: Languages, foreign languages; romance languages, mostly.

BURG: Had you acquired Chinese or any of--

BETTS: I had studied some Chinese in China, but I was the wrong age. I had passed the age where you blotted out [lost this remark]



BURG: Yes.

BETTS: --and I hadn't reached the age where a boy can really apply himself and study. But I'll come back to that later if I may.

BURG: Of course.

BETTS: Anyhow, I graduated in 1916. Meanwhile, World War I

had broken out and I was very much on the Allied side and believed we should get into that war. And so when we got into that war, I signed up. I had one brief interval of less than a year when, after graduation, I went to the National City Bank of New York as a sort of trainee for foreign service. I always wanted to serve in a big company. My father had tried going into business for himself and had successes and had failures, and I felt that wasn't my dish of tea. I didn't sense it but actually, of course, the managerial revolution had set in about that time and, actually, managers were running the big companies and not the proprietors anymore.

BURG: I understand.

BETTS: I didn't feel that, but I did feel that I wanted to work for somebody. It had to be a big organization because I wanted to have room to grow in it. And I also felt I was very well qualified for service abroad, having lived in China and Japan, and having studied modern languages and being interested in foreign affairs, and I felt the whole thing would fit me. So I went to the City Bank with the idea that they would send



me overseas at some close time.

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: Well, the war, our entry into the war, supervened and I at once said, "Well, I've got to fight in this war." So I put in and was sent to Plattsburg.

BURG: Oh, yes.

BETTS: It was called the first Plattsburg training camp. Well, I had been there about a week and I suddenly realized that this was what I had been looking for all along, anyhow. This was the big organization, with permanent personnel, lots of overseas duty, and opportunity for promotion if you were good. It was a career. And while I was thinking this--I might say that I stayed at Plattsburg only about three weeks, and then a rumor swept the camp. If you wanted to get to France, why you should go to Fort Monroe where they were training heavy artillerymen, who were in great demand. So when an opportunity came to transfer to Fort Monroe, I put in my name, went to Fort Monroe and joined the coast artillery, and stayed



in it all the rest of my military career, more or less.

BURG: Did it get you to France, General?

BETTS: In October, 1918. [Laughter]

BURG: Ah, I see. Yes. You had a quick four-week war!



BETTS: Just about that. I remember when I landed, my colonel sent me to get--we landed at Brest and went to Pont d'Naiison(?) barracks and the tents were about six inches deep in mud-- and the colonel called me in and said, "Get something for the men to sleep on." So I went to the--I did the proper thing first, I went to the quartermaster and there was a young captain. He looked at me and said, "What are you doing around here? Don't you know the war is over?" Here I was fresh landed, somewhat crestfallen and disappointed, because they didn't have anything for me. So I went out and found a lot of duckboard, turned out the battalion, and we stole the duckboard and paved the tents, and everything, at night.

BURG: I wondered when it would come to that, [Laughter] because that's the typical solution!

BETTS: Oh, yes, perfectly normal.

BURG: Had you been commissioned?

BETTS: Oh, yes, yes. You see, I graduated from Fort Monroe and was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant. And while I was at Fort Monroe, why all hands were approached and they said, in a rather discouraging way, said, "Does anybody want to get a commission in the regular army? If you want a commission in the regular army, you understand, you will stand no chance of getting any kind of a high commission out of the training camp." The training camp commissioned a few people as majors, a good many captains, a good many 1st lieutenants, but they said, "If you take a regular commission, you can be sure that you will be commissioned as a 2nd lieutenant in the reserves until your regular commission comes through. "Take it or leave it." Well most of the lads were not interested, and I simply put in my name and filled out an application and I never took an examination of any kind. And suddenly through the mail, here came a commission, signed by no less than Woodrow Wilson, saying you are now a brevet--not a brevet; a, oh, what do they call--



BURG: A provisional?

BETTS: --a provisional 2nd lieutenant in the Coast Artillery Corps. So that was how I joined up.

BURG: Now Plattsburg would have, perhaps, given you a higher rank?

BETTS: I don't think so, actually.



BURG: But some, some did?

BETTS: Some did.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: I might have made 1st lieutenant.

BURG: But the way you went, it was a guaranteed 2nd lieutenant, provisional 2nd lieutenant, and that was it.

BETTS: Yes. Well, it wasn't guaranteed, but--

BURG: No.

BETTS: --but it looked good.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: And, actually, most of those commissions were given with age as a very large factor. They hardly ever made a captain under thirty, which is pretty wise, because your newly-commissioned officers were very raw. And they needed to have judgment and some kind of experience in handling men and, of course, somebody fresh out of college, like me, was not as well adapted for that--

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: --as another civilian, age thirty, and of just about equal training, equal military training. Anyhow, that was how I got into the regular army. It made no difference at all in terms of the of my career or the conduct of the war, I mean I was just a 2nd lieutenant. I was sent to Fort Totten, New York, which was a coast artillery post and which was a training ground for coast artillery regiments. Two national guard regiments passed through it while I was there; I mean, they came and stayed several months and trained, and were worked over and brought up to snuff, and then went overseas.

BURG: So this was your first duty assignment after Fort Monroe?

BETTS: Yeah, after Fort Monroe, I went to Fort Totten. And then in October 1918, I was ordered to join the 49th Coast Artillery at Fort Eustis down in Virginia, which was just getting ready for embarkation. So I went down and joined the 49th Coast Artillery and stayed with them. And then, meantime, I had been promoted to 1st lieutenant--

BURG: Oh, you had!



BETTS: --temporary. Temporary commission, but in the regular army. I was not a reserve officer at that point. And I went and joined the 49th Coast Artillery. Three days after I joined-- they were at Fort Eustis. Three days out--no, when I joined them, they were at Newport News. They were at the embarkation camp. And I was assigned to a battery, A battery, and we marched A battery on a steamship and took off and landed at Brest. And the only eventful part of it was that it was in the flu epidemic, and we had a lot of flu on board the ship.

BURG: I see. It actually had begun before the end of the war

in 1918?

BETTS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

BURG: Uh-huh.



BETTS: This ship carried, I think, two thousand troops. She was a French passenger ship, the Luticia, which had been on the South American run, probably from Havre to the River Plate, or something like that, a very, very handsome ship. And we had about two thousand men aboard and we lost seven men, seven men died of flu, on the trip over.

BURG: I see. Had you brought your guns over, General, or were they to be issued in France?

BETTS: Oh, they were to be issued in France, yes.

BURG: What was the unit using?

BETTS: They were going to use nine-point-two howitzers, a British gun.

BURG: I see. Any chance for training on those in the States?

Had you been trained with them?

BETTS: I had not. I think the regiment may have trained with them at Fort Eustis.

BURG: But in any event, you got there in October and I suppose didn't get up--

BETTS: Didn't get near the gun. We stayed in Brest three or four days and then were put on a train and taken to Le Havre. And there, I was separated from the regiment and in company with, I suppose, about twelve other officers was sent to Angers for training in the orientation school, the French orientation school. The French were very precise about siting guns and, of course, for heavy guns it's rather important to be able to know to the yard, or to the meter, just where they are. And while I was at this school the Armistice came and the war was over. The school disbanded amidst cries of happiness. And I was at once ordered, not back to the regiment, but as a regular officer, I was ordered to Bordeaux to the embarkation camp there at Genicart. And I went to Genicart with--all regular officers were immediately detached. That was an AEF-wide



order. That is, all junior officers were detached because they, being regulars, were darned well supposed to see that the volunteers got home before they mutinied, so to speak.

[Laughter]

BURG: Right. Right.



BETTS: Perfectly understandable. And I was very happy about it. I loved France and I was in no hurry to go home. I'd married. One of my reasons for looking for lucrative jobs was that I was engaged to a very charming girl at the University of Virginia, and we got married as soon as I was commissioned. But I had ambitious hopes of getting her over, which did not result. But I stayed at Genicart from about, oh, I would guess, the 10th or 15th of December, 1918, until August, 1919. When everybody else had gone home, we closed up the camp.

BURG: Perhaps I should ask you to spell the name of that camp?

BETTS: It's G-e-n-i-c-a-r-t, Genicart. It's a village about four miles southwest of Bordeaux, on the north bank of the Garonne River.

BURG: All right.



BETTS: And it was a big camp. I was with casualties and in consequence, I was about the last man to leave because as the camp closed down, they all became casualties. I mean, the camp operated by units coming through, regiments usually. I don't think we ever had a division, as a unit, move in, although the camp held about thirty thousand people. It was a big thing. But in addition to that, there were always the rag tag and bobtail. The people who had been AWOL, or the people who had been sick, or had been off on temporary duty somewhere, and they were casualties. They came as individuals to the camp and we always had about, oh, anywhere from five or six hundred to two thousand in our set of barracks. And we formed them into companies, and then we fitted them into the interstices of ships that were going away. In other words, a ship would take a twenty-five-hundred-man regiment aboard and it would have berths for about seventy more men. Well, we would take one of our casual companies and either build it up or cut it down to seventy men that had a casual officer in charge, and we'd put them on the ship and that's the way they got home.

BURG: Were you feeding them strictly out of Bordeaux, or could you feed your casuals out through other French ports?

BETTS: Oh, no, they all went out of that one port, for the very simple reason that the camp itself was practically a prison compound. Once a man was in, why, he was processed. First thing they did, they took them to what was called "the mill" and they made the men take off every stitch of clothes they had, naked as jaybirds. They proceeded then to bathe them, de-louse them, and then they worked their way up a line and gradually got more and more clothing put upon--this was true both for the casual and for every other soldier that came. So once he was caught in the grip of that thing, it would never let him go; there was only one door and that door was to the docks. [Laughter]

BURG: Right, right. And they were moving, shipping back and forth, as quickly as they could in order to get them out.

BETTS: Oh, yes, oh, yes. There was a great turnover. The casuals stayed a little longer than the units, because the units were pretty well tailored, and when a unit started to flow in,



why shipping for it appeared. There was coordination. I don't know how the coordination was worked. It was much above my level.

BURG: Right.

BETTS: But when a unit was ready, why it just marched away, marched down to the docks and got on the ship and off they went. And it was only in our case, where you had to tailor a unit a little bit to fit it into the cracks and crevices of the ship.

BURG: Yeah, right.

BETTS: It was very interesting and, as I say, at the last analysis, why the personnel of the camp turned themselves into casuals. We processed ourselves out. And I think I was about the last man out of that camp.

BURG: Like a sack turning itself inside out.

BETTS: Yes, absolutely.

BURG: Ultimately, it's all completed.



BETTS: Absolutely.

BURG: And then for you, that's August in 1919.

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: And what is the next destination for you?



BETTS: I was then assigned to, of all places, Fort Eustis, Virginia, where the 49th Artillery had started from. And I was there for four years, garrison life, mostly pretty rough in those days. I mean, the camp had been thrown together for a training camp for troops for artillery. They had barracks areas that would hold, conveniently hold, a regiment. And the amenities and things were all shacks. And, in fact, when I first got there, why they gave me for quarters, me and my wife, an ex-post exchange. We got a carpenter--and it had water in it, you see--so we got a carpenter and, I think, we got a soldier plumber and put a shower in. We put up some beaverboard partitions and it was, except for the floor, it was a very comfortable place to live. The floor was terrible because men in hobnail shoes had tramped over those soft pine floors for a number of months. And there was nothing you could do with it. I tried

washing it down with lye and that didn't do any good.

BURG: No, no. I can imagine what that looked like.

BETTS: It was just awful.

BURG: So that was your home for almost four years?



BETTS: No, no. After about a year, why, they converted-- the area had also had a very large hospital, which was designed to cater to a camp of about twelve thousand people, I suppose. So it was a big hospital for the needs of the garrison, which had shrunk to, I would guess, fifteen hundred men. There was lots of extra space. And they took that and turned it into officers' quarters, so-called. And it had steam heat from a central heating plant, but we had coal stoves. We had electric lights. It was not bad, not too bad.

BURG: How about your rank at that time? You had been a temporary 1st lieutenant?

BETTS: Yes, and then, in early 1919, I was promoted to captain at Genicart. A captain in a thing called the Army Service Corps, the ASC, which was modeled on the British army. It was not the

quartermaster corps. The quartermaster was supposed to put up clothes and food and things like this, and we were supposed to be sort of hand maidens and do--Army Service Corps was an odd jobs outfit, I would say. Very appropriate thing for an officer in the casual camp.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: And I was promoted to captain. And I held onto it for quite awhile. I think chiefly because it was an odd rank, you know. If I'd been a temporary captain of coast artillery, I think I'd have lost the bars in about six or eight weeks after I got back to the States.

BURG: Right.



BETTS: But I held on as a captain, ASC, for a couple of years. And then was broken back to a 1st lieutenant. By this time, I had provisional rank as 1st lieutenant, so I went back to 1st lieutenant. Then about after three more months, why, I came back to provisional captain. So it was not too bad, not too bad a deal. Then, as I say, nothing extraordinary happened in the four years, except I had a couple of children, and I learned

a good deal of my trade. I discovered I didn't know as much about being a soldier as I thought I did. And, meanwhile, I had discovered that they were sending language officers to China to study Chinese, and also to Japan, and I had a Chinese background and I liked China, and I figured that it would be a good detail to have. It would be a four years detail. And I put in for it and was turned down two years running. Then I was ordered to the Philippines in December of 1923, I think. I'm not quite certain about the year. I was ordered in December and spent Christmas going around through the Panama Canal to San Francisco and then waited for a transport. And in February of 1924, I embarked for Manila on the good ship, Thomas. And there, I was assigned to Corregidor and had a battery. Meanwhile,--

BURG: You are out of ASC now?



BETTS: What?

BURG: You were out of ASC now?

BETTS: Oh, yes! Yes, I was a captain, Coast Artillery Corps, provisional. And I had a battery. I had it only about two or

three months, and somebody got word that I was supposed to be knowledgeable about the Far East, and I was dragged out and taken to the AC of S, G-2, of the Philippine Department, who was Major Prosser, a very good man.

BURG: P-r-o-s-s-e-r?

BETTS: P-r-o-double s-e-r. He was a Signal Corps officer and a very, very smart guy, and I had a very delightful time with him for about three months. And then suddenly, out of the blue, here came orders to go to China as a language officer, which I always figured was because I was already halfway there and it wouldn't cost the War Department much to send me.

BURG: That's a strong possibility.

BETTS: A very strong possibility.

BURG: Was your family out with you?

BETTS: Oh, yes, yes. By this time, I had two children, two daughters, and we lived in Fort San--well, at Corregidor we lived in standard army quarters, very pleasant, with gardenias blooming



out in the garden. And then, when we went to Manila, I lived at Fort Santiago, right over the main gate of the old fort.

BURG: I see.

BETTS: And, as I say, I was only there a few months. I had a very interesting time because I was put in liaison duty, amongst other things, with the governor-general's office, who was General Leonard Wood, who was a very fine man and a very great gentleman. And one of his great virtues was that he would have none serve with him except a gentleman. His staff was always a group of extremely distinguished officers. He had Frank McCoy, he had Halstead Doey, both of whom were just as smart as they could be.

BURG: How would Doey spell his name?



BETTS: D-o-e-y, I believe.

BURG: All right. Thank you.

BETTS: And he had a Colonel--Lady Astor's family, Virginia family; oh, it doesn't matter, anyhow--who was not so bright, but who was a very fine gentleman. [Laughter]

BURG: A gentleman, anyway! [Laughter]

BETTS: Yeah. And I worked with the staff. I saw General McCoy almost daily; every once in a while, I'd see General Wood. General Wood and General MacArthur are the only two general officers I've ever encountered that, at the first glimpse of them, you felt, "Well now. What can I do to help this man? He deserves the best I've got to give." It was the most astonishing thing.

BURG: I see. And you felt that immediately?



BETTS: I felt it immediately. Just bang! The only time I've done it! I've served with many officers whom I've greatly admired, but not this instantaneous dedication. Of course, I was younger.

BURG: Well that's a very intriguing kind of thought.

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: Now you met Wood first and you met MacArthur later?

BETTS: Yes, MacArthur was in the Philippines when I was there,

but I had nothing to do with him. He was with troops. But, later on, I served him in the War Department. I'll get around to that in due course.

BURG: All right, fine.

BETTS: Well, I went to China on the Thomas. Had four very wonderful years--

BURG: Tientsin?



BETTS: No, Peking. Language officer at the legation and attached to the office of the military attaché. In the last year, I was formally an assistant military attaché, which only meant I had a diplomatic passport. I didn't do a--didn't change my duties at all.

BURG: And once again the family has come up with you?

BETTS: Yes. We all went there and lived a very lordly life. It was a life that was unbelievably comfortable; I mean, lots of servants and everything very cheap. The depression was starting at home but we didn't know that. Then in 1928, we came home, and my wife had a wealthy uncle who gave her enough

money to come home by Europe. I hypotheticated my pay and got enough money to come home by Europe. It took us six months, so by the time we got home, why I was caught up again. And we went three-quarters round the world in six months, for three thousand dollars for two of us, which I still don't understand.

BURG: So you would have come up through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean?

BETTS: Yes, oh, yes. Well, I'd been through the Suez before. When I was in Japan, we came back through Suez; when we went out to China, my mother and I went out through Suez through the Med, so I knew "furrin parts" already.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: Well, I came back and was, in 1928--we arrived home in August--I was ordered to the coast artillery school.

BURG: You were still a captain?

BETTS: Oh, I was still a captain, yes. I stayed a captain for years and years and years.

BURG: You all did, evidently. [Laughter]

BETTS: Oh, we all did. An awful lot, you know, stayed as lieutenants--

BURG: Right.



BETTS: --and it broke most of their hearts. Very few of those lieutenants with seventeen years' services, ever developed into anything. One exception, a fellow who was chief of staff of the army, eventually. Lee--oh, he was a coast artilleryman too. He also commanded SHAPE overseas. He was the one that, when DeGaulle threw SHAPE out of France, why, he gave him the biggest Legion of Honor you could think of, to console him. [Laughter]
[Ed. note: General Lyman L. Lemnitzer is the officer described above.]

BURG: I'll be darned. The name doesn't come to my mind. Well, we should be able to find that out.

BETTS: If you want to, I can look it up.

BURG: I'll check it when I get back to the Library.

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: We'll get his name.

BETTS: Anyhow, he was the only one that I know of that amounted to a great deal. Whereas the captains, on the whole, did pretty creditably. Of course, a captain in those days usually had responsibilities of one kind or another.

BURG: Right. Yes, he would.



BETTS: And the lieutenants were post exchange officers, or they were counting blankets, or doing something of that kind. They were leading a pretty dull life.

BURG: Right. Now that coast artillery school, was that at Fort Monroe at that time?

BETTS: That was at Fort Monroe, yes.

BURG: This is one of the famous "branch" schools.

BETTS: Yes, yes. And it had a series of courses, but I took what was called the "battery officers' course," which was

obligatory. In all the schools, the company officers' course was--nobody was really allowed to escape that.

BURG: Uh-huh.



BETTS: So I stayed there a year and then, while they were discussing what to do with me, I discovered that there was--let's see, this was 1929--I discovered that they had ghost writers in the War Department, and I said, "Well, why don't I go to the War Department and be a ghost writer?" So I went up--all of these people were--when I say all of these people, there were only two or three of them--were under the assistant chief of staff, G-2. And I was known in G-2 because I had been a language officer in China. So I went up there and said, "Look, I'd like to be a ghost writer." And they said, "Well, this is the first time we've ever had anybody apply for a job of this kind. [Laughter] We think you'll probably get it." And sure enough, I was ordered up there, and then for four years, I was in the old--first in the old State--all the time in the old State, [War and Navy Building]--

[Interruption]

BURG: Yes, we're going.

BETTS: That was a lot of fun. What it turned out was you-- I'd say the mainstay of the diet was speeches; you wrote speeches, and I wrote speeches with for the Secretary of War or for the Chief of Staff. And also you wrote messages and laudatory letters, flowery stuff. And once a year you wrote the annual report for the Secretary of War, which was, I think, an intentionally dull document. They were anxious that nobody would really read very much of that. [Laughter]

BURG: I see, yes. Now who would it have been, then, that you were writing speeches for?



BETTS: Well, I wrote speeches, as I say, for the Secretary of War, for the Chief of staff; occasionally, very occasionally, the Deputy Chief of Staff would have a little chore of some kind. I wrote lots of letters, too, you know; letters of commendation, letters of thanks, messages to American Legion conventions when the great men couldn't go.

BURG: Were there two or three of you assigned to this, so that

you'd share the--

BETTS: Yes, there were two of us. There were two of us in the office. And also--and this is where I first met Ike, because Ike at that time was in the War Department on the Battle Monuments caper. And he was in--but the Battle Monuments, administratively, were under the Assistant Secretary of War, who was F. Trubee Davison. Well, they used Ike; Ike wrote Davison's annual report. And as mutual, paralleled, annual reporters, why we got to know each other fairly well. We didn't have much contact. But I wrote speeches for Trubee Davison, occasionally, too. I never knew why or why not. Somebody would just say, "Well, the Assistant Secretary is going to address the Gold Star Mothers," or something, "and he'd like to have a fifteen minute address." I'd say, "O.K.", and I'd write it. Sometimes, I think Ike wrote them. I think that Ike--I'd say we were both pursuing the same line of country.

BURG: Right. Probably a little difficult now, do you suppose, to tell which one of you did what on some of that material?

BETTS: Yes, except that I had the feeling--well, I know that Ike



wrote the Assistant Secretary's annual report. Because I remember the only time I've ever seen any--at that time--that's the only time I'd ever seen any real levity. He came in one Monday and he said, "Tom," he said, "You know, on Saturday I finished that God-damned report. And", he said, "I went home and I did a very unusual thing. I took a bottle of whisky and I just stayed with it. I didn't drink it all, but I drank an awful lot and I felt very good about it the next morning." That's about the only time that he ever talked in personal terms to me in all that whole period of our acquaintanceship in the War Department. We knew each other well--I wouldn't say well; we were on first name basis.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: And we were--as I say, we were working the same line of country.

BURG: Were your offices fairly close together?

BETTS: No, not at all.

BURG: I see, so you wouldn't see each other regularly.

BETTS: No, no, we didn't. We didn't see each other casually at all. I never met Mamie. It was, of course, a starving time for the army; everybody was broke.

BURG: Right, right. But this was one occasion where it was not a conversation germane to the work that the two of you were doing--

BETTS: No.



BURG: --but just his reaction to writing that report?

BETTS: Yes. But, I'd see him fairly often, but never--we never collaborated on anything; you better put it that way. And I don't know what he did for Davison besides. I know he wrote this report. I'm pretty sure he wrote a lot of letters for him. And I rather think he must have written a couple of speeches, because I wrote very few for Davison.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: Of course, in those days the Assistant Secretary wasn't a very big shot anyway. They always wanted to be at the Secretary, and the Secretary was [Patrick J.] Pat Hurley, who was pursuing a very flashy career, he hoped. He wasn't letting anybody else talk if he could get a chance to talk. [Laughter]

BURG: Sure, sure. Now your judgment on Eisenhower at that period was that he was pleasant enough.

BETTS: He was very pleasant, I thought. He was very cool. I mean not in the sense of cold, but--he was not--he was a--poised is probably the word I want to say, he was a poised man. I was struck with the fact that he never seemed to be in a great hurry about anything; I mean, you'd ask him some question and he would deliberate a little while before he would answer it. I got an impression that he was, he was quite self-confident. Those, I would say are the salient points; self-confidence, a certain coolness of approach; objectivity, perhaps, is the word.

BURG: Not aloofness?



BETTS: No, not aloofness at all; oh, no, never. And always pleasant, always courteous. And always willing to chat for a moment but never for any great length of time. I never--I don't think I ever sat down with Ike and had a bull session.

BURG: He was at that time a major?

BETTS: He was a major.

BURG: And you were?

BETTS: I was a captain, still, and there was quite a gap between the ranks in those days--

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: --more than there is now. Less than there was before World War I, but there was still a gap. I think he had been to Leavenworth, I think, I--

BURG: Yes, he had.



BETTS: --I don't know whether he had been to the War College then or not. I think maybe he went to the War College between the War Department and going overseas with MacArthur. [Ed. note: General Eisenhower attended the War College 1927-28]

BURG: I'd have to check the timing on that, too, because it's not clear in my mind.

BETTS: Well it's not terribly important anyway.

BURG: But he had been to Leavenworth.

BETTS: I know he had been to Leavenworth. And, I would say that he was respected in the War Department. There was some slight talk about his being overambitious; there was slight comment along those lines. Plus, neither of us was on the General Staff; we were not brown-ins, we were just indians.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: We had--we didn't have--we might serve the chiefs closely, but we, we were not chiefs by any means. [Laughter] And I think we were both conscious of it.

BURG: The comments that perhaps he was overly ambitious; what level would that have come from, General? Would it have been coming from other captains? Would it have been coming from even more junior officers; or, can you place it?

BETTS: I can't place it, except it was not high level. I mean no general officer, no colonel, and I don't think any lieutenant colonel, ever mentioned Ike to me.

BURG: Uh-huh. But in this group of officers--

BETTS: The officers that I circulated in--it was not stated

with any malice or even great disapproval; I mean, ambitious officers are not badly regarded in the army, but people just seemed to be impressed with the fact that he wanted to go a long way.

BURG: And what was their evidence for that thought, General? Did you ever hear anyone say?

BETTS: No, I never heard.



BURG: No one saying, "We know he's ambitious because look what he did here, or what he said"?

BETTS: No, no, I never heard; it was all just sort of chit-chat.

BURG: Uh-huh. His standing at Leavenworth had been very high, number one in that Leavenworth class.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: That may have marked him in people's minds as somebody who would go.

BETTS: Yes. I never knew how he got to Pershing and the Battle

Monuments Commission. I suppose it was because of his record, while Pershing was a pretty objective person himself. He didn't bother much about the attractiveness of a subordinate, or whether the subordinate wanted a job he wanted him to do.

BURG: It's conceivable that Fox Connor may have assisted there.

BETTS: I don't know, I don't know how it came out.

BURG: If I could recollect the timing of that. He had served under Connor in Panama and then Leavenworth followed that and I believe that the Battle Monuments followed Leavenworth.

BETTS: I think that could well have been.



BURG: So there might be a very natural link that way.

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: Uh-huh. But it's interesting to hear for this period of time--we're now talking about the period say, '31, '32--

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: --that some people were observing this. As you say, they

did not say this with malice?

BETTS: No, there was no malice at all.

BURG: But, in their eyes he was on his way up. They felt he knew he was on his way up.

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: As far as you could tell, however, he was not--to use an older word--he was not a prig about this at all.

BETTS: Oh, no.



BURG: He was pleasant but businesslike, it sounds from your description.

BETTS: Yeah, that's, that's a very good statement. Yes.

BURG: Now what happened next to you? How long did you hold that duty?

BETTS: I was there for almost four years and in due course was relieved. I worked, primarily, as I say, for the Chief of Staff who was, first, General ~~Brehon B.~~ ^{Charles P. Summerall} ~~Somervell~~ and then General

(collected
7/89)

MacArthur; that's where I met MacArthur. I mean, met MacArthur to work for him. And I had this same sort of semi-traumatic experience.

BURG: And that four-year period pretty well matches Eisenhower's own stay, doesn't it?

BETTS: I don't know. I don't even know when Eisenhower left there. He went somewhere else before--I think he left the War Department before I did. Maybe he went to the War College; I don't know. But of course, you know, when MacArthur retired and went to the Philippines, he took Eisenhower with him.

BURG: Uh-huh, right.



BETTS: And there, again, I don't know the provenance of it; I've never known the connection between General MacArthur and General Eisenhower, except MacArthur was a good man and he evidently regarded Eisenhower as a first class man, because he took him out primarily as his, sort of, Chief of Staff--

BURG: Right.

BETTS: --or "shadow" Chief of Staff, you might say.

BURG: And you by then were working for MacArthur?

BETTS: Yes.



BURG: Directly for him. And yet, you weren't in contact with Eisenhower at that particular time.

BETTS: No. No, not at all. I never saw Eisenhower in the Chief of Staff's office at any time.

BURG: Well, evidently MacArthur was seeing Eisenhower in the Assistant Secretary of War's office. He would be in there for some particular business--

BETTS: Could be.

BURG: --and would see him, occasionally, and speak to him there.

BETTS: Could well be, could well be.

BURG: Right. Now did this mean a change of office for you; that is, you moved physically in the building?

BETTS: No, I stayed in the same place all the time.

BURG: Uh-huh, but a change of duty, or was that also about the same?

BETTS: No, it was all the same. I just wrote speeches and messages. And the only difference was for Ike, I mean for Douglas MacArthur, they had to be a little more flowery. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: A little more rhetoric.



BURG: I can well imagine that.

BETTS: I found that a few quotations from Herbert Spencer went awfully well. [Laughter]

BURG: Describe for me if you will that first meeting that you had with him? The first time you met him.

BETTS: He called me in, not as an individual; I mean, he called for the speech writer, because he had a speech he wanted to have written.

BURG: Right.

BETTS: And I went in. There was nothing of a social nature to the thing at all. I just said, "Captain Betts reporting." He said, "Well, I want you to write a speech for such--" I forget what the occasion was. I remember he used one thing-- he said he wanted a 'cryptic speech', which was a strange adjective, I thought.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: But I thought what he meant, I think, was really one of paradox more than anything else. And I don't remember anything else, except I was just simply enormously impressed with the presence of the man, and the fact that he spoke very clearly, very accurately, he knew exactly what he wanted, told me. On your way! Well, I just got this huge impression that here was a man to be followed.

BURG: How much would he alter one of the speeches that you wrote? More so than ^{Summerall (corrected 7/89)} ~~Somerville~~ had done or, or less alteration?

BETTS: Generally speaking, they all took them. Not that they were



so terribly good speeches, but they didn't have time. And most of the speeches were speeches were occasional speeches, usually before some convention or gathering.

BURG: Right.

BETTS: And they were pretty standardized.



BURG: So it's not your recollection that speeches were sent back to you to be rewritten here or there, or that these two particular Chiefs of Staff ever rewrote?

BETTS: No, I know they didn't rewrite them, because we finally mimeographed the text for press releases. I must say this first speech--as I say, I got this impression, this feeling of being a follower, at this first rather impersonal meeting. Well, I turned out this speech and it apparently impressed General MacArthur quite well because he made a point--he called the Chief of the Public Relations Division--it wasn't a division; it must have been the Public Relations Branch of the G-2 Division--was Major Griswold, Oscar Griswold, G-r-i-s-w-o-l-d, who afterwards became a corps commander in World War II. Well he, General

MacArthur, summoned Griswold and me in and he said, "This is a superior speech; I'm very much obliged to it." He said, "You, Betts, you're going to stay here while I'm here and then I'll send you to Leavenworth."

BURG: I see.



BETTS: Well, of course, that completed my enchantment. But the enchantment, the funny thing was it existed before this commendation.

BURG: Well, of course, many men were very, very strongly drawn to General MacArthur.

BETTS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, there was a charisma to him, no question.

BURG: Indeed.

BETTS: Well, anyhow that was that. As I say, I wrote these speeches and I don't think that--I think that, yes, he would make some changes, but they were usually small textual changes. I remember once I wrote a message for the Rainbow Division,

which was holding a meeting. He didn't make a speech but he, of course, you know, had been the Chief of Staff of the division and really had run it. And he sent a message saying he was sorry he couldn't be there in person, and he said that [they were] wonderful soldiers in time of peace and wonderful men-- wonderful soldiers in time of war wonderful men in time of peace and victory--and he changed the 'men' to 'gentlemen'. I remember that very well because it was a thing that puzzled me. I didn't like the--I didn't think, you know. I thought he was a regular officer and he was talking to a lot of ex-soldiers, he'd rather call them men than gentlemen, but no, he wanted to call them gentlemen.



BURG: Interesting. Did he ever cause you any problems? Was he ever sharp with you or displeased with your work that you can recollect?

BETTS: Not that I can recollect, no. But as I say, most of it was pretty run of the mill.

BURG: Right, right. When he left, when he retired and took the position in the Philippines, what then happened to you?

BETTS: Well, I left before he did.

BURG: Oh, you did?

BETTS: For some reason my time ran out, and he didn't send me to Leavenworth.

BURG: Oh, he didn't?

BETTS: No, I went to--I was sent to the 52nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery at Fort Sheridan, Illinois. I think there must have been—I think it was the time of the CCC, and they were just simply scraping the bottom of the barrel to get officers to go out with the CCC. Anyhow, I went to Fort Sheridan and I had been there about three days and I was sent out with the CCC and stayed with them off and on for about two years. Also very interesting.

BURG: Right. In the Illinois--

BETTS: In the Illinois--

BURG: --area?



It was the VI Corps area. Mostly Michigan but also, to some extent, in Wisconsin. I finally ended up in Illinois with a whole string--I finally inherited a CCC district; I had a whole string of camps that ran along the Illinois River. And then from there, I went to, I was transferred to the Presidio, San Francisco.

BURG: Approximately when did that occur?



BETTS: Nineteen thirty-five. And the reason for that was that one of my companions as a speech writer, as a ghost writer, had been a Captain Warren J. Clear, C-l-e-a-r, and we became very good friends. He had been a Japanese language officer, by the way. In other words, this was all sort of a homogeneous group that was floating around. By this time we were all G-2 men, really, although we didn't know it. Well, Clear had left to take a post as assistant G-2 at the Presidio, San Francisco, IX Corps area, and his health gave out. He had to retire, and he persuaded his commanding officer, the assistant chief of staff of G-2, to put in for me, which I was delighted to do..And I went there in 1934, end of '34, I think--either end of '34 or early

1935. And I served there for two years as assistant chief of staff, G-2, doing mostly public relations, but also a certain amount of security work, too. Of course, we weren't concerned with foreign military intelligence at all. We were very much concerned--it was my first acquaintance with the American communist. I knew about communists because I had been in China when the Russians had been so very strong with Sun-Yat-Sen, so I knew about communists. And I knew enough to know that they weren't people with horns and tails, but on the other hand, they were an enemy and had to be handled with considerable care.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: We were very much mixed up in the possibility of sufficient labor trouble on the west coast at that time, fomented by Harry Bridges, to require military intervention. So we watched all these various political strikes, the predecessors of Caesar Chavez and Harry Bridges and others.

BURG: The Longshoremen's union.

BETTS: Longshoremen's union, all of whom were disposed to talk

a lot about violence, and every once in a while they would crack a head somewhere, but they never really took to the streets or anything. But it was a good deal of fun watching them and a good deal of--it was very instructive, too, I would say. I was there two years and was promoted to major while I was there; in fact, I was promoted to major just about the time I got there.

BURG: I see.



BETTS: And then, after two years there, I did get to Leavenworth. I was ordered to Leavenworth, took a year's course, graduated in '38, and was ordered to the War Department General Staff, G-2, office of Chief of Staff, G-2. This time on the general staff and to the China desk; I was to be the China expert.

BURG: How had you done at Leavenworth, may I ask. Did they still have class standings there?

BETTS: Well, they never published them. I would say that I was certainly not number one; I would say I was in the upper third.

BURG: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BETTS: But I, I was--I, I didn't do as well as I had hoped I'd do, actually. I thought I would--I had figured that I ought to graduate in the first ten. But I knew that there were more than ten that were doing better than I did.

BURG: Was it an enjoyable experience when you were there?

BETTS: On the whole, yes. It was very grueling.

BURG: So I understand.

BETTS: It was not as bad as it was right after World War I, when they more or less prided themselves on having at least one suicide in every class. They were not, they were not as mean, and they didn't make you feel that your career was at stake on every map problem. It was--they were, they were much more relaxed than that. On the other hand, they would do all sorts of little tricks which were also, I would say, the sort of thing that you could expect in the field; it was reasonably fair. I mean, for instance, they would give you a very bad photo map of a region somewhere around Leavenworth, usually in two sheets. It was blurred and it had no reference marks on it at all; it was usually very hard to be able to put the two sheets together.



It could go this way just as much as it could go that way.

[Laughter]

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: And you had to figure out from your knowledge of the terrain, "Oh, yes, this is Stranger Creek; this must be Stranger Creek, and it runs this way, so that must be north." And, by and by, you'd get the thing solved, but I've seen officers who just simply couldn't get that far. I mean, here they were, they were field officers in the army but they were just stymied by this rather primitive process. And, of course, you can say that very often in the field, you get that sort of a map or that kind of a photograph and you have to do the best you can by it.



BURG: Did it seem to you later on, given the experiences you had in just a few years, that the Leavenworth course that you had been given was an adequate, or more than adequate, or less than adequate, preparation for what you faced from '41 on?

BETTS: Basically, very adequate, but only in terms of teaching ratiocination, teaching you how to put together the elements

that underlay a decision, which take a lot of doing. Of course, it's all inductive reasoning, there's very little deductive reasoning in it. And I thought the training in that was superb. It helped me enormously. The things you learned by rote were all passé by the time they taught them to us.

BURG: I suppose, yes. Learning from the lessons of the First World War--

BETTS: Of the First World War; I mean, they used to teach us for instance that a division--of course, the mainstay of our work was the infantry division when it got to logistics--a division always needed a thousand tons of ammunition for a day of fire if engaged in fierce combat. Well, actually, in World War II a division would use, I imagine, about twenty or thirty tons. They were back in the trenches in World War I, where you just simply blasted the whole earth before the infantry jumped off. Their teaching on the use of aircraft was very primitive; their teaching on the use of armor was pretty good, except that they never taught you much about the strategic use of armor. On the other hand, how fast an infantryman marched, how far he could go, what



you could expect of him, those things are permanent--

BURG: Yes. Xenophon could have given the information to us.

[Laughter]

BETTS: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

BURG: And it would be true. Uh-huh.

BETTS: So as I say, I answer your question in two sections.

In terms of expanding the mind, if you want to expand your mind, you could and I did.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: In terms of learning by rote, why ~~none~~ of it amounted to anything very much, I don't think.

BURG: Right, right. I see. All right. I try to check with each of you who did attend Leavenworth and get your retrospective view of what it was that was given to you, or what they failed to give to you, and some react with great anger. There will be one facet that they felt was very, very important and, somehow, it wasn't given at Leavenworth at the particular time they were there.



BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: And so it's just part of the documentation, I think, of the past. All right, you finished that and went to Washington, D.C. And the assignment, by the way, pleased you?

BETTS: Oh, very much.

BURG: I would imagine so.

BETTS: It was to the general staff. It was in my specialty. I mean, not only intelligence but also--because by this time I did regard myself as an intelligence officer--but also as a Chinese specialist. This was all fine.

BURG: And your language capacity in Chinese was--



BETTS: The language didn't mean anything, we--

BURG: You didn't have to--

BETTS: --didn't have to--oh, occasionally you read in a Chinese newspaper, but that was--but you didn't talk to any Chinese.

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: And also, I might add, that what they called the China desk was under the Far Eastern Branch, which was under Colonel, then Lieutenant Colonel, Rufus S. Bratton, who was an old friend of mine, he was an old family friend. His wife was a friend of my wife, they went to school together. So this was all a very pleasant assignment for me.

BURG: Surely, Bratton, B-r-a-t-t-

BETTS: o-n.

BURG: Not e-n--yes.

BETTS: And I didn't stay with him very long. The whole schimozzle of the intell--of the people who evaluated intelligence--was called the Intelligence Branch. The Intelligence Branch had--I forget the terminology--but eventually it broke down into desks. Bratton was between me and the Chief of the Intelligence Branch. And the whole Intelligence Branch had about thirty officers in it, deployed in terms, mostly, of countries. We did have an air section, which was turned over to air corps people. At that time, of course, the air force was not in existence, it was the army air corps.



BURG: Yes, right.

BETTS: But that was about the only--and it was organized in terms of the State Department organization. In other words, the same countries were in the Eastern European Section that were in the State Department Eastern European Section.

BURG: Uh-huh, I see.

BETTS: So that it was chiefly a matter of convenience, because it meant that the liaison was easy between the two sections. And there was a lot of it. I mean, our source of information, our special source of information, of course, was the military attache in a given country. And he was in touch with the embassy or legation. He was on the staff of the Chief of Mission. It was perfectly natural for there to be a good deal of conversation between the man in the State Department who supervised that mission and the fellow who ran the section.

[Interruption]



BURG: You were talking about that very natural linkup with the State Department--

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: --and the China desk and your impressions.

BETTS: --China desk and the China desk in the State Department. Well, I was there, and that worked fine for a while, and--

BURG: Let me ask, what kind of a routine would you be following, General Betts, while you had that desk? What would the daily job be like?

BETTS: Well, it would be mostly a flow of reports from the field, from military attaches. In the case of the China desk, we also had the--in theory--had Siam attached to us, but we didn't have a military attache in Siam. However, we did have-- at that time things were very active in China, as you will recall--

BURG: Yes, indeed.



BETTS: --because it was the time of the Japanese had precipitated hostilities there in 1936, and they had a two-year old war going on. And we got quite a lot of reports from the military attache's office in Peking which required evaluation, and some

question of circulating. We maintained a standing, you might say, report, on the Chinese army, not the Japanese. The Japanese army, of course, was run by the Japanese desk. And there was a good deal of going back and forth between my desk and the Japanese man. Bratton was the Japanese language officer. And he had an assistant named, then Major, Moses Pettigrew, P-e-t-t-i-g-r-e-w, which is a very good North Carolina Confederate name--

BURG: Indeed it is. Pettigrew's Brigade.



BETTS: Yeah. And Mose, Mose was a Japanese language student, graduate. He and I were very good friends. Actually, we were both in the same room, one of the great big rooms in the Munitions Building. We were always tossing pieces of information back at each other. We had a lot of trouble with Colonel [Joseph W.?] Stilwell, who was the military attache. We didn't have trouble but, unfortunately, the assistant chief of staff, G-2, who was Colonel Warner MacCabe, for some reason I never understood, had a violent hatred on Stilwell. And he resorted to all kinds--he did all the sorts of things that you didn't believe

occurred in the modern army. I mean, he would cut off his funds. Stilwell would cable in and say, "I'd like to go down to a battle area and see how the Chinese are fighting." MacCabe would say, "No, no money."

BURG: I see. Harassment--

BETTS: A general hazing, yes, and eventually he cut off Stilwell from the telegraph. He said, "No more cables. Put it in writing," which meant it was six weeks from the time--

BURG: Yes, of course.

BETTS: --that Stilwell wrote a report until it appeared at G-2. Well, anyhow, we had to struggle with that on a very low level. We couldn't go and say, "Colonel MacCabe, you're doing wrong. You're drying up our intelligence." But there were things of that nature. And you couldn't say that you did a certain thing at a certain time on a certain day. On the contrary, you generally were improvising a good deal. And the third thing we did was that we were the custodians of the intercepts of the Purple code. You know, we broke the Japanese diplomatic code and as far as the War Department was concerned, why that was



Sumter Bratton's job. But I also had a hand in it and that took a good deal of doing, because you always had to figure very carefully who you could show that to, or sometimes you would have to figure how to tell somebody.

BURG: Did you simply get--

BETTS: We got transcripts and inspected it.

BURG: --decoded Purple stuff--

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: --that dealt with China?

BETTS: Yes. Well, it dealt with the whole thing.

BURG: You got the entire intercept?

BETTS: We got the entire tape. And, of course, sometimes it came from other places. I remember when Hitler was about to attack the Russians, about four days before the attack jumped off, he told the Japanese Ambassador--he didn't quite come out and say that "I am going to attack"--but he said, "I expect



very shortly, in a matter of days, we will be involved in war with Russia." And of course that was pretty hot stuff. Well, in terms of showing that to General Marshall, it was no problem at all. He was in on the code, but the chief of the Intelligence Branch said, "Now, Tom, you must go and tell this to the Chief of the Central European Section, which is responsible for Germany." And he said, "Now you must tell him, but you must not tell him the source and somehow you must convince him that this is true."

BURG: So that section was not getting Purple material at all?

BETTS: They didn't even know that such a thing existed.

BURG: They didn't know it had been broken?

BETTS: No.

BURG: Only the China section and Japanese section--

BETTS: Yes, yes.

BURG: --knew this? And the Japanese Ambassador had sent the word--



BETTS: The Japanese Ambassador--

BURG: --back to Tokyo?

BETTS: --from Ger--from Berlin, had brought this thing on the air.

BURG: Uh-huh, and we'd picked it off.

BETTS: And we picked it right off.

BURG: And he had put it in the Purple code and we had it.

BETTS: Uh-huh.



BURG: And then you're asked by--who was it that asked you to--

BETTS: I can't remember. I think it was Hays Croner but I'm not certain. I can't tell you that. The exact dating of the various people--see, I got in there in '38 and got out in '43; I had five years in that office. Chiefly because we were in the war. But this, of course, happened in 1941--

BURG: June.

BETTS: --June, '41. And the Chief of the German Section was

a Colonel named Hamilton Maguire, M-a-g-u-i-r-e, and I didn't even take him to his office. I took him out on a bridge. You know, the Munitions Building, the top floors, there were bridges between the wings, so you didn't have to go down to the bottom and across and then up again. And I took him out on the middle of this bridge.

BURG: Did the two of you wear your trench coats? [Laughter]

BETTS: No [Laughter]--you're bad!--and I said, "Now I'm told to tell you this and it is on"--this the best that I can remember at this point; I may well be making some of it up but--"I've been told to tell you this and it is kosher; it is the real thing. And it is almost certain that the Germans are going to attack the Russians." He said, "What nonsense!"

BURG: Oh, he did!

BETTS: Oh, he said, "Of course they won't do anything like that. They're having enough trouble--right now they're at peace with the Russians. The Russians are providing them with oil and food, general economic support." He said, "Of course they aren't going to attack the Russians." Well I said, "Ham, I tell you



they are!" He just shook his head. So I went back and reported that I hadn't convinced him. [Laughter]

BURG: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And about three or four days later, he didn't need--

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: --he didn't need convincing. [Laughter]

BETTS: I didn't bring it up with him.

BURG: You never raised the issue or said, "I told you so"?

BETTS: No, no, I never did that.

BURG: And he never did with you either, ay?

BETTS: No, no, he never did.

BURG: Didn't even have the grace to blush when you went by?

BETTS: [Laughter] No. I mean that was the sort of thing you did, although I did this in another transformation. As I say, I was with Bratton, oh, I suppose six or seven or eight months.



And then there was assigned to the Intelligence Branch--in other words this group of thirty officers--Colonel John Magruder, also a good Confederate name, who had been military attache in Peking when I had been assistant military attache there. And Magruder looked around and saw the world was hotting up and he felt he needed an assistant, so he reached down and grabbed me off and I became Magruder's assistant, which was not on the tables of organization, but it meant I sat in his office. In those days you didn't have private office. Nobody had a private office except the assistant chief of staff, G-2-- and more or less coordinated the routine of the whole show. Seeing that everybody got what he should get and nobody got when he shouldn't get and all that sort of thing, and also I would say I was a sort of an executive officer.



BURG: Can you place a date at which you took up that job? Was that in '41, or had it been--

BETTS: Oh, no. That was in, in '4--in '39. See, I graduated from Leavenworth in '39, I think. I think I went there, yes, I went there in '38 and graduated in '39. Magruder came in

very shortly after I got there. I reported for duty, I think, in September or October of '39.

BURG: That would probably be about right.

BETTS: Because we took a leisurely trip after graduation from Leavenworth. I had a month's leave and travel time. So that about September, October, I got into G-2 and I would think that Magruder--I can't remember, I think maybe Magruder was there already, I think he was.

BURG: Okay.



BETTS: But as things became hotter, as it became clearer that-- there was the Czechoslovak affair--it was very clear that war was looming in Europe, and I would say that in January or February of 1940--

BURG: Forty?

BETTS: --1939. No, the war broke out in '39.

BURG: September of '39.

BETTS: Well then I graduated from C&GS in '38.

I see. At the time of the Czechoslovakian crisis.

BETTS: At the time of Czechoslovakian--

BURG: Munich.

BETTS: --and I graduated and came there and, as I say, got there in September about '38, and in about January or February or maybe March of 1939, why, Magruder reached down and said, "Come on and go to work for me."

BURG: I see. So you had the China desk that long--

BETTS: Yes.



BURG: --and then stepped up into this, like an executive officer--

BETTS: Sort of like an executive officer.

BURG: --even though it wasn't on the TO & E.

BETTS: It wasn't on the TO and most of the people there ranked me, but nobody wanted that kind of a job anyhow.

BURG: You were still major?

BETTS: I was still a major, yeah.

BURG: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

BETTS: And there my chief job was really a cable reader more than anything else. I did two things: I read the daily take of cables, everyone that came into G-2 came over Magruder's desk.

BURG: And these were coming from the military attaches--

BETTS: Coming from the military attaches.

BURG: --around the world?

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: And there weren't too many of them, you know, I mean maybe ten or fifteen a day or something like that. But Magruder, who was a very, very smart man, said, "Well, look, the State Department is getting cables, too, not only from its embassies but from its consuls all over the world," said, "we ought to tap



those." And he had very good relations with State, and so he said, "Now you go over there and read the State Department cables." Well for a number of months--I would think until the spring of 1940--I went over to the State Department every morning and read the previous day's take of cables. And you won't believe it but there were usually only about two or three hundred cables, even there, from all over the world. Now there were probably three or four that were withheld from me. I would expect that and everybody would expect that. I mean certain, highly sensitive reports would not get into the regular cable file.

BURG: Uh-huh.



BETTS: But I'd get this thick book and I would read the two or three hundred cables and make notes. And of the two or three hundred, there probably would be fifteen or twenty that had pronounced military interest. And I remember, for instance, when the Germans were invading Norway, when they were starting, the thing was in high state of--the war was on, of course, but there was a great deal of uncertainty and confusion, because the British were very active with naval forces along the west

coast of Norway. Actually we now know--we didn't know then-- they were contemplating a landing. And the Germans started this invasion of Norway and our first solid intimation came from Copenhagen, where the chargé--we didn't have an ambassador there at the moment. There was an ambassador but he was away-- sent in this very detailed report about this large German naval force going through the Kattegat. He'd seen them!

BURG: Yes, yes.



BETTS: And it was a classic example of what you would have for an invasion; I mean, in other words, heavy ships, lots of destroyers, and a convoy of transports. They obviously weren't going out for a sea battle. They were going for a landing.

BURG: And not going out for maneuvers, either, on that kind of a course.

BETTS: No. Oh, no. Oh, no. Well, I mean, things like that were very important. We got a lot of that.

BURG: In effect, General, at that stage, where you're going over to State, you are actually the one man who reads the State

Department intake and evaluates it as to what is or is not of importance, makes notes on that--

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: --brings it back and adds it to the military attache feedin.

BETTS: Yeah, yeah, I would dictate a precis when I got back, which would usually be about three single-spaced typewritten pages. And then that would go to the various sections, desks in the office.

BURG: So of the intake coming in across the desk, one-half of it is--well, actually more than one-half in total content--is that which you bring back from State?

BETTS: Yes, I guess that's so.



BURG: You're the one who made the decision whether it was of significance or was not of significance. Did you realize at the time that you probably had a pretty important role to play--

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: --each day?

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: You took this very seriously?

BETTS: I did take it very seriously. It developed in another strange manner, and that was that it suddenly turned out that I was the only formal liaison between the War Department and the State Department. [Laughter] I mean, obviously Secretary [Cordell] Hull would occasionally lift the phone and talk to the Secretary of War or talk to General Marshall. But the guy who was around most of the time was me. And eventually sort of a habit developed that I became the State Department military expert. Every Sunday morning Judge Hull would come down to his office and sit around, do a little work, and mostly talk. And he discovered me, so he'd always call on me every Sunday morning and I'd go in and tell him what was going on in the war from the military point of view.

BURG: In effect, you were briefing Cordell Hull on the--

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: --on the course of the war overseas--



BETTS: On the course of the war, yes.

BURG: --of the European War.

BETTS: Oh, yes. I remember when I told him the Germans were going to win in France, you know, in 1940. Oh, he was just heartbroken; he just wished I could tell him that the French stood a chance, but I couldn't. I mean, you could see from the map it was over.

BURG: Yes, yes.

BETTS: But it was all a very peculiar arrangement and I enjoyed it immensely.

BURG: Forgive me for saying it, but it was also a rather haphazard kind of arrangement!

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: Nothing like the sophisticated, ultra-sophisticated, intelligence techniques of more recent times.

BETTS: Not a bit.



BURG: And this is giving me, as I'm sure it will give any researcher who uses the material--it's an intriguing picture of our lack of sophistication, our naïvete, in the face of the conflagration in Europe and in Asia. Our own hindsight, of course, tells us our impending doom at Pearl Harbor, and here is intelligence: the military attachés are sending in reports and you're going over and getting what State has--

BETTS: Everybody just sort of beating their wings, ineffectually, in a beautiful voyage. You're quite right. Well, the trouble was, we didn't know it.

BURG: That's right, of course. None of us did.



BETTS: It was the basic fault of our general mobilization plan, which was modeled, really, on the Fock^h headquarters in World War I. In other words, they wanted to keep the War Department just as small as they possible could. They felt that if they could have a little knot of carefully chosen men, why they could do a lot better than if they had a great big sprawling outfit. And so the mobilization plans were reviewed every--revised--every year. Not by our office but, as far as G-2 was concerned

by an office in G-2. And they always came up with the same answer, that when war was imminent G-2 would expand from--I say there were thirty officers in the Intelligence Branch; there weren't thirty officers, there were about fifteen. There were thirty officers in all of G-2--

BURG: All right.

BETTS: --in the latter part of the 1930's.

BURG: But fifteen of them given over to intelligence.

BETTS: The major number of them were in, well, positive intelligence. The chief had to have an executive, there was a military attaché section that dealt with the foreign military attachés here. There was a counter-intelligence section, a security section, a planning section. So we were the mass and the cutting edge of G-2, and the mobilization plan for a full mobilization called for the expansion of all G-2 from thirty officers to sixty officers. And we believed it. I mean, after all, the thing was revised every year; it was done by capable officers who thought it up carefully and who had been guided



in terms by the general policy of the War Department, which was not to have any surplus fat in running this war.

BURG: Uh-huh.



BETTS: And the end product was that we were all sort of used to scamping, to doing just what you could and that's the best you can do. I mean, I knew one, we had one man that had a desk, he had the South American desk, which had twenty countries in it--Latin America desk--had twenty countries. And he was one officer and he had one professional clerk. He didn't have a stenographer. We had a typing pool, officers were encouraged to write things out in long hand. Most of the pool couldn't take dictation. And he said that he was--all he could do was ask his military attaché, once a year, to write out a military report on his particular country, which he accepted verbatim. He said, "I haven't got the time to examine this critically." And, of course, in many cases they were small countries; Panama had no army, Costa Rica had no army, they had two or three hundred policemen, that was about all. It wasn't scamping too much, but his philosophy was that he would only ask once a year for

this stuff, and that was the gospel until the next yearly report came in. And of course when we got into the war, Brazil wanted to get into the war, and you went to this guy and said, "Well, what can Brazil do?", well, he'd say, "Last February we thought they could do--the man in Rio thought we could do this."

BURG: So if the military attaché, let's say in Brazil, was was not using his head or was not alert, he might subside into lethargy and say, "Well, I just have to get my 'once-a-year' report out." And he might be down in the Rio harbor while German submarines were coming in and out, with the German ambassador out there greeting and talking with them, and he would perhaps never even report it until the annual report went in.

BETTS: Something like that might be true. Well, some of them were, although generally speaking, I think they were conscientious, and they were--well, I wouldn't say they were all capable officers. Some of them were there just because they wanted a good time or because they thought it would be fun to be a military attaché. And it is fun being a military attaché.

BURG: Some of them took that job more seriously than others did.



BETTS: Oh, yeah.

BURG: Uh-huh. It's most instructive to hear this rather lighthearted route to war.

BETTS: Yes, indeed.

BURG: Yeah. When you'd like to think we were right on everything and had a finger on the pulse of military affairs in the world, and really, we did not.

BETTS: A lot of our information simply came almost accidentally like these intercepts. We appreciated the value of them, of course, and we appreciated the value of this chargé when he wired in and said the German amphibious expedition is on its way. He didn't use that term, he just said we saw these such and such ships, but it was a very accurate description.

BURG: Did you then pass that information on, presumably to General Marshall? Would it then have been passed on to the British or did you know? Or to the Norwegians?

BETTS: I think it was passed to General Marshall, but I believe



that it was all happening so fast. I mean, it was only hours after we received this report, really, that the Germans were ashore.

BURG: They were almost there--

BETTS: They were almost there.

BURG: --when they passed the Kattegat. Right. Now let me ask you this, were you still in that same position in November-- let me just pick that month--in November of 1941?

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: You were still serving as executive--

BETTS: As a sort of executive, but I had sluffed off--by this time we had put on a little more muscle. We had a fair number. I would say in November 1941, we probably had, I guess it would be, a hundred officers in G-2, who had been sort of smuggled in here and there. Called in, special duty, to do a job and then they stayed on, you know; that's how the thing--

BURG: Uh-huh.



BETTS: And by that time, we had a couple of men--by that time, of course, the State Department cable volume had also increased enormously. They were getting a thousand cables a day then. And we had a couple of men who did nothing but go over there and get these cables. And we had better liaison with State. I was no longer Judge Hull's confidant. [Laughter] And there was plenty going on. And I must say that this was all very amateurish and inadequate but thanks to a number of very good men, on the whole, we got most of the information that we needed. Of course, we did not get the Pearl Harbor information in time, but I think the main trouble with Pearl Harbor was not so much the lack of information, although there was a lack of information, as the lack of the ability to stir up the commanders there, to say the right things to them.

BURG: The commanders at--

BETTS: In Hawaii, both the army and the navy.

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: I don't think that was a--we knew something was coming



on but we didn't pinpoint it on Pearl until the day before. This, once again, is this fellow Bratton, who was a very good man. We got an intercept and it was the famous Pearl Harbor diplomatic message, which was in fourteen sections. But the first section told the ambassador that "you will seek an interview with the Secretary of State at one p.m. tomorrow, Sunday, personally."

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: And Bratton, who was quite good at arithmetic said, "One, p.m. means the Japanese are going to do something and they're going to be doing it at dawn." I said, "Where it will be dawn at one p.m.?" "Be dawn in Hawaii. That's it," said Bratton, and he started on this long hegira, trying to get people excited, trying to get the right kind of messages sent, and the right kind of message was never sent.

BURG: Just nothing that exacted the correct response.

BETTS: That's right. You see, about Thanksgiving, about the twenty-fifth of November, we begin to get reports of Japanese



ship movement. Not the movement toward Pearl Harbor, but evidence of Japanese hostile intent overseas somewhere, notably around Indo-China. There were--

BURG: Convoy movements south.

BETTS: --convoys moving south, and we got that. And at that time the AC of S, G-2, who was Sherman Miles, recognized this. He got in touch with his navy opposite number and they composed a joint message, which was sent out to Pearl Harbor, amongst others, saying, "This is a war message. It is probable that war impends." They could not say where or when or how. Then, unfortunately, about the 28th or 29th, why, somebody got into a panic about the possibility of sabotage; that there might be a Japanese-organized sabotage attempt on the airfield, Hickam Field in Hawaii. So they sent a telegram, another cable, calling attention to this and saying, "Be on your guard against organized Japanese sabotage." Well, unfortunately, the locals at once said, well, our people may be concerned about war somewhere else, but all they're thinking about for us in sabotage, so they took all the planes and sort of put them wing by wing, so they made a fascinating target for the Japanese, and put a strong cordon



of sentries around them to see that the saboteurs couldn't get at them. They didn't disperse them, so--

BURG: Right.

BETTS: --they'd be hard to knock down. On the contrary, they were sitting ducks. [Laughter]

BURG: Then my recollection is that they received shortly after that a message again putting them on the alert, but their response, the response from Hawaii, was the response to the earlier "watch the sabotage" message--

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: --and they said, "We're ready."

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: And they were for sabotage, but they were not replying to that alert--

BETTS: The basic warning.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: That's right.

BURG: And I understand San Francisco and the Panama Canal and the Philippines--I believe those three areas all responded, "Yes, we're ready--"

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: --meaning they were alerted, while Hawaii was actually saying, "Yes, we've got the planes wing to wing so no one can sabotage them." [Laughter]

BETTS: That's right.

[Interruption]



INTERVIEW WITH

Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Betts

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg
Oral Historian

on

November 20, 1974

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



This interview is being taped with Brig. General Thomas J. Betts in Gen. Betts' home on Independence Ave., in Washington D.C. on November 20, 1974. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library staff, and present for the interview are Brig. General Betts and Dr. Burg.

DR. BURG: General, when we finished our last session I
recollect--



GEN. BETTS: We had just about finished with Pearl Harbor.

DR. BURG: --we had just about finished Pearl Harbor. And, in fact, you were telling me something--which I remember still with great amusement--about the intelligence operations that you were carrying out, which included going over to State Department and checking the dispatches that had come in from the embassies, which were at that point about fifty percent of the intelligence data that was coming into the army. Now let me ask you, how long did you remain on that work? What was the next move in your career?

GEN. BETTS: Well, I grew out of that because the job got--the detail got too big, and they got a couple of younger fellows to go over and take the thing over; they did it with two instead of one. When I did it, I would do it in the morning; as I

say, there would be perhaps seven hundred telegrams in a day, and of the seven hundred, why six hundred would be completely irrelevant. I mean, disabled American seamen, and that sort of thing, and tourists who were stranded, and "please tell mom that all is well," But out of the hundred, why I could count-- many of those were unimportant, but I would make a précis and might get through the whole thing in the course of a couple of hours and end up with a dictated text. But it grew and, by and by, there were thousands of cables coming in every day.

BURG: As we came up on December of 1941?



BETTS: Well, no, not so much, but almost immediately after, they began to flood in.

BURG: Oh, I see. After Pearl Harbor.

BETTS: But I was still on my old job. My principal job was-- until I left the War Department--was the assistant to the chief of the intelligence branch of the intelligence division. And I held that job and, in effect, acted as a sort of a backup man and executive and I would take things that the chief was interested

in and call them to his attention, or maybe make a note on them and bring them to his attention. And, occasionally, why he would ask me to ride herd on an estimate or something of that kind. I was a generalist and I took as much of a load off his shoulders as I could.

BURG: Who was the chief at that time sir?



BETTS: Well, at the time of Pearl Harbor the chief was Brigadier General Hayes Kroner, who was an old friend of mine, who had been a fellow language student in China. And he ranked me by a good deal, and he came in a little late. I think he came in in the latter part of 1941; he'd only been in the office for a matter of, I think, four or five months before Pearl Harbor. And he had been preceded by a fellow named Charley Baker, a colonel. And he in turn had been preceded by John Magruder, who had been--he was a colonel and also an old friend of mine. He was promoted brigadier general and sent out with the troops. And then they brought in Charley. Charley was a retired officer, and [Major] General [Sherman] Miles, who was the G-2, had known of him in the past and thought that perhaps it would be a good

idea--he was retired as I say--but he felt that he knew he was lively and he had held this same kind of job during World War I. And so he thought that he could bring him in, and just because he was retired, he'd be quiet and stay there and not go off to the troops. And it didn't work out too well because, unfortunately, Colonel Baker was ahead of his times. He came in and said, "Well, look, you can't do anything here until you get about three or four hundred more men." We had at that time about thirty people in G-2 and the mobilization table called for sixty. We were supposed to run a war on sixty officers. And Charley just simply threw up his hands and said, "Well, of course I'll do the best I can, but you've just got to have lots and lots of people. You're going to work twenty-four hours a day, and you're going to have to do all kinds of funny things, some of which will be very demanding in terms of man hours. You've just got to get them." General Miles grumbled about it and finally relieved Charley and then brought in Hayes Kroner.

BURG: He relieved Baker? For bringing him bad news?

BETTS: Yes, yes.



BURG: But Baker was right, was he not?

BETTS: He was quite right, absolutely. When the war ended, there were seven hundred officers in G-2, War Department, G-2.

BURG: Yes, I wonder if General Marshall was aware of Baker's viewpoint, and of Miles relieving Baker of that duty.

BETTS: I would think not at all. I don't think that General Marshall would concern himself with that. As far as I can--as a matter of fact, it ended up in a sort of a brawl and Miles relieved him peremptorily; that was all there was to it.

BURG: But Baker was saying "I'll do the best I can," but still pressing the issue.

BETTS: Oh, yes.



BURG: It couldn't be done. That's interesting. I wonder if Miles was under any kind of restriction? Had he been told, privately, now hold it down. Because it would seem that Miles ought to have known that we were embarking on a global war and that obviously we were going to be hard pressed.

BETTS: Well, it was the tyranny of the mobilization plan, which had been in existence for many years, you see. And it was based on the idea of the [Marshal Ferdinand] Foch staff in World War I. In other words, at the supreme headquarters there would be the minimum number of officers required to handle jobs, and that the detail would be pushed down to the troops, one way or another. Well, you can't do that in intelligence, but it was ground into everybody and I believed it! I mean, after all, you look in the back files and year after year the mobilization plan would be reviewed and they'd always come up with the same thing. Sometimes sixty-two officers, sometimes sixty-three, [Laughter] something of that kind. And it was not only--now this, I think, answers your basic question. General Marshall, as the war either loomed or at Pearl Harbor, I'm not certain which, appointed Joseph MacNarney as his deputy chief of staff, and the first thing that MacNarney did was to say that all the general staff should be pared down to the limits of the mobilization plan. And the intelligence branch of G-2 would be limited to twelve officers, and the office of the assistant chief of staff G-3 for operations would be limited to seven officers.



And that was the thing that Kroner had to face up to, which he did very cleverly. He was a very smart fellow, and he scratched around for awhile and he finally created an entity which he said we will call "the military intelligence service." They won't be the general staff, they'll just be flunkies; they'll be carriers of water and hewers of wood, but we can have as many of those as we want. They won't wear the general staff star on their lapels, but they'll do what I tell them to do. And that was exactly what they did. And they did have the military intelligence service, and of course it was G-2; it did all the work, really.

BURG: But the "proper" table of organization was maintained.

BETTS: Well, I think they forgot about that in due course.

BURG: After a time, yes.

BETTS: Yes. I think it all became indistinguishable except, perhaps, in some clerk's office where somebody would check around and say, "How many general staff officers are there in G-2?" And they'd say, "Well, there are thirty-two, sir," or



something like that. [Laughter]

BURG: So Kroner met the issue with a very clever piece of pragmatism and got it all solved.

BETTS: Absolutely.

BURG: These officers in the military intelligence service, how high would their ranks run?

BETTS: Well, they ran up to colonel.

BURG: Up to colonel, uh-huh.

BETTS: The chief of the military intelligence branch--in other words, Kroner--became a brigadier general by virtue of being in that slot. And there was a brigadier general executive and I think there was a brigadier general in charge of the military attaché section. He was the man who dealt with the foreign attachés here in Washington. He didn't administer American military attachés. He maintained relations with all the foreign attachés that were legitimately stationed here. And he had to have some rank, too.



BURG: Yes, I can imagine he would dealing with them.

BETTS: And, of course, the assistant chief of staff of G-2 became a major general.

BURG: Now what was your rank at that time, December, roughly. December of 1941?

BETTS: I was a lieutenant colonel. I came with G-2 in '38 as a major, made lieutenant colonel, I think, in 1940. I'm not quite certain of that. And then I made full colonel in 1942.

BURG: Did you wear the general staff star? You were one of those--



BETTS: Oh, yes. Yes, I was detailed. Of course I joined there, you see, before the war, well before the war. In fact, when the war was simply a shadow on the horizon. I joined in 1938, in the fall of 1938. And, of course, we were aware of all this friction but the war didn't break out until 1939. And I was just and ordinary peace-time general staff officer.

BURG: As I think about it--I didn't have time to check the inter-

view before I left--were we actually talking about, literally, the week at the end of which Pearl Harbor occurred?

BETTS: I don't think so. I think--

BURG: We talked about your role then on that day and the day before. All right, fine, I would hate to leave that out and I will check when I get back home and make sure that we didn't. I believe we did talk about it.

BETTS: Oh, yes, I think so.



BURG: Okay. Now after Pearl Harbor, what happened to your duties? Now you've told me that more men are coming in. What did your job become?

BETTS: Well, my job still stayed about the same but it expanded a good deal because, in the first place, I had acquired something of a reputation, as I think I mentioned last time, of being willing [Laughter] and able to go out and give people a semi-official estimate of the situation, just like that, on a moment's notice. Whereas, if anybody--if the chief of staff should ask for an opinion from G-2, why it would probably take a couple of

weeks in those days to churn the thing out and get it all vetted and approved. And time's awastin', so I was more and more in demand to go and tell people what's going on now from the enemy point of view. And so I had considerable contacts with what became the operations division of the general staff; it had been the War Plans Section of G-3. See, G-3 was concerned with operations and training, and in the time of peace that was all, mostly, training, because there weren't any operations. And they did have a small section called the War Plans Section, which was largely dominated by--oh, [then Colonel Albert C.] Al Wedemeyer. And there were five or six officers there and they were all very, very capable officers. I don't know how they managed to get such good officers [Laughter] but they did. They were young, for the time, and they were bright. We had people like [then Colonel George A.] Abe Lincoln, and numerous others and they weren't afraid of responsibility. When the war started, why General Marshall at once formed the operations division of the War Department general staff. And for a few days General Eisenhower commanded it, which was a funny thing. It was amusing because, obviously, General Marshall had really



wanted to bring General Eisenhower to Washington to have a look at him. And I'm wrong. This is while it was still the war plans section; it was before the war. And I remember that Al Wedemeyer was very nervous about this. Ike had just been made a brigadier general and Al more or less felt that he had a little empire here that might be able to grow pretty well, and suddenly here came this rather prominent officer and took over the chair. And Ike was there only a matter of, I would think, a couple of weeks, something like that, and they turned out one estimate for him, an operations estimate which he presented to General Marshall. The boys in the section all breathed a sigh of relief because they felt that he had handled it very well. I mean, making the presentation and also supervising the estimate. And Al heaved an even higher sigh of relief when he left, permanently. [Laughter]

BURG: I suppose so. Now Eisenhower had come there, I think, the week--within about seven days after Pearl Harbor. That's when he came up from Texas. He got the call, I think, within five to seven days after Pearl Harbor.

BETTS: It was that late? I thought it was before Pearl Harbor.



BURG: No, it was actually about a week behind Pearl Harbor. He had been in the Louisiana maneuvers, and I think they had just gotten back to San Antonio.

BETTS: That's right. And had made a good reputation there, too. And I'm certain that General Marshall simply asked him up. General Marshall, if he knew him at all, knew him only slightly, and I think he just asked him up to have a look at him. See if he was a coming man; what shall we do with him, that sort of thing.

BURG: Right. I can imagine Wedemeyer--who had some very positive views on many different things, as his book reveals--I can imagine how he would feel about that.



BETTS: It was all done with a straight face. I mean, the orders were cut and Ike appeared; he took command, as I say, to write out this one estimate, and he went away.

BURG: Did your work bring you into contact either with Eisenhower or any of those men, Wedemeyer, or that group? Did you find yourself ever briefing them or working with them?

BETTS: Well, not Ike, but that group, yes. I had very good relations with them. They were very glad to have me, because they were very much people on the hair trigger. They had to make quick decisions. And General Marshall organized--after the war started, General Marshall organized this war plans division in terms of the theaters. For every theater there was a desk, and there was an officer at that desk who was responsible for the operational viewpoint on what was going on in the theater, or what the commander wanted, and General Marshall instructed them all. He gave them a broad general instruction. He said, "You gentlemen are not my staff officers," he said, "You are the representatives of those theater commanders. And those theater commanders have got to be satisfied with you and you'd better satisfy them." Which was also General Marshall at his very best, I think. But he put the bee right on those fellows. Here they were--in '42 I was forty-eight years old and I suppose they were in their early forties; they were all younger than I am, including Al Wedemeyer, but they just ate up responsibility and they loved it.

BURG: What long hours they must have been keeping!



BETTS: Oh, yes. It was very tough.

BURG: Because the pressure--I would expect the pressure was great on you, too. The hours would be long for you.

BETTS: Well, not too--at that time it wasn't too bad for me, I wouldn't think. When the war got into--of course, at that time we were not terribly tightly engaged anywhere. Anyhow, it was mostly a question of scuttling and running.

BURG: That's ture. [Laughter]



BETTS: Not of conducting operations! But I know that when in 1944--in the fall of '44, I came back to the states for a visit. And I discovered that by this time the whole thing was--the G-2 was highly organized and very responsive but it meant, usually, that somebody got into the office at four o'clock in the morning and began preparing to brief the assistant chief of staff of G-2 so that at eight A.M., he would go and brief General Marshall. General Marshall had a staff conference at eight o'clock every morning when he read the logs and usually had his G's available. At that time, [General] Clayton [L.] Bissell was the G-2 and he had to get there at six, but a staff had to be

up and working at four on the inflow of information so that he could be up to date by eight.

BURG: This was in 1944.

BETTS: This was 1944.

BURG: It hadn't worked like that while you were still there.

BETTS: Oh, no, nothing like that, no. We couldn't have done it, because you can't work twenty-four hours a day.

BURG: Let me ask you, General, with respect to intelligence appreciations, you cite the fact that right after the war began, if war plans or operations division, if these people, needed to know something about what either of our major enemies were up to, it might take a couple of weeks before the appreciations were delivered to them, so they were using you--

BETTS: That's right, as a short cut, yes.

BURG: --you were au courant with what was going on and you would then brief them.

BETTS: See, I saw everything that the chief of the intelligence



branch saw and he saw everything. He had all the sensitive material of every kind, and the only difference was that I sometimes had--I would not be able to consult a local specialist if these fellows called on me suddenly for something. I'd just say, "Well, this came in and this is the way it looks at this moment."

BURG: So you might have within your organization somebody whose natural interest, let's say, focused on North Africa, who might in the spring of 1942, long before the invasions, be the specialist that you could turn to for an appreciation of the activities of the Vichy French in North Africa.

BETTS: Oh, yes, oh, yes. They had that.



BURG: Yeah. So you could latch onto him, if they gave you a little time; you'd be able to talk with him. Now were the other officers at all unhappy with the situation where, either it was wait for one or two weeks to get a full-blown story, or use you. Were they unhappy with it? Did they want faster service out of intelligence and if so, what was done about it?

BETTS: Well, I think they did but they were so busy with their

own affairs, they were just glad to grasp at anything. And they would--I think that General Marshall really did an awful lot of his own intelligence work. I mean, he had the logs every morning. That would give him excerpts from the telegrams received in the course of the night; what's happened here, what's happened there, raw material. And it was not only intelligence, but it was also operational reports; where the troops are at this moment, how they're getting along at Lae or what's happening at Tunis?

BURG: Yes, sitreps.



BETTS: Sitreps. And that would be reduced for him. For each telegram, there were probably just a couple of lines on it, either to say things are going as expected at Lae, or not, and--

BURG: I should tell my transcriber that's L-a-e; we're in New Guinea now! [Laughter] Well, General, while you were there, '41, '42, was there any kind of daily intelligence briefing of General Marshall, in the sense of your chief, for example, coming in early in the morning and saying, "Here's what we have for you today."

BETTS: No, it hadn't got that far. It did not get that far.

BURG: Right. He was deriving that information largely from the logs provided for him.

BETTS: Yes, and, of course, every once in a while, he'd call on me! I mean, well, he knew me. This was all highly unofficial business. Marshall did that a lot. When I left, he actually turned to Colonel Truman Smith; did you ever hear of Colonel Truman Smith?

BURG: Yes, I have heard of him.



BETTS: Who was a very, very fine soldier and had been military attaché in Germany and knew the German army from A to Z and was a very clever person. He got Lindbergh to report the German aviation industry for us. I mean, he suggested that Lindbergh make a trip as a civilian--this was before the war--as a civilian to Germany and the--of course the Germans were advertising. They were trying to show that they were strong everywhere, both on the ground and in the air. And they seized upon Lindbergh and showed him practically everything they had, not only in terms of machines--I mean, of airplanes--but of the factories, how

many they were making. And he was a very intelligent man and he could take a quick look at a factory and determine about how many they were going to turn out in the course of a year, very easily. And Truman Smith thought the whole thing up. And the Germans decorated Lindbergh, they gave him the Red Eagle, [Laughter] and Lindbergh and Smith returned with the bag. I mean, Smith was that kind of a man. And General Marshall knew Smith very well. Colonel Smith had been on duty at Benning when General Marshall had made all these contacts that he did, you know, when he was assistant commandant and was producing the various manuals for training at Benning, school manuals, infantry manuals. And he was very much impressed with Smith-- and Wedemeyer was also there--as he was also very much impressed with Wedemeyer. He put their names down in his little black book and when the war--just before the war broke out--Smith came back from Germany, and also his tour as attaché had finished, but he had also come down with diabetes and it was realized that he could not take active command in the war to come, so he was assigned to G-2. And he was another one of those fellows like me. He had a sort of a roving commission, he wandered around



and saw what was going on and knew what was going on. And when I left, why General Marshall turned to Truman Smith quite a lot. And so that was the way it went; it's the way it goes almost anywhere in an intelligence organization. When you get right down to sort of flash points of intelligence, why some guy comes and tells another guy. You don't have time to get it on paper and put it on the record.

BURG: An ad hoc arrangement.

BETTS: Absolutely.

BURG: Now, on these occasions when Marshall would call you in, what was that like for you, General? We're trying to get a picture of him, too, and the kind of man he was, the way he would function. These, I take it, would be the major occasions when you were coping with him, face to face. Would he let you know ahead of time what he wanted to see you about?

BETTS: No, no. He would just say, "Come along." Usually, he would call me in with somebody from War Plans or Operations. Very seldom I saw him personally; I mean, that we sat face to



face or anything of that kind. There were usually two or three people sitting around. And he was a very--I am a very great admirer of General Marshall's. I think that he probably was more the architect of our military victory than anybody else. And he was very easy to get along with. He never seemed impatient, but you always felt that you hadn't quite told him everything he wanted to know. It was a very curious sensation, that you'd go in there and you'd do your best--sometimes I'd know what he wanted to talk about when he came in--but I always felt that if I had just been a little brighter, why I could maybe have told him a little something more that would have helped him. I remember, I made one great big gaffe once, and this is another indication. General Marshall called me to his office. He said, "I'm going down to the Capitol, come along." I said, "Yes, sir." He was going down to the Capitol to testify before, I imagine, some sub-committee on the capitol. And he obviously was searching around for things that he could tell them that would be of interest to them as extraneous to the business of the day. In other words, a little cushion, you see. And so we sat in his automobile and he began to ask me about the--



it was just at the peak of the German offensive in 1941, 1940, when they almost got to Moscow.

BURG: '41.

BETTS: No, no. No, '40, I think.

BURG: No, it would have to be '41, because they attacked Russia in June of '41.

BETTS: Yes, you're right. And he asked me about how they were getting along and I said, "General, quite frankly, I don't know." I said, "The reports are so vague. They are making progress and whether they're going to capture Moscow or not, I can't say. They're getting awfully close." And he said, "Well, do you think that they'll get across the Borodino?" And my geography failed me because--

[Interruption]

BETTS: --we had fought the battle for Moscow, you know, and it's only a matter of, I think, twenty or thirty miles west of Moscow. And I couldn't, for the life of me, remember whether the Germans were over the Borodino then or not and I just



stammered and I felt such a fool. [Laughter]

BURG: Did he give you a look? [Laughter]

BETTS: No, no. No, I never felt that General Marshall was a person who was trying to catch you out or to make you feel that you had disappointed him. You didn't feel that way at all, you just--you yourself were disappointed because you couldn't give him what he wanted.

BURG: And how did you determine that you hadn't given him what he wanted? In that case, I can see very clearly, but--

BETTS: Well, I'd think it over. I mean, it always worried me, because there just was a feeling that he was sort of feeling that he ought to--maybe he ought to ask something that would be more of a leading nature and which would bring out what he wanted to find out; but he didn't quite know what he wanted to find out, you see.

BURG: Did other officers speak of that with you?

BETTS: Oh, yes.



BURG: They had the same kind of feeling.

BETTS: Oh, yes. I had one very amusing occasion. This was in, I think, 19--, late 1942, and I had occasion--and it was late in the day, it was about six o'clock--and I had occasion to go--I was just a messenger boy. I was delivering some materials for General Marshall which were supposed to be carried by an officer and I was the officer. And I went into the--at that time the secretary of the general staff was a very important person and he really metered access to the general. And the secretary at that time was a fellow named [Brigadier General Stanley R.] Stan Mickelsen, who was a great friend of mine, and I went in and there with Stan was another officer--Pink somebody. I can't think of his last name, but he also had been--

BURG: Not Pinky Bull?

BETTS: No, no, it wasn't Pinky Bull. But this fellow also became a major general. But he had been Mickelsen's predecessor, once removed. He'd been promoted and sent out to the troops.

[Ed. note: This may have been Col. William T. Sexton]

And I came into the office and Michelsen wasn't there; he was in



with General Marshall. And so I said, "Hello, Pink. Glad to see you", and all that, and I said, "Where's Stan?" He said, "Oh, he's with the general." In due course, Mickelsen came out and I gave him the papers, and Pink looked at Mickelsen and he grinned and he said, "Stan, did you tell him everything he wanted to know?" And Stan said, "No." Pink said, "I never did either." [Laughter]

BURG: So it seems to be a common feeling then with many of you.

BETTS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It was just this groping mind of General Marshall, always trying to get just a little deeper into the problem somehow.

BURG: Acquire all the facts that he felt he had to have. But not always knowing what the facts were that he had to have.

BETTS: There was something more that he probably ought to know and, by golly, he was going to try and find out.

BURG: Did you ever see General Marshall thoroughly angry?

BETTS: No, I never did.



BURG: You never did.

BETTS: No.

BURG: Ever see him cast down because of the way things were going?

BETTS: No, no.



BURG: So in your own private observations, you saw a man of some equanimity.

BETTS: Great poise, enormous poise, I think. I don't believe he could be stampeded by anything. If you don't mind, I'll tell you another little anecdote about General Marshall, and this one goes way back. I was in China in 1926 and I went down to the Fifteenth Infantry, who had a camp down by the Great Wall of China, on the beach, where they went for target practice in the summer. You see, they were stationed at Tientsin and you couldn't shoot without killing lots of Chinese. So they had a rifle range where the bullets went over--if you missed the butts, why the bullets went into the sea. They were conducting training, and at the time I was there they were conducting squad training

and General Marshall was the executive officer of the regiment. He was a lieutenant colonel. He had been a colonel-- this was '26, and eight years before he had been a full colonel-- and had been duly recorded, as one of the most talented and coming officers in the American army, and he had handled the movement of the troops. He was an operations officer, and he handled the movement of the troops through the deployment for the Argonne offensive and had controlled something like a million men. Well, here he was, a lieutenant colonel, the executive officer, and they were running these squad courses. They had a trail laid out and the squad leader was supposed to advance toward the targets. And targets of opportunity would spring up around him when he least expected it, and also he had to keep a certain amount of fire going on the principle enemy position. In other words, he was supposed to keep their fire down, and keep moving, and then still have something in reserve so that he could pop off if an odd man should come up here in the near neighborhood and start shooting at his men.

BURG: Sort of a flip target.

BETTS: Yeah, a flip target that would slip up. And General



Marshall, he was then Lieutenant Colonel Marshall, went out every day. He supervised every squad. It took a squad about a half hour to run the course, because it was really an infantry course, and when you are advancing and firing, why you don't move very fast. You move about a hundred yards a minute. But he watched every squad and when the squad came back he critiqued it; told them what they'd done right, what they'd done wrong; always very patient, never raising his voice, never saying, "Well, you were a fool to do that." He'd just say, "Well now, corporal, you should have called 'battle sights' there. You shouldn't have called out 'Range, three hundred yards.' Your men didn't have time to set their sights, so you should say, 'battle sights'". I mean, things like that, you know. The sort of things that any good sergeant would be expected to teach a squad. Well, here he was; he did it all day long, and I think he liked it. I think he enjoyed it, because he was a trainer and a teacher.



BURG: Yeah. That kind of attention to detail; although certainly, at his rank at that point, there was no need for him to be down there doing that. That's something like Jefferson Davis making decisions about the cut of a Confederate private's uniform.

BETTS: Well, he felt that the life of the regiment was the private soldier and if you got all the private soldiers perfectly trained, why you'd have a perfect regiment; it didn't much matter about the officers.

BURG: That seemed to stay his philosophy right on through, too, didn't it? [Laughter] It's interesting to have these vignettes of him. Ultimately, that duty came to an end. You left the War Department.

BETTS: Eventually, yes. Well, what happened next, as I continued on this sort of saddleback opinion, why the boys in G-3 began to say--well, we begin to have these conferences, you know. Of course, they had the big conference right at the start of the war when Churchill came over and they made the great declaration that Germany would be the principle target. And then that was followed by the Casablanca Conference, after the landings in North Africa, after TORCH. I went to neither one of those.

BURG: Neither Quebec nor Casablanca.

BETTS: Well, the first one wasn't Quebec. The first one was Washington.



BURG: Oh. It was! Sorry.

BETTS: And then there came a TRIDENT Conference in Washington, and Al Wedemeyer had found himself outnumbered at Casablanca, because they were still fooling around with this idea of the small staff, you see. And he took about four or five honchos with him and went over there for that conference and he found himself just simply surrounded and overpowered by highly-competent, British staff officers. He found himself engaging in dialectic [Laughter] with a great number of very talented men. And he made the wise decision, well, we've got to bring more manpower to these conferences. So the next conference was the TRIDENT Conference, which was in Washington, in about, I think, March of 1943. And at that point, why Al said, "We've got to have manpower." And my pals over in G-3 said, "Well, you'd better come along, too." So I began to participate in these staff conferences and there I met a--as an opposite number, the British had had a G-2 representative all along at all these conferences--and the representative was a very fine fellow named Piggott, Bill Piggott.

BURG: P-i-g-g-o-t-t, two t's in his name.



BETTS: Two t's. And we were sufficiently--he was a very thorough, thoroughly trained staff officer. I mean, he had been doing this under combat conditions for a long time. But we had both arrived at the conclusion that as soon as you have a meeting of G-2's, it's very important for the G-2's to agree among themselves before they go and face their betters. It's awful to have one G-2 saying one thing and the other G-2 saying another thing to different sets of bosses. So we decided that we just simply would have to join forces and we would have to come up with the same story for whatever situation presented itself.

BURG: That is, you and Piggott.



BETTS: Piggott and I, yes. And so we formed ourselves into the combined intelligence committee. That was the only, actually combined, permanent combined committee in that part of the war. The combined chiefs of staff only met sporadically, then they would disperse. In fact, the combined chiefs of staff only met under the auspices of Roosevelt and Churchill. The British had a mission here which could talk day-to-day problems with the Pentagon.

BURG: That was Sir John Dill's crew.

BETTS: Sir John Dill, that crew, yeah.

BURG: And was Piggott attached to Dill?

BETTS: No, no. Piggott belonged to the British G-2, British military intelligence. But he and I formed, just simply formed, this committee and called ourselves the combined intelligence committee. Nobody questioned us. And we proceeded to take it a step further and write an estimate of the--once again, a horse-back estimate--just the two of us sitting down and facing the problem of the moment, whatever it happened to be.

BURG: This was during TRIDENT?



BETTS: During TRIDENT. And then it continued. It also went on at QUADRANT at Quebec, and then it went on at Cairo, which was SEXTANT, which was in the fall of--really, in November, December 1943. Well by that time another thing had happened, and that was that Sir Frederick Morgan, who was the chief of staff of the--he was called the chief of staff of the supreme allied commander, COSSAC--had come over in the middle summer of 1943. And I think,

although I can not prove this, but I think that he had come in the expectation that General Marshall was going to command the landing in France. And he was the chief of staff of that supreme allied commander and he was more or less, I think, trying to install himself at a good time.

BURG: With the man that he thought he would be chief of staff for.

BETTS: The man he hoped he would be doing this with. I must say that I never thought that General Marshall would get away from Washington. It seemed to me that he was so essential to the political conduct of the war. I mean, he was a man that Congress really trusted. When he went down to talk to a congressional committee, they believed him. It was just pure gold. And there was none of this backbiting or anything else, they just knew General Marshall wouldn't mislead us for anything in the world; they were absolutely certain, and very properly so. So I thought that General Marshall would never take that command. But Freddy Morgan was in anticipation of that, and in that connection, apropos of nothing, General Marshall called me in and introduced me to General Morgan and said, "Now you two people go



and talk." And we talked. We didn't get into any detail at all. We didn't talk professionally, we just--pleasant conversation. Gathered that we were--I think we were amiable people and intelligent people. That was about the extent of what could be drawn from it. And I said good-bye and went away but then, as a result--I think as a result of that--I was picked out and nominated to be a brigadier general and go over and become the American G-2 of the invasion. I was really the deputy G-2 because, under the prevailing policies in all these theater forces, the Chief of staff had to be the same nationality as the commanding general. In other words, Ike had [General Walter Bedell] Beetle Smith; Monty [Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery] had [Major General Francis de] Guingand, and that sort of thing. Then G-3 also had to be of the same nationality as the commanding general, because he was the operations man. So that meant that G-2 became the counterpart. If you had an American G-3, you had a British G-2. And that was what they were going to have. They were going to have an American G-3 at SHAEF and so they had to have a British G-2. And that meant that if I went over, why I would go over as his deputy, which was all right with me. I was glad to go. And while we were at the Cairo Conference, I was notified that I had



been promoted to brigadier general. Came back home. When I got there, I was told I was to get ready to go right back to London. And that was that.

BURG: Now who served as G-2? It wasn't Kenneth Strong?

BETTS: Yes, it was Kenneth Strong.



BURG: It was Kenneth Strong. I had a clear picture of him in the North Africa situation and then I was less clear whether he had gone on and been G-2. Then you served as deputy to Kenneth Strong.

BETTS: To him, yes. And that was one of the--this I think ought to go in your records, if you don't mind. How are you all for time?

BURG: Fine, or at least I think I am. I can't really tell how much-- yes, we've got some time, and I have time, right.

BETTS: Well when I got to London, I, of course--SHAEF had not been created at that time--I was assigned to COSSAC. And I went to COSSAC, which was stationed in Norfolk House at St. Jame's

Square, and I reported there to the British G-2 of COSSAC. I reported first of all to Freddy Morgan, whom I had already met, and then I reported to the British G-2, who was a General John, I think it was Whitewood. I'm not--no, it wasn't Whitewood.

BURG: It wasn't Whiteley?

BETTS: No, it wasn't Whiteley, because Whiteley is going to come back in a minute. But, anyhow, this man had been an official of the British War Office G-2 and he had been assigned as G-2 of COSSAC. And I reported to him; it was Whyteford [Ed. note: actually, Maj. Gen. P.G. Whitefoord], and I had never heard of him before and our relations were a little bit tentative at first. The thing was further complicated by the fact that COSSAC itself, as far as the personnel concern, was in the state of some apprehension, because the word had gotten around pretty well that Ike was going to come and command. Ike at that time was still commanding AFHQ, and there was sort of a feeling, well, Ike is going to come and he'll just bring his African staff with him, and us poor fellows will have to go out somewhere and perhaps starve to death with nothing to eat. Anyhow, there was this



certain amount of malaise I would say and in due course, I think in the latter part of January or the first part of February, Ike's accession to command appointment was announced. And almost instantaneously, why Beetle Smith arrived on the scene.

BURG: This is 1944.

BETTS: Yes, 1944.



BURG: Because Eisenhower, I guess, had know about it in Africa in December of '43 and had come back home, but Smith went on to London. So he's there January, February of 1944.

BETTS: Yeah. And he immediately began to do two things. He brought a refreshing air of realism, because he announced at once that, while General Eisenhower was going to bring a few of his staff with him, generally speaking, he was going to settle for the staff that was already assembled there. And in that connection--this is the amusing thing--he announced that Jock Whiteley was coming and Jock Whiteley was going to be G-2. Beetle was pretty abrupt about this. I mean he just sort of--

I don't think he told Whitefoord at all. He just sort of said, "Jock Whiteley is coming and will be G-2." And Whitefoord got out on practically two day's notice.

BURG: Did you know Whitefoord well enough to know whether this hurt him?

BETTS: Well, it was quite clear it hurt him very much. I'll come back to that again in a moment, if I may. Anyhow Jock Whiteley came, and also he announced he was bringing a fellow named Foord, a British colonel, who had been the chief of intelligence for Kenneth Strong in North Africa, to be his chief of intelligence with us. In other words, run the actual estimating and handling of the intelligence data as opposed to the other activities in the office, because of course we were concerned with security and censorship, technical intelligence, lots of other things.

BURG: That is the G-2 function covered a wide range, but this was that narrower range.

BETTS: Oh, yes. This was the narrow one that covered actual



substantive intelligence of interest to the commander.

BURG: And Foord was going to do that?

BETTS: Yeah. Well, when Jock Whiteley came, I had never heard of him before and I said, "Well, look here," I talked to him. Incidentally, Whiteley is a very fine man and an extremely able man, and I think a man of, perhaps, a little narrowness in his mind. He was rather a conventional soldier. He was not a man of great imagination, but he was a man of enormous integrity and enormous careful thought. And when he came and said he was-- and when he came and was announced, as soon as he took office, I said, "Well, now, this G-2 intelligence is a peculiar sort of work and very much bound up in personalities and maybe you'd rather have somebody else than me. And if you feel that way about it, why that will be all right." I said, "I don't want you to feel that I'm trying to--" I said, "I like this job, I'd like to have the job, but I don't want you to feel bound that you have to take me as encumbrance to your new office." "Oh," he said, "forget about that." He said, "Lots of things are going to happen." And sure enough, about a week--no. Oh, about four weeks later it was announced that Kenneth Strong was going



to come on and be G-2, relieving Whiteley. And the reason for this was very involved. The G-3 of COSSAC had been a British officer; his name was, I think either Strang or Lang. [Ed. note: probably Maj. Gen. Charles West] I'm not certain which--

BURG: We can check that out.



BETTS: --he was a major-general. It's in Overture to OVERLORD. And he had a very important post because, while Freddy Morgan was the chief of staff, Freddy was very much occupied with the realities of the thing. He had to go around and start building these portable harbors and things of that kind. In spite of the fact that COSSAC was purely a paper organization in theory and actual practice, why it oversaw all these unusual developments that were incident to the invasion; such as the pipeline that they laid across under the Channel, and the Mulberry Harbors, and all these other things. They were quite new and novel in the war. And Freddy was very busy with that and very busy with the general, I would say, shaking down of the staff, which was at first very largely British, and then gradually it became more

and more enflamed with Americans as more and more Americans were assigned to it. And as a result of that, why Lang [West] was very much concerned with the mechanical organization of the staff. And he was another one of these people who was a great believer in the small staff, not only the small G-2, but the small general staff. They always referred to it as the "Foch-type" staff, because that was the way Foch ran the concluding phases of World War I. And Lang [West] had fought very hard to keep the staff down, and anybody who tried to get a new body aboard almost had to do it over his dead body. And he obviously was not going to fit in with the Eisenhower-Beetle plan, which was basically a big staff; they had discovered that for a big war you had to have a big staff. It's very cumbersome, and very annoying often, and usually you can't trace down stupidities too well because there are too many links in the chain of command. [Laughter] But at the same time, you just have to have a big staff because life is going on twenty-four hours a day, and there has to be a transfer of thought and people have to fall over each other a little bit to keep everybody on the ball. Well, it was quite clear that Lang [West] wouldn't fit with that and also, with the accession of Eisenhower, why



the G-3 was going to be an American officer. And so that gave a very good excuse for Lang [West] to resign or leave, which he did very shortly. And interestingly enough, he called me in--I don't know why he called me in, particularly--and made a rather moving plea to me. He said, "Now, you understand this thing, Betts; now do everything you can to keep the staff small, don't let it get out of hand." Well, I just said, "Yes, sir." And that was that, because I knew he was wrong. I not only knew he was wrong, I knew it wasn't going to be up to me.

BURG: Yes, and it wasn't going to be that way anyway. [Laughter]

BETTS: Well, anyhow, Lang [West] disappeared and Pink Bull was announced as the G-3. And that made it possible then for Whiteley to get over into the G-3 side. And then when Whiteley was moved over, why then it was possible to call up Kenneth Strong. This thing was all very elaborately planned in advance. I don't know that they figured up precisely who was going to tell whom what on what day, the the end product was going to be Whiteley in G-3 and Strong as the G-2.

BURG: Whiteley as deputy to Bull, and Strong in charge, and



even Freddy Morgan had been taken care of, because he had been offered, I guess, a corps or he could be deputy chief of staff, which is what he opted for.

BETTS: Oh, yes, everybody respected Freddy and of course they made a very good--that was a very neat one, too, because below Beetle they created two deputy chiefs of staff. Beetle was the--no, I think they were vice chiefs of staff; no, they were deputy chiefs of staff. One of them was Freddy and the other was Sir Humphrey Gale, who also came up from Africa. And Gale was a first class man; I mean, Gale would be my man to run US Steel. He's that kind of a type, a great managerial--practically a genius, I thought.

BURG: Now when you got there--



BETTS: None of this had happened, you see. None of these people were there.

BURG: [then Major General Ray W.] Ray Barker was Morgan's deputy, at the point where you got there.

BETTS: Yes. He was deputy and G--I don't know whether--I think

he was G-1, too.

BURG: Oh, he may have worn two hats.



BETTS: He may have held them concurrently. The British never--you see, the British weren't used to our staff system. They never quite understood it because, of course, it's not a very logical thing. But the British have option A; you have a commander, you have a chief of staff, then you have Ops, Operations, and under operations, you have intelligence, G-2. The British G-2 reports to the chief of operations, he does not report to the commanding general, which I think is bad. And on the other hand, on the other side, they have administration, and they don't make our differentiation between general staff and special staff. Under administration they have the whole spectrum of personnel, supply, quartermaster, ordnance, engineers, the whole schmeer.

BURG: Did that side of the British organization please you more?

BETTS: Well, none of these things really work out quite the way they look on paper. And I think, I may be prejudiced, but I think our method is better. It's grown up. I would say that the scheme is ideal for the division, because the division is compact enough so that you have a G-1, G-2, G-3, G-4. And G-4 runs--

Interview ends here

INTERVIEW WITH

Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Betts

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg
Oral Historian

June 25, 1975

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



This is an interview being taped with Brigadier General Thomas Betts in General Betts home in Washington, D.C. on June 25, 1975. Present for the interview General Betts and the interviewer is Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: Now, as we have just agreed, when we last were discussing these matters, General Betts and I had just finished talking about that stage in COSSAC, the group planning the Overlord invasion where a game--as General Betts put it--a game of musical chairs had been played with Whiteley and Ken Strong, and I don't know who else was involved in this. And I have a strong recollection that one of the last things you told me were some very fine things about Sir Humphrey Gale. He was obviously a man that you had enormous respect for; a man of tremendous abilities. Now what was the next move, for you particularly, within COSSAC after that had occurred.

GENERAL BETTS: Well, it was--the transition from COSSAC to SHAEF was really a very smooth one on the whole. Beetle Smith came up from Africa and began to make his impress on the group and, at the same time, why General Morgan more or less began to fade out. Because, of course, he had been chief of staff and technically, I don't think that SHAEF was created until about March. I'm not quite certain about that.



BURG: Of '45?

BETTS: Of '44.



BURG: Sorry. Of '44, of course, Yes.

BETTS: But it was coming. It had been announced that General Eisenhower was coming and that he was bringing his chief of staff. There was a bit of speculation in the COSSAC people as to what was going to happen to them, and Beetle came on the ground and immediately began to take hold and people began to come up from North Africa. Notably, Jock Whiteley, Humphrey Gale, General Rooks, Lowell [W.] Rooks, an American officer who was very prominent in Allied Headquarters but he never found a niche in SHAEF. He was always around, but he was not a mover and shaker.

BURG: I think he was R-o-o-k-s. Wasn't he?

BETTS: That's right. Lowell Rooks. Very fine man, incidentally. And Ike brought him up, I think, in the same way that he handled Al--you know, the man who succeeded him at SHAPE, actually.

BURG: Gruenther.

BETTS: Gruenther, Al Gruenther. He brought him up sort of as a handy man, and a very good man to have ready. He called Al Gruenther his bench when he was President.

BURG: His bench?

BETTS: His bench. Baseball term.

BURG: Oh, yes, I see.

BETTS: He was--yes, he was the reserve that you could plug in anywhere; he could field, run, and hit, whatever you needed done. And he brought Rooks in the same sort of capacity. "Good man to have around; we'll find something for him to do." But the trouble was that the actual transition from COSSAC to SHAEF did involve a good deal of heartburning anyway, and there really wasn't a place found for Rooks. Actually, Rooks would, I think, have made a better G-4 than the man we had, who never did impress me very strongly.

BURG: Who was your G-4 then?



BETTS: I can't remember. I'm sorry I've forgotten. But he had come to COSSAC and he, of course, was really overshadowed by Humphrey Gale and by the two, very outstanding, British officers. One was [Major General "Dome" Charles Scott (?) Napier and one was Blackbill--I can't remember--but he was the Deputy G-4. His name is in Morgan's book. And those two people knew--they'd been on the job all along; they were highly-qualified staff officers. Napier had been the great authority on continental railroads in the British Army. I think he had travelled over every foot of all the railway lines in Europe. He knew them. He practically knew every tie. He had this enormous expertise, you see. And the other fellow was a very, very thorough-going man.

BURG: General, let me ask you: had Napier done that in preparation for an eventuality in the future, or had he simply been so widely travelled that he had literally gone over--

BETTS: Oh, no, no. He had prepared himself very strenuously, but of course, long before the war.

BURG: In between the wars.



BETTS: In between the wars. But British staff training, you know, was really pretty wonderful at that stage of the game; A, because they had people like Napier, and B, because they'd had four years of war under their belts and they'd learned how to run the staffs. And so these people, you couldn't toss them around very easily. And then, of course, Whiteley came up nominally to be G-2; he was assigned as G-2. And the G-3, whose name was either Strang or Lang [Charles West?] vanished. He had been, in COSSAC, very much the nuts and bolts man of the staff. General Morgan was concerned with very broad decisions and policies. As he says in his book, why he had to do a lot of things that he had no business doing, such as building these artificial harbors, making all these plans for the invasion, and had been involved in actual physical preparation, putting your finger on shipping. You've got to have such and such ships at such and such place. And the actual running of the staff had been pretty much under this fellow Lang, or Strang, and he in turn had been a small staff man. I mean by that, he was in favor of a very small, highly-professional staff. What they call the Foch-type staff. The idea was that the supreme commander



would have very little--he would rely on subordinate commanders for information and action. He would tell them to do something and if they had to build a harbor, why they'd build it. He wouldn't do it. But Beetle and Ike had been through the North African business, and they discovered you just had to have a great big staff, [ultimately?] in terms of meeting the twenty-four day. In other words, you really have to have three shifts of the staff. But also, because there were jealousies with an Allied command, it's very important that the decision-making power of the headquarters could be implemented by planning and thinking on that same staff. So as a result, why Strang differed from Beetle immediately and made his exit at once.

BURG: Was this a cheerful kind of disagreement, or was there any ill feeling and animosity?

BETTS: Oh, there was rancor, I'm quite sure.



BURG: Oh there really was.

BETTS: But it was over very quickly. I mean not only Lang, but the British knew the score. I mean, Ike was going to come and

they knew he was going to have his kind of headquarters, and better not oppose him on relatively minor issues. Much better to get another man. And actually, of course, the other man was [Major General Harold R.] "Pink" Bull, who came in as G-3. He succeeded Lang and then he eventually got Whiteley, in a nominal way, as his deputy. And Whiteley was--that was nicely arranged, because Whiteley was made his deputy, with responsibility for the plans rather than operations. The catch is, of course, that SHAEF was all plans, and the operating part was mostly telling a general to go and do something. So Whiteley, as soon as he got into that niche, he began to make the plans for the continuation of the invasion after we got ashore. The original landing had been very carefully staked out by COSSAC. Everybody accepted this, except that both Ike and Montgomery wanted a stronger first wave. They opened up the Utah Beach as well as Omaha. And that was accepted without any cavil and any trouble. They beefed up the first wave, but aside from that they took the COSSAC plan, with all the beaches and who got ashore where, and British on the left, the Americans on the right, and so away they went. But the very funny thing was that while Whiteley was



acting G-2, or was G-2 in fact, but knew he wasn't going to be--he was only a bird of passage there, because he knew Strong was coming. As a matter of tact, why they wanted to have this influx from North Africa sort of dribble in, rather than come in. It was a shock wave, you know. So he was G-2 and we were occupying the same office in--by that time the headquarters had moved to Bushey Park, near Hampton Court, from Norfolk House-- and he came in looking worried and he said, "Tom," he said, "The old man just came in and he forgot I was G-2. He said, 'Jock,' he said, 'what are we going to do after we get ashore, after we break out? What do we do then?' And he said, 'You work it out.'" Despite the fact he was a G-2 and not a G-3. And one thing that worried him very much was the fact that he had been thoroughly brought up in the Eisenhower school that, one, you're an Anglo-American staff; you always consulted your American counterpart, either your subordinate or your superior, whichever it was, and arrived at a joint decision. But he couldn't consult his assistant G-3, because he didn't dare tell the G-3 that Ike was telling him to take over, you see. And the only American he could confide in was me. So we sat down and worked the thing out,



which took us about fifteen minutes. It was quite simple, I mean--

BURG: Fifteen minutes to work out what you were going to do after the breakout?! [Laughter]

BETTS: Oh, yes. Well, I mean, we didn't work it out in detail. The big question was--we knew we were going to break out somewhere, burst into France. The question really was, should we then attack--should we advance on a broad front or on a narrow front. If we advanced on a narrow front, we could thrust up toward Antwerp through Belgium, or if you went out on the other flank, why you'd have to go over by way of Metz and up by Mainz and Frankfort. If you went on--but we also felt that if you did that, such a thrust would be very easy to parry because the Germans would have--you can't do it overnight--and the Germans could diagnose it and could meet it. So we decided the thing to do was to spread it out. In other words, play the open game, shotgun formation. Spread out the broad front, sweep up to the north, and then we could decide whether to attack around both flanks or just hit one punch the other way. And we decided that



was the thing to do. We'd break out, we'd cross the Seine, and fan out and advance north. That was it.

BURG: So you sort of had in mind a door--as we look at the Normandy beachheads--a door hinged on the left flank that would simply swing across towards Paris and the Seine and then on.

BETTS: Rather. Yes.

BURG: And with another door, actually, opening in the south of France.

BETTS: Yes. Oh, yes.



BURG: Now at that brief session of a few minutes with Jock Whiteley, did you also add the curve fanning around up to Cherbourg?

BETTS: No, no, no. That came out in the course of the--that was in the original plan. In the COSSAC plan. Because everybody set great store on having a good port. That you could use for big ships. And about the only thing that you could count on was Cherbourg. I mean you--the next one would be Le Havre, and you have to cross the Seine to get at that. Or you would have to go

way back, go down to Brest. The British were rather keen on Brest because, from the naval point of view, they were very anxious to clean out the Germans' submarine activities on the south of England. And as a matter of fact in the planning for the breakout, we did detach a corps to capture Brest; we did capture Brest. But the Cherbourg role was inherent in the whole thing and then, of course, when we captured Cherbourg the Germans had destroyed it to such extent it couldn't be used. So we had to come across the beaches for a long, long time.

BURG: Yeah. Through the one harbor that you had; the one Mulberry that stayed in operation. Well, that's amazing that Whiteley had that dumped on him. He didn't feel that he was in a position to say, "Now remember, General Eisenhower, I'm not your G-3."

[Laughter]

BETTS: No, no, no.



BURG: He didn't do it. Do you suppose it was out of deference?

BETTS: Well I think he agreed with Ike, actually. He was glad to do it. You see, he'd been--in AFHQ, he had been a deputy chief

of staff, but he and Ike had established very close relations, early on. Matter of fact, remember when the Admiral, the French Admiral was assassinated?

BURG: [Admiral Jean Francois] Darlan?

BETTS: Darlan. Well when it happened, why Ike and Jock Whiteley were on reconnaissance together up toward the front. They were going, they were driving east, well to the east of Algiers, and they suddenly got the word that Darlan had been assassinated. Of course, Ike immediately turned around and went back. But I mean at that point, why, Whiteley was already a very trusted advisor of Ike's.

BURG: Yes, I see. So then, this matter in London of making this assignment to Whiteley was not as unusual as I thought at first.

BETTS: Oh, no. It was just routine.



BURG: Yeah. But how fast the two of you did this. In, say, fifteen minutes--

BETTS: There were only two or three things to consider. Actually,

you know, big strategic decisions are usually rather simple. It's the nitty-gritty, when you have to lay it down and say, well a certain battalion has got to be on a certain line at 8:47, that you really have to be precise. But this is all broad brush.

BURG: Now, let me ask you, this decision that it would be better to go broad front. As we know it, ran contrary to Field Marshal Montgomery's views.

BETTS: Well, it--Field Marshal Montgomery's view was very simple. It simply was that any advance should be commanded by Montgomery.

[Laughter]

BURG: Whether it was broad or narrow.



BETTS: Yeah, it made no diff--and I think that he was consistently influenced, throughout the war, by trying to accrete power, to accrete command of the ground forces. He wanted to be the ground force commander. He felt that Ike should have a naval commander, and air commander, and a ground force commander. And the ground force commander should command the army groups.

BURG: Directly.

BETTS: Directly, yes.

BURG: With the Supreme Commander acting as the central point to which information could come, and the central point that the combined chiefs could deal with.

BETTS: Presumably. And, of course, also the--in all this war business there is always a sort of an ebb and flow of who makes the decisions, or who should make the decisions, who ought to make the decisions, and who can make the decisions. And Montgomery wanted--he was a very ambitious man--he wanted power, there's no question about it. And it was exemplified during the whole invasion, of course. As you know, when we did first burst out and did--you spoke of a door, you know, through this door, which is a good simile I think. But also, I always thought of it as the, really, the line of the Seine. We get up to the line of the Seine and get over the Seine. That wasn't going to be hard, because it's a very long river and the Germans couldn't defend it all. And then, after we got over the Seine, that was the point when this particular strategy would have to be reviewed. But as



you remember, we got over the Seine and the Germans, actually, in northern France were demoralized. They were more demoralized than we realized, and then Montgomery, for the first time in his life, made a very strong and lightning manuever. He got through Le Havre to Brussels, I think, in a couple of days. He just charged up the road. And he was so enthusiastic about that that he made the proposal to Eisenhower that, "Here, give me"--this was the narrow front idea--"give me the mass of the troops and I'll push right through to the Rhine. There's nothing to stop me." Well, he wasn't quite right, and besides, it would have meant that the rest of the army, the rest of the front, would have been half starved, because what he really wanted were the soldiers and the gasoline. And we were getting very short on gas. We were not doing too badly on soldiers, but we were getting short on gas. And also, as we know, the Germans did rally. It was a matter of some luck, but on the other hand, it meant that we really wiped out the German army in France, but the German army in Germany more or less manned the frontier and then moved down and held very stubbornly. We had an awful lot of fighting south of the German frontiers in September and October.



BURG: Judging from Cornelius Ryan's book [A Bridge Too Far], even the remnants of the army in France, by the time it had moved through Belgium into Holland, had rallied itself.

BETTS: Oh, yes. They'd rallied a lot.

BURG: And Montgomery's progress there, in trying to come up in order to relieve the parachute bridgeheads, was certainly slow motion, much in keeping, I think, with his habitual work.

BETTS: Yes. Yes, his usual work.

BURG: Uh-huh. So, I think, too, that Lord--well, then, [Field Marshal Sir] Alan Brooke also had been a supporter of narrow front, but is it safe to say then, General, that the narrow front-broad front controversy really develops steam, let's say, after the Seine; but in the initial planning stage, this thing that you and Whiteley cooked up was perfectly acceptable as planned.

BETTS: Quite acceptable, yes. And to some extent it--you have to remember that the clean up of the break through--I mean, the actual wiping out of the Falaise Gap and the rounding up of the German armies, German Normandy army--it took a little time, but



more than that, it took a lot of dislocation because we had to move a lot of troops back toward the coast. The break through went through Le Mans--it went through that bottleneck, Avranches. When it got through Avranches, why we could fan out. We sent a corps to capture Brest and started Georgie Patton marching east. And with him also went a large part of the 1st Army, which had to make a big wheel. It got to Le Mans and then it had to change course and almost backtrack, get up to the Caen area where they finally closed the Falaise Gap. And all that--you couldn't really say you were going to advert to a very broad strategy until that particular operation had been accomplished. It was fast so it didn't mean much loss of time, but then you had to do a lot of displacing again. Some of the 1st Army had, once again, to turn around and go east and cross the Seine above Paris at Melun.

BURG: How is that spelled?



BETTS: M-e-l-u-n. And another corps crossed the Seine at Mantesgassicourt. M-a-n-t-e-s-g-a-s-s-i-c-o-u-r-t. In other words, we'd done this, and then you had to do that. [Laughter]

BURG: Everything converging and then having to diverge--

BETTS: Yes. Then you had to reform, really, and always with a little fighting, not a great deal. And it happened very fast, but also you couldn't be sure of who was going to be where. You couldn't start telling even army commanders where to go next, because they had to get their armies under control.

BURG: Yes. And everything, of course, fluid with the Germans, too.

BETTS: Yes.



BURG: I suspect that this business of the gap being closed by 3rd and 1st Army and Montgomery's troops at Falaise, and then the diverging again to the broader front, that could never have been carried out half so fast or so successfully if the Germans themselves hadn't been reeling and unable to really interfere with that divergence.

BETTS: Yes, that's right.

BURG: All right, moving back then to this period of time, we

pick up you and Whiteley once more. You had been asked to do this, you have done it; you've come up with this idea of going for a broad front once we had broken out. Then, I presume that Whiteley took this to General Eisenhower--

BETTS: I suppose so.



BURG: --and did you ever hear more about it at that time?

BETTS: I never heard a thing more about it.

BURG: And neither one of you, evidently, was asked to do any more vigorous planning of it, detailed planning for it.

BETTS: Not at all, not at all. Actually, I was overtaken by the fact that we had to replan G-2, because G-2 had been brought up to be a very small body. It was supposed to have about, I think, seventy officers. Well, up from North Africa came--not first of all Kenneth Strong--there came first of all a British colonel named Foord, F-o-o-r-d, who of course was always known as "Henry" Foord. [Laughter] I don't know why that; his name was Edward. And he had been the chief of intelligence in the intelligence staff at Algiers. And he knew what kind of a staff, intelligence staff, that Beetle and Kenneth

Strong and Ike Wanted. So he arrived and we began a long series of replanning the G-2 staff at SHAEF to fit with these ideas. I was very busy with it and had a lot of very serious discussions with Foord about what we were to do. Incidentally of course the British G-2, whose name was Whyteford, not Whiteley but Whyteford, when I got there--

BURG: W-h-i-t-e-f-o-o-r-d?



BETTS: Yes, that's right. I think t's W-h-y-t-e-f-o-o-r-d, I'm not quite certain. [Ed. note: actually, Major General P.G. Whitefoord]

BURG: Oh, okay.

BETTS: But he was in charge there when I landed and I worked with him. And naturally, he had it set up the way he wanted it set up and I was new on the job. I wasn't going to start reorganization.

BURG: Now you say, when you "landed" there, General. In the sense of landed on the SHAEF staff?

BETTS: When I got to England.

BURG: Oh, when you got to England.

BETTS: Yeah, when I joined the COSSAC staff. Whitefoord was the COSSAC G-2.

BURG: Oh, I see. I see.



BETTS: And when Whiteley appeared and was made G-2, why Whitefoord disappeared. He went away. I don't know why. I think he got a brigade; I'm not certain. So I was sort of the residual head of the COSSAC G-2 staff, you might say, and I had to talk this out with Foord, who was very amicable. We had no troubles at all, except that I felt that Foord wanted too big a staff. Although, I knew he needed a bigger staff, and I think Foord thought I wanted to cut his staff, so he decided he'd put in for a little bigger staff than he really needed. [Laughter] Anyhow, for about two weeks, why Foord and I fumbled papers. This is precise planning, you see; this is not something you do in fifteen minutes. Because you have to figure out who you're going to get and where you're going to put them.

BURG: And balance the staff, I presume, British and Americans.

BETTS: Oh, yes. All that. More particular, just the organization itself. How many men do you need for a particular assignment? For instance, we had in the staff--the big section, of course, was the intelligence section. It did the mass of the work, because it considered the information, evaluated it, and then put it into some kind of a form, either a report or a statement. It was quite a large body, but then we had lots of little staffs. We had a security staff, which did security planning for SHAEF, also.

BURG: Within G-2.



BETTS: No, this was for all SHAEF.

BURG: Ah ha.

BETTS: See, it's counter-intelligence.

BURG: So it fell within the purview of SHAEF G-2, uh-huh.

BETTS: And it had a staff of only about eight or ten people. Then we had a censorship section, which did not do any censoring itself, but they did promulgate policy on censorship. It was

very small; about six men. And we had a technical intelligence staff; people who were interested in the, let's say, the technology of war and finding what the Germans were doing, and analyzing new weapons, and all that sort of thing. And that was only a couple of men. Of course, it was mostly done by the technical services themselves. I mean, the ordnance, the engineers, and signal corps. But these people rode herd on it and worked out systems and applications.

BURG: Would this extend to new German developments--Luftwaffe developments, for example--or was it confined to new developments in ground warfare?

BETTS: Almost entirely ground warfare. In the first place, there was very little new development in the German Luftwaffe until they brought along the secret weapons. You know the--

BURG: V-1, V-2's, yes.

BETTS: --buzz bombs, V-1s and V-2's, all those. Actually, they were fighting the war with the kind of planes and the kind of pilots that they started out with. Except they gave up Stuka's;



that was about the only thing. They discovered the dive bomber couldn't live on a modern battlefield, very quickly. But their material changed very, very little. One of Hitler's big mistakes. He thought he was going to have a short war and he didn't try to tool up the kind of research and development for air. For ordnance, yes; tanks, they kept on turning out new and better tanks all the time. Very quick to incorporate new designs and alterations. But that was the nitty-gritty. Actually, of course, we had very little contact with the Luftwaffe itself. I mean, they were off fighting in Russia most of the time. We had air superiority all through the whole invasion.

BURG: Yes, so General [Maj. Gen. Elwood R.] Quesada has said with great pride. [Laughter]

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: That there really wasn't much there to do. That's when he brought 9th Tactical Air across.

BETTS: Yes, that's right.

BURG: Now, I'm sorry. I interrupted you, because you were filling



me in on the various sections.

BETTS: Anyhow, the point was that this was a very complex staff, and we ended up with a TO of about, I think, 250 officers and--I think, 250 bodies; that included clerks, WACS, what have you. And we kept them all pretty busy.

BURG: Two hundred and fifty!

BETTS: Well, doing this preoccupied me. I wasn't--

[Interruption]

BURG: --in what sense, General?



BETTS: Well, I mean, we discussed this. In a way it was not-- it hadn't quite been revealed that Ken Strong was coming up to be G-2, but you could certainly smell it in the air if you know what I mean. And I, naturally, wanted to have something that would work. That would fit in with the personalities involved and with the tasks involved, and to some extent Ford knew more about the tasks than I did because he'd been active in practicing for it, rather directly. And he also knew Kenneth Strong. He also knew Jock Whiteley, because Jock [sort of pervaded our Air

Force headquarters.]? So we had very long talks and then Whiteley and I would tell Foord to go away and draw up a TO, and he'd go away and draw up a TO, and we'd vet it down and say, "Well, no, we think it ought to be, maybe, a little bit more this way." After all, you're going to have an awful lot of report writing. You were going to have to have a sort of a newsletter to get out and that means you've got to have editors, and you've got to have people who can write fast and write accurately. This went on, as I said, for a couple of weeks. Finally, we hammered out something that satisfied Whiteley and Foord and me. But it kept me busy; I wasn't terribly concerned with the great strategic decisions at that point. Actually, of course, Ike hadn't got there yet, either. Then Strong came in and was-- came up--and was announced. I'd known Strong before. I'd met him twice. He came over to one of the combined staff conferences, as I recall. I think he came to the Quebec Conference, and I also met him at the Cairo Conference, you know, when they went on to Tehran. Chiang Kai-shek and all the mixed bag of people. Well, so I knew him and I knew I could work with him all right. And it didn't bother me, but I did take the step--I took two steps.



When he came in, I said, "Now look here. I like this job and I like you and I think I can do it, but I'd understand perfectly if you'd want to bring up your own deputy." Because he had a very good deputy in North Africa, a fellow named [Colonel] Tom Roderick, and I certainly didn't want to stand in his way if he wanted to make a change. If he had that idea. He said, "No." He said, "You really mean you want the job?" I said, "Yes." And he said, "You get it." And I still felt that I ought to do something a little more, so I went and put it up to Beetle, also. I said, "You're moving into a new headquarters. You may want somebody else in my place. If you do, I understand." And Beetle is very quick on the trigger and he thought I was complaining because I wasn't being made G-2, so he began to talk to me very gently and persuasively, trying to persuade me; to avert this storm, [Laughter] which I hadn't intended to do. But we straightened that out and then we really got on with the business of getting ready for the invasion, which included--I also went, in the middle of March, I went down to North Africa. I went to AFHQ and looked over how their G-2 worked, some of the things they did that I was not familiar with. In particular, handling



of vital and supersensitive material, which, of course, was a high art with the British. To some extent, I educated myself, too. I made a visit to Bletchley Park and checked up on the intercept people there. I made a number of other trips around, just familiarizing myself with the feel of the whole army, so I'd know what was going on.

BURG: These trips were in England.

BETTS: Yes, these were all in England.



BURG: Then down to North Africa to--

BETTS: Then in North Africa and in Italy. I took about ten days for it.

BURG: Now let me ask you--let's divert just long enough--you flew down, of course.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: And what was the routine? Did you go to Strong, who was by then the head of G-2; you were his deputy?

BETTS: Well, Whiteley was still in charge when I went down. I cleared it with Whiteley, of course. I said, "I think I ought to do this." He said, "Yes, I think you should."

BURG: Had you, by then, been conferring for some period of time with Foord?

BETTS: No, Foord hadn't got there yet, either.



BURG: He wasn't there yet. So, actually, you did this and had the advantage when working with Foord of having seen the operation that Foord had.

BETTS: Yes. Seeing him in operatin, too.

BURG: Uh-huh. Oh, he was still there.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: So you didn't pass one another.

BETTS: No.

BURG: Ah ha. So you saw him on his own home ground. Well that must have been a great advantage, then, in working with him in

making this transition. So you're given permission to fly on a military aircraft and they assigned the seat to you, told you which one you were to go on. Then you took that frightening flight across the Bay of Biscay.

BETTS: Well, no. Actually, at that time, the Germans were sufficiently active so that we flew, we took off from--oh, that Scottish air field, up near Glasgow.

BURG: Prestwick?



BETTS: Prestwick, yeah. Went up to Prestwick by train; got on a DC-3; the DC-3 flew west to about two hundred miles off the coast of Ireland, then turned south, and then flew east again and landed at Casablanca. Quite a flight!

BURG: Indeed. Anything to avoid the Junkers 88's that were infesting the Bay of Biscay.

BETTS: We just didn't want to get in the range of German fighting craft, fighting aircraft. And they had long range fighters at that time. So this was a necessary--everybody did it. It was standard procedure. And then from Casablanca, I flew to Algiers.

That was a wonderful thing, because the Atlas Mountains were fogged in and we flew through the Strait of Gibraltar. It was one of the most beautiful flights I've ever made. Perfectly lovely. I went to Algiers. As I say, I think I stayed there three or four days and then went over to Italy and took a look at the Allied Army there and, more particularly, 5th U.S. Army, because the G-2 of that army is a great friend of mine, [Brigadier] General [George Stanley] Smith, General Budge Smith. [Ed. note: Smith, then a colonel, was deputy G-2 of 15th Army Group, and evidently replaced Edwin B. Howard while Howard was home on leave. Betts seems to have visited Smith during the time he was substituting for Howard]

BURG: Budge.

BETTS: Budge, that's his nickname. And we went up to the front and looked around and I looked at his operation, too. Of course, that was an Army operation. It was a much smaller thing than one with these great big huge staffs, but still, it was very enlightening. And then I came back the same way that I went; I went back to Algiers, then back to Casablanca, and then out on this



long roundabout flight to Prestwick.

BURG: So you'd been gone, perhaps ten days.

BETTS: Ten days, two weeks, something like that.

BURG: And let me ask you what your rank was at that time.

BETTS: I was a Brigadier General.

BURG: Oh, you were.



BETTS: Yes. I was promoted Brigadier General when I was assigned to COSSAC.

BURG: I'm sorry. Perhaps I asked you that at the time.

BETTS: Well, it was a little bit in anticipation of assignment. I was actually promoted in December 1943, but the reason I was promoted was because I was going to COSSAC.

BURG: Right. I see. I'm sorry, I had forgotten that--

BETTS: That's quite all right.

BURG: --and for me it confused the issue a little bit. Because

I was still with you as a Lieutenant Colonel, I think, or a Colonel, somewhere back down the line. Now I wanted to ask you before we got too far away from this matter: as you worked with Foord--in England, now, I thinking, particularly--can you recollect any of the differences between the British approach--either the British approach per sé, or the British approach as modified by the experiences of the war in North Africa--that Foord was putting to you that may have been in conflict with your own American-trained view of intelligence operations.



BETTS: No, I don't think so. We were on the same beam. There was no trouble. It was mostly a question of allocation of resources. How many men we needed; what they should do. I mean, the organization of both the COSSAC and the SHAEF G-2 was very much like any high American headquarters organization. Very little change. They all had the same functions. I mean, I enumerated several of them. Well, you'd find all those in an American headquarters, too; it's sort of classic. There are differences in emphasis, a great deal, I think, and there are differences in, you might almost say, scholarly approach. I mean by that, you found an awful lot of Oxford dons on British

intelligence staffs. People who could write very well; who are highly intelligent; and who, by and large, were real scholars. I mean, they had a scholarly approach. They were inclined to be objective. And in the American staff, you tended to get more--I hesitate to say more practical people, because these people were very practical--but people who are more pragmatic, I would say. A little less philosophy in the American staff. A little more philosophy on the British. [Laughter]

BURG: I see.



BETTS: But it's not, it was not material. We never had any trouble along those lines at all. I mean, we had completely equal staffs. Well, you take the big section of our G-2 staff was a thing run by Foord. I don't know whether they called it the Intelligence Section or the Intelligence Branch, and he had an American deputy who had started out in life as an obstetrician. Foord, on the other hand, was not a professional soldier; he was a British businessman. He was connected with the tobacco business, Abdullah Cigarettes. And then under them, why you had a staff of what you might call the writing staff, or the disseminating staff,

which was in charge of an Oxford don named Austin. A most cultured man. And extremely able. And a little stiff. He was--they all tended--everybody, I think, in intelligence tends this way. They tend to feel that they're really the hub of the whole thing; they're the brains of the business. And Austin felt very strongly, I think, that he should have had Foord's job, particularly as Montgomery's G-2 was also an Oxford don named [Brigadier E.T.] Williams, called Bill Williams. And I think Austin felt that if Williams could be a G-2, well, by golly, he ought to be a G-2, too. I mean there was a little of this. And there was a little of it in Foord. Foord was not particularly jealous of me, but he was jealous of Strong. He felt that Strong was getting the credit for the work that Foord did. I could sense that.

BURG: But he wasn't telling you that directly.



BETTS: Oh, no. No.

BURG: Ford never said it.

BETTS: Oh, no. Oh, no.

BURG: But some of these things are so clearly indicated that it doesn't have to be put into words, I think.

BETTS: But there were--everybody--the spirit was good. Everybody was on the job and I don't think there was a man on the staff who wouldn't gladly have undergone any particular hardship, or any grievance, that could help win the war. The spirit was excellent. And it was largely the work, I think, of, especially of Morgan, and then of Ike. Because they were very good staff leaders. You'd always hear people speaking well of them and not in any lip service at all. I mean, they'd say, "By golly, the man is good, isn't he?" That sort of thing.

BURG: That seems to come through in Morgan's book. That is, not that he's deliberately trying to tell you that, but just the kinds of--the way in which he seemed to see things, seems to come through very strongly, that the man was of that kind. That he would get along well with his Allies and--well, his graciousness in handling that situation where, in theory, he would have been the SHAEF deputy but gave way to Beetle Smith so that Eisenhower and Smith could stay together. That was



rather typical of the man, I think.

BETTS: Oh, yes. He's a very fine man. He was--I hesitate to say it--but I think he was just a little bit cautious. He was the kind of person that before he took a step, he had to be very thoroughly convinced that he was right. Beetle was not that way at all. I mean, Beetle learned early on that if you make up your mind and say something, it's a lot better than to sit around and think about it. Very often, you'll be wrong, but it's better to do something wrong than not to do something at all. And to a certain extent, Beetle complimented Ike, too, because Beetle sort of supplied the pepper and the fire and Ike was the big moving force. Everybody felt that he really had the power.



BURG: Uh-huh. Was it your feeling, or did you detect it as a general feeling in SHAEF, that Eisenhower tended, like Morgan, to be a little reluctant?

BETTS: No, not at all. Not at all. In fact, I would say that in many ways I think Ike's main characteristics--one of Ike's most valuable characteristics--was the fact that he was always

looking quite far ahead. He was always--just like he asked Whiteley, "Here, we're going to get ashore; we're going to win a battle. What do we do next?" And you'd always find that he was not thinking very much of the battle in progress; he was thinking about the next battle always. Saying, "What do I have to do to get that set up." Of course, he was blessed with good commanders who could take the load of the day-to-day planning off his chest.

BURG: Now let me pursue this matter. With Strong now in charge, and you are deputy, things have been worked out with Foord so that you have an organization that you feel all of you can live with.

BETTS: Yes. And we had the organization and then we manned it, which was not hard, because we had the residual staff and we had a pool.

BURG: "Residual staff" in the sense of those from COSSAC and--

BETTS: We had the COSSAC staff, plus a few accretions from North Africa. And then--this was really a stroke of luck, and also a



stroke of bureaucracy--because when I got there, I discovered that there was--in addition to G-2--there was a, you might call it a static information staff, a little group of people. As a result of the original decision that the SHAEF staff was going to be a small staff, there was a general tendency to push tasks down hill, or to other, to subordinate commands.

BURG: I see. As you described with the Foch system.



BETTS: Yes. But there also developed the need for very careful examination of geography and communications and railroads and the preparation of reliable data on them. And as I say, because it was a bureaucracy they formed a little special group of about thirty officers that was called the Territorial Intelligence Section, or TIS, and they weren't allowed in Norfolk House where COSSAC was, but they were farmed out in a department store, a department store loft, on Regents Street. And they busied themselves with a lot of all kinds of studies, some of them very close; they studies of the beaches, for instance. Eventually, why they had to--every platoon leader in the assault got a map with his particular beach marked on it, just where he was supposed

to land, and then the admonition, "Well, you probably won't land there anyhow. If you don't, why do the best you can."

[Laughter] But all this involved enormous, enormous detailed work.

BURG: So these people had done that, too.

BETTS: What?

BURG: So these people had done that, too.



BETTS: These people were busily engaged in this, and when I got there they were in a very sad state, because they had been told that as soon as the invasion came, why boys, your task is over. Then you can go back and be infantrymen, or cook, or do whatever you like, but you don't belong in the hierarchy. And as soon as I got there, why they began to sort of come around and sort of rub against me and say, "Don't you think I ought to go to war with you, General", [Laughter] that sort of thing. So when the time came to expand the staff, why we had this very considerable body that was eager and willing to go and whom we knew, and we piled them in, too. So getting our 250 people wasn't

too hard. I suppose when the thing was all over, we probably had a hundred, maybe, and lots of those were not key people at all.

BURG: I was going to say, that would be one hundred, really, of all ranks.

BETTS: Yes, oh yes.



BURG: Clerical, as well as any remaining specialists that you' needed.

BETTS: Yeah. TIS staff was all commissioned, practically. I think they had very little clerical help. They pored over maps by themselves. But they were very useful, very good men.

BURG: Yes. Their task is broader than I would have thought. I didn't realize that they were also responsible for beach data, and this kind of thing. Much of that information, I suppose, very painfully gained. Putting men ashore, for example.

BETTS: Oh, yes. Putting men ashore. Well, I remember when we had--well, I suppose about April, two months before the invasion--

a flap ensued. Somebody got word that on a certain section of Utah beach there were quicksands. If you landed tanks on them, why the tanks would immediately bog down and get nowhere. And so the British sent a submarine and [can't comprehend this] out. He got ashore in a little boat with sort of a corkscrew, you know, [Laughter] and pulled up a couple of cores of sand, got into his little boat and rowed back, and nothing happened to him. The sand was perfectly good; no quicksands.



BURG: Presumably, had he found some, he would not have returned and they would have known that he had found the quicksand. [Laughter]

BETTS: But he [?] a problem slightly [lost in laughter]

BURG: Yes, indeed! When you stop to think about it, even three, five, six or seven core samples might very well not tell you a darned thing! A lot would depend on what time of the tide he'd hit that beach. Hard telling. All right, now you've got this full staff and my next question--perhaps, that almost answers it--I was going to say, when you have your full TO, you have it well before the invasion, of course. Is it--

BETTS: A couple of months before the invasion.

BURG: Yeah. So the SHAEF G-2 staff is manned and operating two months before the invasion--or is it safe to say "operating?"

BETTS: Well it was operating in the sense that we were getting--we were handling information about the enemy, but it was not the information that we would get when we had our own troops out there. In other words, once we were ashore, why our greatest source of information was the reports from the armies, and for air reconnaissance, too. They'd come and say, "What's on our front?" Or, "What [cannot make this out] any identifications of what they'll use in front of us?" What we've done, and we weren't getting that. But we were getting a great deal of information from intercepts, from espionage, from various studies. I mean, the sort of thing like these TIS people; they were really working from books more than anything else. They were using books and atlases. But we had enough of a flow of intelligence so that we could actually keep the machinery turning. We could develop routines and test things out about just what we should start telling people, and that was a very delicate thing because



some information you can't disseminate. I mean, anything from an intercept, you can't disseminate. That was automatic.

BURG: Because that gives away the source?



BETTS: It gives away the source to somebody or it may do it. It was very strict. So we finally ended up by having a daily and a weekly report. And they were only classified SECRET; they weren't classified TOP-SECRET. So they could get quick dissemination; somebody wouldn't have to wait a week while a courier went with the document, and all that sort of thing. But we got a rhythm. We started--we felt that we had information coming in, we were handling it the way we would at any time, and we were turning out reports. And, of course, we were also facing up the desideratum for the offensive, because one of the rules which COSSAC turned out, and which we inherited and which we accepted, was that the invasion was possible and pretty sure of success if not more than thirteen German divisions could come into action on the third day of the battle. In other words, the Germans would have three days, presumably, to bring troops in and really hit us at the beach. And it was pretty well figured out,

and everybody agreed, that with the strike forces that we had laid out, that we'd get them ashore and if after three days they were engaged with not more than thirteen German divisions, why, we had it made.

BURG: I presume the thirteen divisions, that was plotted out as so many panzer divisions, so many infantry--

BETTS: Oh, yes. Well, of course, we knew that. That information was coming in. The German dispositions--

BURG: That is, you knew what was there in the invasion area.

BETTS: Yes. We knew exactly what was on the beaches.



BURG: Now, General, did you also know what was within range of moving to the beach area within three days' time?

BETTS: Oh, yes, yes. We knew that.

BURG: So if you had a panzer division bivouacked a hundred miles away, you had already plotted out, "All right, they could have their vehicles on the beaches in three days' time." Uh-huh.

BETTS: And of course one of the most sensitive things was that

there was a panzer division in tactical reserve not too far from [Caen ? The 21st Panzer Division was so placed] and it could intervene on the first day, and it worried everybody a great deal. I mean, if it should hit, say five or six hours after we landed when there was confusion, why it might be able to do an awful lot of damage. But we still figured that was all--we could take it, but we'd rather it didn't do it. [Laughter]

BURG: I would think so.



BETTS: But I mean, all that stuff we had, and all the matters of that kind were reported periodically in person to General Eisenhower, by General Strong by that time. And it was not a set piece at all; Ike would call him in every once in awhile and say, "How does it look?" And strong would tell him.

BURG: So nothing came up during this period of time that forced you, or forced Strong, to go to him quickly and to say--

BETTS: "Watch out! "

BURG: Yes--"Watch out! Somethings's come up."

BETTS: No that never happened.

BURG: I can imagine how pleased the Surpeme Commander would be if you had had to dash in like that.



BETTS: Well you know, actually, Ike's method of operating was one in which he only asked for what he felt that he needed to know. He didn't like to burden his mind with minutiae at all. He generally felt that having the initiative, that he didn't-- as a Supreme Commander--he didn't need too much in the way of jogging from G-2 at all. He was always thinking well in advance and he very seldom called on us for anything. I mean, except in the most general terms. Mostly, as I say, he'd call in General Strong and say, "How's it doing? Any change?" And General Strong would say, "All systems are the same." Or General Strong might say, "Well, we relieved a division here and put another one in its place," or something like that, but I doubt if he would.

[Interruption]

BURG: We were talking about the way--

BETTS: Ike's attitude.

BURG: Right.

BETTS: And I was going to say that at the--for instance, a very good instance of that was in the two big conferences that occurred just before the invasion. I think, on the 3rd and 4th of June--I'm not quite--it's vague--and at those conferences, Strong and I were present and Ike never asked us a question, never asked about the enemy. The enemy was something he was going to do something to, and I think he would have expected us, if we had had panic, to come tell him about it.

BURG: Now that's, that's a fascinating thing.



BETTS: Yeah. The only people he consulted were the commanders and the meteorologists. He didn't consult his own G-3. He didn't say, "Are we ready, General?" Damn well had to be ready! And he didn't say, "Are we in dire peril from the enemy, General Strong?" No. He said not a word.

BURG: Good Lord! I don't think I've ever heard that story before. I don't think anyone has ever brought it up!

BETTS: Well it's a negative story. Nothing happened. Just like the dog in Sherlock Holmes that didn't bark. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes! That's fascinating! We all know about the Met man, Group Captain [J. M.] Stagg, coming in and giving his reports. I don't think--

BETTS: Coming in looking like death, too, the first day when he had the bad report.

BURG: Oh, did he?

BETTS: There were three of them. He, I think, was Royal Air Force.

BURG: Um-hum, right.

BETTS: And there was a Navy man and, I think, another; I think an American Air Force man. But there were three of them. But Stagg was carrying the ball and, as I say, he looked just



like somebody going into the execution chamber.

BURG: Now would that have been the 3rd? June the 3rd?

BETTS: Yes, that's right.

BURG: Let me just ask you to look back at that meeting. Let's start it from as early as we possibly can, just to get another insight into these two very crucial meetings. You and Strong were ordered to appear at these meetings.

BETTS: Oh, yes.



BURG: And where were you when you were given your instructions to come to it?

BETTS: I was at--the meetings were held down at Portsmouth, at that Navy Headquarters there, great big building [Southwick House]. It was a private--I think it may have been a big public school, or something of the sort, or great big mansion, anyhow. I was down there. SHAEF staff, the forward staff, had gone into camp down at Portsmouth. Beetle had the idea that

we were going to be rough, field soldiers and we should be conditioned to living in tents and keeping proper discipline. Not being observed from the air, and all that sort of thing.

BURG: I see. So this was carried out--forgive the interruption--but this was carried out in rather full detail.

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: You were under canvas, or in caravans as the British would say.

BETTS: We were under canvas.



BURG: You were under canvas; you were eating out of field kitchens?

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: Mess kits and--

BETTS: I don't think there were mess kits. I think there were [Lost this] soldiers than that. But I don't remember.

I think I would have remembered if it had been mess kits.

[Laughter] But it was not an onerous sort of thing. They--

BURG: No. How long had it gone on, General? How long were you under those combat conditions, so to speak?

BETTS: We'd been there about a month. I think we went down there about the first of May, and one element in it, I think, was that Ike wanted to have a good excuse to be out of London. Mr. Churchill was always calling him up at three o'clock in the morning saying, "I've got a good idea, General. Come over and we'll have a little talk about it." And--



BURG: Were you aware, General, that--I will not mention any names, but--were you aware that within the Air Corps, similar measures had been taken and units that were going to go over in a tactical role had been dispersed beside their fields, placed into tents, put under combat conditions, perhaps for a month or more, also? They, too, had gone--at least in one group that I know of--they, too, had gone to those very same conditions.

BETTS: I did not know that.

BURG: uh-huh.

BETTS: Of course, the ground troops had all been under vigorous training all this time. They were practically in the field all the time. And then, of course, when the time came to assemble for the real invasion, why they were put into what we call "duesays" ^{or "goose eggs" (S)} [?] and the British call sausages-- little circles on the map--and they were put in there and they weren't allowed to leave. They could not go out of their own perimeter for any reason, whatsoever. Once they'd been briefed and they'd been told--

BURG: They were "lagered," as they would have said in North Africa under Montgomery.

BETTS: Yes, that's right. But that only took place about, I think, four or five days before the invasion. It was fairly gradual sort of thing because the movement had to be progressive. I mean, you had to get the first men in before you could bring the next batch up and bring them in, so it took several days.



It wasn't a question of everybody just walking down to the beach one night--

BURG: And piling on a ship.

BETTS: And off.

BURG: Yes. So your group-- most of SHAEF then, I presume-- was established in the Portsmouth area. So when the meetings are called in Portsmouth, it isn't a great distance for either you or General Strong to move.

BETTS: Oh, no. As a matter of fact, I think Strong came down from London. I don't think he was out at the SHEAF forward at that time. I really can't remember that.

BURG: And you, of course, knew--given the nature of your work-- the date, the planned date.

BETTS: Oh, yes.



BURG: As did General Strong. So the news to come to this conference would not have surprised you.

BETTS: Oh, not at all.

BURG: And you were quite sure of what was going to be discussed.

BETTS: Oh, yes.



BURG: Now, when you came into the building you, of course, passed through security, the like of which I suppose hadn't been seen in England since Nelson was there! [Laughter] But you're coming into a fairly good-sized room--

BETTS: Oh, a great big room, a very high-ceiling room. I have a feeling that it was a sort of a foyer, really. I mean, in other words, maybe a staircase going up one side of it. But it was an enormously high-ceilinged room, and I'd suppose the room itself was about 40 by 40 feet.

BURG: And about how many men were gathered there, then, when that meeting began?

BETTS: I would say a hundred.

BURG: About a hundred of you. All the key people out of SHAEF.

BETTS: Yeah. Out of SHAEF, yes. The commanders, by and large, were with the troops at that time. Montgomery attended; the Commanders-In-Chief, Montgomery, the Admiral [Sir Bertram Ramsey], [Sir Trafford] Leigh-Mallory, the Air Marshal; and, of course, [Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W.] Tedder was there.

BURG: Bradley there?

BETTS: No, Bradley was not there.

BURG: He was not, um-hum.



BETTS: Maybe a hundred in excessive. It seemed to me like there were an awful lot of people there. It was a lounge kind of a room. I mean, you sat on sofas around and about. You weren't--it wasn't like being in a classroom at a desk and somebody next to you.

BURG: It was not?

BETTS: No, no. People were just sitting around.

BURG: And where was the focal point of the room? The--

BETTS: It was toward one side and not quite--I would say it was the corner. I mean, in other words, that was where Ike-- Ike sat there and he came in last, of course. Everybody else was there before he appeared. And closest to him were the ground, air, and naval commanders, and Tedder and Bettle. But there was no feeling of being crowded in, or anybody snapping to attention. It was just--it might have been a discussion by a big board of directors more than anything else.

BURG: So he simply strode in. No one called, "Attention!"; there was no rising as he came in. Were Eisenhower, Tedder, Bettle Smith the others seated at a table, or did they, too, take informal positions?

BETTS: No, I don't recall anything approaching what you might call a desk or a formal table in the whole thing. There must have been small tables for smoking--I mean, ashtrays--and that



sort of thing, but the whole thing was extremely "country-house living," I'd say. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes. I see. I see. Then who opened the session? Was it Eisenhower himself who opened it?

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: Do you remember how--the tenor of his remarks, his opening remarks. How this--

BETTS: No, I don't. He was very informal. I think, as I recall it, I'm sure I'm right on this, that the first people-- I think he said, I think he got right down to business and said, "Well, gentlemen, this decision, in the last analysis, depends on the weather, so I suggest we bring in the weathermen right away," or "the meteorologists," or words to that effect. And on that cue, why as I say, these three characters came in and they told a very doleful tale. They were very--you could see it just hurt them to have to say things like this. And after that--



BURG: Yes. Had they drawn up weather maps, by the way?

BETTS: No, they had nothing like that.

BURG: They had no visual display to show you; they simply talked about it.

BETTS: There wasn't a map in sight that I remember at the time. And then I remember that after that, why Ike called on the three commanders; first of all on Montgomery, and Montgomery was very perky about it, you know; "I'm ready. Put me ashore. I'll start fighting. I'll do it tomorrow or the next day, whatever you say, Sir. I'm ready." He was--the responsibility, of course, for getting him ashore was the Navy's. He didn't start to work until the troops were on the shore. And then the Navy--then Ike called on the Navy and the Navy gave a very uncomfortable report, I would say. They said, "Well,--this will--the weather as described will greatly hamper us with the question of whether timetables can be met or landings made at the proper point. We can bombard," they said, "But the visibility may be such that we won't be able to observe



properly." And then the Air Force came in and they were the most pessimistic of all. They said, "Well, of course, we can't--if you do it in the weather as described, we can't make any parachute landings or any airborne landings. You have to write that out right away. And our bombing efficiency, our tactical bombing efficiency, will be extremely low because we won't be able to see targets." And that was about it and Ike, as I remember, didn't consult anybody else. He said, "Well," he said,--I think he called on Humphrey Gale to ask him--I'm sure it was Humphrey Gale--to ask him about the movement of the vessels; more particularly whether, if we had to call it off, could the movement be stopped, having gone so far already that it would be impossible to stop the landing. I think he called on Gale for that. I'm not sure. And whoever it was replied "No." He said, "It's quite true that the movement has already started"--because we were bringing men in ships from around the, all the way from Scotland down, down through the Irish Channel--and those ships have moved their load, and their move. The men will undoubtedly be very uncomfortable, cooped up on them, but they will--nothing has moved that we



can't--anything that is moving is all right. The ship people who are embarked closest to the invasion coast are in harbor; they're not in movement now. And from that point of view, if you want to call it off it can be called off." And Ike just simply sat there and, I suppose, thought two or three minutes; "Well, I've decided to postpone it. We'll have another meeting tommorrow."



BURG: The room must have been very quiet during those moments while he was thinking about it.

BETTS: Oh, yes. It was a very quiet conference; I mean, there was no cheering or speechmaking. It was just a business meeting, that's all it amounted to. Then, of course, the next day, why it was all different because the tone was exactly--the place was the same, the tone was the same.

BURG: When were the two meetings held, by the way, General?

BETTS: They were held, as I say, they were both held at about four o'clock in the morning. Because that was the latest time

that you could take to make the decision whether to proceed or to stop.

BURG: Now the dates of the conferences again. The first one, four o'clock in the morning, June--

BETTS: 3rd I think. I think it was a Saturday morning. No, the 6th was a Sunday wasn't it? Now I can't remember.

BURG: Neither can I.

[Ed. Note: A meeting Saturday evening, 3 June, was inconclusive. Another meeting at 0430 Sunday, 4 June, also was inconclusive. The "Go" signal was given at a meeting called for 2130 hours Sunday evening, 4 June.]

BETTS: No, No, I think the 4th was a Sunday. I think the 3rd was a Saturday. The 4th I think was a Sunday. Same place, same people. And that was extremely brief because the procedure was exactly the same. Ike called in his meteorologists, and this time they came in and said, "Well, it's all right. We have a chance, we have a good chance, for the 6th of June. We can't guarantee it, but the chances are good." And at that point everybody broke into a broad grin. Ike, I don't think even



consulted the commanders about it. He just said, "All right, we go ahead."

BURG: Now the way you put it is, "All right, we go ahead", and of course, there's been a lot of mild controversy about exactly what he said.

BETTS: Well, I can't remember exactly.

BURG: Yes, nobody else can either. But it seems to boil down to a phrase, fairly short and something along those lines.

BETTS: Something along those lines, and then everybody sort of took a great deep breath of satisfaction and happiness. Despite the fact that there was still considerable risk didn't seem to bother anybody.

BURG: Uh-huh. I was going to ask you this question about it: If you could remember what your personal assessment was at that time? Do you recall having any doubts?

BETTS: I would say, I had very little doubt. The atmosphere at SHAEF was such that you--people who doubted usually got out.



I mean, you have to have confidence; everybody had confidence, I would say. I would say that I've seen staffs that have been more confident than this staff, in the sense that this was pretty much of a thinking man's staff. They were not rah-rah boys at all, and people felt very responsible, and--

BURG: Fully cognizant of the risks that were being run, and "doubt" then, I suppose, thinking in terms of the impoderables, that nobody could guarantee, that could cause problems. A surf running higher than anyone expected it to, or--



BETTS: More effective beach defenses. I mean, the real problem, the real tactical problem, was getting through all those obstacles they had along the beaches. That was [courage?]. It took a great deal of guts to cross, and a lot of lives. They were very vicious things. They had to be pulled out of the way; they were all mined, so you tied a rope to one and then tied the rope to a tractor, and when the tractor tried to pull it away, why the powder would go off, "Bang!". [Laughter] On that you had to work fast; so that was a terrible thing.

INTERVIEW WITH
Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Betts

by

Dr. Maclyn Burg
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



BURG: Now at the conference, either of these two conferences, was it there that Air Marshall Leigh-Mallory raised the issue of the airborne drops and the very heavy casualties that he was predicting? I think it was Leigh-Mallory who was very reluctant about those drops.

BETTS: Well, he put it up in terms of the weather at this particular point.

BURG: Oh, at the conferences it was the weather.



BETTS: Yes. I mean, he blamed it on the weather. He said, "This is going to make the airborne drops silly." The conference that resulted in Ike's decision to cancel, when the weathermen came in with the adverse report, Leigh-Mallory said, "Well, I," he said, "From the description that you give," or words to that effect, "I think it will be impossible to make those drops." He used the word "impossible," "You just simply have to write off your airborne portion of your attack." And on the second time, I don't remember that he said a thing.

BURG: I'm fairly sure that at some point, perhaps not at those

conferences--it may have been earlier in the planning--he was very much opposed to it. He felt that the casualties in the airborne troops would be totally unacceptable. We're talking about, I think, casualty figures of fifty or sixty percent. A terrible figure. And I wondered if any of that had come to you, with you people--Strong and you and your staff--being asked, "Listen. Evaluate Leigh-Mallory's remark for me, gentlemen."?

BETTS: No. That never came into our purview. And, of course, the British doctrine at that time on airborne operations was that, as I said, there were things that could not be carried on on too large a scale. The idea of dropping a whole corps, for instance, they would regard as fantastic; and as a matter of fact, the British air drop performance was a minor one. It was an important one because they secured the bridge over the Orne near Caen. And they were supposed to do it and they did it, but I think they only dropped about a battalion. I think they dropped oh, five or six or seven hundred men.

BURG: Only elements, I think, of the 6th British Airborne



Division. [Ed. note: actually, the 5th Brigade and the 3rd Brigade Group. The total British airborne force dropped on June 6, including glider pilots, was approximately 7,900 men.]

BETTS: Something like that. But they did it very well. They were very neat about it, and they landed just where they were supposed to do and they went and did what they were supposed to do. Of course, our two divisional drops were very messy affairs. They were not terribly costly, but their chief value was that they were so confused, they confused the Germans!

[Laughter] Nobody understood what was going on! [Laughter]
There were just people wandering around over the country with these little cricket things: ticka, tickety, ticka!

BURG: Yes!

BETTS: And the Germans would see them going one way, and then somebody would be going another way. They couldn't locate what the center of gravity of the attack was, or what the Americans were up to. It was very, very discouraging to them, and the attacks did--they did precisely what they were required to do and that was that they cleared Utah Beach, so the landing there



was a very smooth one and there was no trouble at all. It was upopposed to all intents and purposes.

BURG: Right. Right. I do recall reading reports that the Germans had sent back that the two divisional drops, plus the dropping of fake parachutists, had thoroughly confused the issue. And the fact that our men were badly scattered in the jump zones and never got together to really operate as effective large groups.

BETTS: Oh, they were quite unready for combat. I mean, the--

BURG: Supplies into the swamp, and everything conceivable that could have gone wrong, did go wrong. I think, in those drops.

BETTS: I think it was--was it the 81st or the 102nd; I can't remember.

BURG: 82nd and 101st.



BETTS: 82nd and 101st, but one of them dropped two howitzers in parachutes, you know, mountain howitzers, light guns--

BURG: Pack howitzers.

BETTS: Yes, pack howitzers. And they never got put together!
[Laughter] They never found all the parts [Laughter] until
Cherbourg was captured! [Laughter]

BURG: Yes. If a parachute didn't open on a drop of that size,
you had a pack howitzer that was sixteen feet into the ground
[Laughter] by the time it was finished going through! Well,
what course then did you and General Strong follow? When the
go-ahead signal had been given, what were your instructions?
What precisely did you gentlemen have to do with your staffs?

BETTS: The only thing we did was--I might say that it was
general knowledge that the assembly for the assault was going
on, or had been completed, because all England was just shaking
with the movement of troops towards the ports. And everybody
knew what was up. Of course, in our staff, everybody knew the
plan, too. We were all what they call "Bigoted", and I think
the only thing--I'm pretty sure that the only thing we did was,
we did not alert the staff when General Eisenhower announced the
decision; we waited until the night before and then we told them.

BURG: So the night of June 5-6 was the time that you informed



your staff.

BETTS: Yeah. They were there. They were functioning. And we all knew that we weren't going to get any early picture of the fight. In other words, we land at dawn and we figured it would be about eleven before we would know the landing had been, in some degree, successful.

BURG: And that news would come back to you at Portsmouth.

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: Let me ask, were any people detailed from SHAEF G-2 to go with the assault in the command ship or to be there in any way?

BETTS: No. No.



BURG: Was there a particular reason for that, General?

BETTS: A very particular reason. That is that--see, General Montgomery was in charge of the ground assault, after they got ashore, and he was extremely jealous about having anybody from higher echelons coming down and swanning around. He didn't mind

Ike coming, but he certainly didn't want anybody of lowly rank to appear at his headquarters unless the thing had been thoroughly vetted out and the reason for it explained to him. He was a very touchy sort of man in that regard and he had a definite conception of command, and it was that the Commander commands and the staff does what the Commander tells them to, and if the superior commander wants to see that commander, why he can darned well come, but he can't send a staff officer. We had all kinds of minor difficulties with Montgomery all along because of that attitude. I could understand it, although I think he was wrong. For instance, we made a point, as soon as the army groups were formed--see, of course, the landing was really made by two corps which were part of two separate--well, they were actually part of three separate armies of the--it was 1st U.S. Army, and then it was the 1st Canadian Army and the 2nd British Army, and Montgomery was in nominal command of the whole thing and was therefore an army group commander. Bradley went in as an army commander and as soon as he had two corps ashore, why he got out there and opened up his headquarters. On the other hand, Montgomery--I don't think Montgomery opened up



his headquarters until about the same time that--overseas-- at about the same time that Bradley did. His army commanders, his British and Canadian army commanders, had landed. As soon as each of them got a corps ashore, why they set up army headquarters. But Montgomery didn't go over, I don't think, until-- I'm guessing--but I would not think that he got over there until about the 9th or 10th. And as the war went on, we found it very convenient to exchange liaison officers with the army groups. We had no trouble at all with Omar Bradley. We sent a colonel to him; he sent a colonel to us. And each one could tell the other headquarters what the problems were, what information they were getting, what information they weren't getting, why is the traffic so slow, or--

BURG: How soon was that done, General?



BETTS: Oh, that was not done until after the breakout. It was much less formal while the slogging was going on right there in the bocage.

BURG: Was that an error, do you think? Should liaison officers have been--

BETTS: I think so. I think it's very good. But it obviously didn't work with Montgomery, and the few occasions I--I think, I only went to his headquarters twice in the course of the whole war. In each case, I was very careful to do it through Bill Williams, who was his G-2, you see. It was, you know, "I want to come and see you and I want to see you about something in particular." And he would, he'd have to take it through his boss and say, "I think it's all right for Betts to come." But it was not an easy--it was not a soft shoe relationship at all. On the other hand, Omar was always most accommodating. But there again he and I were old friends, but we weren't terribly good friends--I mean, we weren't terribly intimate friends, but we knew each other. We were on a first name basis. He was glad to see me when I got there. And almost anything that we cooked up, why we would approve. We had a very peculiar experience in--well, just before the liberation of Paris. We had a dreadful time with people who wanted to go to the front; about half of them were just simply spectators, sight-seers, and half of them had legitimate things to do. They were people--a lot of them were OSS and MI-6 intelligence.

[Interruption]



BURG: Now just to be sure we got that on there, we were saying that state department, in particular, had sent a couple of live-wire types who virtually led the assault waves in on every new position, looking for documents--

BETTS: And they got vast quantities of extremely valuable documents, from the diplomatic point of view. I think they caught all the residual documents that the German foreign office in Marburg, the university town above Frankfort. This place was just stuffed with all these documents, most of them incriminating-- [Laughter]--their happiest times and high times! And then you had the technical people, who were looking for new designs in weapons and new techniques, and things of that kind, which they wanted from the home front production point of view. I remember that they had a great interest in plastic explosives, where the Germans were much better than we were. And they were always scrambling around; they finally found what they wanted. And as I say, you had people who just thought they had a good excuse. And we decided that A., they needed first of all support and protection and, secondly, they needed some measure of control. Because you can't just simply get on a bicycle and start running



around looking for documents in the middle of the battle. So we discovered that in Italy the same problem had arisen and they had organized a special force for this purpose which was a very simple thing. It consisted, really, of a travelling mess, with food and cooks, and the transportation pool--lots of jeeps to carry these visitors--and then if they got into a hot corner, why they would detail some combat troops to protect them. And we liked that idea very much and SHAEF G-2 wanted to get the thing established. We decided that the people could do it with the army groups, quite obviously. They had to run across the whole front. Well, Montgomery wouldn't touch it. He said, "It doesn't interest me. It's not necessary. I'm interested in fighting my own battles, and let these fellows dig and scramble around any way they can, just so they don't get in my way."

BURG: So they could come into 21 Army Group area but they were not going to find any support there, really.

BETTS: No, not at all. On the other hand, Omar said, "Fine." He gave us wonderful support. And the thing worked beautifully. They were--when they needed it, they usually gave them a squadron



of mechanized cavalry, a few armored cars, and when they needed them they'd give them this and these people would shepherd them and see that they didn't really get out to where the fighting was too intense. And it worked just beautifully. It was very helpful. It smoothed out a great deal of trouble we had, because we were also being pretty much bombarded by all kinds of requests from the home front to find out certain things or give special treatment to Congressman so-and-so.

BURG: That was funneled through G-2?

BETTS: What?

BURG: That was funneled through G-2?

BETTS: Pretty much, yes.

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: This, of course, was an intelligence force, you see, and you could send anybody to that [lost this word] with no trouble.

BURG: Uh-huh. So this was an example of the liaison, the way



liaison could work and could assist.

BETTS: Yes. It was an example of how it didn't work in 21st Army Group. It did work with 12th [Army Group].

BURG: Yes. By the way, I wanted to ask you, too; would it have been desirable for SHAEF G-2 to have been on the command ship to evaluate anything coming off those beaches on June 6th, or into June 7th?

BETTS: I don't think so.

BURG: So the decision to not have anyone there was probably perfectly all right.

BETTS: It was a good one. I mean, of course, the locals had their intelligence people. Of course, they were looking primarily at that point for tactical intelligence. Who's holding that bunker?

BURG: Yes, yes. And they were able to count the number of lands and grooves in the "eighty-eight" barrels because they were that close to them. So there was no real need for any of your people there.



BETTS: Now as I say, we didn't really--about eleven, I think, we got word that the troops were ashore and fighting was going on. That was all we heard. And then at the end of the day, why reports came in that the landing had been a success. But even then the reports were vague and our information for the Germans was practically non-existent. So far as I know, we didn't have any tactical radio intercepts indicating what they were doing or who was coming where. It was perfectly clear that this armored division hadn't come and it was rather--we did get negative--we got intercepts that indicated that the Germans were still expecting attack on the Calais area. They were standing-to there; that northern army was not moving.

BURG: That's about all that you were picking up from German radio traffic.

BETTS: That's all we were picking up; that's all we were getting. I imagine there was a lot of other pinpoint stuff, but that was what we wanted to know, really. At that point our interest, G-2 SHAEF's interest, was I think, what kind of intervention are the Germans going to make? Have they started it yet? As far we we could tell, they had not, that was quite right, they had not.



They held back.

BURG: Was G-2, SHAEF G-2, in a kind of limbo, let us say, from the early morning of June the 6th, for an appreciable period of time?

BETTS: Only for that first day, I would say. But nobody--until sundown on the 6th--nobody in England, or nobody in SHAEF in England, I think, knew anything very definite about how the battle was going.

BURG: I wondered if there was a period of time when there wasn't a great deal that you could do.

BETTS: There was nothing very much we could do.



BURG: Yes, you mounted your intelligence efforts toward landing--

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: --then there would come a time when the fingers in front of you, the armies themselves, would be sending back intelligence data--

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: --but in the interim period there probably wouldn't be much for your people to do.

BETTS: Only, as I say, in terms of large scale movements. For instance, there were two German armored divisions stationed around Toulouse. They were put there as a strategic reserve because they could be applied either on the Atlantic coast or on the Mediterranean; they were about equidistant, you might say, from Marseille and from Bordeaux. And they were ordered to move almost at once. And we got that; we knew they were on the way. I don't think--this was not my province--but I don't think that any orders or suggestions were made from SHAEF to the French resistance, but the French resistance reacted to them very promptly. And the two divisions just barely got through.

BURG: Were they bringing their armored vehicles up on rail?

BETTS: Oh, no, no, no. They were traveling on the roads.

BURG: Even--they were accepting the beating that their treads were going to take on the roads and came that way, anyway?

BETTS: Yes.



BURG: Perhaps because you had so interdicted the rail communications into Normandy that they couldn't come any other way.

BETTS: Well, they could have come, I think, but I think they probably could move more quickly that way than waiting to assemble trains, getting them on the flat cars, and then getting them--. They could probably have been brought by train to, I would think, 50 miles from Caen. But I think they came--they expected to come more quickly by road. But they did come by road. They were terribly cut up. Of course, that was the background of that Oradour [-sur-Glane] massacre, you know, that the French made so much of. The Germans practically killed a whole French village to the south, down to the southeast, of LeMans. It was done because of the virulence of the Free French attacks on them. They were just sniping at them. It was really the retreat from Lexington, so far as those two divisions were concerned. They were almost useless by the time they finally got to the battle scene. [Ed. note: The massacre was carried out by the 1st Bn. of SS Panzergrenadier Regiment Nr. 4, "Der Führer," of SS Division "Das Reich". Six hundred and forty-two French civilians were killed.]



BURG: I never really knew much about that.

BETTS: What I mean is, I don't think that SHAEF made a specific instruction or suggestion about that. We wouldn't have made it, anyhow, because it was an operational matter. But the Free French had a very full, not a plan so much, but a system of alerting an area against a German force. They anticipated things like this would happen, and it worked very, very well. And I think the points General Eisenhower makes of, [?

] called on the French, on the Resistance, to resist at the proper places. He made a great point of that: "Don't just shoot a German because you see a German, but shoot the right kind of a German." And what I think happened was that the French did have a liaison with us and that man may have suggested to DeGaulle that he do this, but I don't think it was necessary. I think that was all in the cards. When the invasion started, why German units moving towards the invasion area were fair game.

BURG: Yes. It could have been SOE--Special Operations Executive operatives--in that region of France who would have had those prior instructions and could have been sent to the Maquis groups, and the like--



BETTS: Oh, yes. That's true.

BURG: "Here it is; this is what we'll do." Now did you bring your--you came over with SHAEF headquarters itself, when you finally crossed into France?

BETTS: Yes, well, I visited there a couple of times before we moved. We moved from, nominally from Portsmouth, but actually from London, to Granville, you know, that little port on the Gulf of St. Malo.

BURG: On the Atlantic side.

BETTS: Yeah. On the left. No, it's on the Gulf. I mean--

BURG: Oh, that's right, it is! Isn't it? Down from Cherbourg and--

BETTS: Yeah, down from Cherbourg.



BURG: --and down--sure, of course.

BETTS: And that was one of Bettles's mistakes [Laughter] because he was so anxious to get us ashore. He wanted to get us in the

field, and politically there was an advantage. I mean, obviously, it was very good for General Eisenhower to be in the battle area and commanding from there. And this was an attractive town, but it didn't have any telephone facilities [Laughter] or at least they had very few telephone facilities. And when it later developed that SHAEF headquarters needed a 600 drop telephone exchange to operate, 600 lines, why we were sort of silent.

BURG: Now you had been tied in, as I understand it, to the regular British telephone network--

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: --now, you had to completely abandon that--



BETTS: Yes.

BURG: --and was the ultimate decision to tie into the existing French network? Or were special Army lines laid?

BETTS: I think, I think we used the French network. I think so. I'm almost sure we did, because I know when--well we had to. I mean, when they moved SHAEF to Paris, they particularly took

this big hotel up at the Arc de Triomphe for the headquarters of the SOS, Service of Supplies, where they did have a 600 line switchboard. And that's why they put it there. But, of course, that was in the French network.

BURG: Now when you moved into Granville--when was that?

BETTS: Oh, it must have been--it was after the breakout, which was about August the 10th, I think. I'm not sure on my date. But it was in August, early August. And of course, the breakout struck through in just a couple of days, after we got into St. Lô, and then they unleashed Georgie Patton, and you know, he was at Avranches the next day. But we were in London then, I know, because I remember we were--we had a good intercept that time on the, on Hitler's instructions for the counterattack. See, he wanted to do the logical thing, but but he wanted to take everything that he could gather together and put them, really, into a column and just strike right across that--see, we only had a single road that ran along the coast there to Avranches. After you got to Avranches and turned the corner, why then you got into a very good road net. Well



he said this road ran along the coast; and he wanted to try it. He issued--from East Prussia--and he issued orders detailing not only this operation, but saying when they should do it and what should be in it, right down to the last division. And we got the whole thing. And, of course, we relayed that to Omar, and nobody worried because, A., we knew the German forces better than Hitler did. That was "Henry" Foord's great contribution. He took this [?] and he said, "Well look, these units are coming. Well," he said--I think he named three or four divisions and he said "One division isn't in reach any more and two others are so completely smashed up in the fighting that they have no real attack value." He said, "Now, they'll attack," he said, "And they'll attack right here, where Hitler tells them to, and they'll attack at the time he said." And he said, "They'll gain 800 yards and then that'll be that." And he said, "I imagine that General Bradley will--he has a steady column of troops going down that road, and when the attack develops, why he'll simply tell the troops on that particular sector of the road, 'Left Face, Forward March,' [Laughter] and that will be that."



BURG: And break the attack.

BETTS: Yeah. And that was it. That's exactly what happened. That was a very fine example of intelligence work. I mean, when your intelligence officer knows more than Hitler does about what he's going to do, why you're in pretty good shape.
[Laughter]

BURG: Interesting, isn't it? It's so reminiscent of what later would be the trouble in the defense of Berlin. Where, to Hitler, the sight of a division or army or corps title on his map meant--

BETTS: "Well, the 12th Army is coming."

BURG: --[General der Pangertrespon Walter] Wenck's 12th Army. It's there with every vehicle it should have, every man it should have, every gun it should have--

BETTS: Just thirsting for prey.

BURG: Yes. Intact, ready to go, eager. And what it is, is a handful of men dragged in from everywhere possible and given



the worst possible weapons, and thrown willy-nilly into a fight that they couldn't possibly win. So even in 1944--let's say, in August, roughly July or August of '44--the same thing was happening.

BETTS: Hitler had a great deal of luck in demanding the impossible of his troops, so sometimes he made a habit of it. I mean, he was always being told something is impossible, and for a long time, why he did it anyhow. Then the luck faded.

BURG: Let me ask at this point then--there were several places where it could be slipped in, but let's put it in here--you are talking about radio intercepts.

BETTS: Yeah.

BURG: Now does this tie in with the recent publicity given to the British author [Frederick W. Winterbotham, The Ultra Secret , 1974] who wrote about--

BETTS: Ultra.

BURG: Ultra, uh-huh.



BETTS: This is exactly Ultra.

BURG: This is what it was.

BETTS: Yeah. Not only Ultra, but we had a special Ultra detachment that lived a, more or less, secret life, but they were part of G-2. They would get us these messages, and the thing that astounded me was, not only did they get them in very short order, but beautifully translated. I mean, the sort of thing that--I suppose they must have had people who were bi-lingual in German, because there were hardly any mistakes in translation.

BURG: So German messages in the German language which was then coded, were broken by Ultra teams--

BETTS: Yes. Well, our team didn't break them. Our team was just a reception center. They were all broken at "Blech"--something. It was a place in England where they had this huge plant for handling intercepts. They not only handled the Ultra; they handled a great many lower level codes, too.

BURG: And you knew that Ultra existed?



BETTS: Oh, yes. Bletchley Park, Bletchely Park.

BURG: Ah, yes. Bletchley. I remember the name.

BETTS: That was one of the requirements when I joined COSSAC, going to Bletchley and see what they were doing. They were not completely candid with me. I mean, there were some things that they told me that were not quite so. And I might add, this book on Ultra is not completely candid, either.

BURG: You've read the book?

BETTS: I read the book, yes.

BURG: Uh-huh.

BETTS: Of course, we had the thing on the Japanese, called Purple.

BURG: Purple, uh-huh.

BETTS: And I knew about that when I was in the War Department in Washington.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: I was not surprised at these goings-on, so to speak. But I was surprised at the great skill with which they were handled.

BURG: You and Strong knew about it. How far down the line did knowledge of Ultra go within SHAEF G-2? Much beyond you two gentlemen?

BETTS: Foord knew it. I think Foord and his deputy, but below them, no. But it was one of our real problems, because we had to turn out these daily and weekly reports. The weekly reports were sort of a magazine. I mean, to some extent they had to be written to show the customers we were doing something. But you couldn't put Ultra in it! And so our reports were often incomplete, I'll say that. Sometimes some of our purple-prose people were saying things, why--getting a little carried away by their imaginations--why, you couldn't say, "But, I know that's wrong." You just had to sigh and let it go.

BURG: Uh-huh. So--this is an intriguing thought. The Ultra data frequently couldn't be passed on to people who desperately needed to have it.



BETTS: That's right.

BURG: How did you live with it? Was there any way in which you could convey data of this sort without giving away how it was being obtained?

BETTS: Well, only in the sense that these little sections existed throughout; existed down to army groups. General Montgomery had one--

BURG: That is, he had an Ultra section--

BETTS: He had an Ultra section.

BURG: --that would receive the data from--

BETTS: That would receive the data--

BURG: --Bletchley.

BETTS: from Bletchley. And people at Bletchley would use discretion, I think. They would be the ones who would decide, well, Montgomery ought to see this or Montgomery ought not to see this. But generally speaking, they were quite generous



because they were dealing with trusted people. And the same way, Omar Bradley had it and to that extent the high commanders knew it and sometimes they would tell army commanders; sometimes they would not. It was not too important for it to go to below army group from headquarters, I don't think.

BURG: So, in effect, the data does come, let us say, to an army commander. He does know where it's coming from--

BETTS: It comes to an army group commander I'd say. The army commander doesn't necessarily know it. The army group commander--

BURG: Ah-army group.

BETTS: Army group commander knows--

BURG: So he knows it's Ultra--

BETTS: And his G-2 will know it. The fact is, it's his G-2's job to see that it goes farther and in the best possible form.

BURG: Right. So it's up to the army group G-2 to pass it on to the troops--



BETTS: Say, the army commander must be told--

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: --so it's necessary to send a courier. Not with the message, but just with a message. "You know very well that they're strengthening their right flank," or something of that kind. But not very helpful.

BURG: Or, "You can expect an attack, probably, tomorrow, in this strength," without ever saying, "Now, we know that because we're cracking a code and we have the data." Some have suggested in the immediate rush after the Ultra book came out that, really, with that kind of knowledge coming through Ultra, it was a very easy war. You didn't have to take any risks--the Allies, the western Allies--didn't have to take any risks in Europe at all. This is a gross oversimplification, isn't it?

BETTS: I think so. I think you obviously have to fight.

When I first joined COSSAC--this has nothing to do with Ultra--but I joined COSSAC, as you know, at the start of 1944 and I was talking to one of the young intelligence officers. The news



had just come in that Russians had broken the great German counter-offensive around Orel, you know. Over there in the Ukraine. And, of course, Stalingrad had been fought and the Russians had had a year on the offensive--

BURG: This would have been the Kursk--

BETTS: Kursk, yes.

BURG: Kursk Battle.

BETTS: And I tole this young officer, I said, "Well the war's over." I was right; I meant it was over strategically. I knew we were going to win it. I knew we were going to have to fight to win it, but you could see--I mean, from the map and from the knowledge of the forces involved--that the Germans weren't going to win it. They just couldn't, quite clearly. Well, that didn't mean we didn't have to land.

BURG: Right.

BETTS: If we hadn't done our best, why, it wouldn't have been over. But you always assume--once you get it this close--



the factor of confidence, I suppose. You assume you can do it yourself. Everybody that did this, thought the war was lost right at that point, I thought.

BURG: One other thing about Ultra at this point. All of you kept it very, very quiet for a great many years.

BETTS: Oh, yes. It was a very precious thing, you know. Still is.

BURG: Uh-huh. Ultimately, since I've not had a chance yet to read this book--I'm not sure that it's reached the Eisenhower Library yet--ultimately, I assume that the British government gave the author permission to finally speak about it.

BETTS: Oh, yes. As I say there are reticences.

BURG: So to your certain knowledge, we still have not been told everything that there is to learn about Ultra.

BETTS: No. No. I shall never be the one to tell it.

BURG: No, I assume not. Having kept your mouth so firmly shut all these years, [Laughter] I knew better than to even ask.



This interview is being taped with Brigadier General Thomas J. Betts in General Betts' home in Washington, DC on August the 16th, 1976. Present for the interview are General Betts and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: All right, General, you've mentioned to me that on our previous discussions we were talking about intelligence activities prior to the D-Day landings, and that you had been concentrating very much on the positive side and recollected later that the negative side, the security side, had been overlooked. So may I ask you then to tell me a little bit about the measures taken to try and keep this enormous enterprise absolutely from the hands of the Germans?



GEN. BETTS: Well, of course, it was more or less an affair of the heart because we couldn't keep the fact of the invasion from them. All we could hope to do was conceal the place and the time. And that, of course, more or less came into the field of deception as well as of security. But there were so many opportunities, apparent opportunities, for leaks in Britain at that time. As for instance there were two hundred and fifty thousand Irishmen working in England and busily engaged in telephoning their wives and sweethearts every weekend across

the channel, and presumably they could say something; if one of them was ill-effected, why he could get the message across. And I was very much worried, too, about ships; the fact that foreign ships were--notably from places like Portugal and Spain--were coming into British ports all the time, and it would be very easy to put an agent on such a ship and he wouldn't have to go ashore. His bona fides wouldn't be questioned; he was just a sailor. But he might observe things that might tend to be giveaways. I mean, there were things like that that bothered me enormously, quite aside from the fact that there was a lot of speculation at all times about what was going to happen and when it was going to happen. Some of the speculation, invariably, was very acute. Of course, the end product, I think, and the one that the British realized much better than we did, was that there was going to be such a cloud of rumors, speculation, and small talk going on that it would be very hard, really, to sort out the truth from all these other leads that were constantly being presented, many of which, of course, were being presented by the deception



people, too, purposely. But it was a source of great worry to me although--and, of course, we did not have in any way complete responsibility. I mean, the security of the British Isles--that is security, intelligence security--was a function of the British government. They were the people who really had to tell the diplomats they could no longer send their diplomatic pouches and things like that that took rather careful timing. You didn't want to do it too far in advance of the event, and on the other hand, you didn't want to do it too close. I mean, if five days before the landing you said, "No more messages," why that would alert everybody. And so we spent a lot of time figuring out things like that, that, well, maybe in--I say "we." I mean we were called into consultation with the British security people. They enunciated the measures. But we closed out diplomatic pouches about three months before D-Day. "No more diplomatic pouches," we just said, and that was quite obviously well in advance, because nobody thought we were going to invade much before May or June anyhow. And the Irish people, we put on--there was a lot of talk about



cutting off telephone communications with Ireland but we realized we just couldn't do it. So what they did, they did a lot of spot checking by listening in, hoping to catch anything that might sound a little bit queer. I don't think anything got out along those lines. I think the Irishmen were too busy telling their wives and sweethearts how much they missed them to worry much about the military situation.



BURG: Yes. Would the key to all of that have been that our own people--that is, certainly those of you at the top knew--but down the line, had you been pretty successful in keeping it from subordinate commanders and the troops?

BETTS: Oh, yes, there was no problem about that.

BURG: So, in short, there's very little opportunity for even a slip of the tongue, several months before D-Day, to give anything away to the Irish.

BETTS: Oh, no. Nothing like that.

BURG: So that probably helped.

BETTS: Oh, yes, that all helped, of course. And, of course, they were working in war industry, but some of the war industry was pretty remote. And after all, if you were making say shell cases, why a shell case doesn't give much information about when you're going to have an invasion. If you have a sudden influx of orders, everybody has to work overtime, why maybe somebody says, "Golly, they're getting really hot." All that was pretty well muffled down, but it was an awful chancey thing. I spent an awful lot of sleepless hours just figuring, figuring, figuring. We had--in terms of specific responsibility, of course--we had SHAEF headquarters, which we had to paper off and make sure that everybody was checked out, and we kept on checking. We monitored all telephone conversations at SHAEF, automatically. We had rock-ribbed censorship I guess.

BURG: So everything coming out of SHAEF was subject to being monitored?

BETTS: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

BURG: Every phone call made.



BETTS: Beg your pardon?

BURG: Every phone call made.



BETTS: Oh, yes. Yes, there was somebody listening in. Of course, it was public knowledge. I mean, this was not like bugging because it was--everybody was told, "Buster, if you talk on the phone, we're going to listen. You can expect that." And--

BURG: Now am I right in thinking, General, that superisingly few breaches occurred? And if I remember correctly the breaches that I've read about were rather stupid blunders by one or two individuals.

BETTS: Well, of course, the answer there was that the people in SHAEF and the knowledgeable people everywhere were very carefully vetted and selected. They were just pawed over all the time by people who--before you could get a job with SHAEF, why you had to have a very thorough character study made of you, not only in terms of your loyalty but also your stability.

BURG: Were these things done by the proper security agency of the American army, for example, and the British army?

BETTS: Oh, yes, yes. That is--in SHAEF--

BURG: Depending on what country you were serving.

BETTS: --that was the case and, generally speaking, the soldiers everywhere were--their security was the responsibility of command all the way through. That was understood. As a matter of fact, they relieved an American general because he spouted off in a London hotel once about how he was going to be fighting in France in June. Well he caught the next plane back! [Laughter]

BURG: Turned out he wasn't fighting in France in June! Did you encounter that fabulously coincidental affair, concerning the crossword puzzle here in the United States?

BETTS: I heard about it; I never saw the puzzle and I think it was a British puzzle. I think it was in a British paper.

BURG: It may have been in a British paper, come to think of it.



BETTS: It what?

BURG: It may have been in a British paper.

BETTS: Well it had Omaha and a few others.

BURG: It had OVERLORD--



BETTS: OVERLORD, and a few other choice words in it. Oh, no, that caused a mild flap in British security circles. MI-5 took care of it. They told us about it. I didn't see the puzzle; it was never brought to my attention, officially, until they came and said, "Look do you know about this?"

BURG: Yes, I think five, if not six, key words out of that operation appeared in that puzzle.

BETTS: Oh, yes, that's right.

BURG: And evidently strictly by coincidence.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: But it must have frightened the living daylights out of everyone involved.

BETTS: Oh yes, but also it took a fairly bright person to connect it, too. I mean, somebody who was in on the planning must have--and I'm sure that he just read the puzzle casually. I don't think anybody was "officer in charge of crossword puzzles." [Laughter]



BURG: Yes, yes. [Laughter] Yes, but when you stop to think about it, since this occurred just a few days before the operation, somebody at high enough level to recognize all those words had to be just casually looking, as you say. He had a little time to burn and was doing that puzzle. Now did the British security people come to SHAEF as they got ready to put a lock down on the operations, security aspects of the operation, and say, "Now, what has crossed your minds?"

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: That's the way they handled it?

BETTS: Oh, yes. There was the very closest of cooperation and there was a very wonderful British civil servant--I wish I could remember his name--who--he was an elderly man. I suppose he was in his seventies, he was serious, he had been knighted, and he was the quintessence of the British bureaucrat. I mean, in the best possible sense; highly intelligent, highly trained, completely loyal, and he knew how everything worked. He knew all the wheels. And it was his job, really, more than anybody else's, to go around and spot and say, "Well, now look here's something that you people ought to talk to MI-5," or he'd go to MI-5 and say, "You people ought to talk to SHAEF about this particular thing that you're thinking about doing." And he was a regular poohbah. I mean for instance, when the time came to move the troops to the water's edge so they could embark, it suddenly appeared that there were an awful lot of--his name was Findletter. Sir something Findletter.

BURG: He had been knighted.

BETTS: Oh, yes. He was retired. He'd actually served in India, I think, most of his career.



BURG: Would it be spelled F-i-n-l-a-t-e-r, perhaps?

BETTS: F-i-n-d-l-e-t-t-e-r, I think. His name is in Morgan's book.

[Ed note: This man does not appear in the index to Morgan's Overture to Overlord.]

BURG: All right, fine.

BETTS: But as I say, they suddenly discovered that they were going to have some of these huge loads, construction machinery, big eight inch howitzers and things like that going down the lanes of England and they were going to tear out all the phone lines and all the power lines.

BURG: As they moved them.

BETTS: And they had to tell all the equivalents of *Va. Electric Power Co.* ~~vepco~~ [?] and PepCo and Con Ed, "Now don't worry, and don't bother, and it's none of your God-damned business, [laughter] but just be sure that these lines are cut and dead at a certain time." And he was the man that would do that. He would know whom to talk to, who in turn would be a very knowledgeable and discreet person,



who would finally get the word to the operating people. I mean, there were just oceans and oceans of that stuff. It was just swashing back and forth all the time.

BURG: In effect, then, General, if someone had been clever enough to note it, on some of these big lifting cranes, the big guns that were being moved down the length of England, you might very well have a succession of blackouts that would tell you something--

BETTS: Some kind of a pattern.



BURG: --whether you saw it or not, you'd see those blackouts moving south. And that was spotted ahead of time and taken care of by a man whose connections were so good that he could pick a man in the British power industry, for example, and just have it quietly done.

BETTS: Yes. I can give another one of my headaches that didn't turn out to be a headache. The question came, of course, of maps for the assault, and the soldiers, the fighting men, said that every lieutenant must have a map showing just exactly

where his boats were going to land, and where they were going to go up the beach, and what particular little spot on the dunes they were going to assault. And there were a few provisos that, "Probably your boats will land three or four hundred yard up and down the beach, but don't mind, buddy; why this is the general idea." But the point is they had to have literally thousands of these pinpointed maps of the whole invasion attack. Now they had to be specially printed. And the question came up, where to get them printed? And it was too big a job for the military; the military establishments had pretty good printing facilities, but not for this size. And so, once again, Sir so-and-so Findletter called us all together and we discussed it and the British said, "Well, of course, it's very simple." He said, "Why, His Majesty's Stationery Office will print them," which of course is the same thing as our Government Printing Office. My hair went right up on end as I thought of putting any kind of a confidential document in the Government Printing Office here and expecting it to remain confidential more than ten or fifteen minutes. He said, "No, no, no, don't worry." He said, "We understand about



this. We've got it. They have facilities for private printing." And so that's what they did! Well I was still scared; my flesh just crawled!

BURG: They gave it to some special group.



BETTS: Yes, some special group that was probably cloistered off somewhere and probably didn't do anything else until after the invasion.

BURG: They'd probably been producing German money and French money, and everything else during that period of time! [Laughter] The Channel was closed off, so I presume there was no question of neutral shipping coming up or down the Channel and thereby getting a good view of some of the major invasion ports.

BETTS: Well they could come into Southhampton.

BURG: Oh, they could? You mean you were still permitting, say, Swedish shipping?

BETTS: Swedish or--the thing that worried me most was Portuguese, because Lisbon was the great focus of German espionage outside

the battle area. Oh, no, that worried me a lot and I went down and took a look at the Channel there between the Isle of Wight and the Sussex shore and once again my hair rose on my head, because there was just this crowd of highly specialized shipping industry. All the most odd looking kinds of craft you could possibly imagine. They had these big--they were really great big tugboats that had enormous reels fitted on. The reels, I suppose, were fifty feet in diameter and they were to carry the pipeline that was going--the oil line--that was going to be laid--Pluto--that was going to be laid from England to Port-en-Bessin. And there they were. They were sitting there. I couldn't well whether they were showing any pipes on board their reels, but if I'd been a foreigner and looked at that, I would say, "Well, my God! It's not a paddle wheel steamer but what the hell is it?"

BURG: Right, right.

BETTS: Well, I shivered over that one, but apparently once again the people--the word just didn't get out, or it wasn't appreciated. I'm sure that there were agents that came in and



watched, and came out again.

BURG: There was a time, I presume, a particular time, where you had to shut off and did shut off the shipping lanes into that area.

BETTS: Oh, yes. But it was a very short time. Actually, it was only a matter of two, three days. That was because we did-- some shipping actually started up from the northern ports of Scotland, from the Clyde, to come down and join the invasion group.

BURG: And some, I guess, out of the Bristol Channel.



BETTS: Yes, oh, yes. I don't think any came down near North Sea because there were German submarines likely to be around. But there was an awful lot of movement of ships and all, once again, flowing in the same direction. But the Germans either didn't perceive it or were confused by it. Of course, there was a lot of movement of shipping anyway. There were constant drills and practices and ships going out and lobbing shells at land targets, and landings made on British soil. This was going

on all the time with a great deal of sound and fury, and so a few more or less were not particularly noticeable. But it was all a very, very ticklish thing, and I think the thing that worried me most was not the things that I envisaged but my fear that I hadn't envisaged something! [Laughter] That something would happen that we just hadn't thought about.

BURG: Yes, yes. You had so much at stake--

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: --and all it was to take. You knew, of course, about the various deceptions which would be carried out to effect the invasion. That is, you knew about the dropping of dummy parachutists--

BETTS: Yes, I knew about Third Army being up there, in theory, in the tents.

BURG: Yes, running a radio network as though it actually was an army in being.

BETTS: Matter of fact, they played it very cute; they ran it like



people who were trying to maintain secrecy and just were slipping a little bit every now and then. They were really clever about it. And they had--the British also had, in the course of the early days of the war when they first began to dream about the counter-invasion, the landing on French soil, they turned in a great many small landing craft. Really, mostly launches that would hold 20 or 30 people. And they were all right to cross the Straits of Dover on a clam day. In other words, they were the same kind of ships--same kind of boats--that worked out the evacuation of Dunkirk. It was that kind of craft. And the British made a great point of concentrating them around the Medway and the Nore and the mouth of the Thames in the hopes the Germans would see them and see that these craft were all there and nicely lined up, all ready to do. They also had the hope that the Germans would make an air reconnaissance. They were very disappointed for a long time, because the German air force was pretty well committed in Russia. They didn't have great strength in the West at the time. But the British said, "If a German reconnaissance plane comes over, why treat it with every possible respect." They said, "Shoot at it, by all means,



but don't send up fighters to shoot it down. Anti-craft just fire away at it, but anybody who hits it will get courtmartialed." And, eventually, one day a German reconnaissance plane did come up that Thames estuary and almost reached London and then turned around and came back. He was flying at a high altitude on a good day and everybody was greatly pleased with that.

[Laughter]

BURG: He would have seen the nests of ships everywhere.



BETTS: Yes, yes. Well, there were tank tracks, too, in the forests --I mean the thickets and copses of Kent--and presumably there were tanks in those woods just waiting to come out.

BURG: One busy little British tank being driven all over, I suppose, to give the illusion.

BETTS: Yes, oh, yes. It was really a very rough time.

BURG: It is your present recollection, perhaps through Jock Whiteley or others, that Eisenhower, the others at the top, were sharing your concern? Did any of that show up at your level-- any evidence of--

BETTS: No.

BURG: Really didn't?



BETTS: Ike was a--I'm sure that the staff was well aware of it, and I think it stopped at Beetle Smith. I think Beetle Smith just closed his ears and said, "I'm not going to tell the commander any of this bilge." But Ike was a great man, you know, for closing his mind to things that he felt were either irrelevant or should only be presented to him with a great deal of urgency. For instance, in the invasion itself, he never consulted G-2. He never called us in, and said, "What are our chances?" He never asked us. That was his worry and he did worry about it, I know, but if he had called us in, we would simply say, "Well, sir, it's--the situation's unchanged and our conclusions are unchanged." But it would have been our duty, if we had got indication that things had changed and suddenly seven or eight more German divisions were rolling down toward Bayeux, why it would have been our duty to go and pound on the door and say, "Look, General, we've got to tell you this. This is not good news but you must know it." But, he put the weight on

the subordinates to do that, and he trusted his subordinates, too.

BURG: As I remember, you told me that you had attended a couple of those last-minute conferences, wherein he made the decision to go. And it seems to me that your story was that almost no one was called upon, except the meteorologist.

BETTS: Well, the commanders were called on.



BURG: And the commanders, yes.

BETTS: The commanders, the three commanders; air, navy, and land were all called on to give their views. And of course in the first meeting, when it was decided to postpone the landing, why air and the navy were very, very pessimistic and didn't hesitate to say so. Navy, in effect, said that we can't guarantee getting the people ashore. And the air people said that most of their effectiveness would be aborted, both in terms of bombing, and especially in terms of parachute landing. They were quite outspoken about it and they were worried. I mean they--I didn't have the feeling that they were disturbed

at having to bring bad news. It was their duty to do it and they did it.

BURG: Now once the invasion had occurred and you had a foothold, did you yourself go over to France? How long was it before you went over?

BETTS: I went over on a trip about the 16th of June, just after the capture of Cherbourg. I wanted to see what sort of shape Cherbourg was in. And more particularly, I was very much worried about our technological intelligence side. What we call technical intelligence or economic--yes, technical intelligence. In other words, finding out what kind of mines the Germans used, what kind of materiel they were using, that sort of thing.

BURG: I see.

BETTS: Not the straight, tactical thing, like whether they put mines on a road or put it on the shoulders of a road or something; that's something the troops would find out. But more the captured materiel, what they had, what sort of shape they were in. All that sort of thing. But I was only over there a couple of days



and then I came back. And we didn't move to--SHAEF didn't move to France until they moved the headquarters to Granville, which was after the breakthrough, after Patton's breakout in July. But I think I went over once or twice before that, too, for one trip or another. But in each case, it was a trip; it was to see something specific. I think once I went and consulted with the G-2--I think I consulted with G-2 12th Army Group as soon as 12th Army Group was formed. [B/G Edwin L.] Eddie Sibert was their G-2. He'd been G-2 at 1st Army when the landing occurred and in fact, Omar Bradley took headquarters 1st Army and transformed it into Headquarters 12th Army Group, leaving some scratch replacements to at least bring some experience to 1st Army.

BURG: Yes, I see.



BETTS: But when 12th Army Group was formed, I believe that I went over and had a special talk with Sibert.

BURG: Did he spell his name S-e-i-b--?

BETTS: S-i-b-e-r-t. Eddie Sibert, Edwin Sibert, I believe.

BURG: Okay. All right. Now in that instance, you talked with him and presumably got some data about technical intelligence--

BETTS: Well, in that case, it was about the general picture. How are things going? Were there any problems? Can we help you? I don't think--I'm sure I didn't ask him to do anything, because he had plenty on his mind with his tactical situation. But that was about all. I said, "What can we do?" And he said, "Well, thanks. We're okay." I don't think I even checked the Ultra link. They had it, both at Army and at 12th Army group. I knew it was working because we'd been talking--everybody'd been using it.

BURG: Bradley had access to that Ultra link.



BETTS: Oh, yes. He had it and when the--

BURG: Sibert did.

BETTS: Oh, yes, Sibert did. But very few other people in Sibert's staff did. Sibert--we were a little more free with it

at SHAEF because we weren't quite so close to the shooting, because of course--

BURG: Right. Even after you were in France?

BETTS: Oh, yes. I mean, the general idea was that when you have a big G-2 headquarters, why a thing like that, you have to consider very carefully how much distribution you give to it.

BURG: I can imagine.



BETTS: And it's really the duty of the G-2 in each instance to work it out because he is responsible. If he gets somebody who spills the beans, why it's his neck. And so everybody's very careful. In G-2 SHAEF there were--I believe, I'm sure there were only two officers in the intelligence branch--in other words, the people who specialized in intelligence as opposed to operations and security and everything--there were only two that were cleared for Ultra. And it very often would cause lots of trouble. It caused serious trouble in the case of the Battle of the Bulge because Sibert, unfortunately--well, both

Sibert and our office had people who were a little too sanguine, and we used to put out a daily bulletin from which Ultra was excluded. The writers were--

[Interruption]



BURG: In case we missed it, I want to get on the tape that General Betts has just said that, for example, the formation of the Panzer armies, which was done before the Germans launched the Ardennes offensive, would not have gotten into the bulletin of which he's been speaking, so--

BETTS: And worse than that, the people that wrote the bulletin were a little enthusiastic and very anxious to put out an appealing, as well as a purely informative, sheet and they tended to become overoptimistic. I caught my people, fortunately, before the Bulge. But my people were sort of beginning to indicate in October that the war was practically over, that there was no punch left in the Germans. Well, I caught my people and said, "Now, let's at least be a little careful about this." But Sibert didn't catch his people, and he had this unfortunate

man who was the editor of the New York Star. What was his name? He wrote the book The Battle is the Answer, or words to--

BURG: The Battle is the Payoff.

BETTS: The Battle is the Payoff.



BURG: Ralph Ingersoll.

BETTS: Yes, Ralph Ingersoll wrote his bulletin and unfortunately, just before the Battle of the Bulge, why Ralph Ingersoll was very out in left field and predicting that the war was over, which was very bad. And it gave Sibert some professional trouble and it gave rise to a lot of accusations, after the event, that G-2 knew nothing about the upcoming battle, [Laughter] which we could not refute because at that time we could not refer back to Ultra.

BURG: Right. So you actually knew? You had them taped. You knew that they were forming these armies, that there was strength there, that there could be trouble, could be problems.

BETTS: But we lost Ultra contact with them, and we lost all radio contact after they were formed. It came over the Ultra as a Fuhrer command that there will be formed for a counter-offensive--it didn't say "in the West"--but for a counteroffensive, these two Panzer armies, the 5th and 6th. And it gave their organization. There were, I think, five Panzer divisions--no there were four Panzer divisions in each army. Then they vanished from the screen entirely. Their radio discipline was very good; we got nothing, either in Ultra or in the ordinary chit-chat that was very often helpful. We gathered that some of these divisions--on the western [front?]-had been in action, and they disappeared. They went somewhere. And we gathered that they had crossed back into main Germany across the Rhine, because there was no sense in trying to set up and train a counteroffensive in the very shallow front between the Rhine and the existing front. But that was all we knew, that the offensive was coming, that it was a powerful one, and we had no information about either date or place. It became a matter of speculation, and we speculated and speculated and I, personally, wargamed it and I came up--I are you familiar with



John Eisenhower's book, The Bitter Woods?

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: Well you know he says how the German staff wargamed it about where to make this offensive, what to do, and they decided that there was not a decision in sight anywhere. Well, I worked it out and I came to exactly the same conclusion.

BURG: Oh, you did?



BETTS: So I said, "Well this is something that's going to be suicidal and in consequence, it's going to be a wild card. It's not going to be a thing that we can really work it out and say, well, now, this is the only obvious place, or there are two or three places where it must come." Couldn't do it. I mean anywhere they tried it, why it was clear to me that they were going to get a bloody nose out of it. That's a nice thing to know, but it doesn't help you very much in telling where is the offensive coming, or when.

BURG: Yes. When you looked at Antwerp, that didn't stand out in

your mind anymore than any other point as, for example, an objective for a counteroffensive?



BETTS: Well it stood out as an objective but I went a little farther. I said, "How do they get to Antwerp?" And I said, "The only way they can get to Antwerp is to breakthrough out of the Ardennes which," I said, "they can do, and then they have to go into, really, the pocket of the Meuse River," which you know at Sedan--it runs practically east and west from Verdun to Sedan and then turns sharp north at Sedan. I said, "They've got to break out of that pocket; they've got to get across the Meuse," which was what the German general staff said, too. "We've got to get across the Meuse somewhere" and then sweep either closely or widely. But under the Fuhrer's command they were supposed, really, to destroy the 1st U.S. Army and the British Army Group. But I looked at it and I said, "They're never going to get across the Meuse," so at that point, I said, "To hell with that business. Why bother about that? They can't even get Sedan," I said. I was right. I mean they tried it and they didn't do it.

BURG: But it proved then--because of many factors--it proved very difficult for you or anyone else to try to say where something might come that would be useful to them.

BETTS: Yes, or be worth the effort, obviously. I mean, if you take ten armored divisions, why you can make an awful blow with it, but while you do it--it wouldn't make any sense to do it between the mouth of the Rhine and, say, Cologne or, say, the British front and 1st Army front. Well, the left flank of the 1st Army, because that's where we were fighting very hard. We were heavily concentrated there and we were trying to break through and get the ridges and the lakes so that we could break into the Rhine plain. And incidentally, of course, General Bradley also made his studies, and from his point of view it was that, "Who could do it first?" I mean, in other words, if he had been able to really break into the plain and capture Cologne, say, why any offensive across the Rhine would have been impossible right from that moment. And he took a calculated risk. He thinned out his right flank in the hope that he would beat the Germans to the punch. That's what it amounted to.



And he didn't succeed.

BURG: And anything further south would have been striking into difficult terrain with no real objectives.



BETTS: Yes. Well, there again the Germans--there were about four or five places that they could strike. They could strike up the valley of the Moselle, and the disadvantage there is that that is very rough ground. The river is really sort of a mountain river coming out of the hills there. But if you could get clean out of that, why you would be behind 3rd Army and also behind 6th Army Group, who were holding the Vosges and Strasbourg. And if they could have done that, that would have been a very serious blow. But there again it didn't look like it could happen, because the 6th Army and 3rd Army had reserves and they could have plugged in there pretty fast. Then he could have tried to come down right inside the Vosges, which in fact he did in the secondary phase of the Bulge, but he hoped the 3rd Army had been drawn away. He was trying to strike at the hinge between, really, 12th Army Group and 6th Army Group, but he didn't succeed because they didn't have the forces by that

time. The bolt had been shot. And the fourth thing they could have done was to--they were across the Rhine and in the plain between the Rhine and the Vosges on French soil--and they could have, if they had wanted to, they could have swept across the Vosges. But in that case, they wouldn't have been anywhere at all; they had nowhere to go, really. They just would have been milling around Metz and Nancy and places like that. And they would have been rounded up. So the whole outlook, as I looked at it and as the German staff looked at it, it was just (a) a pretty dismal picture from the German point of view, but (b) from our point of view, why, as I said before, what you had to expect was something crazy. You had to expect something that was not going to be successful but was certainly going to be unexpected.

BURG: Yes. So an astute, realistic German commander, high commander, would probably be looking at it as merely a checking action, a spoiling kind of attack. It was going to consume their resources for very little gain, except to momentarily halt us.

BETTS: Yes, yes. And of course, eventually, it really bought the Rhine crossing for us. I mean, when that was over, when



we cleaned up the Bulge, why there was very little German resistance left along the Rhine. So all that hundreds of miles of river, and just defeated troops on the other bank, and we practically crossed at will. We paid a heavy price for it; we paid with lost of casualties, but if they had resorted to a passive or, you might say, a dogged defense, falling back to the Rhine gradually and then crossing the Rhine at their leisure and organizing a front with the Rhine as the front lines, it could have been pretty tough.



BURG: If they'd husbanded those resources and used them there.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: Now you were with SHAEF headquarters when the Bulge came.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: And you would have been with it until, roughly, New Years.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: Did you see, at headquarters, any sign of panic when the word came, "This is where it's coming," and they were pouring through?



BETTS: No. No, there was some anxiety, there always is, I mean, when you've got somebody who has really made a breakthrough, and you say, "Well, I really wonder if there's more behind that than I thought there would be." But I would not say in SHAEF headquarters--I'd say that all the decisions made were made very calmly, with the--once again, I refer to John Eisenhower's book. I knew nothing about this at the time myself--but when Jock Whiteley and Kenneth Strong went to Ike and said that he ought to put the American forces on the left side of the Bulge under Montgomery's command. And I knew nothing--I knew of the event; I knew what had happened--but I didn't know that those two lads were out doing it. I'm very glad I didn't, because it would have been very--I'm sure I would have backed them up but I would have felt very sad about doing it. [Laughter]

BURG: On purely nationalistic grounds?

BETTS: Well, yes, and it--nationalistic, and also there was the more distant echo of Montgomery still hoping to be the ground force commander of the last stage of the war.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: And in fact, hoping so to kick Ike upstairs. And I think it took great courage on Ike's part to do it.

BURG: But you felt that you would have supported Whiteley's move. You felt that, rationally, that was the decision to take.

BETTS: Yes. Not only that, but it so happened that right after the Bulge, I think about the 21st of December, Kenneth Strong directed me to go to 1st Army Headquarters and see how things were going up there on that front, and he did not limit me to G-2 intelligence. He told me he wanted to know how the war was going! [Laughter] And so I chugged up there.

BURG: Using what means of conveyance?



BETTS: Well, I had a--I think I drove all the way--I'm sure I drove all the way in my own car. I mean, I had a driver, of course, an official car, a Chevrolet. You see, by that time we had a forward echelon at Reims. We didn't have a big headquarters at Reims at that time.

BURG: R-e-n-n-e-s?

BETTS: R-h-e-i-m-s or R-e-i-m-s.

BURG: Okay.

BETTS: Reims. And I think I took off from there. I was only about a hundred and fifty miles to where 1st Army Headquarters was. They were at a place called LaFontaine. They had been at Spa and had been forced back.

BURG: How is that spelled?

BETTS: L-a-F-o-n-t-a-i-n-e. And the place their headquarters before had been at Spa, S-p-a, both in Belgium. Spa, of course, was a very famous watering place



and a very good place for an army headquarters. I mean, it has communications and all that sort of thing. They became alarmed at the proximity of the Germans and the fact that they were creeping down towards their southern flank, and so they pulled back a matter of about fifteen, twenty miles to LaFontaine. And I went to LaFontaine and I found the place a terrible mess. I mean, there was no question about it; they just didn't know what was going on. As far as fighting a war was concerned the 1st Army was thinking in terms of a battalion here and something else there, but they seemed to have no plan at all for meeting this attack. And I couldn't see any orders going forth. I came back and reported it to Kenneth Strong and he said, "Well, you must go and report this to Bettie Smith," which I did. I went and reported to Bettie and I said, "It's my recommendation that you relieve the 1st Army commander," who was [Lieutenant] General [Courtney H.] Hodges. And he sort of grumbled and that was that. And I might say also that Kenneth sent me also down to 6th Army Group to see how they were getting along, and they were very, very cross. They even minded because they had



been told to go on the defensive, so as they could spare troops to replace 3rd Army troops which were turning north and west to go and take the Germans in the flank. And [General Jacob L.] Jakie Devers was taking it all very personally; "They can't do this to me. What are you guys in SHAEF up to anyhow? Practicularly you, Betts, I think you're responsible for it." That was how that one went. But there's no question, they were in good shape and were not in the least concerned. And they had a big shenanigan because DeGaulle--when Devers was ordered to assume the defensive, why he immediately decided that he would defend on the crest of the Vosges Mountains, and that meant giving up Strasbourg, which of course is a key name in French history--and DeGaulle at once intervened and said, "You cannot. Strasbourg must be defended to the last man. If it's lost to the Germans, we'll have nothing in support." And there was a little skirmishing back and forth and finally Jakie came up with the idea, "Well," he said, "If you think so highly of Strasbourg, why 1st French Army is on my right flank here and practically in Strasbourg. You just take over the defense. I'm going back to the Vosges." And that ended that one.



BURG: And that's what they did.

BETTS: That's what they did. Well, actually it never came-- the Germans never got into Strasbourg. They never--they tried to cut in behind the Vosges, cut in west of the Vosges. They wanted to come down the crest of the Vosges and, more particularly, behind--it was so-called 6th Army Group, but it really was U.S. 7th Army. But their attack never had any guts; it never even got into the Maginot line, so it was no problem.

BURG: Yes. So nothing came of that attack down there.



BETTS: Nothing came of it.

BURG: It's interesting to note what you found at 1st Army.

BETTS: It was dreadful, really. These people, they didn't know where their troops were, they didn't know where the Germans were, they didn't know anything. They barely knew where they were. And you'll find that mentioned in John Eisenhower's book, too. Somebody noted that also and reported it, or didn't report it, I think. Some general came into 1st Army headquarters--some

corps commander came into 1st Army headquarters--where they had been at Spa and found the place--it had been abandoned and it was in the utmost confusion, with situation maps still hanging on the walls and various order books sitting on desks, all that sort of thing. But they'd just taken off, taken away from there and fallen back, and just hadn't had time to regroup.

BURG: So it lends some credence to Montgomery's remarks in which he strongly implied, if he didn't directly state, that he had saved our bacon.



BETTS: Yes, well it--I think I would give him some credit; I mean, in the sense that he saved it with American forces. But I've never known who ordered the counter-dispositions to the German thrust. Which involved, really, almost the whole of the 1st U.S. Army. I mean, the 1st--yes, the 1st Army. Four corps that gradually--they had been facing the Germans roughly on a north-west-southeast line and as the Germans hit and broke, they hit the right flank of the 1st Army and were repelled there by some very good local fighting. But then as the German thrust proceeded, they began to fall further and further to the south--

roughly parallel to the Meuse but never getting south of the Meuse--by American corps who were shifted from the northern front around to the eastern front, corps by corps. In the end there were four American corps facing--in other words, about twelve divisions--facing about four or five German divisions. And, of course, that simply fixed their bacon for them.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: Eventually, why, they could go no farther; they were out-flanked and were driven back. And I assume--I don't know whether 1st Army ordered that general displacement or whether Montgomery ordered it. But it was the thing to do and it was done very, very well. And also in Eisenhower's book--which I think is very significant--Montgomery, on relinquishing command, wrote Ike a letter and said--this is before they had the big blowup--but when he relinquished command of the American troops in the Bulge, he wrote Ike a letter and said, "I am turning in," and he said, "I particularly want to commend your corps commanders, all of whom behaved admirably and came up, always came up, at

the right time in the right place. It is very rare you find corps commanders, so many corps commanders, of that caliber." But not a word about 1st Army; he didn't say--he didn't say that 1st U. S. Army fought the good fight. All he had to do was sort of express a few intimations and all these [?] rallied around.

BURG: Yes, yes.



BETTS: And I think, I would give him credit. I would not--he saw what was to be done and he did it.

BURG: And came on, at least as far as 1st Army's concerned, on a rather confused and ineffectual defense and did straighten things out.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: And had he kept relatively quiet about it; there would have been no great excitement. [Laughter] But I guess one of the first things he did was to contact every British newspaperman that he could get his hands on.

BETTS: Oh, yes. Well, of course, after that came his terrible gaffe when, in effect, he had a press conference and said that he was going to--the thing to do now was "give me the troops and I'll finish the war."

BURG: Now what I'd like to know--it's precisely at this moment the Bulge is pretty well in hand.

BETTS: Yes.

BURG: This is beginning to straighten out and it's at that point that you are sent off on your trip eastward.

BETTS: That's right.

BURG: What led to your being sent on that particular mission?

BETTS: Well, I was sent as a member of a delegation. There is some cursory reference in Eisenhower's Crusade in Europe to it. And it is--what he says there was what I knew at the time. To set the chronology just a little bit in order, the Battle of the Bulge started on the 19th, and on the 23rd or 24th we were convinced



that we had it in hand. Before that time, why, there was confused fighting. You couldn't see how you were going to win, but it was pretty clear that on the 23rd, the actual date, represented a clearing in the weather and the air forces were able to get out in great strength and bomb the Germans on the road all over the Bulge, the Ardennes, and way back to the Rhine, and really just tore the logistic heart out of their offensive in just a couple of days. And as soon as that happened, why, all tension ceased at SHAEF. They said, "Well, this is it." It was after that that General Strong sent--this, of course, was all after General Montgomery assumed this command, also. It was on the 24th General Strong then sent me down to the Vosges to see Jackie Devers. I spent Christmas Eve with Jackie. And when I got back, about the 26th or 27th, I was told that I was part of a group of three officers, consisting of Air Marshal Tedder, Pinky--oh, the G-3.

BURG: Bull.



BETTS: Pinky Bull and myself. And we were to go to Moscow, and we had a specific mission, which was to make what arrangements

we could that--by this time as you see, we felt the Bulge was over. Strategically it was over. We were looking forward to closing the Rhine and crossing the Rhine sometime early in March. Well, March is a month that is notoriously a month of mud and immobility on the eastern front where the Russians were fighting. And we were told to go and tell the Russian commander-in-chief that--to ask the Russian commander-in-chief--that even if he could not apply great pressure in the month of March on the Germans, would he by deception, threats, sabre-rattling, and what have you, keep them from reinforcing the western front while we were crossing the Rhine, which at that time we still thought would be a very, very serious operation. So with that in mind, why, we were also told to go to London and to take a plane there and go first to Naples, then to Cairo, then to the Crimea, and then to Moscow. And in the meantime it had been determined that actually the Russian supreme field commander was named Joseph Stalin--there wasn't anybody else who was ordering the armies, Russian armies, around in terms of strategy. And so we were told that we would please talk to Mr. Stalin.



And the Russians were questioned by radio and they agreed; they said, "Fine." So we set out and we were supposed to start on New Years Eve--or rather on the 31st of December--and we got to Bovington airport, where there was waiting a very fine B-25 bomber to take us on this trip.

BURG: Bovington? B-o-v-i-n-g--

BETTS: B-o-v-i-n-g-d-o-n. And we were supposed to start at dawn, and Pinky and I got up at three and went over to the naval headquarters where our classified documents had been in a safe; woke up a sleepily watch officer and he woke up an equally sleepily man who could open the safe. He gave us our documents and we got to Bovington about five-thirty, which was still just as black as ink, and we got to this--we were conducted to this plane and the plane was full of gas fumes, [from] which we concluded that the RAF crew was going to have New Years Eve in London and to hell with missions.

[Interrruption]



BURG: Having found that it's full of gas fumes, you all went back home?

BETTS: We went back home. We relocked up the papers which, it being New Years Eve, took just as much trouble as it did to get them unlocked.

BURG: They must have been happy to see you coming back to lock them up again! [Laughter]

BETTS: Oh, we were welcome! And then Pinky and I went to Grosvenor Hotel for New Years Eve and had a very pleasant time, and the next morning repeated the performance and this time we got off and flew to Rome, flew to Naples, and to the headquarters near Naples, oh,--

BURG: Foggia?



BETTS: No, no, it's the old palace, Caserta, which was headquarters of 5th Army. And I think maybe--no, it wasn't AFHQ--anyhow, the commanding general there was the commanding general of the 5th Army, who was this Air Force lad who was deputy chief of staff under General Marshall at the start of the war. I can't

remember his name, but he's easily indentifiable.

[Ed. note: General Betts may have been referring to [then] Lt. Gen. Joseph Traggart McNarney, who in October 1944 became Deputy Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean, and commanding general of U.S. Mediterranean theater of operations. McNarney did not, however, personally command Fifty Army.]

He was very nice to us and put us up, and then we began to get messages that the weather was very bad. We had communications with--once again, this British technical and intelligence efficiency--we had communications from around Yalta that the weather was very bad. We couldn't be expecting to land there for several days. So we stayed in Caserta for two, three days. We went up to Rome, had a mini-tour of Rome. Then we came back and about the 4th or 5th of February, why--4th or 5th of January--why, we flew to Cairo. We arrived at Cairo and sat down, more word, two more kinds of word. One word that the weather was still filthy in Yalta, the Crimea, "don't come;" and then a whisper from Air Marshal Tedder that he didn't want to go to Moscow in a B-25 bomber. He wanted to go in a York, four-motor York. The York was a converted Lancaster bomber, four-motor bomber, very much more handsome bomber than a B-25. Well anyhow, this went on and so about the-- I'm fudging on percise time--but about the 10th the York turned up



and the weather improved and we took off and we flew to Yalta. Except it was not Yalta, it was an airfield outside of Yalta. And there at once we were met by a very cheerful Russian major-general who was in command, who couldn't have been nicer or more hospitable, and we began to talk about how to go to Moscow. He said, "Well, the weather in Moscow is impossible. You can't fly to Moscow. All communications are out." And so we talked some more and we said, "Well, how could we go up by train?" "Well you can go by train but it takes not quite two days by train to get from the Crimea to Moscow. Perhaps better wait a day and make up your mind." Well, we said that we'd been deviled by weather all this time and how about getting us on the train tonight to--on the Moscow train. So we did and we picked up--got on this train in some place nowhere, and by this time we'd become quite a delegation because the Russian major-general was coming with us and here appeared a British naval "leftenant" commander who had been giving us this dope by radio. He was attached to the Russian Black Sea fleet-- it appeared and was knowledgeable in communicating. And a clutch of soldiers, and a very charming stewardess named Dushka, and a very surly female porter who--she was really terrified because



we had a special car. It was an old trans-Siberian sleeper; at least, oh, it must have been forty years old. It just had grime ground into the woodwork. It was very handsomely upholstered, very beautifully carpeted, but it just outlived its usefulness, and she obviously had done her best to clean it up because she wouldn't be shot on sight anyhow.

BURG: Did you have your own interpreters?

BETTS: We had--this British naval officer interpreted for us.

BURG: Oh.



BETTS: He came right aboard and it became a very jolly trip, but it took the whole--we boarded this train at about three o'clock in the morning and we arrived in Moscow at about nine or ten o'clock the next night, I mean the night after. We spent one night on the train, sleeping on the train. And we must have got there about the 12th.

BURG: So you boarded at three in the morning, you spent that day and that night--the next night--on and then until almost--

BETTS: Almost the next night. It was not quite forty-eight hours. We were--I say we missed perhaps by--forty-two, forty-three hours was what it took.



BURG: You said "jolly." Was it jolly because of the company or was it jolly because of the traditional Russian hospitality on--

BETTS: Well it was jolly--everybody was amiable. This Russian general had obviously been instructed to be a genial host. He was not engaged in negotiations of any kind and he wanted everybody to have a good time, and there was lots of liquor and lots of things to eat and general moving around. There was plenty of room on this car. The Russian railroads, you know, are very broad gauge and in consequence, these cars were very wide and you had about a seven foot berth in each of the--each of our delegation had a compartment to himself with a washroom. And people circulated around and chatted, and every once in a while the train would stop and we would get out. Nobody bothered about that. And it was very interesting watching the countryside because a large part of the war had been fought for the possession of that particular railroad, as you can well imagine, and it was

really the German original 1941 objective. That was what they wanted to do. They wanted to get Moscow, Lenigrad, and the line to the Crimea; that was what they wanted.

BURG: Yes, they would have crossed that line during the Stalingrad offensive.

BETTS: Yes, and the next year they did cross it. In '42 they did fight their way across it.

BURG: Yes.



BETTS: But it was defended very stoutly, and then when they retreated, why the great Kunsck offensive was fought right in the middle of that line. So there were plenty of evidences of war all over the place and also evidences of--what interested me very much was the fact that the Russinas were obviously using their heads in terms of reconstruction. The line itself, the railway line itself was, you'd have to say, in perfect condition. I mean the rails laid straight, the road was well-ballasted, and when the train came by at every crossroads there would be a big woman,

five feet by five feet by five feet, with a flag in her hand holding up all traffic, there being no traffic at all. [Laughter] And the train would go on and about four miles on there'd be the same thing repeated. On the other hand, all the stations were destroyed, no effort made to recover them, and as far as I could see, there were no railway yards intact. There were passing sidings. It was a single-track line and there were passing sidings.

BURG: At key points.



BETTS: Well, pretty regularly, They taught me at Leavenworth that you could run seventeen trains a day each way on a single track railway. When I was in Poltava, I counted the trains as they came by and that's what happened. They ran seventeen trains a day.

BURG: I see.

BETTS: [Laughter] They may not have gone to Leavenworth but they'd reached a similar conclusion. [Laughter]

BURG: But you saw no sign of marshalling yards, per sé.

BETTS: No, nothing of that kind, as I say, and very often you

would see great masses of debris. I mean, cars and locomotives and things pulled off on the side of the track. They'd been destroyed and nobody'd had time to do anything about it. It was that sort of thing. It was very interesting. Well, anyhow, we got to Moscow and--

BURG: Let me ask you one more thing. Did nay of the Russians speak English? Did that major-general, for example?

BETTS: He didn't admit it and I don't think he did.

BURG: And you can't recall his name at this stage.

BETTS: No, I don't. We had this very limited contact with him. But he was obviously detailed to be the perfect host, give us every consideration and, presumably, he was--had nothing to tell us. The only place of significance where we stopped was Orel. That was part of the Kursk battle and was a terribly destroyed town. I was very much interested in that because, there again, the primary reconstruction had started but dwellings, no, nothing of that caliber [cannot make this passage out.] And loudspeakers everywhere blaring out propaganda. I assume it was propaganda. And a



great deal of private trade. People--we were attached to a regular train, the regular, so-called, Moscow Express. I suppose there were ten or fifteen other carriages, with most of them second and third class, crowded with Russians, and they would--

BURG: Military? Civilian? Or both?



BETTS: Both. More civilians, I would say than military. And there was one platoon of soldiers aboard who obviously were going up to the front. I mean, they had new uniforms and they had their field equipment and they had a couple of pretty smart young lieutenants in charge of them. And the relationship between the soldiers and the officers was very good. The officers joked with the soldiers and, on the other hand, they turned out at every station and made them do physical jerks; in other words, to get the stiffness out of their legs. And a lot of laughter and a lot of very--I would say that there was more camaraderie between the officers and the soldiers than existed in the American army at that time. And there was lots of market trading. People would get off the train with goods which

they would sell for very large wads of banknotes. I don't know just what, but the people who essembled at the stations were willing to buy things. Nobody stopped them. These obviously were unrationed goods or grown up in the farmers' own little plots, or what have you. Couldn't tell what they were, but they seemed to be mostly vegetables, winter vegetables, potatoes, cabbages, that sort of thing.

BURG: Yes, I think that would make a lot of sense. I think that's the way they were operating at that time. Well you arrived in Moscow fairly late in the evening?



BETTS: Fairly late in the evening and I believe on the 12th, and we were met by a very pleasant delegation of--nobody of enormous importance. The main man was a major-general and I have no idea what his capacity was. But he was very jovial, and there were two or three others, but I know they laughed at Pinky and me because we had flown in this unheated B-25 bomber from London to Cairo, and at about 25,000 feet altitude, and so we'd been issued flying boots. We hadn't been able to get rid of

them so we disembarked in Moscow with our flying boots and oh, the Russians just laughed and laughed. "Oh," they said, "You think" in effect, "you think this is the land of eternal ice and snow. Well now you see. It's just a lovely spring climate." And it wasn't very cold. The weather wasn't freezing. Anyhow, it was a big joke about that, and then they told us at the time that we would see Stalin on the 14th. That was the evening of the day after our arrival. We arrived on the 12th, and it was well we had the time because--am I taking up too much of your time with this?

BURG: No.

BETTS: We found that our first problem lay with the friendly forces, the American and British embassies, both of whom felt that, "Well, if you wanted to deal with Stalin, why did you guys come? Why didn't you just send us a cable. It would be no problem at all. We see him every day; he's a good friend of ours." Well we went into a huddle on that because while we didn't feel that we were particularly bound by protocol, we



did feel that our only reason for seeing Stalin was because it was in a military capacity. He was the commanding general. If somebody else had been commanding the armies, if Stalin had had a George Marshall, why we would have expected to see General Marshall, not Marshal Stalin. So we took that pretty seriously and we talked it around and tossed it around and we finally decided that this was some--we, incidentally, were put up in the American chancery of the American embassy, which was an office building right across from the Kremlin. It's been changed; they've all moved away from there now. But at that time it had some living accommodations.

BURG: Tedder was put there, too?

BETTS: Beg your pardon?



BURG: Tedder was put there, too?

BETTS: I think Tedder stayed with the British embassy. I think he stayed with his own people. But we all [?] together, we were all agreed on this. The British ambassador was

away and so, basically, our conversation was with Averell Harriman. And he was very, very difficult; chiefly I thought because, as he put it, he knew how to handle Stalin; he was always seeing Stalin; much better for him to go along with us and lend a hand. We stolidly and stubbornly said we didn't think so and I gradually formed the idea that he didn't see as much of Stalin as he wanted to and he was very anxious to have any opportunity he could to see Stalin. But that didn't really bear on it. Our problem really was, should we talk to Stalin? Was Stalin a soldier or was he a chief of state when he was talking to us? So we decided he was a soldier and he'd better talk to the soldiers. So we told Harriman that we felt that we ought to conduct the negotiations. That we'd be glad to have representation from the embassy, assistance, especially in interpreter, and Harriman rather grouchyly said okay, he would send General John Deane. John Russell Deane, Russ Deane.

BURG: Did Harriman know you were coming?

BETTS: Oh, yes, yes. They knew we were coming. And they also furnished us with an interpreter, American interpreter, who



spoke magnificent Russian. And the British sent their, John Deane's, opposite number, a, I think, a naval captain, Archer, A-r-c-h-e-r. I don't think he was an admiral, I think he was a captain. And so it was agreed that we would carry the ball and that we would all go see Mr. Stalin on the night of the 14th. And with that happy result, why, we were all invited to the Bolshoi, to the Royal Box, and saw "Prince Igor" that evening. Very, very interesting event in itself. And we were still accompanied by our Crimean major-general, and by the major-general who met us, and some other Russian officer, and they had brought their wives. And everybody said that was most unusual. It was the first time that wives had ever been interjected into international affairs in Moscow. Maybe they were trying it out on a low level to see if it worked out. They had these rather stiff-looking, rather overfed gals who came and stayed with us, and we saw "Prince Igor," then went home. We devoted the next day to more conversation about just what we were going to do, and that evening about nine, why, cars called for us and we were taken to the Kremlin. And when we reached the



Kremlin, we went to the famous office that Stalin had, which I think they still use. It's in a building that I think, used to be either a barracks or a hospital in the Kremlin itself. Very depressing sort of thing with lots of stairways and lots of corridors, and calcimine walls of dark green up to the wainscoting, light green above that. And at every corner, as we went around a lot of corridors, why here was an officer with a drawn pistol, all standing. In case.

BURG: Drawn!



BETTS: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. He was on guard. I mean, he was not--I imagine they had him here at all times; it was not a special arrangement for us.

BURG: Oh, no, no. No, I'm sure you're right.

BETTS: Just a normal precaution. Well, we got to this office of Stalin's, which was a long, narrow room with a rather small desk at one end. And between the desk and the door was a long, green baige-covered table. And there was Stalin. He came to see us,

very pleasantly, and his first remark was, "Well, I'm happy to tell you that I responded to your pleas and have started an offensive to take the pressure off you in the Bulge." Well this sort of smote us in the eye because we hadn't--we thought the Bulge was over and Tedder, who is very quick-witted, quickly scrambled and said that he certainly appreciated the friendliness of the great Russian people, or words to that effect, but after the event, I began to realize that there was something I had not known. And that was that at the onset of the Bulge, Churchill had sent a personal message to Stalin saying, in effect, "We're in dire peril and will you please exert all possible pressure on the eastern front until we solve this Bulge problem."

BURG: And none of you, evidently, had been told that.

BETTS: I had--I think Tedder had been told.

BURG: You think so?

BETTS: I think so. I think that was why we took so long to get there. I think Tedder wanted to be darned sure that the Bulge was liquidated before he started talking about crossing the



Rhine.

BURG: Oh, ho.

BETTS: That's why it took us from the 1st of January to the 14th to get to the Kremlin.

BURG: Yes. But you didn't find that out until later?

BETTS: I didn't find it out until long after the war when I heard about the Churchill message. At the time, I just assumed that it was a sort of gratuitous slap from Stalin, but I don't think so. I think that he was referring to this--he thought we knew about it and he was trying to get the thing off on a cordial footing. Well, nobody's foot slipped anyhow. We all sat down at the table and--

BURG: I might ask you: What kind of an impression did you have of him as he walked toward you?

BETTS: I had an impression of--you say "as he walked"--I mean, in other words, the first impression as opposed to a total impression. The first impression was that he was a very small



man. That he was very self-contained. I mean, he was not indulging in fancy movements, or wringing his hands, or putting his hands in his pockets; he was just, you felt that you--I would say very much like going and having an interview with the president of United States Steel, or a man of importance and great self-control and of great self-confidence. I got all those feelings just at the first glance.

BURG: Did his stature surprise you?

BETTS: Yes, it did. In spite of the fact that I knew he was short. But I didn't realize how short he really was. In other words, I suppose he was about five feet four inches tall, something on that order. But I'd always thought that he was a little shorter than me, about five feet six or something like that. But he was a remarkably short man and had very wide shoulders and wide hips. He was a broad man. He was not a fat man, particularly, but he had a broad skeleton.

BURG: Was he dressed in a uniform?



BETTS: He was in uniform, yes. And I think it was the uniform of a marshal.

BURG: I was thinking, the title he used, and I think was using at that time, was generalissimo.

BETTS: Yes, I think so.

BURG: So it had gold braid at the collar and--

BETTS: Yes, and he had the Order of Lenin on his chest.

BURG: Was that the only decoration that he was wearing?

BETTS: Yes, that was the only thing he was wearing, yes. He was not dressed in anything like full military dress at all. It was a field uniform, what you'd call--I believe you call it Class A uniform, I think.

BURG: Grey in color, do you remember?

BETTS: Greyish-brown, greyish-brownish; it was more brown than our current green uniform is, I'd say. But it had--it was not the brown of standard U.S. khaki at all. It was a lighter color



than that.

BURG: Obviously the room was not a sumptuous room.

BETTS: Beg your pardon?

BURG: The room was not a sumptuous room.

BETTS: Oh, no, no.

BURG: Quite plain.

BETTS: Quite plain.



BURG: And nothing to indicate the enormous power of the occupant.

BETTS: No, not at all. And his desk was--I think what surprised me was his desk was a very small desk. I mean, I suppose not more than three foot six in length, something like that. And rather low, which I now realize was because of his low stature. Had a telephone--I think it had only one telephone on it. And in the course of our interview, why, he got a couple

of calls and then he evidently told them to shut it up, call him back later when he was ready to talk.

BURG: Were there any maps in view?

BETTS: No maps. There was a huge photograph of Lenin haranguing.

BURG: With the arm upraised.

BETTS: That's right, yes. And I think that was the only decoration in the room.

BURG: Just that one single photograph.



BETTS: That's it, I think, and the photograph was not over his--it was where he could look at it. It faced him. In other words, his desk was at the far corner of the room and the photograph was on the wall where he came in. We did not enter under the photograph; we entered on a side--just think of the room as a long oblong one. We entered a door on the side of the room, of the long side of the room, and very near the far wall from Stalin.

BURG: I see. And then had to turn, say, to the right--

BETTS: Had to turn left.

BURG: Had turned left and walked down a rather long room,
yes.

BETTS: It was longer--this room is sixteen feet long--I imagine
it was about twenty-two, twenty-three feet long. It's hard to
tell, because it was rather narrow. It was narrower than this
room. It wasn't more than, I wouldn't guess, ten feet wide.

BURG: High ceiling?

BETTS: Fairly high ceiling, yes.



BURG: Did he have an interpreter in the room with him, or--

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: So he was not alone in the room when you entered.

BETTS: No, he had an interpreter and he had a General [A.I.]

Antonov, A-n-t-o-n-o-v

BURG: Very well known Russian general.

BETTS: Who was the deputy chief of staff. The chief of staff, I think, at that time was--I think it was Malenkov, but I'm not sure. But the story in Russia, in Moscow, at the time was that the way Stalin really ran the war was that he sent the chief of staff out to inspect the armies and the army groups and shoot whatever generals were necessary, and Antonov was the office man who kept the papers going and worked out the policy. Stalin himself, apparently, did not inspect troops. He did not go out to the front.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: But he sent the chief of staff.



BURG: So when you sat down to talk, it was Betts, Bull, Tedder, Stalin, Antonov, and you had your own interpreter from the embassy.

BETTS: Yes, we sat on opposite sides of the long table. Stalin sat on the side--the table itself was almost against the wall. In other words, to sit at the table on the side of the wall, you had to pull the chair right back against the wall to get a seat. And the Russians sat on that side, and there was Stalin, there

was Antonov, and there was this interpreter; there were only three of them. And our side there was our delegation of three and then there were the two embassy representatives, Deane and Archer, and our interpreter.

BURG: Was your interpreter the British naval officer still?

BETTS: Our interpreter was the embassy, American embassy interpreter.

BURG: The embassy man, okay.

BETTS: And the--

[Interruption]



BURG: You were saying that the interpreters were youngish men.

BETTS: Youngish men in their late twenties or early thirties, I would think. And I thought both of them were extremely attractive. They were so very professional, so very anxious to do their job, which was to interpret. They were not at all anxious to influence policy or anything, just to make sure that the message got through.

BURG: Was their man uniformed?

BETTS: No, no.

BURG: And so, of course, was--

BETTS: Ours was, too.



BURG: --yours, yes. Now was Air Marshal Tedder, in effect, presenting the allied case?

BETTS: Yes. And he started--and I might say the whole interview took place, lasted, I think about forty-five minutes. Which, in view of the interpreting, really meant that probably it was about a twenty-five minute--if it had been conducted in a common language it would have taken about twenty-five minutes. It was businesslike but quite short. And Tedder made our--in effect, Stalin said, "Well gentlemen, what have you got to say? What have you got to tell me?" He was polite about it but he was-- he was very polite all the way through, I thought. And Tedder then just made the pitch that I described at the beginning here: mainly, that we were hoping that--we were expecting to close the

Rhine, of course, in March--and we were hoping that even if the Russians could not put on an offensive at that time, that they would create enough of a disturbance so that the Germans would not reinforce the front. And Stalin shook his head and agreed. He said that they, that he understood, that, in effect, they had already started their offensive, which they had. They had started on the, I think, the 13th or 14th, and at that time their armies were well into Poland. They had not reached German soil yet anywhere. And he said there was a rule about offensives; he said, "Sometimes they go on well, sometimes they sputter out, so I have no idea how long this offensive will continue. But," he said, "if it grinds to a halt, why, yes there are things that I can do and I should be very glad to do it." That was about the interview. There were a few more interchanges. I mean, there was more dialogue than I indicate but that was the nuts and bolts of the thing. He recognized the problem, he said, "Yes, I can help out. I will help out. Good." Then there was some--he asked if we had any particular information to give him and Pink spoke up and said, "Well, one thing, Generalissimo," or whatever he called him, "we're expecting to be entrenched on German soil very soon and we've given a lot of



thought about how we're going to treat the civilian population after we occupy large portions of the territory and the war is still going on." He said, "Have you any good ideas to tell us about that?" And the old man just smiled a very hard smile. He said, "General," he said, "have you ever heard of the Cheka?"

BURG: C-h-e-k-a?

BETTS: C-h-e-k-a, yes.

BURG: The old Czarist secret police.

BETTS: Yes. And that was his comment.

BURG: What did Pink say?

BETTS: Pink didn't say anything more. [Laughter] Then he turned to me and I fortunately dredged up something and said that we had recently encountered the German Tiger tanks. That was their last tank, a very heavy and rather ponderous tank that couldn't move, but it was very powerful and carried a six inch gun. It couldn't move too fast or too far, and I described



that to him. And he said, "Oh, yes, we have encountered them, also." But that's when the party broke up.

BURG: Did he seek any confirmation from Antonov when he talked with you, or did Antonov simply play a passive role in the conversation?

BETTS: He never even looked toward Antonov. He did it all on his own personality. I think Antonov was just there as a back-stop if we had asked for something specifically, you know, but probably preferred to have [?] . He felt--I got a feeling that he had an enormous sense of confidence and I had a feeling, too, that he knew damned well what was going on in his war. That he might not tell everybody what he knew was going on, but he knew.

BURG: So nothing else was discussed? There was no mention by him, for example, of the operation for Berlin, or any prospects of--no discussion of--"We'll have to work out some arrangements whereby we can safely meet, so that our armies don't collide and fight one another."



BETTS: Well, we had done something of that already. That had been done on the field level. The various armies had got in touch with the Russians as they got very close. That was not work done on a high level at all. And the Russians were never very forthcoming about it; they just sort of said, "Da, da." Actually, it worked. I mean, we never had any trouble. We never found ourselves shooting at Russians and we never found Russians shooting at us, so you have to say that the--that that worked okay. And also, of course, his offensive that he launched on the 10th or 11th or 12th of January, why it never did stop until it got to Berlin. I think he was surprised at that himself. I think he thought he'd have to stop and regroup somewhere, because he actually pushed, oh, I suppose about four hundred miles in that last big exploitation.



BURG: Yes. I think they paused on the Oder line, if I'm not mistaken. There was a lengthy pause there. No one could quite understand why, and I believe it went on for quite some period of time. Meanwhile, we got closer and closer to Berlin and I think they became frightened. In fact, he is reputed to have

called in [Marshal Georgi K] Zhukov and perhaps [Marshal Konstantin] Rokossovski, or it could have been [Marshal Ivan S.] Konev or [Col. Gen. Vasily I.] Chuikov and said, "Well, who is going to take Berlin first, we or the allies?" Although he already knew what the answer was going to be, and had to be, as far as he was concerned. Well when the conference broke up, then you parted with him--he was as polite as always--and you went back then to your own quarters?



BETTS: We went back to our own quarters and I had been having trouble with this leg of mine. My leg had all swollen up in the course of this mission, and so the next day I stayed in a cot that they had, the embassy, and I wrote out the report on the interview, which was a Top Secret report, and I have no idea what happened to it. I gave it to Tedder. I doubt that Tedder gave it to Ike. But anyhow, I felt there ought to be a report and I was the junior officer and the junior officer is always the secretary of the board, so I typed up a report to add to the-- I must say, I thought it was a pretty good report. And, meanwhile, that day the rest of the delegation were entertained in

some fashion. I don't know what it was. I think maybe they visited schools--I mean, military installations of some kind. There was courtesy involved all the way through it. I must say that in the whole trip, you couldn't fault the Russians, not only for politeness, but also, really, for the very kindly approach. A very friendly approach. And then the day after that, why we--of course, the York plane had never got to Moscow.

BURG: It had just stayed down in the Crimea?



BETTS: Stayed down in the Crimea and we got on the embassy liaison plane, and by this time my leg had swelled up, so they dropped me off at Poltava and the rest of them went down to Crimea and got in the York and flew away. Well that, of course, was another thing that puzzled me, because while our York--while we were waiting around for a York and the weather was so foul in the Crimea, why here was this DC-3 flying two missions a week between Cairo and Moscow without any troubles at all; not a care in the world. It had a--it didn't have two pilots; it only had one pilot, a Captain Solomon, who was a delightful man and--

BURG: RAF?

BETTS: What?

BURG: RAF?

BETTS: Oh, no, this was U.S. Army. This was an army aircraft.

BURG: Oh, really. This was the American embassy liaison.

BETTS: Well, yes, this is American liaison. I don't think-- I think--well, I don't know how he did it. When I left Poltava-- he flew me down to Poltava and I was in Poltava a matter of about a week and then they decided to evacuate me to Cairo. And this fellow picked me up at Poltava--and he had been to Moscow, was on his way back to Cairo from Moscow. He picked me up and he said he had to stop for gas at the Crimea. He said he couldn't make the flight from Moscow to Cairo on his DC-3 tankage. Anyhow, we flew from Poltava to the Crimea, the same field that we landed at. I think the field was called Sochi--I'm not-sure.

BURG: Yes, yes.



BETTS: S-o-c-h-i.

BURG: Yes, that's probably very right.

BETTS: And there he started to refuel and they had to refuel from jerry cans which--I mean, by the time you put six or seven hundred gallons of gas into a plane from five gallon jerry cans, you've got a real operation, so he said, "Oh, hell. We'll go to Ankara." So we flew to Ankara and there we refueled and then took off to Cairo. But this whole thing was done, as far as he was concerned, with the greatest insouciance, and apparently it never occurred to him he couldn't fly to Moscow any day he wanted to. So I'm pretty sure that Tedder just really wanted the news of the Bulge to sink in before he--he didn't want to appear as a plaintiff, I think. At Moscow, he was probably right. Also, he knew it from British diplomatic sources and he didn't dare tell Ike that. I mean, he didn't dare say, "Well, look--" I'm not sure that Ike knew that Churchill had dashed off this message, of it he had, I don't think that Ike had put it together and said, "Well, look, you fellows ought to go right now while the Bulge is in the balance." Because we didn't think the Bulge was



in the balance. Well, anyhow, I just had the feeling that Tedder was sort of flying around saying, "Well, now, what am I going to do? What am I going to do?" And "I don't want to get to Moscow too soon if I haven't got anybody that I can consult about it. I've just got to use my own head. I've got to just have a lot of bad weather in the Crimea until it's time to get to Moscow."

BURG: Yes, delay it. Delay it a bit.

BETTS: Yes. That, I think, is what really happened.

BURG: Why did they drop you off at Poltava? Were there--

BETTS: There was an American hospital there.

BURG: Because of that shuttle bombing--

BETTS: Shuttle bombing idea. Poltava was chosen as the field to which American bombers that bombed eastern Germany and who might be damaged could make their way, and it was closer--if they were bombing around Warsaw or Breslau, or someplace like that, they were closer to Poltava than they were to Blighty.



BURG: Yes.

BETTS: The U.S. Army Air Force set it up; they tried their darned--it never worked. They never got--

BURG: I better put on the record, General Betts just said "Blighty," B-l-i-g-h-t-y, [Laughter] because my transcriber won't recognize the term. Okay.

BETTS: Anyhow, the Russians always dragged their feet and what happened was that the Russians would receive injured American planes at Poltava, but they would not embark on a really cooperative business where the planes would land there and then refuel and rebomb Germany on the way back. That never happened at all. But incident to that, why they put a small hospital in at Poltava, which consisted of eight beds and had three extremely capable, all-purpose doctors who could do anything, as far as I could see.

BURG: They were American doctors.



BETTS: They were American doctors. And I think three or four American nurses, and a pick-up crew of Russian medical attendants

who would make the beds and give the baths and do all that. And I was just astonished at how efficient they were. They were up-to-date; they had all the latest gadgets and all the latest knowledge, and I've never seen three doctors who shared as much knowledge between them in my life. And they were just delighted to have a patient.

BURG: Did they comment on their isolation there?

BETTS: Beg your pardon?

BURG: Did they comment on their isolation there?



BETTS: They commented on it in terms of derogation of Russians; they were terribly fed up with Russians. Everything--they were reluctantly admiring of some of the things the Russians did, but they just felt that there was no communication with the Russians and no--if they really wanted to, say, get a gallon of castor oil, why it would be impossible. The Russians wouldn't turn that loose at all. That was all earmarked for Russian patients. On the other hand, they had considerable respect for Russian medical skills. When I was there an American flying

lieutenant was brought in; his plane had been shot down over Poland, fell behind the Russian lines and he had suffered a terribly--in coming down, he'd suffered a terribly mangled ankle. And he was taken, first of all, to a Russian hospital and he was taken in hand by a Russian doctor, and presumably somebody could translate. I don't know how they got the word but apparently he knew what was going on. And he said that this doctor spoke to him very understandingly and said, "Now, of course, I know that this is a strange experience for you; you've never been in a Russian hospital before, and you don't know our skills. For that reason, I am not going to try to force you into anything. But," she said, "if you were a Russian officer and had this trouble, I would amputate your foot." She said, "I would recommend that I amputate your foot because it's going to have to come off anyway, and it will save you a great deal of pain and a great deal of discomfort and a great deal of worry in the next few days until you get into American hands." And I talked to him and he spoke in terms of great appreciation of her attitude and he said, "Okay, go ahead." And she did, she amputated his foot, and in due course he was brought to Poltava



and the doctors there said it was a very fine job, that she'd done exactly the right thing, they would have done it too, and that they were thoroughly satisfied with the treatment. They also had another experience and that was that the Germans apparently had discovered that Poltava--something was going on at Poltava of a peculiar nature and that it was something that they ought to disapprove of. So they bombed out the field and, of course, the German air force was mostly on the eastern front at this time and they sent over quite a strong body of planes that first dropped rather small demolition bombs, fifty pounders, that sort of thing. And then carpeted the field, both the runways and the whole area, with anti-personnel bombs--these little things that if you kicked them, why, they popped up in the air--

BURG: Yes, like a "Bouncing Betty."



BETTS: What? "Bouncing Betty." And the Americans said that the Russian reaction to that was to call out the women of Poltava, all these good, fine, five by five by five girls, and put them in a line across the field and marched them across the field and told them to pick up the bombs. If they weren't lively, why, they got blown up! And several of them did get blown up in the

course of it. [Laughter] Well, the Americans admired that; they found it was a pretty brutal sort of thing, but it certainly solved the bouncing bomb problem.

BURG: Boy, oh boy, oh boy. Isn't that something?

BETTS: And as I say, they spoke of it with a sort of grudging admiration.

BURG: Yes. They had been there when that German raid took place.

BETTS: They'd been there.

BURG: And that had been in '44, before you got there.

BETTS: That was right, yes.

BURG: Right. Did--



BETTS: My only other experience in Soviet-American relations was that the Russian field commander, who was a major-general--

BURG: At Poltava.

BETTS: At Poltava--hears there was an American general officer in the hospital and he very kindly came over to see me. He called on me. I think he brought me some cakes or something. I mean, it was a nice gesture. And we had a pleasant conversation and I asked him, rather idly, because I was not--it was not a matter of enormous importance, but I was interested in whether, in the course of the fighting, whether the Germans had destroyed the great hydro-electric dam over the Deniper River, you know? At Dneipropetrovsk. And so I asked him. It made no difference to me; it he'd just said, "Well, I'm sorry. I don't know; I can't tell you," why I wouldn't have been hurt at all, but he smiled a broad smile and said, "Oh," he said, "nothing was touched. We saved it all, It's all working." Well, he lied in his teeth, because the Germans did destroy it. [Laughter] But it's natural Russian tendency to cover up. Why--

BURG: Yes. [Laughter]



BETTS: Why admit a weakness? This might be a weakness and why admit it. That's why he was a major-general, probably.

BURG: Yes. [Laughter] That's pretty typical, though. It's pretty typical. Even if you showed him the aerial photographs and showed it had been blown to smithereens, it would have been another dam.

BETTS: It was another dam, it wasn't--



BURG: Well now did they rest your leg there, is that basically what they did? Before they sent you on?

BETTS: Well, what they did was they had discovered that--they'd just discovered penicillin and the whole army was--I won't say the army--the military service was just wild about penicillin. And so they began filling my backside with penicillin in Poltava and after about a week, why they said, "You're getting along--" my leg actually had swelled up tremendously. It hadn't gangrened or anything, but--oh, it was swollen about like this all the way down. And it really looked pretty bad. And the swelling went down somewhat and they said, "Well, look, you'll get better and more refined treatment in Cairo, so why don't you go to Cairo?" And so the next time Captain Solomon came by, they put me on the

plane with one of the doctors, who was delighted to go to Cairo, and we flew to Cairo where I stayed about two months.

BURG: Oh, you were there for two months in Cairo?

BETTS: Oh, yes.

BURG: In a British hospital there?

BETTS: Oh, no, American hospital.

BURG: In an American hospital again.



BETTS: And it was boring because I wanted to get on with the war but it was very pleasant. It was out in the desert, out at what they call Heliopolis.

BURG: Yes.

BETTS: But this place was not in a suburb at all. It was just in the sand dunes. And you looked out your window and there would be camels walking by. And the weather--it was the Egyptian winter--was just a nice, tepid weather all the time.

BURG: When would you have gotten to Cairo or to Heliopolis?

BETTS: Beg your pardon?

BURG: What time would you have gotten to Cairo?

BETTS: I must have gotten there about--we left Moscow on the 16th. I got to Poltava--

BURG: Of January?



BETTS: Sixteenth of January, that's right. And we got to Poltava on the 16th and I think about the 23rd or 24th, why, I flew to Cairo, 23rd or 24th of January. And then about the 1st of March I finally reappeared at SHAEF.

BURG: Meanwhile, Tedder and Bull had gone on down to Cairo and--

BETTS: Oh, yes, they'd gone on back down.

BURG: --back on up, yes. And the war was coming to a close.

BETTS: Oh, it was very much coming to a close. Well, you could tell in Cairo that it was coming to a close.

BURG: Yes. Do you recollect anything from that last month, two months, of the war in Europe that proved to be any kind of a problem for you or took special handling, once you got back on duty?

BETTS: Only in the sense of--militarily, no. In fact, the military unraveling of the war was very, very much in the hands of the local commanders. I don't mean Georgia Patton ever told anybody very much where he was going. He may have told in a general way, "Yes, I'm going to Vienna and I'm going to Prague. He almost got to Prague [Laughter] and then they pulled a rein on him. But, generally speaking, I never heard of any broad strategic decisions being made at SHAEF after, really, after the Rhine crossings. The Rhine crossings required some coordination, but not a great deal because, as it happened, the crossing at Cologne was a set piece that Montgomery timed very carefully.

BURG: Oh, yes.



BETTS: And, of course, Patton just sort of swam across when

the notion seized him. And the only thing, there was some jeering around about Patton being in a swivet to get across before Montgomery got across, which was a matter of vanity. But SHAEF was consulted very little about that and I think that most of the decisions about the--I think the decision of the British army, British army group, to plunge ahead and go as far north and east as they could was mostly taken by Montgomery. It was given a tacit approval. There was a question--as you know, the surrounding of the Ruhr was on the flank of this British thrust and there had to be some coordination there. But it turned out to be much of a promenade that it really wasn't necessary. Montgomery took right off and pushed northeast. Had some difficulty with the rivers, the Weser, and I don't think he got--I guess he got across the Elbe, too. He got across the Elbe. But generally speaking, why, he was not--he never--his army never felt in any danger. And on the other hand, the U.S. 9th Army, which crossed with Montgomery under [General William H.] Simpson, then swung off more to the east and went around the north of the Ruhr, and at the same time 1st Army swung east of the Ruhr



and swung around to the northwest, eventually, so they enveloped the whole area. And I don't think there was much--any coordination of those moves, aside from coordination with Montgomery, which was, I'm sure, done by General Bradley. I don't think he bothered SHAEF about it at all. They knew what Ike's orders were, which were to advance to the heart of Germany and destroy the Nazi power, and that's what they were doing.

BURG: Did you have anything to do with assessing the possibility of there being a redoubt in Bavaria?

BETTS: Yes, it gave us some concern. It was a--it gave us more concern--I would say it gave us less and less concern as the German debacle continued. When I got in from Cairo, there was talk of the redoubt and there was some reconnaissances, some air reconnaissances, and I think probably some clandestine operations to check about anything going in there. But almost as soon as we began to look at it, why it became clear that nothing much of an organized nature was going on there. The people were going there more for safety or to hide gold and



things of that kind, than to put up a big defense. And then as soon as Patton reached the Inn River, why, he made a special report and said, "[There is] nothing to the redoubt. Forget about it."

