

Dean Rusk Oral History Collection

Rusk 7R: Part 4 of 6

Dean Rusk, autobiographical sketch told to Richard Rusk
circa 1985

The complete interview also includes Rusk 7O: Part 1; Rusk 7P: Part 2; Rusk 7Q: Part 3; Rusk 7S: Part 5; Rusk 7T: Part 6

DEAN RUSK: My sister Margaret was the oldest of five children. She was very slight in build and during her teens was seriously ill. I am not sure what the problems were, but we were not all sure that she was going to make it, but she turned out to be the strongest of the family. She had a very sturdy spirit and she knew how to live with adversity and before too long she got a job. At first as a dentist's assistant and then as a doctor's assistant and worked all of her life in a doctor's office. Along the way she was always a great source of encouragement. In high school, if I ever needed a little extra money she was the one who provided it. She read a great deal; she was a very intelligent young woman although she never went beyond grammar school. In her later years she became an elder in the Morningside Presbyterian Church and was very active in church affairs. In fact the church was her life outside of her family. My older brother Parks dropped out of school at the end of elementary school to get a job in order to help the family make ends meet and make it possible for the younger children to continue in school. He worked mostly in the field of newspapers and public relations. He was a cub reporter on the Atlanta Constitution; there was a time when he sold automobiles. I remember how excited we were when he drove a demonstration Stutz Bearcat out and parked it in front of our house. That was the car to end all cars in those days. He continued in the newspaper work; for a time there he published a little weekly paper called Atlanta Life and he found himself running quite a campaign against corruption in City Hall.

He particularly aimed his barbs at one individual to whom he gave the name "The Lone Wolf" and spent a good deal of time exposing the corrupt activities of this fellow to the point where my brother had to get an ex-professional wrestler to go around with him as his bodyguard because he received a lot of threats. Well, he did this for a period well over a year and then the Atlanta Constitution picked up the same story which my brother had been exposing for a long time, ran some articles on it and won the Pulitzer Prize with it. His was a little six to eight page paper that he had created. It was a struggle financially; he did most of the writing for it. Parks was editor for two or three years of the English language paper in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil; he was editor and publisher of a Miami Beach newspaper. Then he came back home to Georgia and built a little cottage up on our old homeplace in Cherokee County and did public relations work including professional work for political campaigns. He is a very shrewd grass roots political analyst and so he has worked for a number of candidates over the years and has also been involved in various bond issues and other referenda questions before the voters. He is an extraordinarily able fellow and although he hasn't had formal schooling, he knows a great deal about what is going on in the world and is widely read and is a very interesting person indeed. My next older brother Roger went to Tech High School in Atlanta. He had a special interest in

mathematics and technical engineering matters. From there he went to Nacoochee School, a Presbyterian school up in the mountains of north Georgia and then went to Maryville

College in Tennessee, which was a college run by the Northern Presbyterian Church. Then, I think he did some graduate studies at the University of Tennessee and became professor of physics at Tennessee where he spent the rest of his life. He retired as professor of physics at the University of Tennessee and has done some very imaginative things about training school teachers who teach physics and devised a good many interesting experiments built on materials that anyone could get from any local 5 and 10 cents store. I have run across a good many people who studied with him at the University of Tennessee and they all speak of him in the highest terms. My younger sister Helen was perhaps the one in the family that I was closest to because we were nearer the same age and growing up at the bottom of the ladder as far as the children were concerned; so we were very close as children.

She was a lovely girl. She attended Girls' High School in Atlanta. Helen went to Maryville College and there she met a wonderful young man named Richard Orr who was on the way to becoming a minister. Then Richard Orr volunteered for the chaplaincy in World War II and went out to the South Pacific and was in places like New Guinea and places of that sort and developed aplastic anemia and died during the war. After a time, Helen married a very fine man named James Perkins who was working with the railroad retirement program and they lived first in Nashville and then in Memphis. In 1981, my sister Helen developed cancer and we lost her. In early 1982, my sister Margaret went to sleep one night and did not wake up. She was eighty-two years old at the time. We all thought that she was going to outlive all of us--she almost did. But we were a rather close family although we were not a demonstrative family. I always treasured my relations with my brothers and sisters. I was in India for two years during the war and in 1944 while I was in India, my father died at the age of seventy-four of a heart attack. My mother lived to be eighty-four and died in Atlanta while I was at the Rockefeller Foundation. By and large the Rusks have tended to live relatively long lives.

I suppose the two men who most influenced me along the way were Robert E. Lee and George Marshall. It is almost pretentious to say that because I had no thought that I could ever equal either one of them. Robert E. Lee was something of an idol for most of us in the South when I was growing up. He was looked upon as one of those southern gentlemen who had extraordinary qualities of both decision and character--gentle in nature most of the time but firm when firmness was required. He proved to be a brilliant technician during the Civil War but steady erosion of manpower and resources brought him to defeat which was so important to the health of the country as a whole. It would have been a great tragedy if the Confederacy had won the Civil War. Douglas Southall Freeman's great four volume biography of Robert E. Lee was something that I always treasured and have read more than once. I read it when it first came out in the 1930s. After the Civil War was over, Robert E. Lee helped to found Washington and Lee University and participated in founding the college fraternity of which I am a member, Kappa Alpha, the first chapter of which was at Washington and Lee. The motto of Kappa Alpha is *Deux et les dames*, but the other fraternities translate it as "my God the women." But he was an authentic folk hero. I said earlier on the tapes that Robert E. Lee had been an officer in the Union Army and at the time of the Civil War was offered command of the Union forces, but he could not bring himself to fight against his own family and friends and people in Virginia so he joined

the Confederacy, but he was furious with the politicians who had allowed the Civil War to develop.

He was convinced that this was a war which could have been avoided. It might have been had there been concessions on both sides but there was a pride among southern leaders that caused them to be pretty stiff-necked when controversies arose and sometimes they let their own rhetoric get away from them. This made it difficult for them to make concessions and there were radical northerners who were not in any mood to compromise. As a matter of fact, it was these radical northerners who were largely responsible for the penal period which we often call the Reconstruction period at the end of the Civil War. There was a rigidity of view on both sides that made compromise very difficult. But pride has been one of the qualities which was sometimes the burden of southerners. It had its place but there were times when it was overdone. George Catlett Marshall was one of the most extraordinary men in public life that one could encounter. He was a great teacher about the public service and how it should be conducted; both by his example and by little remarks he would make from time to time. He had been chief of staff of the army during the grueling days of World War II. Churchill had called him the principal architect of victory in World War II, and he had every right to retire on his laurels.

But President Truman asked him to go off to China to try to bring about some kind of reconciliation with the Chiang Kai-shek government and the Communists. He went out there on what was predictably an impossible mission and worked very hard trying to find a basis for agreement between those two sides to try to avoid a civil war in China. He came away rather disgusted with both sides. The failure of his mission was not due in any way to lack of effort and good judgment on his part. The two sides just were not going to agree with each other. While he was in China, President Truman sent him a cable asking him to become secretary of state and in typical George Marshall fashion he said, "Yes, Mr. President." So he came in the early part of 1947 to take over the job as secretary of state. He did not bring with him a substantial group of people who were so-called "Marshall men"--he did ask for Robert [Abercrombie] Lovett to be undersecretary of state, Robert Lovett having been assistant for air during World War II in the Pentagon. And there were two or three lesser people: Marshall Carter came over to be his own personal assistant in the office of the secretary, he asked me to come over and take charge of United Nations Affairs but he had not expected to be or planned to be secretary of state so he had not developed a team to bring over with him.

He tried to reduce things to their simplicities. For example, he expected any recommendations that we brought to him to be set out on a single page. Now you could have annexes and tabs and things of that sort in case you wanted to provide material which he could read further, but he felt that unless we had thought through the problem to the point where we could reduce the essence of the problem to the space of one page that we had not thought about it enough. It was one of his ways of training us to bore into a matter and to find out what the central question was. There were times when we when we would cheat a little on his one page idea by using legal length paper, single spacing instead of double spacing and narrowing the margins, cramming as much as we could onto one page, but he was very insistent on that. It was very good intellectual discipline for those around him.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you operate the same thing as secretary of state?

DEAN RUSK: Not quite. I tried to insist on brevity but I felt that the one page thing was a little too restrictive for complicated questions. Marshall had a great respect for language, for words. He always had an unabridged dictionary at his elbow at his desk and he would constantly search through it for exactly the right word that he wanted to express himself. He didn't believe in using ten words if you could say what you meant in three. I remember when I first went to work for him, I took up to him a draft reply to a letter he had received and my draft reply said in effect, "Dr. Mr. Brown: I have read with much appreciation your letter of March 18. I feel that" and I went on with the letter and he stopped me right there. He said, "Now wait a minute, Rusk, I didn't receive his letter, you did and I didn't appreciate it one bit, so let's strike that out. Let's just say, I have received your letter." And he said, "I feel, I don't have feelings about questions of public policy, if I think it, let's say I think it." But everybody who worked for him has mementoes in the form of drafts which he had corrected in trying to tune up the language to be precise and exactly to the point. He kept his official relationships and personal relationships very distinct. He always stayed at arm's length with people above him and with people who were working under him. He was very strongly of the view that personal relationships should not have anything to do with the merits of policy issues.

He always called us by our last name, but never by first names. Once President Roosevelt apparently called him George and he said "It's General Marshall, Mr. President." I think one of the reasons for that, among other things, is that during World War II, he had to relieve some of his own classmates and some of his own best friends in the army because they were not able to cut the mustard, so he wanted to keep just a little arm's length from colleagues while he was carrying out official responsibility. I tried to follow that a bit in my own experience and developed a reputation for being aloof or enigmatic as a result of it. He almost never complimented anybody who was working under him while he was working under him. After that relationship had ceased, no one could be more generous or appreciative than George Marshall. The nearest I ever came to a compliment from George Marshall when I was working under him was in Paris while the United Nations was meeting in 1948. One morning about three o'clock, I was awakened in my hotel room by the message center from over at the embassy and was told by them that there was an "Eyes Only" telegram from President Truman to Secretary Marshall and it appeared to require an immediate answer. So I got some clothes on and went over to the code room and picked up the message. It did indeed need an answer so I went over to General Marshall's quarters at the hotel and woke him up about four o'clock in the morning. He put on the bathrobe and slippers and came out and read over the incoming message and then looked at my draft reply and made a few changes. As I was leaving the room to go back to the message center to send off his reply he said, "Rusk, there are times when I think you earn your pay." Well, since I was making about \$9,000 a year at the time that was not so effusive a compliment as to interfere in the merits of any policy question. But after he left office, I visited him and he couldn't have been more warm and friendly and interested in what was going on. George Marshall was a great delegator of responsibility.

He took the view that he, as secretary of state, should do only those things which only the secretary can do. If anybody else could do it, he would expect them to do it. That meant that he would go home at four-thirty or five o'clock in the afternoon. Of course, he had a great undersecretary in Robert Lovett, who was in every sense fully qualified to be secretary of state

himself. But he delegated and if he found that he could not delegate effectively to a particular person, he would get somebody else to whom he thought he could delegate, but he was very strong on it. There is a story that illustrates this point having to do with D-Day and the Normandy landings. There was apparently a colonel on duty at the operations center in the Pentagon. Sometime early in the morning, about two or three o'clock, the flash came in from General Eisenhower saying that he had made the decision to begin the landing. So this colonel picked up the phone and called General Marshall over at his quarters at Ft. Myers and said, "General, we have the message from General Eisenhower that you have been waiting for, let's go." George Marshall said, "Colonel, what do you want me to do about it?" and the colonel said, "Nothing sir." "Then why did you call?" In other words, there was something that was in Eisenhower's hands; there was nothing that Marshall could do at that point, it was Eisenhower's responsibility. I had a little sympathy with the colonel at that point because I think that it is possible I would have thought that if I had not called Marshall that he would have asked me the next morning why I didn't.

One point I have copied General Marshall; when I became secretary of state, I made the decision and announced it at the time that I would never write memoirs. There are many reasons for it. I wanted leaders of other governments to know that if they wanted to talk to me in confidence, they could do so and I wouldn't run out and write a book about it. Memoirs tend to be self-serving and I don't have much taste for that kind of writing. Memoirs can only contain a fragment of the story, of what really went on, particularly for someone who served there for eight years. I have other things I want to do with my life rather than knuckle down for a considerable period over the laborious business of writing that kind of book, in this sense I copied General Marshall. He was once asked about whether he would write memoirs and he said, "No. If I were to write memoirs, I would owe it to myself as a matter of personal integrity to tell the full truth, but if I were to tell the full truth, I would injure a great many people including myself; therefore, I will leave this job to the historians." Marshall had a rather wry sense of humor. For example, I was flying with him from Washington up to the United Nations in New York on a little DC-3 airplane and we were sitting across the aisle from each other on the plane. He reached into his briefcase and pulled out a bunch of papers and passed them over to me and said, "This is a speech the department has prepared for me to use in New York tomorrow; look it over and see what you think."

Well, just as I began to read this draft speech, the plane got into some turbulence and began to bounce around and I simply cannot do that kind of work on a plane in turbulent weather without getting air sick so I handed the papers back to Marshall and said, "If I were to read these now, I would get sick, I will take a look at them when we get to New York." He said nothing but put the papers back into his briefcase. But when we got to New York, he sent a telegram back to the department saying, "Rusk says this speech makes him sick, get me another one." Of course, that made me very popular with the department at that point. During the administration of Franklin [Delano] Roosevelt there grew up something called New Deal resignations. People would go in to Franklin Roosevelt and offer to resign for the purpose of getting a fresh vote of confidence from FDR or to put some pressure on him on particular policy points. It was a form of blackmail that people used freely on Franklin Roosevelt. Marshall would have none of that kind of thing. Soon after he became secretary of state, a senior officer of the department came in and made some policy proposals to him and then added that if Marshall could not see fit to take that line of

policy, then the officer felt that he could no longer be of any use in the department and would have to resign. Marshall said, "Mr. So and So, whether you or I work for the government of the United States has nothing whatever to do with the merits of this question. So let's remove this irrelevancy. I accept your resignation, effective now. Now, that is done. If you wish to spend a few minutes with me talking about the merits of this problem, I would be grateful." So no one ever pulled a New Deal kind of resignation after that on George Marshall. No president or cabinet officer should allow that to be done to him because it is a form of pressure which is wholly irrelevant to the merits of the issues that are before those high officials.

At one point, Harry Truman pulled the rug out from under George Marshall pretty badly on a matter involving what was then called the Palestine issue. Some of his friends told George Marshall that they thought he ought to resign. He said, "No gentlemen, you do not take a post of this sort and then resign when the man who has the constitutional responsibility for making a decision, makes one. You can resign at any other time for any other reason, including no reason at all but you can't resign on that account." Well, that is the extreme view of what I would call constitutional discipline as it relates to the president and the handling of the Executive branch of the government. After all, the first sentence of Article II of the Constitution reads, "The Executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." Period. It is the president who is elected by all the people to give direction to the Executive branch of the government within the laws of the Constitution. That is fundamental to our constitutional system. When we were in Paris in 1948 for the meeting of the United Nations, both General Assembly and Security Council, the American delegation was housed in a small, pretty crummy little hotel not too far from the hall where the U.N. was meeting. It had been completely gutted by the Germans for all of the metal, for example, the pipes and the radiators, and all the rest of it and it was about as bare a place as one can imagine. Secretary Marshall's office was in a corner room which could only be approached by going through either one or two dilapidated bathrooms. No rug on the floor, the barest of furniture and we once suggested to Secretary Marshall that he should have more adequate space. He said, "Oh no.

Those foreign ministers, who are living over at the Ritz Hotel, who want to come over here to borrow a billion dollars, should see where I am living." On one occasion, Secretary Marshall had received a long and rather unwelcome telegram from Mr. Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary. It fell to me to draft a reply and I mustered my wit and eloquence and wrote a reply that just took Mr. Bevin to pieces; just left him nothing to hang on--told him what was what. I took this draft reply up to George Marshall and he looked it over and paused a moment and then turned to me and said, "Rusk, this is a very able telegram and I am sure you enjoyed drafting it. But I am not going to send this kind of message to my friend Bevin. Write me another one." Another piece of the example that George Marshall set for the rest of us about public service had to do with the period after he had left the office of secretary of state and retired to Virginia with uncertain health; he had had an operation.

RICHARD RUSK: Is this why he left his office?

DEAN RUSK: Largely, but then in the middle of the Korean War, President Truman decided that Secretary of Defense Louis [Arthur] Johnson was not the same man that he wanted on the job and he asked George Marshall to come back for a period as secretary of defense and

Marshall once again said, "Yes, Mr. President, if that is what you want, I will do it." Marshall was very clear about relationships; how public business should be transacted. For example, President Truman had his famous differences with General Douglas MacArthur and he was in the process of thinking it all out and deciding what to do and talking with senior cabinet people. In one of these sessions, Secretary Marshall said, "Mr. President, General MacArthur is a general in our army on active duty, you are entitled to have a recommendation from your Joint Chiefs of Staff on this matter. I suggest you ask them for one."

So Truman asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their recommendation and they unanimously recommended that MacArthur be relieved. But it illustrates the clarity of Marshall's own thinking about matters of that sort. Marshall and I were on a train going from Washington to New York on one occasion and as we went through that rather long tunnel, railroad tunnel, between Washington and Baltimore, he smiled and said, "I think of this as the 'Black Jack' Pershing tunnel," and I waited for an explanation. He said that after World War I, when he was an aid in Washington to General Pershing, they were with a group of socialites on a special car going from Washington to New York and he said, "As we approached this tunnel, Pershing called me over and said, 'Marshall, when we go through that tunnel, you keep Mrs. So and So off of me.'" He smiled and said, "I always think of 'Black Jack' Pershing when we go through this tunnel." On one occasion when we were reminiscing about various things, which Marshall was willing to do when one was traveling with him, he remarked that his rough rule of thumb in World War II was to that Empire--these little notions of freedom. It was not possible for the British to have such a strong and active democratic system in England and to impose imperial rule in other parts of the world, so I think the collapse of the British Empire was built into the very nature of the British political system, but of course it didn't really happen in any major way until the end of World War II. In my time at Oxford there were, of course, a great many foreign students studying there. Many of them from Commonwealth countries.

As a matter of fact each of the Commonwealth countries had been assigned a Rhodes scholar, at least one, some more. And there were a good many Indian students studying at Oxford. They formed their own club, I think it was called the Lotus Club. There were Germans, there were people from the Continent, there were blacks from Africa and other places; it was a very cosmopolitan kind of student congregation there in the 1930s and I got to know a good many of these people from outside of England. Now the thirty-two Rhodes scholars who went to England each year were distributed among these many colleges. Maybe each college would take one or two of the incoming Rhodes scholars so that any given time a college would have say three or four maybe five American Rhodes scholars. We theoretically were attached to Rhodes House where the secretary of the Rhodes Trust lived and where we got together maybe once or twice a year; but by in large the American Rhodes scholars did not collect with each other very much. Of course, we knew those who were within each our own college but social life was largely a matter that took place within each college. There was some exchange, because we had a lot of sports events and there were archery clubs and dramatic clubs and all sorts of things that brought people back and forth across college lines but most of the friends we made were Englishmen and people from other countries rather than Americans; I think that was very good because it meant that we

Americans over there did not just draw ourselves up into a little puddle of Americans and try to live as if there were no such place as England. I value that experience in England because I came

away with a very deep respect for England based upon knowing a lot more about what I like about England and what I did not like about England. Well, I liked the way the English took everything in a kind of laid back kind of fashion. They didn't get unduly excited about what was going on; of course that was before television and things might have changed a good deal since then. They respected each other's privacy; they did not intrude upon you in any way; each person was very much on his own. As a matter of fact, there were a minimal number of rules about personal conduct at Oxford. If somebody wanted to drink himself to death, the University couldn't care less, it was up to him. If he wanted to flunk out, if he wanted to fail, they just let him fail. When you went there they said now here is this degree you want, if you want this degree, you pass that exam, it is about a four day exam, if you want that degree. You could take that exam at the end of two years, three years, or four years, they didn't much care. If you passed that exam, you got that degree, if you didn't, you didn't. There were no such things as grades for each term or course grades and things of that sort. They had a very strong lecture program in all subjects, in all fields. Each term the University would print up a big sheet of lectures to be offered during that term and you could look it over and decide which ones you would like to attend.

You might attend those that were directly related to your own examination that was coming up or you might branch out and listen in lectures that were in wholly different fields. And the lectures were given in the halls of the different colleges so often you had to go off the other colleges to attend a particular lecture.

RICHARD RUSK: Did you prefer the English system to the American?

DEAN RUSK: In general, I prefer the English system of grading and not grading and the awarding of degrees. For example, at Oxford those who do the examining are not those who do the teaching. They use outside examiners. The result is that there develops an alliance between your tutor and yourself over against that common, external enemy -the outside examiner. Whereas in our system where each professor gives the exam and gives the grades at the end of each course, you cannot avoid a period of tension between teacher and student and I think I prefer the Oxford system.

RICHARD RUSK: Getting back to the overall impression that England made on you, what were some of the things you cared for or didn't care for there?

DEAN RUSK: Well there was a great sense of roots in England, a great sense of history. It was, after all, British parliamentary institutions developed over a period of centuries beginning with Magna Carta. They had worked out at considerable cost and at times considerable cost of life a way to transform the notion that the "King can do no wrong" into the notion that "If it is wrong the King cannot do it."

They succeeded in imposing upon the exercise of raw power, democratic restraints rooted in the electorate itself. The Common Law was a great tradition that is part of the English fabric and it was very exciting to read about some of those old British judges in the early days, putting their arms around the prisoner at the bar and at the risk of their own lives saying to the King, "You cannot do this to this man," so we who value institutions of freedom have an enormous historical

root in the British experience. After all their Petition of Rights and Bill of Rights preceded our own Bill of Rights and Constitution and so it is not for nothing that the Parliament over there is called the Mother of Parliaments. During my years at Oxford you could still observe what remained of a class system. Most of the undergraduates at Oxford were gentlemen by origin but it was not worn on their sleeves and they didn't make a great deal out of it, possibly because they simply took it for granted. But those who were in the so-called lower classes, the tradesmen, the scouts, the servants around the college and so forth also more or less took it for granted and did not presume to be anything else. And so, one was not confronted daily with what would appear to be injustices based upon a class system. Over the years as more and more state financing became available for scholarships and things of that sort, the class structure at Oxford and Cambridge has changed considerably because a great many young people on the basis of state scholarships can now compete to go to Oxford who in my day would never have dreamed about the possibility of going to such places.

There were puddles of privilege that one encountered. When I was secretary of state, I went to London and was visiting with our Ambassador David [Kirkpatrick Este] Bruce and he took me around to his club for lunch and when we entered the door of the club the mayordomo there said very quietly to Ambassador Bruce, "I am very sorry Mr. Ambassador, but your guest is not welcome here." And Ambassador Bruce said, "But this is the Secretary of State of the United States," and the man said, "Well I'm very sorry, but he will not be welcome here in the club." Whereupon I laughed and said, "Well that's not the way we do it in the Century Club in New York." "Oh," he said, "you're a member of the Century Club, please come in." I mentioned the afternoon sports in which we all took part. One thing that I liked to do was to get on a bicycle and peddle around the countryside because Oxford is located in beautiful, beautiful country, particularly the constable where every turn in the road gave you a lovely view so I did a lot of biking through the countryside and found it fascinating, usually stopping off somewhere in some little pub for tea before coming home. During one vacation some of us, about eight or ten of us, went on a reading party up in the lake district of England, up in Wordsworth country.

And I decided to grow a beard and it turned out to be red and bushy. Well, we had an old motorbike up there and one day I put on an American helmet that I used in lacrosse and strapped it down over this beard and put on an American sweatshirt and some old baggy pants and got on the motorbike and went off for a little ride around the countryside. I stopped in what we would call a filling station to get some petrol gasoline for my motorbike. While I was there, a big limousine drove up for some gas and a lady with a lorgnette in the back seat and she looked at me very intently through the window from the back seat in the car and they drove on off. When I got back to camp where we were staying,

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