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Interview of William F. Burns, Major General USA

William F. Burns
La Salle University

Brian Carlson
La Salle University

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FIELD NOTES

Interviewee: Major General William F. Burns

Interviewer: Brian Carlson

Interview Date: March 26, 2011

Interview Location: General Burn's home in Carlisle, Pennsylvania

The Interviewee:

General Burns was enrolled in La Salle University's Army ROTC program. Burns was the first distinguished ROTC graduate in school history. He commissioned as a Field Artillery officer in 1954. From there, General Burns began his military career, which include, posts at: Fort Bragg, Fort Sill, United States Army War College, Princeton University and Germany. He retired in 1988 as a Major General in the United States Army. President Reagan nominated Gen Burns as the Director for Arms Control Agency in 1988. During this time he spent countless hours negotiating arms control with the Soviets for example, in Geneva. In his later years he has served on advisory committees such as being a member of La Salle's Board of Trustees. He still resides in Carlisle, PA where he has lived for twenty years.

The Interviewer:

I, Brian Carlson (b. 1988 in Modesto, CA), grew up in Stanislaus County, CA. I earned a B.A. in Political Science and History and minor degrees in Japanese and Asian Studies from La Salle University in 2010. I left California to pursue a graduate degree in history at La Salle University. While attending graduate school, I earned a job in the finance department of the university. I remain close with my family members that still maintain residence in California and visit them as often as possible.

Background:

I became interested in interviewing General Burns due to his career in the United States Army and my involvement with the ROTC. General Burns graduated from La Salle and also graduated from the La Salle ROTC program. He is still very much involved with the program, and during my junior year of college the La Salle cadets journeyed to his home and met with him personally at the United States War College. During the meeting at the War College we were briefed on ongoing operations at Afghanistan by the commandant of the war college. We were also given a personal tour by General Burns of the grounds of the War College. I also wanted to conduct this interview to preserve his record of his involvement with the ROTC program at La Salle, and also to obtain a record of his time as director of the United States Arms Control Agency.

Description of the Interview:

I arrived in Carlisle, PA on March 26, 2010 at 10:00am at Major General Burn's residence. Upon driving down his driveway, I noticed army memorabilia such as shell casing of artillery rounds and canons. His house was situated on at least 2 acres of land. I proceeded to walk to his front door and knocked; he answered, and escorted me to his study.

In his study, the fireplace was burning, books surrounded all four walls, and numerous pictures of foreign dignitaries. General Burns, offered me refreshments, in which I declined. He explained his busy schedule of the ongoing Libyan crisis, and that his future travels to Moscow for further negotiations with the Russians.

For the interview I used a digital RCA voice recorder. He sat in his burgundy chair, I sat on the couch across from him. As we were conducting the interview, I was worried that his soft-spoken voice would not be recorded well. Gen Burns seemed very confident with his recollection of memories.

We conducted the interview for 2 hours 45 minutes, in which there were two interruptions. One was his son calling and the other was the Department of Defense calling to confirm his travel arrangements. After the interview was conducted, he showed me some photographs of his son, Ambassador to Syria. I ate lunch with him and his wife. I thank him, and then was on my way.

Follow-up:

There was no follow-up because General Burns was out of the country without any way to contact him. I will be sending him a copy of the transcription.

Note on recording:

For recording, I used my RCA model VR5220-A voice recorder on battery power. This recorder was the only device I used during the interview. After I arrived home, I connected the RCA recorder by USB port to my Toshiba laptop and uploaded the audio files for storage in *wav* format. I then created an audio CD. I used NCH Express Scribe software for transcription. Finally, I reviewed the transcript at normal speed three times.

Editing the Transcript

My editing decisions included:

- 1) Kept repeated words to show the deep thinking by Gen Burns
- 2) Eliminated all umms, huhs and you knows for a clearer reading
- 3) Did not type out WWII to have the reading be much clearer
- 4) Had a time sequence on each page.
- 5) Used footnotes to add additional information
- 6) Brackets used to show difficulty in understanding audio

- 7) Did not ask for permission to record after each file. This was done out of request by Gen Burns because easier to finish a thought if the phone rang.
- 8) Kept the usage of “Anyway” used by Gen Burn a lot to show his style of speech
- 9) Did not ask for early life history such as Birth date and family information because this had already been recorded by a pervious student. I mentioned this on the audio file.
- 10) Noted General Burns as WFB, and myself as BC during transcribing
- 11) Pages were numbered
- 12) Phone interruptions were indicated each time
- 13) Main emphasis of the interview was ROTC, Army career then time in the State Department.
- 14) Did not talk much about his time in Vietnam because emphasis was put on later military career
- 15) Gave Gen Burns a copy of questions and was told what he could talk about and what he couldn't. Therefore, at points in the interview remarks were left without a follow-up out of request from Gen Burns.
- 16) A dash indicates an awkward transition in the middle of a sentence
- 17) All abbreviations were used for military rank such as Lt. Col for Lieutenant Colonel, Capt. for Captain and Lt. for Lieutenant. Did this so a more military feel was given to the readings. This was a direct representation to what I felt from Gen Burns stories.
- 18) **Bold** to indicate emphasis
- 19) Slang words like “wanna” was kept in the transcription.