INTERVIEWEE NAME: Lieutenant Colonel John Masters

COLLECTION: 4700.0610 Tape 892 (Tape 2 of 2)

IDENTIFICATION: Briton in Pre-Independence India

INTERVIEWERS: Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

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OTHER MATERIALS: None

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Tape 892, Side A
Masters (Part 2 of 3)

001 the position of principal at the public school gave a sense of duty and carrying out responsibility; you are given a job to do and you do it unsupervised

008 British in India were given more responsibility than anywhere else; there isn’t a job that compares to a district commissioner

012 went out to India at nineteen, did his years of attachment; before his twentieth, he went from commanding a platoon of twenty-five to thirty British soldiers to commanding a company when he joined his Indian regiment; had two companies to command because the other commanding officer was away on leave

018 three years later, was in charge of one hundred soldiers, wives and training recruits

021 the British public school system, as it was working in his time, was a considerable help in achieving his accomplishments

023 it gave people confidence; it goes back to a racist idea: that every British institution is perfect

029 life at the stations was very isolated; there were no movies, theaters; part of the problem was the stations were so small due to the small number of civil citizens; average civil
station had two government people in it, if you take away the army troops; there may be one or two civilians

civilian with a capital “C” meant a member of the Indian Civil Service; a civilian with a small “c” was one who bought, sold, and traded things

wife went to Shahapur where there was an arms factory and rum factory; there were many civilians there to help run the factories

military is always different; in the hot weather there would be six of them, twelve in the winter; there were no civilians in some places

in the north, there were relatively few isolated civil stations; in the south and east parts of India, there were hundreds of civil stations

in some of the larger places, a traveling judge would come

you had to know your position: senior wife would decide when it was time for the women to leave the dinner table; you went to the bathroom according to seniority

India could be considered a sub-culture because it had its own rules

he doesn’t believe in allegories or heavily loaded symbolism; did try to create a broad canvas of British India and the Indians in it; if you read it all, you would have a good idea of what it looked like, smelt like, and felt like to be there and live through it

there were moral dilemmas in India, mostly sexual ones; there was real problem of sexuality because there was a sexual imbalance: there were about twenty men for each woman; women had a hard time, especially in trying to retain their virtue

in a broader sense, the only thing that separates India from anywhere else is the dilemma of wondering why you were there, especially if you were sensitive; didn’t bother many people because it was just part of history

in the long run, he believes British occupation didn’t do any harm, but did some good.

a good ICS officer was considered good because he was aware of the dilemma of wondering why he was there

Philip Mason was a friend of his wife’s; was deputy minister of defense in Delhi when Masters was there; wrote *Call the Next Witness*; those books shows the awareness of the dilemmas; he sensed a moral dilemma and solved it

deals with inept administrators in some of the situations in his book because of the real life ideals: soldier always disagrees with administrators

for example, when there’s war on the Northwest Frontier, the political agent’s interests are with the enemy because those are the people they like; they would not be any good if they didn’t associate themselves with the private point of view

however, when they are out there getting men killed, they don’t think it is funny

military necessity and outlook is always different and the political agents are always their superiors, unless the situation gets completely out of hand and they are called upon

ICS was magnificent service; there were some that were not as good because they were indecisive; Masters wanted to show that and believes facts of history will show how good the ICS did

in some cases, if you did not have a bad administrator, you would not have any crises and therefore no story

discuss some of his characters and their desire to be “odd men out”; Robin has to leave because he cannot be tied down; William has to act alone and become almost like an Indian; if someone is going to be like that, he must obviously be different from the other “hearty fellows”
the more extraordinary the person is, the more you have to differentiate him from the ordinary people
doesn’t know if William could have passed as an Indian; Richard Burton, who was an officer in the Indian army, was able to do so
problem with having an outstanding character while making it typical of the way the British felt; overcame it by making reader realize he was not particularly bright and enjoyed being alone
to some, India was an overwhelming place, but only in later generations; there was enormous confidence in race and religion
Indian culture is non-absorptive; as tempting as it is for you to “sink back” into India, they would not accept you; you could not do it in at least two generations; the Skinners, who were once English, are now Indian because they married Indian and have not married British
in general, if you had a long ties to India, you did not have a problem of deciding what was home; England was home because you were born and educated there; Masters never thought of India as home: it was where he worked
Molly’s motivation was to reveal two points of view without having two characters: one character can be both English and Indian if he has this background; suppose it’s an extension of the need for tension
discuss book and character William Savage; moral dilemma was between a good, moral guy who went out to investigate murders, only to find himself doing them
would say that staying in India after independence would be a bad idea for some British, but the alternatives could have been worse; tells about the old English women that had apparently married Indians and were widows: suppose they could not face going back to England
many rest houses in India, especially going up the hills
going back and staying with the army is great; the rest of India is a mess because some things don’t work; in the army, things do work
the army has retained some of the old traditions; only trouble is that English is now being taught third hand; modern Indian army corporal or general has difficulty, reflected mostly in their writings
civilians are in fear that the army is going to take them over; some general made the comment that the civilians were crazy because the English did not want to take over the awful mess that has developed there
far more aware of problems of dismantling an empire verses constructing one
in Thunder at Sunset, posed a problem from a previous, unpublished book: the hereditary queen of a fictional area declares her state part of the United States; would have made good platform for some of the American problems
similarities between the hereditary queen and the English ambassador sent with orders to get rid of a country at all costs; soldiers decide they cannot carry out orders because the ambassador can’t really do it
he thinks of himself as an American writer, which may be different from being an American; he could not have become a writer unless he had come to America
as long as he stayed in England, he was trapped in a certain pattern; he was going to be either Commander and Chief of the Indian army or CIGS of the British army because he is
a Master’s
463 decided the typical jobs he would have taken were not for him
480 was asked to take up politics after leaving the army, but he could not figure out what he was
485 going to do for a living; turned it down
492 coming to America made him see England through eyes that saw it, not those that live there
he is known more in England than America; anyone who is interested in India has read his
510 American image of India has changed, due mostly to events; those that are interested in
522 India of the past will have a modified view of India;
533 the prime source of India for everyone is Kipling; you have a definite picture, drawn in
distinct colors of India
554 when talking about the modern American view of India, they are discussing those people
that are in their sixties or older; very few people under sixty have read Kipling; younger
people get their information from television and news; their views are incomplete
everyone of Master’s generation and before had some real contact with India; there were
587 many people passing through and bringing things back; enormous connections with India
back then
most famous story is the two Anglo-Indians in England discussing an old man in
593 Hindustani; when the man gets up, he makes a reply to them; you couldn’t speak
Hindustani anywhere in England if you wanted to be secretive because it was more
frequently known than French or Spanish
606 modern British outlook is formed by fact that three-fourths of the doctors in Bradford are
Indian;
611 there are racial feelings against them now, whereas back then there was not; most evident
at his last job, where the Indians would all show up working the same types of jobs:
railways, buses, transport
624 end of tape

No recording on Tape 892, Side B