



First Captain

"This institution gave me not only a standard for my daily conduct among men, but it endowed me with a military heritage of honor and self-sacrifice."

SOMEWHERE in the course of growing up the idea of becoming a soldier occurred to George Marshall. At some point he considered the idea more or less seriously, though it is impossible to guess—and he himself did not remember—when or how deeply he thought about it. In any case he got no encouragement. His father and mother were opposed.¹ Certainly the chances could not have seemed bright to achieve distinction in a professional army of twenty-five thousand, which was no longer needed to fight Indians and seemed to face only a penurious future as a dubious sort of constabulary.

The elder Marshall could see other objections. He thought it would be politically difficult, if not impossible, to get an appointment to West Point, the only sure road to an Army commission. He was a Democrat, locally prominent as a Democrat. Uniontown's representative, Ernest Acheson, was a Republican² and so were Pennsylvania's two senators, Boies Penrose and Matthew Quay. Even though the competitive examination system used by Mr. Acheson in selecting his nominees for the Military Academy seemed fair to so partisan an observer as the Democratic editor

of the *Genius of Liberty*,³ Marshall was unwilling to risk a political rebuff. His reluctance was possibly reinforced by doubts that George would do well in the competitive examinations. The boy remained a poor or, at best, erratic student, and it was made clear that the applicant, on the basis of tests administered by the county superintendents of the congressional district (two of whom were Democrats and two Republicans), would be selected with special care.⁴ For whatever reason, George Marshall never applied for West Point.⁵

The idea of attending the Virginia Military Institute was an early one and does not seem to have been connected with thoughts of a military career. In 1897 the Institute offered courses in civil engineering, chemistry, and electrical engineering. Although students lived in barracks and followed a strict military routine, the purpose was the inculcation of discipline and not preparation for a military life. Indeed, graduation from VMI at this time not only offered no assurance of a commission; it offered little reasonable hope. In 1890 not more than ten VMI graduates were on duty with the regular Army.⁶

The Institute's military traditions were more intimately linked with the Confederate past. It seemed to many Southerners (and even to some Northerners) to be the guardian of some of the nobler traditions of the lost cause, and particularly the ideal of pure, brave, and self-sacrificing manhood. So it seemed to Colonel Charles Marshall, a distant cousin, who had been Lee's aide. George later believed that the colonel was mainly responsible for persuading his father of the virtues of VMI. In Uniontown, VMI had an enthusiastic supporter in James Hustead, whose son Ed was one of George's companions. Hustead, commanding a detachment of Northern troops at the Battle of New Market, had been so impressed with the gallantry of the contingent of cadets who fought there that he pressed his own two sons to go to VMI.⁷ The older one, Albert, yielded but stuck it out for only three years. Ed would not go at all. It was some solace to Captain Hustead when Stuart Marshall decided to enroll and still more when George came along later.⁸ Stuart did well in the Institute's chemistry course and on his graduation in 1894 took a job as chemist in the main iron works at Dunbar.

The VMI road was thus prepared and there was apparently no pull in any other direction. But George Marshall believed that his own resolution was only hardened at last by an incident which affected him so strongly that sixty years later he recalled it with unique intensity of feeling. "When I was begging to go to VMI," he said, "I overheard Stuart talking to my mother; he was trying to persuade her not to let me go because he thought I would disgrace the family name. Well, that made more impression on me than all instructors, parental pressure, or anything else. I decided right then that I was going to wipe his eye." And, the general concluded with satisfaction, "I did finally get ahead of what my brother had done. That was the first time I had ever done that, and it was where I really learned my lesson. The urgency to succeed came from hearing that conversation; it had a psychological effect on my career."

His mind was made up but the means were still to be found. It is clear that sending George to college at all put a great strain on the family resources. To get him started, Mrs. Marshall at the last minute sold some land in Augusta.⁹ The next year she sold a lot in Uniontown next to the Gilmores' on which she had hoped someday to build a house of her own.¹⁰ Even so they had to scrape for the tuition. Mr. Marshall in the middle of the first year wrote the superintendent, General Scott Shipp, apologizing for "the grace taken" in sending his check; his own collections, he explained wryly, were "very slow under McKinley prosperity."¹¹

On the other hand, there were no academic bars even high enough to bother an applicant with young George's poor scholastic record. The chief hurdle was an examination given personally by Superintendent Shipp, who cared more about an applicant's background than his academic achievement. One of Marshall's contemporaries, the son of a Confederate veteran, missed every question General Shipp asked but was nevertheless admitted after his father pledged to remove him at Christmastime if by that time he was not doing well. There is no record that George took any examination at all. He bore a great Virginia name (there were seven other Marshalls at VMI during the time he was there); his father had a solid local standing (the superintendent was always careful to address him as "Colonel"), and Stuart had made a

satisfactory record. George's principal difficulty—once the tuition money was found—was a bout with typhoid fever that made him miss the opening of school by several days. On September 11 Mr. Marshall at last wrote Superintendent Shipp: "I send you my youngest and last. He is bright, full of life, and I believe will get along well." ¹²

In the round, and omitting a number of uncomfortable details of four years in a school dedicated to the Spartan thesis of building men, it was a fair prognosis and, in fact, from a father, a considerable understatement. There was no doubt that George Marshall was bright, eager to get along well, and perhaps for the first time in his life placed in an environment that gave him confidence. When he arrived and made the long walk down along the parade ground toward the towered and crenelated yellow stucco barracks of VMI he was stopped by the notes of a bugle sounding assembly. Out onto the tree-lined ground strutted the adjutant and sergeant major and set the line on which the cadet battalion, already then in residence more than a week, would form for dress parade. The boy watching—he was still only sixteen, tall, gangling, shy—felt excited and happy. "They were very wonderful-looking figures to me." The next day he wrote his father that he was not homesick and thought he would like it.

Perhaps Superintendent Shipp found him with the excitement of that moment still bracing his shoulders for he wrote Mr. Marshall, who had worried lest the effects of the fever and "this intense weather with the little *et ceteras* at barracks may go hard with him on the drill grounds," that he had "just seen the cadet son and he already looks the soldier." ¹³

General Shipp set a high value on the look of a soldier. A small brusque man with a goatee and a stern and rigid manner that had won him the nickname of "Old Billy," he was then fifty-eight and had been commandant of cadets for twenty-seven years before succeeding General Francis H. Smith, the Institute's first superintendent, in 1890.¹⁴ For General Shipp, unbending and austere in his own life, the primary goal of the Institute was not so much to train officers, chemists, or engineers as to teach discipline. He was himself a soldier who had led the "Baby Corps" into the battle at New Market and had been wounded there. But he prized the

soldierly life rather as a builder of men. In his report of 1901 he noted that well-regulated school life leads "to habits of obedience, self-denial, and self-restraint: to respect for lawful authority, and to that self-respect which the consciousness of duty well done carries with it." Under his watchful eye, drills, parades, inspections, and formations dominated the school routine for the two hundred and twenty-one cadets. The academic year lasted from early September until almost the end of June. Classes did not meet on Christmas Day, New Year's, Washington's Birthday, and the anniversary of the New Market battle, and there were no Christmas vacations. Students were excused at that time only by special dispensation of the superintendent.¹⁵ The school week ended at one o'clock on Saturdays. Cadets with no penalty tours to walk off were then allowed two hours in uptown Lexington, a few blocks away. On Sundays they marched to church. Afterward they were allowed to go to the back country, but not to Lexington. They had to be back for evening parade.¹⁶

Room 88, to which Marshall was assigned with three other cadets, was about twenty-one by seventeen feet and contained four wire-spring cots, straight chairs, a table, a wardrobe, and a washstand on which, during the first winter, the water often froze in the basin. Before the end of Marshall's first year, central heating and inside toilets were installed, but water still had to be brought in buckets from outside hydrants. "Rats" (new cadets—fourth classmen) were commanded by upper classmen to sleep with the large double windows open wide in all seasons. Blankets strapped to the cots against night winds might be covered with snow in the morning.¹⁷

If not at his first meal, then at his second or third, Marshall met "growlie"—a hash of various and indescribable elements that for years was the mainstay of the VMI menu. The other staple, bread, could be tough enough to be thrown—and sometimes was. "The mess," said the General, reminiscing across a span of sixty years, "was a pretty stern affair."

The new cadet was not to find living conditions fun at VMI, nor did he pretend afterward that they had been. He was fortunate, however, in having as one roommate Leonard Nicholson, a boy of imperturbable good humor and generosity, who with his

brother Yorke had inherited the *New Orleans Picayune*. Nick, with whom he lived his whole four years, provided a refuge and a release from the rigors of the Institute. This was perhaps especially important for Marshall, who had no taste for social activities and little pocket money to spend on them anyway. His allowance for the first three years was five dollars a month, and he handed this on to Nick to dole out to him.¹⁸

To his fellow cadets, Marshall at first seems to have been distinguished chiefly by the Pittsburgh twang in his speech and by his aloofness. These, together with the fact that his room was on the stoop next to those occupied by third classmen, may have accounted for the earliest and most serious incident of the hazing which he and his fellow "Rats" had to endure despite stern Institute rules against it.

He had been in residence only two or three weeks when one evening he was required to squat over a naked bayonet as a test of endurance. Still weak from typhoid, his endurance proved slight. He slipped. The bayonet gashed his buttock. By a narrow margin, he escaped serious injury; the wound at most may have caused him to miss drill for several days. How Marshall explained that disability is not recorded. He certainly said nothing of the real cause.¹⁹

Toward hazing as toward other trials of cadet life, Marshall took a characteristically stoical attitude that set him apart from many—perhaps most—of his fellows. As he remarked mildly afterward, "I think I was more philosophical about this sort of thing than a great many boys. It was part of the business and the only thing to do was to accept it as best you could."

Years later he came back to VMI to be honored by having an arch named after him. In a speech at his class dinner on this occasion he recalled that he had been hazed throughout his four years for his Yankee accent and remarked in good humor, but with an edge, that while they were nearly all Southerners and had "pretty much kept the pressure on me on account of my northern accent and all, I happened to be the one and the only one there who had an arch named for him down at VMI."²⁰ It does not appear that he was crowing over his classmates so much as boasting of a defect that he had lived down. Of his unfortunate accent he

would later remark that "it improved a little bit" after he got married.

Hazing, chivvyng, discomforts, were "part of the business" to be borne. Other parts caught his imagination. The excitement of his first glimpse of military ceremony on the parade ground stayed with him, widened and deepened with familiarity. VMI at this time was saturated with recent and heroic memories of the Civil War. "Stonewall" Jackson had been an instructor there and had left his teaching on the outbreak of war for a brief but brilliant career in battle. On the day of Chancellorsville, where he was mortally wounded, he had seen so many former cadets in the line that he boasted "the Institute will be heard from today." When he died his body was brought back to VMI to lie in state in his old classroom before burial in the Lexington cemetery. His fabled marches, his tragic death, as well as his eccentricities, were already legend in Marshall's time. Jackson Memorial Hall at VMI was dedicated, although not completed, three months before Marshall's arrival, crowning the long struggle of former Superintendent Smith to restore the Institute after it was burned by General Hunter during his raid on Lexington in 1864. Scars on the barracks walls from Hunter's cannon remained as a tangible reminder of the war.²¹

Adjoining the VMI parade ground to the west was the campus of Washington and Lee University, of which General Lee was president after the Civil War.²² The Lee Chapel, a few hundred yards from the limits of VMI, held his remains and was at least as much a shrine for the cadets as for the university students. For Marshall, both Jackson and Lee were inspiring figures—both great and austere generals, the one an infantry commander of fanatic drive, the other, a soldier-statesman whose brilliance in war was capped by his demonstration in peace of how a general could live honorably and constructively in defeat.

In Marshall's day the VMI college catalogue listed all graduates and distinguished with heavy black type those who had fallen fighting for the Confederacy. On May 15 a formation was held each year to commemorate the battle of New Market, in which ten cadets were killed and forty-four wounded. As the name of each fallen cadet was called, a first classman would step

forward, salute, and reply, "Died on the field of honor." Five of those who died at New Market were buried "in a wooded dell" on VMI grounds. And every living cadet knew the story of their sacrifice, how two hundred and forty-one of them, under six officers, marched to reinforce the fifteen hundred men of General J. D. Imboden opposing the drive of General Franz Sigel up the Shenandoah Valley, and how when the flank of the Union forces was turned at New Market, they charged the retreating enemy to their front from the wheatfield north of Bushong Orchard to the Pike Bridge over the Shenandoah. They were credited with having taken up to one hundred prisoners, and at an average age of eighteen—some were only fifteen—they showed the stuff of which great legends of courage are made.²³

There were at VMI in 1897 still living reminders of the war—General Shipp was one—veterans for whom the lost cause still stirred hot blood. To the Yankee from Uniontown some of the speeches at VMI ceremonies sounded shockingly close to treason.

The past also bred sentiment. "In the archway, the sally port we called it, there was an old fellow with a scraggly beard—so sunburned and dark he looked like a colored man. He sat there and sold nuts and things like that which he had collected up on the mountain. Some one of the cadet officers (once) ordered the old man out of the archway. He was sent for by General Shipp and in the general's very ponderous voice . . . he was informed that the man was a veteran of the Confederate Army, the Confederate Cavalry, with a very fine record, and he could sit in that arch till he died."

Marshall absorbed the lore of history and soldiering and profited by the discipline. "What I learned at VMI," he said later, "was self-control, discipline, so that it was ground in. I learned also the problem of managing men." But he never thought much of the academic instruction. Though he improved steadily during his four years, he remained somewhere in the middle of his class in most subjects and could not afterward remember having liked any of them. Some contemporaries say that they had to tutor him; others that he always excelled in military subjects. Marshall admitted later that as a mediocre student he had no right

to criticize the curriculum but he always regretted his lack of training in how to express himself in writing and speaking, the ineffective instruction in foreign languages (he considered the time spent there on French and German almost completely wasted), and the total lack of courses in history and the social sciences which would have better prepared him for understanding national and international problems. Yet one thing he learned well—the art of leadership. At Finals in the spring of 1898, when the names of cadet officers for the following year were read out, George Marshall led the list as first corporal. When he came home that first summer, he seemed taller, heavier, less awkward. He walked erect and proud in his cadet uniform. He was growing up.

So was the nation. The year 1898 saw America at war with Spain and at the beginning of new world responsibilities. Cuba, in whose fortunes we had shown a lively interest for almost a century, had gained our sympathies in a bitter civil war which had broken out in 1895. The repressive measures of Governor General Valeriano Weyler, appointed early in 1896, intensified the struggle and stirred American demands for intervention. Public resentment, fanned by sensational newspaper reports, reached a climax in February 1898, after the sinking of the U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana harbor. President William McKinley, who had been pursuing the moderate policy favored by many of his supporters, now demanded self-government for Cuba. When the Spanish government delayed full acceptance of his requirements, he asked Congress to act. On April 25 the two houses declared that a state of war existed.

Cadets at VMI were able to follow the exciting developments in Lexington's weeklies. One of them, the *Rockbridge County News*, responded to the announcement of the sinking of the *Maine* with an appeal for calm. In the days which followed, the editor reminded his readers that the South knew the heavy costs of war and reprinted former Confederate General Wade Hampton's suggestion that if conflict came the North should be allowed to fight it. A local correspondent noted that if a draft law were imposed a number of the county residents would head for "caves and bomb-proofs" in order to escape the horrors of yellow fever in Cuba.²⁴ The cadets were somewhat more enthusiastic.

In February 1898 the VMI Dialectic Society chose as its debate topic: "Resolved that war alone will efface the national insults inflicted by Spain on the United States."²⁵ When Congress announced that a state of war existed the cadets unanimously voted to offer "their services to the government to fight for their country." Adopted at a mass meeting at the Cadet Society Hall on the evening of April 27, the offer was formally conveyed to the Secretary of War, to the Governor of Virginia, and to General Fitzhugh Lee, former Confederate officer who was now consul general in Havana.²⁶ More to the point, Superintendent Shipp had already told Virginia's governor that the Institute would assist in organizing and training volunteers at Camp Lee. VMI's commandant left for the camp not long afterward.

George Marshall, in voting with his fellow cadets for service against Spain, did not foresee the extent to which the war with Spain and the attendant occupation of the Philippines would affect his own career and the future of the United States. Dewey's destruction of the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay less than a week after the outbreak of war and the speedy, though badly handled, campaign to rid Cuba of Spanish rule announced to the world that the United States had fully reached the status of a great power and raised the question of what disposition this former non-colonial power would make of Spain's conquered provinces.

After word of Dewey's victory, Major General Wesley Merritt was dispatched to the Philippines with a force of regulars and volunteers. His orders were to complete the reduction of Spanish power and administer the Islands for the United States, with respect for the rights of the natives. There was no mention of a native government. General Merritt arrived in Manila at the end of July when the city had already been under close siege for ten weeks by the Insurrectos under Emilio Aguinaldo. The Spanish commander had refused demands to surrender only because he still dreamed of getting reinforcements from home. When that dream faded the Spaniards saw their next best hope of protecting the city and themselves from Philippine vengeance in a deal with the Americans. An American attack was arranged on August 13. Aguinaldo was ordered to stay out of the city. He decided to obey in the hope that the independent government he

had declared might still be recognized by the United States. After a sham battle the Spaniards gratefully turned over Manila to United States troops. By a special irony this battle, unnecessary and contrived, took place a day after the armistice with Spain had been signed, ending the "splendid little war."

Among the volunteers sent to Manila with General Merritt was the 10th Pennsylvania Regiment, reputed to be one of the best of the National Guard regiments. And with them of course went Company C from Uniontown. In the months following, Marshall was brought close to the war by reports of casualties or of heroic action by men whom he knew. Besides, three recent VMI graduates, known to Marshall, were off to war with commissions in the volunteers: R. C. Marshall and James Taylor of the class of '98 and Arthur M. Shipp, class of '97, son of the superintendent. A classmate of Stuart Marshall's, Charles E. Kilbourne, later superintendent of VMI, won the Medal of Honor as a captain of the volunteers in the Philippines.²⁷

When Marshall returned to VMI in September, hostilities had been halted by the August 12 armistice, although peace would not be signed until December and would be followed by prolonged bitter fighting in the Philippines. The Army meanwhile was much in the news as the nation learned of scandalous blundering in the conduct of the war. Two revelations were particularly shocking: the filthy, disease-ridden conditions of the American camps at Santiago during the siege and the issuance of inedible rations. Even more serious from the standpoint of national preparedness was the scene of utter confusion at Tampa where the Cuban expeditionary force was assembled. The troops came dressed in winter uniforms for tropical duty. No one knew enough about the enemy or the terrain of Cuba to have any precise idea of what their mission would be. The capacity of the ships to transport them had been grossly overestimated. Supplies poured into Tampa in three hundred freight cars and parked along miles of siding without bills of lading. To equip and load their units, officers had personally to find the supplies and in many cases commandeer the ships. While the press had a field day over "embalmed beef," it was the chaos in Tampa that impressed those seriously concerned with the future of the Army,

including Marshall, who would study the failure and never forget it.

In September, Major General Nelson Miles returned from Puerto Rico and handed the press a statement of sensational charges against the War Department. Demands for investigation of Secretary of War Russell Alger's conduct of his department became irresistible. The Dodge Commission appointed in September reported its findings in eight volumes. It found not a clear-cut, easy-to-understand indictment against Secretary Alger, but abundant evidence of the need for thorough reorganization of the Army and the War Department. As Marshall himself was to conclude after his later study of the unpreparedness, "It wasn't so much wrong, in a sense, as it was lacking. . . . Roosevelt and Wood and the Rough Riders sort of highlighted the affair and took the painfulness out of the situation [at Tampa]. But there [was practically nothing] in the way of preparation as the troops [were] gotten together from the western posts, company by company, assembled there almost for the first time since the Civil War. . . . It was a sorry dilemma and only the gallantry . . . and the initiative of the men and leaders and the extreme weakness of the Spanish Army . . . made it possible to go through with the early fighting . . . without some great catastrophe befalling us." So clear to those who studied it, the lesson would be learned only slowly and painfully by the nation after many blunders and risks of disaster.

In the same month that the Dodge Commission report was published, news arrived of insurrection in the Philippines. It might have been expected. Indeed, in retrospect it looked as though the United States worked hard to bring it on. Nevertheless the outbreak came as a shock even to imperialists. From the moment the country had known of Dewey's victory at Manila, American leaders had worried over our future policy regarding the Philippines. That our decision might mark a grave turning point in the nation's history was clear to many Americans at the time—to anti-imperialists of both parties who disliked the idea of conquest and feared the implications of American involvement in the Pacific; to Democrats who hoped for an issue to counter McKinley prosperity in the next presidential election; and to the

President who moved slowly under the pressure of his more militant advisers and of the march of events abroad toward a commitment far beyond his original crusade to liberate Cuba.

The immediate American reaction had been to stay out of these little-known and far-off islands, but a small group of expansionists, which included Theodore Roosevelt and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, influenced by the "big navy" teachings of Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan and by publicists preaching the special destiny of Anglo-Saxons for imperial rule, first urged that we take and hold the city of Manila and then added the whole of the Philippines to the list.

The expansionists of 1898 differed from their ancestors who had pushed to the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and of the Pacific in insisting on island bases as the gateway to Far Eastern trade and on accepting the tutelage of a backward people not ready for self-government. It was this talk of empire, long accepted in Europe's capitals but long deprecated here, which disturbed the traditionalists. McKinley's final decision to demand the whole of the Philippines brought a stirring national debate on the issue of imperialism in which the desire to "civilize" the Filipinos and to prevent another major power from taking the Islands equaled and perhaps outweighed our hopes of gaining economic benefits from the Islands. The ultimate results were the expenditure of more men and money to pacify the Philippines than we had spent on the war with Spain, and the acquisition of military and naval outposts on the opposite side of the world.

Marshall, whose career was to be so intimately involved in his country's altered course toward world power, continued to prepare in his own way. His second year at VMI brought scant improvement in his grades but resulted in his appointment among the first sergeants for the year following. Again he stood first on the list.

Midway in this year he and his fellow cadets got a lesson in what "Old Billy" meant by soldierly discipline. On New Year's Eve, 1898, the entire first class (seniors), with the exception of the first captain who was officer of the day, barricaded themselves on top of the barracks and set off fireworks in defiance of the superintendent's specific orders. They apparently took for

granted that "Old Billy" could not punish the whole class. They underestimated him. He could and he did. He ordered every one of them put under arrest at once and shortly thereafter expelled them from school. The expulsion lasted until almost the end of the month. Then, having made his point, he allowed them to return but stripped them of their rank for three months, promoted former subordinates over their heads, took away their first-class privileges, and delayed the granting of their diplomas until the beginning of the following fall term.²⁸

That summer (1899) Marshall got a job as a rodman for a surveyor who was mapping the area around Uniontown for the United States Geological Survey. In later years he remembered best the summer dreaminess of an eighteen-year-old on a job whose ultimate relevance to his Army career must have seemed more remote than the woods and mountains in which he had always felt at home. He recalled that time and again the man behind the transit had to remind him to pay attention and hold the rod so that it could be read.

"On one of these occasions I sought an excuse, as a boy always does, and told him I was looking at a bird on the fence. He stopped and, in a scathing tone, said, 'What about that bird on the fence?' Without any idea of what I was doing, I walked over to the fence and picked up a swallow. It wasn't wounded. Yet it didn't fly and I picked it up. That paralyzed my surveyor friend. When I turned the swallow loose and it flew off, he thought I had some mysterious quality which allowed me to handle birds." In fact, whatever magic there was served Marshall just that once. In a long life no other bird ever sat still for him.

The surveying job lasted only two months and Marshall was back in Uniontown at the end of summer in time to join the town's tumultuous welcome for the men of Company C returning from the war. They had given a good account of themselves in fighting both against the Spanish and against the Insurrectos. When their train brought them to Uniontown from Pittsburgh, where their regiment had been received by the President, every whistle and church bell in town blew and rang for five minutes in a pandemonium of local pride.

George Marshall watched with an excitement as great as any-

one's as the troops paraded down Main Street, painted red, white, and blue for the occasion and hung with more flags than any local inhabitant had ever seen before. Through arches—one made of a hundred electric lights, another built of coal—the returning heroes and their official escort marched to the fairgrounds. There, perhaps twenty thousand of their fellow citizens gathered to cheer.²⁹

Afterward Marshall was to feel that this was his "first great emotional reaction" and that it had "a determining effect on my choice of profession." He was stirred not only by the panoply of parade and visions of glory but by the thought of far-off places suddenly brought close. Neighbors had fought and some had died in Manila, which until then had been just the name for a kind of rope.³⁰ He had, in fact, though he did not know it then, a glimpse of the new dimensions of twentieth-century America and an intimation of his own career in it. Uniontown cheered and made every member of Company C a hero who "had but to command and his desires were gratified. . . . It was a grand American small-town demonstration of pride in its young men and of wholesome enthusiasm over their achievements. Years later most of us realized that it was much more than that. It reflected the introduction of America into the affairs of the world beyond the seas."³¹

In his third year at VMI, Marshall chose the civil engineering course and did notably better in his standings. He finished nineteenth in his class of forty-seven. At the Final Ball in June, George led the Ring figure with Miss Kate Fauntleroy of Staunton. His mother came down from Uniontown to be one of the chaperones.

Best of all, he won the prize he coveted most and had worked for hardest. By solid recommendation of his tactical officers, and the four cadet captains, the adjutant, and the quartermaster, he was named first captain for his final year. "I tried very hard," he said afterward. "I was very exacting and very exact in all my military duties as I gradually developed from the mild authority—almost none—exercised by the corporal to the pronounced authority of the first sergeant. As first sergeant, I fell the company in, called the roll, kept tabs on it, and marched the detail to guard

mount every morning." He did it all so well, with an impressively military bearing and a voice which could be heard the length of the parade ground, that when the end of the term came apparently no one had any doubt that George Marshall had earned the top rank of cadet command.

He had also developed an austerity and coolness of manner that characterized him thereafter. In later years he corresponded with and sometimes visited Taylor Carter, Banks Hudson, Erskine Miller, Charles S. Roller, Morgan Hudgins, Edward Ryland, and a few other members of his class, but at that time, except for his roommates, Nicholson and Philip B ("Buster") Peyton, who joined him and Nick in their second year, he had no intimate friends at the Institute. He wished above all else to command. He found that he had the power to command but that to keep it he could not let himself get too close to those who had to obey.

The cadets found ways to test the first captain's mettle. He was in charge of the corps during meals and sat at a separate table with his staff—Battalion Staff Adjutant Taylor Carter, Quartermaster Charles S. Roller, and Sergeant Major Murray Innes. One evening, perhaps by chance or perhaps by design, "there was complete silence while they were eating and that attracted some fellow's attention." So he shushed, making the silence deliberate and official, "and they all settled down to see what I was going to do. Recently there had been a famous case up at West Point of giving 'a silence' to a tactical officer" (an act mutinous in intent, if not in form, which became the subject of a congressional investigation). Marshall recognized the challenge and made up his mind. He noted that the cadets had just begun to eat their strawberries—a new and rare dessert. He got up, "called them to attention and marched them out of the mess hall when the strawberries were only about a third eaten." So the reflexes of discipline were used to put down the murmurs of rebellion. Marshall emerged master of the situation, secure in the admiration and respect of his fellows. The cadets, he noted later, "would judge you severely if you proved to be a slack performer in the business of your military duties." He did not expect to be loved for it.

In his last year Marshall went out for football. He had played

some football and baseball in Uniontown and perhaps would have tried out at VMI sooner had he not promised his mother to refrain. Mrs. Marshall was afraid that he might do serious injury to his right elbow, which had been partly dislocated in play and never properly healed.³² The boy was also very light; he weighed only a hundred and forty-five pounds when on the VMI squad. Released from his promise in his third year, he had played a little before an outbreak of typhoid fever forced the closing of the Institute for six weeks, washing out the football season. In the 1900 season his tackling helped VMI tie the University of Virginia, and he starred in the annual Thanksgiving Day game against VMI's chief rival, the Virginia Polytechnic Institute. The *Rockbridge County News*, in crowing over VMI's 5-0 victory, noted that "the tackling of G. Marshall in backing up the interference was of the highest order."³³

It was a year of blossoming because it was a year of success. The boy who wished all his life to be first in everything was now first in the soldierly ways that to him counted most. He was also suddenly, completely, in love.

She was Elizabeth Carter Coles, called "Lily." She lived with her widowed mother in her Grandfather Pendleton's house near the Limit Gates of the Institute. Despite this propinquity and the fact that Lily had dated Marshall's brother Stuart years before, George did not meet her until early in his last year, possibly because he had more freedom then or possibly because he had more confidence. It came about as a kind of romantic accident. One evening Marshall was passing her house and heard her playing the piano. He stopped, astonished and entranced to hear "some of the airs my mother had played to which I had become devoted." He thought she played beautifully. Later he said Lily was "the finest amateur pianist I have ever heard." Indeed he was so impressed that he brought one or two of his cadet friends back on other evenings to stand outside the house and listen with him. On one such occasion the door was opened and the shy young man was invited in.

Lily was brown-eyed, titian-haired, fair of skin—by common consent a beauty. Older than Marshall—four years at least—she was immediately attracted to him and he to her. She had the repu-

tation of being something of a flirt. Popular with young men, she drew sharp comment from some of the girls who knew her. Older women have recalled her as gracious. Marshall found her vivacious, witty, and altogether fascinating. It was said in Lexington that when she first saw the tall young first captain she declared, "I intend to marry him." In any case, within a few weeks of their first meeting they were seeing as much as possible of each other.

In time he was even to forgive her descent from the first families of Virginia, though he commented that Lily's family was not impressed by his forebears and sniffed at his Pennsylvania birthplace. Lily's father, Dr. Walter Coles, was the great-grandson of Colonel John Coles, who had given refuge on his great estate at Enniscorthy to Thomas Jefferson during the Revolution.³⁴ John's brother Isaac had been a member of the first United States Congress. Lily's mother, Elizabeth Childs Pendleton, was the daughter of Colonel Edmund Pendleton, a member of the first class to have been graduated at VMI in 1842.³⁵ He was the namesake of that Edmund Pendleton, nephew of Lily's great-great-grandfather, who was a member of the Continental Congress and governor of Virginia³⁶ at the time of the Declaration of Independence. It was quite enough, combined with native charm, to make Lily one of the leading belles of Lexington society, even though her mother had apparently very little money.

The regimen at VMI was not designed for a young man in love, and even the comparative privileges of a first classman who was first captain to boot did not provide nearly enough liberty. To be sure, Lily was close by: Marshall could see her often, driving her "little horse and Stanhope trap" along the parade ground, sitting up on the slightly raised seat holding her whip with the long lash. He loved, when he could, to drive with her. But that was not often enough. And so the austere young first captain took to "running the block" or, in plain terms, ducking out of the Institute after hours. The maneuver was apparently not too difficult, but the penalty for being caught would certainly have been the loss of his cadet rank and possibly even expulsion. His only defense, when questioned years later, was, "I was much in love." He was not caught, and under Lily's spell he led a much fuller

social life in his last year than before. He was vice-president of the Final Ball, although Lily's health prevented her from dancing, and at graduation he was initiated, along with a number of his classmates, into Kappa Alpha fraternity.³⁷

At graduation the first captain received none of the academic honors. His quartermaster, "Chief" Roller, gave the class address. St. Julian Ravenal Marshall (no close relation) was picked as the year's most distinguished graduate. George was not one of the six top men to receive the baccalaureate degree, but had to be content with the ordinary degree of Graduate, such as was also awarded at West Point at this time.

Yet he had reason to be proud. With steady hard work he had brought up his standing, and in his major field, civil engineering, finished fifth. He was eighth in military science. More important, he had taken firm hold of himself and his career. "Ambition," he said later, "had set in." But it would be more accurate to say that ambition had hit upon an appropriate goal, or that the young man, driven from his earliest days by the passion to excel, had found in himself as a cadet an excellence that pleased him.