



Armistice—1919

"Both the British and American governments would be very loath to involve their armies in a further advance into Germany. . . ."

—Letter drafted by Marshall for Conner to Chief of Staff, February 15, 1919.

THAT moral singleness, simplicity, and intensity of purpose which is unique to war was the first casualty of peace. The huge American Army—almost two million men on November 11—were suddenly out of the job for which they were trained and to which they had steeled themselves.¹ Orders to the First Army on November 11 were "to hold the front now attained while preparing for further advance and to cease hostilities until further orders." Presently they began to move out of the line. Only the Third Army, formed while the Meuse-Argonne battle was going on, was to remain for occupation duty under command of General Dickman. For all other troops the ensuing weeks and months were a purposeless, exasperated wait to get out and go home. For the command it was a period, hardly less exasperating, of holding together a military organization while speedily demobilizing it² and simultaneously preparing against the contingency of more fighting if Germany proved intransigent. The battle cement of common purpose and life-

and-death urgency that united professional and recruit in a citizen army leached out in the silence of the Western Front. For professionals like Marshall the rest was patchwork; he was thrust into scores of small emergencies, making plans that came to nothing, filling in for departing colleagues, straightening out injustices, working to keep up discipline.

For two months—until near the end of January 1919—he served as chief of staff at VIII Corps under Major General Henry T. Allen. Allen, a cavalry man with a good fighting record (he had commanded the 90th Division), was charged with training units for use in Germany. Apparently Pershing suggested Marshall to him for that purpose. The tall, straight, serious, businesslike infantry colonel seemed markedly out of place in this headquarters of boots and spurs. He actually stayed only long enough to carry out some training exercises, gaining the commendation of General Allen as a staff officer who had “few equals.”³ Then he was called back to Pershing’s headquarters as a member of the Operations Section and set to work on a study of how to move an American army into Germany in case negotiations at Paris broke down. In spite of estimates and information already compiled by GHQ Intelligence, he had little firm basis for planning. He had to suppose various eventualities in which the Allies might elect to use force and the Germans to resist. If the object was to occupy the German capital, to force on the German government the reality of unqualified military defeat, then he proposed that the Allies occupy the North Sea and Baltic ports and send expeditions to Berlin from Hamburg and Stettin. If, on the other hand, the Germans were disposed to resume the fight in the West, he outlined a broad advance between Mulhouse and Wesel to sweep the Rhineland and western Germany. As a final objective of such an advance he proposed occupation of an arc from the Baltic northeast of Lübeck on the left to Leipzig and Lake Constance on the right. The center—interestingly, in the light of what happened in World War II—would hold at the line of the Elbe, and if it were necessary to move into Berlin, that would be done by advancing the left flank to Stettin.⁴

It was a portion of the center that Marshall selected for the American army. From a line of departure in the occupation zone

between Bonn and the Lahn near Koblenz, three divisions in the lead, followed by four more for clean-up and occupation duty, would move on the axis, Koblenz-Kassel-Helmstedt-Stendal. At the Elbe the American sector would be widened to about sixty miles from Wittenberge to Schönebeck and would require an additional three divisions in line.

Having made the plan, Marshall along with General Conner regarded the whole project with distaste. Some such show of force might indeed be desirable if internal disorders in Germany threatened to open the way for the Bolsheviks. Yet Marshall was inclined to doubt the wisdom of American participation. "Both the British and American governments," he wrote in a letter prepared for Conner's signature, "would be very loath to involve their armies in a further advance into Germany, particularly in view of the earnest desire of the two governments at the present time to carry out the rapid demobilization of their armies." Furthermore there was some question as to the political aims and consequences of an occupation, which, he was aware, the French, in particular, were pushing. Marshall warned that a move in force into Germany, if done at all, "should only be carried out to such extent as is deemed necessary in order to maintain the present dominant position of the Allied governments and to definitely cripple the power of the German government." He was anxious, in other words, that military operations should go only to the point of fully achieving the military aim of crushing the enemy's power to resist. Beyond that he was thinking of reconstruction. The purpose of putting down civil disorders within Germany was to avoid the destruction of its national wealth. He recommended that the Allies take steps to send more food into the defeated country.⁵

His final objection to the march into Germany was doubt that we could do it successfully. Not only was the Army rapidly slipping away, but it was hard to find transportation for even the few divisions that might be left. To move a few United States occupation forces to Koblenz a few weeks before, Marshall had had to "unhorse brigade after brigade of artillery and leave them on their fronts near the railroads and take their horses for units that were going into Germany." Had it been necessary to move

on in force to Berlin, there might have been logistic nightmares. Marshall did not afterward change his skepticism of the wisdom of a march into Germany, but he did feel that the Germans should have been sufficiently "licked" to scotch the myth that their government accepted peace without defeat in the field.⁶

From planning operations that would not happen Marshall turned to describing those that were finished, first in writing—he worked on General Pershing's final report—then in talks. Along with General Drum and the First Army G-2, Colonel Willey Howell, he was ordered on a lecture circuit of division camps.⁷ The idea was that if the troops waiting to go home were told of what America had done in the war their pride in past achievement would stiffen them against their present discontent. The project had been ordered by Pershing and the men had been personally selected by him, as the Operations Staff at GHQ discovered when they tried to get Marshall excused from the assignment. The Allied commander-in-chief was moving to answer criticisms stemming from returned officers and men and spreading in Washington. Frederick Palmer, the war correspondent, and Martin Egan, one of Pershing's old friends from early Philippine days, both wrote to urge that he meet the attacks by telling the AEF story; Egan particularly emphasized the need of giving close attention to returning divisions, in whom he had found a "woeful lack of understanding" of the campaign and a failure to grasp the simplest facts behind certain policies and actions.⁸

Because of General Drum's subsequent shift to the Services of Supply and Howell's duties elsewhere, Marshall ended by giving more of the lectures than the other two. As delivered, they must have been a good deal more interesting than they appear in surviving notes. At least some officers asked for repeat performances. How the troops reacted is uncertain. Colonel Howell, anxious to be rid of the job, was of the opinion that the men began with the assumption that they were being fed "headquarters propaganda" and scarcely listened.⁹ Marshall, however, persisted. For his diligence he was rewarded by assignments to deliver his general lecture complete with maps and charts at Chaumont to members of the House Military Affairs Committee, among whom

was Fiorello LaGuardia, then a major recently elected to Congress.¹⁰

On his tour Marshall did more than try to talk the soldiers into a better frame of mind: he inquired into their grievances and at the request of the AEF chief of staff, McAndrew, made recommendations for relieving them. Some he dealt with himself. It was a mission with which he had particular sympathy. The substantial grievances—and there were many—were largely complaints against two kinds of officers who flourished in the rear: the martinet and the bureaucrat. It exasperated Marshall to find a “Prussian-type officer” conducting a rigid training program just to keep the men busy while they waited for a boat. He thought that was the abuse of the idea of training both in principle and practice. The men “were going out into the cold and wet and slime and going through these [special drills] in some godforsaken little village which didn’t have a pavement in the place or a thing to see after dark. With this severe program . . . they were embittered in a way they never forgot.” To make matters worse, regulations governing their after-hours activities were arbitrary and inconsistent.

Lecturing officers and men of the 27th Division on board the *Leviathan* at Brest just before it sailed, he found officers resentful over a directive to fill out complicated forms and repeat in Brest shakedown inspections that they had already gone through at Le Mans. As time for a remedy was short, Marshall went after it himself. He talked to the general and chief of staff of the Base Section at Brest who had demanded the forms and inspections. They said only that they had to do it “because it was an order.” Marshall dropped his lecturing and went to the Embarkation Center at Le Mans, where he knew the chief of staff. The reply was the same: Sorry, but those were the orders. It was useless to explain how damaging was the effect on morale, particularly serious and unnecessary when the division was on the point of going home. The general treated Marshall like an intruder and would hardly listen. Taking the bit in his teeth, Marshall then drove to the headquarters of the Services of Supply at Tours. Again he talked to the commanding general, whom he knew, and again he was brushed aside as an intruder. Even the

G-4 who was an old friend, "a very nice, gentle friend," said he could do nothing and urged Marshall to "talk to them at Le Mans." He said he had but agreed anyway to go back and try again. It was no use. At Le Mans they said they could do nothing without an order from Tours.

Marshall then picked up the phone and called the chief of staff of the Services of Supply and told him the whole story of his frustrations and the reasons given him. The chief of staff said he was sorry.

At that Marshall exploded. "You may be sorry," he said, "but that doesn't cure anything. Now I have reached the point where I am going to . . . communicate directly with the chief of staff, AEF."

The SOS chief said, "Give me two hours."

Marshall snapped at him, "I will give you an hour and a half and no longer."

It was enough. Tours talked to Brest and then to Le Mans as Marshall waited. Then his call came: "It's all cured."

Some of the bureaucratic troubles, Marshall thought, were caused by the precipitation of "class B officers" in the rear echelon when their incompetence could not be tolerated at the front. More—like the rigidity which he fought through for the benefit of the 27th Division—were due not to incompetence but to the reluctance of even fine officers to meddle with the workings of the machine of which they felt themselves, often rather helplessly, a part. They feared "changes which would complicate things [in a way] they couldn't foresee." They also tended to resent the intervention of outsiders, the "visiting firemen" from higher headquarters.

But if their attitude was understandable it could not be tolerated. There were already grumblings at home, some just, some unjust, all boiling up in the headlines and in the halls of Congress. Marshall, from his view of the staging and embarkation camps, suggested changes, a number of which Pershing ordered into effect. His suggestions eventually reached Secretary of War Baker, who made use of them in answering some criticisms of the Army's handling of men in the port areas.

There were a lot to answer—from the complaints of disgrun-

tled officers who thought they had been unfairly passed over for promotion or decoration to more serious charges of blundering in supply and of brutality to military prisoners. The acting Judge Advocate General of the Army joined in grave complaints against the Army's system of military justice.¹¹

Perhaps the most general and bitterest attack fell upon the civilian welfare organizations, the YMCA in particular. Investigating some of the charges later, Marshall felt the criticisms of the Y, which for a time threatened to dry up contributions, were largely unjust. For one of the more venomous gibes, that the Y had sold gift cigarettes, he blamed Army shippers, who mixed packages marked as gifts with others consigned for sale. He thought also that the more general complaint concerning the shortage of canteen goods should properly have been made against the Army, which provided less shipping space than it had promised. With a keen sense of injustice, Marshall persuaded General Pershing to come publicly to the defense of the Y and later he himself took every chance he got to set the record straight.¹²

Along with the peculiarly frustrating problems of these final house-cleaning days in France, there were also rewards and exuberant moments. Near the end of April, Marshall went to Metz to receive, along with other members of Pershing's command, the French Legion of Honor for distinguished service.¹³ Before the ceremony one of Pershing's staff members, Colonel James L. Collins, a former aide in the Philippines and Mexican campaign who had been with Pershing early in the war and had recently returned to his headquarters, brought an offer from the American commander. Walking beside Marshall and fitting his words to the cadence of the step, he said in a low voice, "How would you like to be the General's aide?" Whether Marshall altogether liked the idea or not, he made up his mind quickly that he should accept. He told Collins so after the ceremony.¹⁴ He knew, of course, that he was not being picked as a social secretary but as a personal adviser and executive—the capacity in which he had served General Liggett briefly in the Philippines and General Bell for a longer time. In later years he was to have a strong feeling that his service as an aide had been a

handicap to his career by keeping him from troop duty, and during his years as a general on active duty he seldom had an officer detailed as aide.¹⁵

The moment of his decision, however, was celebrated with rare gaiety. Following the award formation, Marshal Pétain, whom Marshall knew well and for whom he had a high regard,¹⁶ invited the American officers to join him and his staff at lunch in the villa of the former German commander of Metz. After they had eaten and drunk and talked like old comrades at ease, Marshall recognized two brigadiers he had known in the 1st Moroccan Division, to which he had been attached in 1917. They were delighted to see him, kissed him on both cheeks, and talked of old times. "One fellow was standing with his arm around me and I had my arm around him. We were having quite a time (we had had a lot to drink) when Pétain came up and said, 'I'm very glad to see you on such intimate terms with my fighting generals.' " Then Pershing joined them and announced that Marshall had just consented to be his aide. On this relaxed and harmonious note Marshall embarked on one of the longest tours of his Army career. For more than five years—to within three months of Pershing's retirement in October 1924—Marshall would stand at his right hand as a kind of personal chief of staff.¹⁷

At Chaumont the myriad details of winding up the affairs of the AEF occupied Marshall for a little while longer, until shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, when Pershing transferred his small remaining headquarters to Paris.¹⁸ Marshall, along with the rest of the personal staff, moved into the Rue de Varenne house that was owned by American banker Ogden Mills. Their days thenceforth, and a good part of their nights, were devoted to the ceremonies of victory, which were to take Marshall at Pershing's side on a grand tour of the Allied capitals and introduce him to the leaders of Europe.

Paris set the pattern and the standard. On the Fourth of July, President Poincaré reviewed American troops in the Place de la Concorde. Then on the French holiday, Bastille Day, Paris in perfect weather put on what Marshall called the greatest victory parade he ever saw. Early in the morning, when the marchers began gathering near the Porte Maillot and the Avenue de la

Grande Armée, spectators already thronged the line of march from the Place de l'Etoile down the Champs Elysées to the Place de la Concorde, thence past the Madeleine, through the Place de l'Opéra to the reviewing stand at the Place de la République. Symbolically the chains placed at the base of the Arc de Triomphe were removed so that the troops might march through after the solemn ceremony of commemoration, in which President Poincaré and Premier Clemenceau placed wreaths on the casket in the center dedicated to those who had died. With them stood a sailor and soldier of France, representing the victorious armed forces, a girl from Alsace and a girl from Lorraine, symbolizing the recovery of the lost provinces, and a member of the Lafayette Escadrille, included in tribute to the ally whose help was at last decisive.¹⁹

The parade itself began on a solemn note as a thousand lame, mutilated, and blind veterans led the procession. Then followed military splendor to which the huge crowd responded with wild cheering. After Marshal Joffre and Marshal Foch came Pershing and his aides, followed by thirty American generals on horseback at the head of an American composite regiment of men whose combat records and soldierly bearing earned them the honor. Troops of the other Allies came next—the British, the Italians, Japanese, Portuguese, Serbs, Czechs, Rumanians, and Poles—then the French.

Just behind Pershing and Harbord, Marshall, mounted on a white horse, rode abreast with his fellow aides, Colonel John G. Quekemeyer and Major John C. Hughes. He was deeply moved by the great military spectacle of which he was now a part. The broad expanse of the Champs Elysées, which even in its daily shabby flow of civilian vehicles conveyed some of the breadth and flow of civilization, was now a breathtaking triumphal way. The banks of cheering crowds, the statues representing Alsace and Lorraine in the Place de la Concorde decked in flowers in place of the mourning crepe that had clothed them for nearly half a century, the Madeleine with rich red drapery hung behind the white columns in a startling burst of color—these remained vivid memories through Marshall's life.²⁰

Then the triumph and exultation passed. The cheering ceased,

and France remembered. Wives, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters of men who had fallen in the most terrible of humanity's wars to date marched single file through the quiet Arch of Triumph, each to drop a single flower on the casket there. All afternoon they filed past, and into the night, leaving a great mound of blossoms to mark the place where the casket lay.

With the cheers of Paris still fresh, Pershing, his staff, and the victory regiment boarded British destroyers at Boulogne to cross the Channel and then take a train to London. Among the political and military great of Britain who greeted them at Victoria Station was Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War. In the course of the next week of festivities Marshall spent one day as Churchill's escort when, in Hyde Park, Pershing held a review for the Prince of Wales and Churchill and later decorated a number of British officers.²¹ It was Marshall's first close look at the man whom he would come to know intimately as staunch ally and brilliant adversary in the great debates over how to defeat the enemy in World War II. That same evening Churchill presided at a dinner in the House of Commons in honor of the Americans, attended by many of the top British political and military leaders.

With Churchillian eloquence the Secretary of State for War warned of the Bolshevik threat that might join Germany and Russia and force the English-speaking peoples to stand together. "It was inevitable," he said in both tribute and prophecy, "that the struggle should terminate victoriously for freedom from the moment that the United States entered the war. Until then the fearful equipoise of the conflict gave no certainty that even if every effort was made a decisive victory would be attained. From the moment the Germans in their vanity and folly drove the United States to draw the sword there was no doubt that Germany was ruined, that the cause of freedom was safe, and that the British and American democracy would begin once more to write their history in common."²²

London's victory parade on July 19 was chiefly memorable for Marshall because of a "devil of a horse" he had to ride. The horse had been assigned to General André Brewster, the inspector general, who was unable to manage him. Marshall offered to

swap mounts. The parade assembled at Hyde Park and from Albert Gate marched along Sloane Street through Belgravia and across the Thames by Vauxhall Bridge. They marched then to Westminster Bridge, recrossed the river, passed through the Admiralty Arch in Whitehall, and thence along the Mall before the royal pavilion on the steps of the Queen Victoria Memorial. All the way Marshall fought his horse. At the Admiralty Arch the animal reared and went over backward. Marshall, falling, broke a small bone in his hand. Nevertheless he remounted and continued past the reviewing stand. Thereafter he was invited to sit in the royal pavilion to watch Haig, Beatty, and Foch lead British and French troops through the remainder of the parade. Years later General Brewster, writing to Marshall, recalled the parade and said with little if any exaggeration that Marshall by trading horses had saved his life.²³

Back in France there were more parades and more parties. General Pershing and his staff visited the 1st and 3d Divisions in Germany and made a nine-day tour of the old battlefield from Belfort to Nieuport on the Belgian coast. Partly a sentimental pilgrimage, it involved also some study of the places where Americans had fought. With scarcely a pause, Pershing's party swept on to Italy, where in four days they visited scenes of Italian victory, were fêted in Venice, Treviso, Vicenza, Milan, and Turin, and entertained by King Victor Emmanuel in Rome. Among the guests at the royal dinner in the Quirinal Palace were some leading figures of the time—Nitti, president of the Council, Albricco, war minister, General Diaz, commander-in-chief—and some of the future: Count Sforza and General (later in less happy circumstances Marshal) Badoglio.²⁴

It was near the end—nine more days in Paris for packing, shopping, and farewells, including Clemenceau's reception on the last day. On September 1 they were in Brest ready to board the *Leviathan* along with members of the victory regiment and some men of the 1st Division selected to march in the parades still ahead at home. Among them appeared suddenly, for Marshall, a familiar face: Sergeant Torstrup, the noncom on whom Lieutenant Marshall had leaned long ago on his first assignment in Mindoro, when he was just beginning to learn his business as

an officer. It was a curious reminder of the beginning on a day which marked such a dramatic ending. There was also a reminder of the future when Marshal Foch, personally bidding farewell, remarked on the pier: "We have cemented our ties of friendship, and if ever in the future we shall find it necessary to unfurl our banner, then we know that we shall continue as brothers-in-arms."²⁵ The banner would be unfurled almost twenty years to the day from that morning. Twenty-five years later, less one week, American forces would parade again down the streets of liberated Paris.

New York might find it difficult to outdo Paris and London, though the tumult began at high pitch as the *Leviathan* moved past Ambrose Light and guns fired and sirens screamed the news to the waiting city. But New York had what nearly every returning hero wanted most, wives and families—home. Lily was there at City Hall, waiting while Pershing's party made their way up Broadway. At the Battery they had been met by Vice-President Thomas R. Marshall, representing the President (already on his crosscountry tour to try to get public support for the League of Nations), Secretary of War Baker, the Chief of Staff, General Peyton March, General Bullard, Governor Alfred E. Smith, and Mayor John F. Hylan. This was at last the moment of completion—the end of war.²⁶ Marshall and his wife were put up at the Waldorf, along with other members of the staff and their families, and there must have been in the course of the next wildly festive days some quiet times to talk and knit over the two-year gap in their married life.

New York, of course, had its official reception, its banquet followed by a special program at the Hippodrome, and its parade, this time all American, with the veteran 1st Division in the lead just behind Pershing, his staff and aides. From New York they entrained for Washington, with a stop at Philadelphia, where Pershing and his party were driven through cheering throngs, dined at the Union League Club, and then put back on their train.²⁷

Washington found hundreds of thousands of persons lining the route from the Peace Monument down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House for the last of the victory parades on September

17. Altogether twenty-five thousand troops marched by.²⁸ There were cheers for them all, but Marshall recalled that the hero who pleased the crowds best was an Army mule who lapped up some soup spilled from one of the field ranges. They were home. This was peace. And to make it official a joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives convened the next day to do honor and say thanks to the general.²⁹