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# The Old Man

*"Suggest Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall. He has no superior among Infantry colonels. . . ."*
—General MacArthur to General Keehn, September 28, 1933.

SOON after he came to Benning, Marshall had received a flattering offer to go to Manila. In the spring of 1929 the newly appointed governor general of the Philippines, Dwight F. Davis, asked that he go out with him to the Islands as prospective chief of the constabulary, a post that would carry great prestige and higher pay. Secretary of State Stimson proposed him for the post, and he went to Washington to discuss it with Davis. But in the end he put the temptation behind him, partly because he was not sure he would like to work with Davis but mostly because he thought he should "keep close to straight Army business at my age"—duty with troops. Pershing agreed. "Your future interest," the general wrote, "lies in your continued splendid service with the Army." Not long after, Virginia friends asked that he allow his name to be presented for the superintendency of VMI—again a considerable compliment and a temptation. But again he declined. At the end of his Benning tour he had his chance to be again with troops: he was assigned to command a battalion of the 8th Infantry at Fort Screven, Georgia—a small post but one that he was delighted to get.[1]

When Marshall left Benning in the spring of 1932 the United States was near the bottom of the greatest economic depression in history. The unemployed numbered at least twelve million and guesses ranged as high as seventeen million. In America's great cities the destitute begged, lined up when they could for free bread and soup, slept in parks or in the packing-case shanty towns that were derisively called "Hoovervilles" after the unfortunate President who a few years before had been one of the most popular men in America and now was the goat for all its ills. As in the depression of the 1870s, gangs of idle young men roamed the land. People long without work came to doubt their ability and to despair of their world. People still employed had their wages cut, saw the men beside them let go, and held on with a numbing sense that each pay envelope might be the last.

While men and officers of the regular Army had somewhat greater job security, they were by no means free from the general uncertainty or from the economic pinch. The orthodox administration of Herbert Hoover under the pressure of national misery was trying some highly unorthodox economic experiments to feed federal funds into the stagnant economy, through the Emergency Relief Organization, the Home Loan Banks, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. But, insisting at the same time on fiscal soundness, which then meant balancing the federal budget, it called also for economy, and the Army, as always, stood high on the list of the dispensables. Even before the crash Hoover had proclaimed that military spending must not "exceed the barest necessity." Now he asked for drastic economies. The House, captured by the Democrats in 1930, was as eager as the Republican Senate to help the President pare the budget—at least where it was politically safe. They agreed to impose on the services an unpaid furlough equal to 8⅓ per cent of their active duty and barred increases of pay for promotion and automatic in-grade raises. The House also approved a reduction of the officer corps from twelve thousand to ten thousand. Although the Senate, in response to appeals by General MacArthur, Chief of Staff since 1930, and Secretary of War Patrick Hurley, struck out this provision of the bill, both houses agreed on cutbacks in the appropriations for the organized Reserves, the National Guard, and the Citizens Military Training Camps. So strong was

the drive for retrenchment that the thirty-year-old proposals to eliminate some Army posts along with more recent schemes for unifying the services were at last gathering support. In the circumstances Army officers could hardly feel sanguine about their careers even if they avoided unemployment.[2]

The post to which Marshall reported in June was rumored to be among those Congress was thinking of abolishing. Located on the northern end of Tybee Island, seventeen miles from Savannah, Georgia, Fort Screven had once housed coast artillery to guard the entrance to Savannah harbor. More recently it had served as headquarters of the 8th Infantry. In 1929 when the regiment moved to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, one battalion was left at Screven to keep the post alive. The whole establishment that Marshall came to command consisted of less than four hundred men, but he was cheerful enough about the prospect. "However small," he wrote to Pershing, "it at least keeps me away from office work and high theory." [3]

He was happy to be back with troops. Characteristically he plunged into the new job of managing a small post and making it run as harmoniously and efficiently as possible with the same enthusiasm and wholehearted absorption as he had applied to his assignment at Benning. Arriving unexpectedly, he found the officers in the throes of getting several hundred CMTC trainees settled. He had a reputation in the Army as a strict and meticulous taskmaster, and when he suddenly appeared in the confusion at Screven the unhappy officers expected an explosion. Instead they got an apology for his unannounced arrival. When they proposed an off-post informal reception that evening, the colonel not only accepted but suggested they dispense with the formal affair scheduled for later in the week.[4]

Off on the right foot in his new command, the colonel resolved also to lay at once ground work for friendly relations with its civilian community. That Sunday he and Mrs. Marshall made the long drive into Savannah to attend services at an Episcopal church. Members of the congregation were surprised and delighted.[5] Considering that the new commanding officer had put himself out to pay his respects to Savannah, the mayor the next day returned the courtesy and visited Fort Screven and shortly

thereafter had some crepe myrtle delivered to help landscape the driveways.[6] The good community relations thus launched Marshall cultivated with special festivities on the post. On the Fourth of July, he asked the mayors of Savannah and Tybee Beach to review the CMTC unit at the end of its summer training.

From these first days at Fort Screven, Marshall cherished what he called a "ribald" story of how the ice was broken at a formal post dinner. The new CO, despite the graciousness of his arrival, still seemed somewhat forbidding—a man who in discouraging fools often discouraged gaiety, too, among the majority who lacked his self-assurance. That evening was particularly sticky. The dinner guests crowded at small tables in a steamy hot room, ate in silence or with subdued conversation, while waitresses squeezed among them serving course after course. One waitress, a large colored woman, was particularly hot and uncomfortable as she pushed among the tables, muttering, "Excuse me, excuse me." Only after the dessert did she come with dawning happiness, bearing the finger bowls. It was nearly over. She had the bowls almost all distributed when she looked into one and realized that she had forgotten the flower petals that traditionally floated on the water. Facing another tortuous journey through the crowd, she cried out in anguish, "Jesus! The geraniums!" The diners dissolved in laughter and so did the last stuffiness of the evening.[7]

Work at Fort Screven included training and military housekeeping. Marshall took over the post like a paterfamilias or, as one of the young officers under him later wrote, "as would a Southern planter his domain." On his early morning rides about the post he noticed a spot where a little myrtle might be planted to improve appearance, a freshly planted garden to be commended. He was a stickler for details. At least once he observed girls playing tennis with dirty shoes and ordered that henceforth their shoes be whitened to set his men a good example. He liked to have things just so but he preferred not to issue orders. He did more by suggestion or example. (When the CO was seen fixing up his yard, it was a foolish young officer who did not take the hint.) Along with his insistence on an outward perfection

he concerned himself with the welfare of his men. He arranged, with the help of a local civic organization, to buy a captured rum runner which he made available to officers and men and their families for picnics or fishing.[8] To combat the effects of the recent legislative economies he personally saw to the laying out of vegetable gardens and chickenyards and had the troop messes prepare extra portions of food and put them up in containers for sale at cost to men with families. Those who knew what he did in those days never forgot him. For all his austerity the role of "the old man" suited him.

The New Deal would soon provide larger scope for his paternalistic concerns. In March 1933, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt was inaugurated, Marshall was in Washington at a meeting of the Mershon Fund Board. He was impressed, as were so many others, with the fresh air of excitement. "Washington was a remarkable-looking place," he wrote to General Pershing, who had been prevented by illness from taking his place in the ceremonies as grand marshal of the inaugural parade. "Seemingly every deserving Democrat . . . was there—streets crowded, hotels overflowing, and every crowd sprinkled with the uniforms of governors' staff officers. The parade was Democracy at its blatant best and the simultaneous closing of the banks made plenty of atmosphere for the occasion." [9]

While waiting in Union Station for his train back to Savannah, Marshall sat by a bewildered old man and woman, talked to them, and discovered that they had tickets to Oklahoma but as a result of the "bank holiday," proclaimed by the President in an effort to stop the mounting toll of bank failures, they had been unable to cash a check to buy food on the way. The fact was that he had been in the same predicament himself a few hours before but had managed to borrow five dollars from a fellow officer. Most of that he now turned over to the couple.[10]

Within days of his return to Fort Screven, Marshall was caught up in a New Deal measure for which he developed and retained a great enthusiasm all his life—the Civilian Conservation Corps. The plan to employ thousands of idle young men in planting trees and saving marginal land from flood and erosion had been outlined by Roosevelt in his acceptance speech at the

Democratic National Convention the previous July.[11] On March 21 he sent Congress a bill to create a CCC, predicting that two hundred and fifty thousand young men could be at work by summer.[12] When opposition developed on the ground that such camps would lead to militarism and undercut the wages of labor, Congress met the problem by passing a bill which permitted the President to define the program.

While the shape of the plan was still uncertain the new Secretary of War, George H. Dern, on March 25 sent his corps area commanders "merely warning instructions" that the War Department must be ready to take care of a hundred thousand men. The Army's role, he assumed, would be limited to enrolling the men selected by the Labor Department and transporting them to Army stations for organization into self-sustaining companies. They would be in Army care for four weeks at most and then would go on to their work in the woods under the supervision of some other federal agency.[13]

Fort Screven was presently notified that the IV Corps Area, of which it was a part, had a quota of seventy-one hundred trainees. That did not seem like a very big job though it was an urgent one. Marshall was informed that corps maneuvers were being canceled and that he should call back to the post his detachments that were already on their way to the maneuver area. The corps commander, Major General Edward L. King, expected to put all the trainees into four camps and told Marshall he would need from Screven only "some of your troops and organization to send to one or more of these camps to furnish personnel for handling." [14]

In fact he would need much more. The Army role, as described in the March 25 instruction, was enlarged as it became apparent to the directors of the program that only the Army was equipped to organize and operate the work camps. Orders went out on April 12 that the Army was to take charge of everything except the administration and technical supervision of the work projects. The War Department had already laid groundwork for its new task when early in 1933 it had studied a proposal by Senator James Couzens of Michigan to take over the "housing, feeding, and clothing of certain unemployed persons

at military posts in the United States." There had been little enthusiasm for that kind of direct charity. The CCC was a good deal more attractive. It was a chance for the regular Army to do in peacetime something of what it was trained to do in war—to mobilize, organize, and administer a civilian force. Since the job clearly required not only all regular officers presently allotted but the addition of a great many reserve officers, whom the War Department promptly called up, it should also discourage renewed proposals in Congress to slash military appropriations, including a fresh suggestion that four thousand officers be lopped off the rolls. On May 10 President Roosevelt directed the War Department to produce a plan for completing the movement of the two hundred and fifty thousand trainees into work camps by July 1. General Drum, Deputy Chief of Staff under General MacArthur, asked for orders for field commanders by the following day. All that night, lights burned in the War Department as the staff went to work as if for war. (In the event, corps area commanders were authorized wide discretion in carrying out their tasks.)[15]

Marshall was to find that the CCC was to take most of his own energies and most of the resources of his command. When asked what he could spare for CCC work, he said, "Leave my post surgeon, my commissary officer, my post-exchange office, and my adjutant, and I will run this command with first sergeants." [16] Ultimately he had to do just that. The CMTC program at Fort Screven, which IV Corps Area decided to continue, was handed over almost entirely to reserve officers who had arrived for training. From the moment in late April when Marshall had word that a group of trainees was on its way to Fort Screven from Jacksonville, Florida, he "ate, breathed, and digested the many CCC problems," [17] as did the officers and noncoms of his command.[18]

About two weeks after the accelerated CCC program was ordered, Marshall was named to command the 8th Infantry, with a scheduled promotion to full colonel, which would actually come through on September 1. Being already "deep in the complicated business of building camps in the Florida-Georgia swamp areas, as well as running the big CCC camp here at Fort

Screven and getting ready to take on an increased size unit of five hundred CMTC boys June 13 with reserve officers to handle them," he asked that his transfer to 8th Infantry headquarters at Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, be delayed a month. Since his successor at Screven was not due until July 1 the delay was granted.[19]

Early in June he was made commanding officer of CCC District "F" of the IV Corps Area in charge of establishing some nineteen camps, the closest to his base being at Hinesville, Georgia, the most distant four hundred and fifty miles away in southern Florida. He visited them all on a four-day trip, June 14-18, and assured himself within a week of his return that all would be completed on schedule. He was then ready to report to Fort Moultrie.[20]

From the beginning of the year Marshall had known that he was in line for promotion and had been found qualified by the special board before which he appeared in December 1932. But he also was aware, as he told Pershing in January, that it would probably be months before a vacancy in colonel's grade could be found to which he could be assigned.[21]

In view of the fact that Marshall's career had so seldom put him in command of troops, it is a commentary on his broad competence that to his corps area commander, General King, it seemed that Marshall above all belonged with troops and should stay with them. When King read of Marshall's prospective promotion and reassignment he wrote to the Chief of Infantry, General Fuqua, to ask that the colonel be given a troop command. "Marshall's work at Fort Screven has been outstanding," King wrote, "and he is, as you know, of a very high type." It seemed to King, as it had to General Liggett in 1928 when he wrote Pershing, "Please don't forget Colonel Marshall, who ought to be a Brig-General right now," that the promotion system in his case had badly blundered. "For the work he did during the war, he should be much higher up." King suggested the Fort Moultrie command, which General Fuqua had already decided Marshall should have.[22]

After the assignment was made the Inspector General's report on Fort Screven for fiscal year 1933 was received in Washington.

It included a special commendation "to Lieutenant Colonel G. C. Marshall, 8th Infantry, for the efficient and economical administration of his duties and the high morale of his command." [23]

Savannah, whose friendliness the Marshalls had won, gave them a farewell dinner on June 26 at which the president of the Chamber of Commerce presented a field marshal's baton to the colonel dubbing him "Marshal of Savannah." It was a gay if somewhat wry promotion.[24] On the twenty-ninth Marshall assumed command of the 8th Infantry (including the detachment at Fort Screven) and he and his family began settling into the huge and rather dilapidated quarters there, for which Mrs. Marshall had to buy three hundred and twenty-five yards of curtaining to cover the forty-two French windows. Fort Moultrie, on Sullivan's Island three miles from Charleston, dated back to colonial days. In 1776, as Fort Sullivan, it had saved Charleston from capture. But in 1933 it was on the list of those posts which an economy-minded Congress felt might not be missed.

At Fort Moultrie, Marshall's work with the CCC continued. As the distances to be covered in his new district were not as great as in Georgia and Florida, he managed to visit each of the fifteen camps twice during July. His main efforts were aimed at his camp commanders before they actually reached their camps. Aware that for most of the commanders this was a new kind of assignment and that they would all be improvising solutions to a variety of human problems, Marshall warned above all against discouragement. His parting word was: "I'll be out to see you soon and if I find you doing something, I will help you, but if I find you doing nothing, only God will help you." [25] It became his practice to descend upon a camp about dawn, make a rapid physical survey, talk to some trainees and some officers, and then write sometimes pages of comment for the camp commander.[26] At one camp his early morning call found the commander and another officer still asleep. After rousing them with appropriate remarks, he went on to the supply room, where an embarrassed lieutenant at work in his undershirt sprang to attention and apologized for his undress. The colonel broke into one of his rare smiles. "You may not be in proper uniform," he

said, "but you are the only officer I found working here." [27]

On the whole the Army did an effective job of launching the CCC. On June 30 Colonel Duncan K. Major, Jr., the War Department representative for the program, reported to the director of Emergency Conservation Work, Robert Fechner, that the Army had within the time limit set completed the processing of 275,000 men and organized 1330 companies and camps. He noted that the figure compared to 180,000 men mobilized in a similar period after the declaration of war in 1917.[28] Its size might also have been made more impressive by noting that the CCC trainees outnumbered the men in the regular Army by more than two to one. General MacArthur was delighted and personally dictated congratulations to be read at each post and station in the country. He called the handling of the CCC "a task of character and proportions equivalent of emergencies of war" and observed that "only a high morale, spirit of cooperation, pride of service, and devotion to duty could have accomplished such splendid results." Indeed, the success was generally recognized. General MacArthur was to have his term as Chief of Staff extended a year, largely as a result. There was no more talk about reducing the regular officer corps.[29]

Besides the satisfaction of the job, Marshall took considerable pleasure in the visible transformation of the young men in camp. From week to week he could see the underfed, slouching, undisciplined, truculent youngsters fill out and straighten up. Not all, of course. Some, drawn in particular from the big cities of New York and New Jersey, could not adjust either to country life or to authority and had to be released. It was essential to maintain discipline in the camps, but since the trainees were all volunteers discipline in the last resort could be enforced only by dismissal. If that was perhaps a weakness in the program, it was also the obvious counter to fears of militarism.[30]

Proud of the camps, Marshall seized opportunities to show them off to visitors. As a result the CCC played a part in entertaining the crew of the French cruiser *D'Entrecasteaux,* which visited Charleston in September 1933. Officers and men attended the dedication of a camp near Georgetown, South Carolina, named Camp Lafayette in memory of the French leader who

had first landed in America near that spot. Crew members downed hot dogs, pie, and coffee with the boys of the CCC and *L'Illustration* covered it all for its readers in France.[31]

Some of the enthusiasm which Marshall felt at first hand for the work of human salvage helped carry him along in a general enthusiasm for the spirit of action and leadership shown by the New Deal. Indeed, in these early days the New Deal seemed to many who later opposed it a truly national effort. No partisan opposition had yet developed. If businessmen here and there doubted the wisdom of some of the first experiments, their objections were but softly and tentatively made. In the atmosphere of general acceptance Marshall publicly expressed his own approval. In speeches to local civic clubs he praised the CCC as "the greatest social experiment outside of Russia." He predicted the success of the NRA if only business and labor worked together. This was said at a time when the leaders of Charleston, including its mayor, Burnet Maybank, G. C. Buist Rivers, president of the Chamber of Commerce, General Summerall, president of the Citadel, and Admiral James J. Raby, commandant of the Navy Yard—all conservatives—were celebrating the creation of NRA.[32]

Marshall had been unusually scrupulous in the past, and would continue so, to avoid mixing in any way with party affairs or party issues. He would not even vote, and when no longer in uniform he still refused, as Truman's Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, to contribute to the Democratic party campaign funds, speak at party meetings, or in any way lend his name or support to politicians seeking office. When the political euphoria of 1933 evaporated and the parties resumed their normal scrapping, Marshall's words could be—and by some people were—represented in retrospect as partisan. The suggestion made by a detractor years afterward that Marshall's rise to fame began with the enthusiasm he showed for the CCC and the program of the New Deal in 1933 had no substance, but it had just that superficial contact with fact that demonstrated the danger Marshall habitually took such precautions to avoid.

Marshall liked service with troops and work with the CCC. When his promotion came through in September he looked for-

ward to a good two years as colonel of the regiment. He had managed to get some WPA help to refurbish the post and by the end of summer the old signs of dilapidation were disappearing. Mrs. Marshall brought down a van load of antique furniture from Baltimore, partly to furnish the colonel's roomy quarters. Then came the blow—orders to move. That was disappointment enough. But in addition the new assignment away from troops Marshall thought was a serious setback to his career: he was to go to Chicago as senior instructor with the Illinois National Guard. The Adjutant General attempted to soften the blow by writing that the War Department considered the position of great, perhaps critical, importance, that General MacArthur had recommended him highly, and that he understood some extra pay went with the job.[33] Marshall appealed directly to MacArthur. In a sympathetic reply the Chief of Staff explained why he believed a man of the colonel's talents was needed in Chicago and urged it as Marshall's duty to go.[34]

The commander of the Illinois National Guard Division (the 33d) was Major General Roy D. Keehn, attorney for the Hearst interests in Chicago, a man active in Democratic circles and a power in National Guard affairs. His division, under more or less running attack from Colonel McCormick's *Tribune,* had also drawn serious criticism in the summer of 1933 from the corps area inspectors, who faulted "the inadequate training of junior officers, noncommissioned officers, and specialists in their basic field duties." That criticism coincided with the end of the senior instructor's tour. Keehn wanted a first-rate replacement. When his first choice, Colonel W. K. Naylor, who had been chief of staff of the 33d Division in the war, was declared not available he asked for suggestions.[35] MacArthur ordered Major General Edward Croft, the Chief of Infantry, to list three or more colonels considered outstanding and suitable for the job. Croft knew Marshall's qualifications—only a few weeks before he had been asking the colonel for suggestions on improving Army training procedure. He included him on the list with a notation that Marshall himself preferred to stay where he was. MacArthur ignored the notation—not an unusual Army practice—and at once wired Marshall's name to Keehn in Chi-

cago, urging his acceptance. "He has no superior among Infantry colonels," MacArthur wrote. "Have other names, if not satisfactory. He is of such outstanding ability, however, that I suggest you confer with General [Frank] Parker with reference to him before proceeding further with the matter." Keehn saw no need to proceed any further.[36]

As for Marshall, he remained unhappy. He appreciated the War Department's view that the Chicago post was important because of the danger of riots that the National Guard might have to deal with. "An anticipated internal situation this winter with the hungry and the striking coal miners," he wrote Pershing, "caused my selection." [37] Nevertheless he was not reconciled to going. A number of his friends shared his feeling that the assignment, by intention or not, put him off the main career road to high command in the Army. It seemed to them an injustice they were determined to correct if possible.