

TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY'S
GRADUATION CEREMONY¹

June 6, 1951
St. Louis, Missouri

Dr. Compton, ladies and gentlemen, I am very happy to be here this morning. I was in Annapolis last Friday and West Point yesterday morning, and it's a very inspiring thing in these troubled days to see gatherings such as this and realize that this is America, this is the youth of America, who are to carry on through a very difficult period, but to do it presumably with wisdom and with courage. It's very significant, the character of the groups that one sees on occasions like this. I don't know any better way to understand our country, and it is always an inspiration to me.

I'm going to read what I have to say, which I don't generally do, but I talked off-hand Friday and I talked off-hand yesterday, and it's a rather perilous business, so I thought I'd relax today and read.²

In talking to the graduating class at Annapolis and to the class at West Point, I spoke of the apologetic feeling I always have when addressing a graduating class of young men and women who within a few minutes are to embark on their lifetime careers. I realize from my own experience how little interest most of you will have at the moment in the formalities of an address such as this and also that it is not an appropriate moment for moralizing or dealing with generalities. But there are some comments I wish to make, some by way of explanation and some which I hope will be of interest to you.

I accepted this invitation because of my high regard for your President, Dr. Compton, and the fact that he had done so much for this country and so much specifically for the Army at the time I was its Chief of Staff. I felt that I owed him a debt on which I could make a small

payment in accepting his invitation for this morning. I will not refer to his brothers who occupy a similar distinguished position in this country in all they have done for the government and the people through the brilliance of their minds and their willingness to contribute through great personal effort.³

I don't need to tell you that these are critical days. Just how critical is a matter of opinion and personal judgment, but I think that all recognize that there has seldom, if ever, been a period in our history when we were faced with such grave dangers and difficulties. There is unlimited debate as to what we should do and more particularly how we arrived where we are. I think there is always a possibility that the average man or woman fails to analyze or to take into proper account the various situations and the decisions which took place under those special conditions. Unless one keeps clearly in mind what were the conditions of the moment, it is virtually impossible to form a reasonable judgment as to what was the most appropriate action at the time. We are all by habit pretty good Monday morning quarterbacks, but what we need these days is very sober thinking and that requires a solid foundation of facts.

And I might explain of my own point of view that while I was secretary of state, at a time when the pressures were exceedingly great, and I could accept few invitations, I never failed to meet with young groups that came into Washington so often under various auspices, and I saw them in the State Department auditorium. And my purpose was to say this—these were as a rule of the high school age and period—my purpose was to say this: that I wanted them to feel that their point of view was a very important factor, particularly when it came to the family dinner table. And that what I implored them to do was get the facts and not venture the opinions for quite some time to come. I had passed 60 by quite a few years, and I was

having a great time of opinions even at that age. And I knew that the opinions of youth, they are inspirational, but often emotional, and too hasty. But the collection of facts was a most important matter. And if they were modest about those facts, they could exert a great influence in their communities, beginning with the family dinner table. But if they were officious with them, all they made was to stir up resistance. What we lack in this country, it seems to me, particularly the younger generation, is a search for facts rather than a frequency of opinions. And so much comes to us through the radio, through the press, and other ways, such as this, that you get into a great confusion between the opinions of this person and that person, this commentator and that commentator, that the facts are entirely lost track of. And when you come to sober thinking, it's got to have a solid basis of facts, and I commend that idea to all of you.⁴

Since our much too rapid—almost tumultuous demobilization of the greatest military force in the world in 1945 and '46, since we sank into a position of military impotence at a time when virtually by acclamation, saving for the Soviets, we were accorded the responsibility of leadership for the world. Great changes have occurred and great accomplishments have been recorded.

In the summer of 1947 Western Europe was virtually a slough of despond, the individual was sunk in despair, the future held no hope. Only one who personally observed that situation can realize how tragic it was and how dramatic and remarkable has been the recovery. Under the leadership of this government, the economic recovery of Western Europe has been carried to the point of an acknowledged success and of most critical importance in the battle against Communism. That was and is an achievement of major proportions. Coincident with that was the decision of this government to move to the succor

of Greece in its struggle against the Communist guerrillas aided, abetted, and sheltered by the Soviet satellite states on her borders. There were many criticisms and dim views of the European Recovery Program, and there were more of these regarding the courageous decision of this government as to Greece. The latter was advertised as a stalemate, as a costly and futile enterprise. It proved to be a significant success in saving Greece from Communistic domination and probably Italy as well, and it gave great reassurance to Turkey. But what was even more important, it made possible the first great defection in the Soviet line-up, that of Yugoslavia.⁵

A little later came another crisis with another great decision, and all of these are to the same purpose, this resistance to the Communistic domination first of the European continent. There was a blockade of Berlin by the Soviets and the refusal of the allied governments to accept the condition. There was also a refusal to follow the advice and urgings of many who advocated a break-through by force which almost certainly would have provoked a war. Instead the famous airlift to Berlin was established. Again there were those who regarded it as impossible of execution. There were those who cried stalemate again and the waste of large sums. But it ended after 18 months in a success which made a vast impression on the people of Germany and of Western Europe, building up their confidence in the great democracies and their fight to resist the subjection of Western Europe to the Communistic regime. There were other instances at Teheran and Trieste which were successfully met and finally came the supreme test of the moment in Korea—this time a test of whether or not we would stand aloof and see a new Republic, created under the auspices of the United Nations, deliberately destroyed by the Communistic hordes.⁶

I think that is a remarkable record to-date, a record of unusually difficult and dangerous situations, met each in turn by courageous decisions and so far with the avoidance of general war.

I am reciting these as a background as we go step by step, so much of which is completely forgotten by many.

As to the fighting in Korea, you are kept reasonably informed of the course of that struggle, but there are several aspects that I would like to bring more directly to your attention. When you attempt to judge what has happened and what is happening there, you should first have clearly in mind the position of the United Nations in connection with the creation of the Republic of South Korea and the responsibility for us that that entailed. Then you should be well briefed on the succession of events in that struggle, and particularly on the amazing performance of our heavily outnumbered troops in striking a deadly blow at Communist prestige in Asia. The Communist regime in China reached a peak of prestige in the conquest of that vast territory but it reached a higher peak by its first successful blows last fall against our small United Nations force in Korea.⁷

Now, prestige, or face as it is commonly called in the Orient, assumes an importance that we do not vaguely realize. What has happened since General Ridgway assumed command of the Eighth Army has not only struck, as I have just said, a deadly blow to the prestige of the Communists in Asia but has all but wrecked their pride and morale in the debacle of the past month in Korea. Without reinforcements except for a single Canadian brigade which did not arrive until the closing phase of the battle, the Eighth Army repulsed the Communist onslaught, inflicting on them terrific—almost unbelievable—losses, and then instantly struck back with an offensive counter-thrust that cut off thousands of the enemy, destroyed many

thousands more and carried our men beyond the 38th parallel and deep into the Communist's position.⁸

Strange but happy to relate, our losses have been exceedingly, almost unbelievably small. By comparison with those of the Communist forces they have been minute, though to all of us and especially to the families of the fallen they constitute a major tragedy.

We have not seen the end in Korea. No man can predict exactly what that will be. But it is becoming more and more apparent that without fatally sapping our military resources we have posed a terrific problem for the hostile regime in China. Let us hope that before more of these hideous losses have been piled up that our opponents will come to realize that war is not a profitable business and that world disputes can and should be settled by peaceful negotiations and the establishment of a reputation for good faith as to all commitments.

Now I would like to comment on men from Missouri that I have come to know intimately and who have made a great contribution to the country. I refer, of course, to the President, Mr. Truman, and to General Bradley, who stands for the finest of qualities in a soldier, and to General Pershing, with whom I served personally for a number of years. There are many great Missourians but these three men I have known intimately.⁹

Then there is another Missourian, little known outside of the State and I doubt if many of you young people here in Missouri are aware of his remarkable career. I am referring to Alexander William Doniphan, a soldier and a statesman who was born in Kentucky and who moved out to Lexington, Missouri, in 1830. There he had a distinguished career as a lawyer. His influence over juries was considered almost infallible, and he was employed in nearly every important case in the northwestern section of the state. His qualities of leadership were

emphasized by his physical stature as a man, said to be very handsome, and he was six feet four.

In May of 1846, outbreak of the Mexican War, he organized the first regiment of Missouri Volunteers for the Mexican War. The regiment was made up of young men from the best families of the state and a number of pretty rough plainsmen, and Doniphan, who enlisted as a private, was elected colonel. The regiment rendezvoused at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where I spent a great many years. There followed one of the most remarkable military campaigns in history. The most famous military narrative, I believe, is that of Xenophon's "Anabasis," a classic of Greek literature, describing "The March Down of the Ten Thousand," and that has become a military classic both in action and in description.¹⁰ Doniphan's men, without quartermaster, or paymaster, or commissary, without uniforms or tents or even military discipline as we know it today, marched 700 miles across the plains to the conquest of an area larger than the entire United States at that time. From Santa Fe his little regiment penetrated 900 miles in a hostile country, crossing two deserts, twice defeating overwhelmingly superior forces and completed the great trek by a march of 250 miles to the mouth of the Rio Grande. Half rationed throughout the journey, half famished in crossing the deserts, misled into the heart of a hostile country, these Missourians jauntily strode through every difficulty, crushed every enemy, and received their first full rations after marching 1600 miles.

I am going to take the liberty of describing to you a little of what they did because it provides a perfect example of American qualities and leadership, of initiative and individual competence at their best, and apparently with a complete absence of recriminations and complaints because of lack of food, lack of pay, and lack of public appreciation.

This little command of less than a thousand men, after they had gone 700 miles to Santa Fe, and the Mexican governor had withdrawn before the fight that was expected, went on from there some 225 miles south of what is now El Paso, there to meet General Wool.¹¹ There was an old telegraph there, there was no radio, and I presume there were no press correspondents. In any event, they made this march of 225 miles, I believe, crossing the Jornada del Muerto, this desert of death, “a Journey of Death,” which was about 90 miles across, with no water whatever. They made that successfully and halted about 15 miles north of El Paso. There a force of Mexicans about three times their number appeared suddenly while these men were completely relaxed, as a matter of fact the commander was playing cards, and moved to the attack, and they included a brigade of cavalry and a very gaudy lieutenant with a light blue dolman and a lance, a very conspicuous bonnet, not unlike that of your president here, and surged forward to exterminate this invasion. When the smoke cleared away, Doniphan had lost eight men, the enemy had lost over 200, and they were in a complete flight. And the action is rather celebrated, because a company of 30 men on foot charged and drove back the cavalry.

They moved on into El Paso, and there was no General Wool, of course. They stayed there about a week and then, being a citizen army, they voted as to whether or not they would go south to Chihuahua, 275 miles, because they thought maybe General Wool was there. That meant another desert, even worse than the one they had just crossed. But they voted to go and they left, still no supplies, still no pay, in a sense you might say no nothing. They had a very difficult time crossing this desert. They even carried water in the scabbards for their swords. But they made it, a fortunate rain storm, almost unprecedented, came up, and they appeared on the far side, and there had a stroke of good fortune in meeting a plainsman, very

gaudily attired, who had 20 Delaware Indian scouts. He was a scalp merchant. He was hired by the Mexican government to procure Apache scalps, and they hadn't paid him and they owed him \$30,000. I don't know what the scalp payment basis was, but he left in disgust, he met Doniphan, and became his chief of scouts, and these Delaware Indians were famous in that capacity.¹²

So they moved on south until they came about 25 miles north of Chihuahua, and there on a high pass they found a force of almost about 5,000 entrenched, I know they say there were some 26 redoubts, all prepared to receive them and exterminate them. Here they were way down south, now almost, more than 1,000 miles from their starting point, no support, no contact with other troops, and the enemy was so confident that they brought out the shackles to put on the survivors as they led them into Chihuahua. This time Doniphan attacked in a very perfectly executed way, drove these people back with tremendous losses, completely dispersed their army, and moved into Chihuahua, took over the town, cleaned up the town much better than he had been cleaning his own campsites as he went down the road. There was nobody there, but they learned something of what was going on with General Taylor further south in Mexico, and they marched down another long move, I think of something like 700 miles, and finally near Monterrey joined up with the other American forces. I know they said at their first inspection—they had just received their first rations in pretty much near 2,000 miles—one soldier was questioned by the general because he had his blouse full of food, and he said, his response was they enlisted to fight, not to dress, and they'd have to accept that the way it went.

The battle had been decided in Buena Vista. The movement was now from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Therefore Doniphan's people turned and marched some 300 miles, I think, to

near the mouth of the Rio Grande and embarked, were taken to New Orleans, transferred to river ships, were taken up the river to Missouri, and arrived back almost a year from the time they started. It was a perfectly wonderful military feat, unbelievable, at the time it was hardly credited, and all of the publicity was going to the affairs of General Taylor at Buena Vista, who afterwards became president, and to General Scott in the march to Mexico City. So literally nothing was heard of Doniphan. Besides that, in the later years he stood very strongly for the federal Union, and that, of course, put him under considerable blight in the particular community in which he lived, because Lexington, Missouri, was largely populated by people from the South. So he was little heard of. I don't know of any recognition he received in later years until a camp at the beginning of the First World War was given his name, Camp Doniphan near Little Rock, Arkansas [*Lawton, Oklahoma*].¹³

I ask your indulgence for having gone into the details of military history in this matter, but it is good to know the type of men who moved to the frontiers of this country and largely made it what it is. We need to cultivate those qualities today, to understand them, to compare our own actions with them, because they are inherent, I think, in our quality of citizenship. Yet they are very apt to be lost in the luxuries, excitements, and diversions of our too-complex civilization and extraordinarily high standards of living.

I recall that when I was in the Philippines, just before the termination of the Philippine Insurrection, and with a company, our rice was 16 cents a day. Nothing was ever given that company, until the second year when we received a box of forty books from Helen Gould. No one ever heard of hot chocolate, no one ever heard of Coca-Cola, and no one ever heard of a write-up in any magazine or newspaper in the United States, but we took it and we did it and were rather proud of it, and they still have reunions of that particular outfit. Now in an

American army we have quite a struggle, because we have acquired the habit, we'll say, of orange juice, and they've got to have it all over the Far Pacific, and Coca-Cola, which is difficult to take around in bottles, but you have to provide it. I won't mention beer and things like that. But we have to keep pace with the development of our habits, and it makes it a pretty trying thing on the logistical end of an army, and the reactions when these are not all provided are sometimes pretty difficult to meet. But the quality is there. I think the greatest mistake the Japanese made, other than their tortures of prisoners and things of that sort—that's unbelievably reactive at their disadvantage—was the fact they felt American young men would not fight. Well they were completely disabused of that. But they were looking at the luxuries that had become a habit of life for us, here in this particular instance I described, you can see how much can be done with so very little.¹⁴

Now I would like to speak of another matter. Congress is about to bring to completion the final enactment of what should be an enduring system to maintain this country in the position of leadership in which it finds itself in the world today. And that is a system of Universal Military Training.¹⁵ Without such a system, and I know of no other substitute, our leadership is doomed to failure in my opinion, and our inevitable weakness would endanger the peace of the world in my opinion and that of all my associates. We will never, now please listen to this, we will never tolerate or finance a large standing army, which means that we must have a form of citizen-soldiery that will be effective in this world today. The old system will not work. It's taken us from last September beyond now, and it will go into June and July before our divisions we called out from the National Guard will be fully trained. We can't afford such long delays. The old system will not work. The new system under this new law, I am

convinced will work to make us, with a minimum of appropriations, so powerful in the world that our peaceful intentions can be made effective for all countries.

I wish the graduating class the best of luck, and may God bless you.¹⁶

Washington University in St. Louis Archives/University Records (Commencement Collection, Audio-Visual Media, Commencement, June 6, 1951)

¹ Major George reported to Marshall on April 24 that Lovett had spoken with Arthur Compton, chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, “who is very anxious for you to come out and make the graduation address on June 6. Dr. Compton thought this would provide you with an ideal sounding board and that it was very much needed at this time in the midwest.” Marshall “would not have to make a final decision on this until May 26,” but George warned Marshall that “Dr. Compton will probably request an appointment to see you and this is the matter about which he would talk. As you know, you have some 28 similar invitations still in the pending file and you are committed to make the graduation addresses at Annapolis (June 1) and West Point (June 5).” During his meeting with Compton at 10:37 a.m. on April 25, Marshall assured Compton that he “would make every effort” to give the address. Compton wrote to Marshall on May 11 to follow up on this conversation and to provide some additional details. Regarding the content of the speech, Compton thought that one point “that has seemed to me worthy of special emphasis, and which would come with peculiar appropriateness from yourself is, educated men and women as a national resource for the strength of our nation in both war and peace. There is also the world message, which I know is on your mind, to the effect that the great American goal is not empire but that free men and women everywhere shall be able to work toward a society in

which all can contribute their part and will accordingly find that their lives have meaning. Special emphasis would naturally come on the fact that what America wants in such a world is a stable, peaceful situation in which we can cooperate effectively with our neighbor nations. But I have no desire to put words in your mouth.” Marshall accepted the invitation on May 21 and explained that “in all probability Mrs. Marshall will not accompany me.” He also appreciated Compton’s “pointers on what I might say in my address.” (George to Marshall, memorandum, April 24, 1951; Compton to Marshall, May 11, 1951; and Marshall to Compton, May 21, 1951, GCMRL/G. C. Marshall Papers [Secretary of Defense, Number Indexed, M214-13-4].) See 51.04.30D to Ginsburgh.

² The copy of this speech available in the Marshall Papers is a “Brief transcript of informal remarks by” Marshall and was “Delivered as written with numerous extemporization.” (GCMRL/G. C. Marshall Papers [Secretary of Defense, Speeches and Statements].) The editors have used an audio recording of the speech available at the Washington University in St. Louis Archives to produce this transcript, which differs substantially from the reading copy in the Marshall Papers. The above two paragraphs do not appear in Marshall’s reading copy. (See also notes 4, 13, and 14 below.)

³ Arthur Compton, a Nobel Prize–winning physicist, played a major role in the development of the atomic bomb as the leader of the Metallurgical Laboratory that produced the first nuclear chain reaction as part of the Manhattan Project. (See 56.10.25B to Compton) His eldest brother, Karl, also a physicist, was president of MIT from 1930 to 1948 and current president of the MIT Corporation and had chaired Truman’s Advisory Commission on Universal Training in 1946 and 1947. Wilson M. Compton, the middle brother, had recently resigned as president of the State College of Washington.

⁴ For an example of Marshall's remarks to youth organizations while secretary of state, see *Papers of GCM*, 6: 354–55. Marshall also addressed the American Legion Boys Forum on August 3, 1948, and the American Legion Auxiliary Girls Nation on August 4, 1948. (GCMRL/G. C. Marshall Papers [Secretary of State, Speeches and Statements].) This paragraph was not in Marshall's reading copy of the speech.

⁵ See the index of volume six of *Papers of GCM* for specific references to the European Recovery Program (ERP), the Truman Doctrine, and US aid to Greece. On the Yugoslavian break with the Soviet Union, see 51.05.25 Industrial PR Orientation Conference and *Papers of GCM*, 6: 496.

⁶ On the Berlin blockade and airlift, see *Papers of GCM*, 6: 489–597 passim. On the Iran Crisis of 1946 and the situation involving the territory of Trieste, see 51.05.25 Industrial PR Orientation Conference. For more on Trieste, see *Papers of GCM*, 6: 110, 423.

⁷ See 50.11.07H; 50.11.28H; 50.11.28X; 50.12.01H; 50.12.02-03X

⁸ See 51.03.01H; 51.05.25 Industrial PR Orientation Conference; 51.08.24 Canadian Exhibition>

⁹ President Truman was born in Lamar, General Bradley in Randolph County, and General Pershing in Laclède, Missouri.

¹⁰ For more on Marshall's time at Fort Leavenworth, see *Papers of GCM*, 1: 36–50, and Pogue, *Education*, 92–108.

According to an earlier article by Marshall which recounted Doniphan's story, Xenophon's *Anabasis* tells of a mass of "Greek mercenaries" including Xenophon, who despite being "Encompassed by foes and betrayed by friends, . . . made their war from the heart of the hostile Persian Empire" to the Black Sea "and so back to Constantinople. Absent

15 months, they had traveled 3,500 miles.” (George C. Marshall, “Epic March of Americans,” *Illinois Guardsman* 3, no. 1 [December 1935]: 14–16, quotes on 14.)

¹¹ Brigadier General John E. Wool commanded the Center Division of Major General Zachary Taylor’s American Army of Observation and led the mission to capture the Mexican city of Chihuahua. The Mexican governor of New Mexico at this time was Manuel Armijo. (Ibid., 14.)

¹² Marshall identified this American man in his 1935 article as Captain James Kirker. (Ibid., 15.)

¹³ General Taylor defeated a Mexican army at the February 1847 Battle of Buena Vista. One month later, Major General Winfield Scott took the Mexican port of Vera Cruz and, after a series of battlefield victories, occupied Mexico City in September. Taylor served as president from 1849 until his death in 1850. The preceding four paragraphs were omitted from Marshall’s reading copy and replaced with a note that Marshall would include a “detailed description” of Doniphan’s mission.

¹⁴ For more on Marshall’s tour in the Philippines, see *Papers of GCM*, 1: 23–28, and Pogue, *Education*, 70–83. Helen Miller Gould was a wealthy philanthropist at the time Marshall was stationed in the Philippines. This paragraph was not in Marshall’s reading copy of the speech.

¹⁵ See 51.06.09 to George; 51.06.19A UMT enactment.

¹⁶ Compton rose following Marshall’s speech to thank him for “that great message of courage and confidence in the future.” (Recording of Washington University in St. Louis Archives/University Records [Commencement Collection, Audio-Visual Media, Commencement, June 6, 1951].)

Compton wrote to Marshall later on June 6 “to express my appreciation for your message to us at the Commencement Exercises. Nothing could have been more appropriate than your account of Doniphan and his gallant Missourians. It was just the setting we needed to give our young men and women the appreciation of the great possibilities that lie before them.” Compton also offered Marshall an honorarium for his address. Marshall replied on June 12 following his return from his inspection tour of the Far East (see the next document) to thank Compton for his “assistance in making my departure from Saint Louis for the Far East quiet and publicly uneventful. I was glad to go out to the University for the occasion, but more particularly for the debt that the nation and I personally owe you for your valuable efforts in the last war.” Marshall also “signed a bread-and-butter note to Mrs. Compton” thanking her for her hospitality during his visit and requested on June 14 that Dr. Compton make out the honorarium to the Dill Memorial Committee, which received a check for \$300.00 from Compton on July 6. (Compton to Marshall, June 6, 1951; Marshall to Compton, June 12 and 14, 1951; and Marshall to Mrs. Compton, June 13, 1951, GCMRL/G. C. Marshall Papers [Secretary of Defense, Number Indexed, M214-13-4]; Bliss to Marshall, July 6, 1951, GCMRL/G. C. Marshall Papers [Secretary of Defense, Selected].)