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March 23, 1962

Mr. Robert E. Smith,
Dunster F-54
Cambridge 38, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Smith:

I have your letter of March 21 about General Marshall's speech at the alumni meeting in 1947.

The members of the corporation, the President and Fellows of Harvard College, select the candidates for honorary degrees. By custom the degree is not awarded except when the candidate is present in person. As I recall it, General Marshall was not available when a number of the leading generals and admirals were nominated for honorary degrees shortly after the war. In consequence the others had attended but General Marshall had not received his degree.

Some time before Commencement I renewed the invitation to General Marshall to attend and receive his degree, since by that time he had become Secretary of State. But again he declined.

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Meantime I had consulted Mr. Conant about the nominees. Having authority to select the candidates, I indulged my dislike of the award of Harvard degrees to high brass and told Mr. Conant that I was not going to name any general or admiral. Mr. Conant told me very firmly that that wouldn't do, that there might be logic in it but that the public would not stand for it. So I invited General Bradley to speak.

Two days before Commencement I got a call from the State Department to the effect that the Secretary would be glad to come to Commencement after all and make a speech, although he did not want it to be the major speech of the occasion. Thus I wound up with two generals instead of none. I did not realize at once how historic the occasion would be.

Theoretically the names of the candidates are not disclosed until actually awarded. While it was attempted to maintain secrecy about his coming to Commencement it of course leaked out and resulted in a capacity crowd.

The Secretary told me later something of the origin of his determination to speak at this time. A few weeks before, by the trial balloon technique, a speech was made in a small city by Mr. Dean Acheson, who was, I think, under secretary

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at that time. The public reaction to this being satisfactory, the Secretary determined to go all out for what has become known as the Marshall Plan, and a speech was prepared accordingly. The question was then the rostrum from which it should be delivered. Two or three suggestions were made and then the Secretary remembered that he had been invited to receive a Harvard degree and that seemed a highly suitable occasion. He therefore indicated that he would like to accept and of course was welcomed.

When the Secretary began to read his speech there was an increasing recognition that this was a very important event and the atmosphere was electric. At the end the Secretary took off his glasses and leaning on the stand said, in a very few words, that he couldn't overstate the seriousness of the situation and his hope that the American public would realize it. The applause was tremendous and the distinguished guests crowded around the Secretary. Probably few recognized the full extent of the policy declared or what it would do for Europe in particular, but I think everyone there recognized that it was an event of great significance.

I think that about completes the story. It has been a pleasure to recall these details.

Very truly yours,



LB
RD