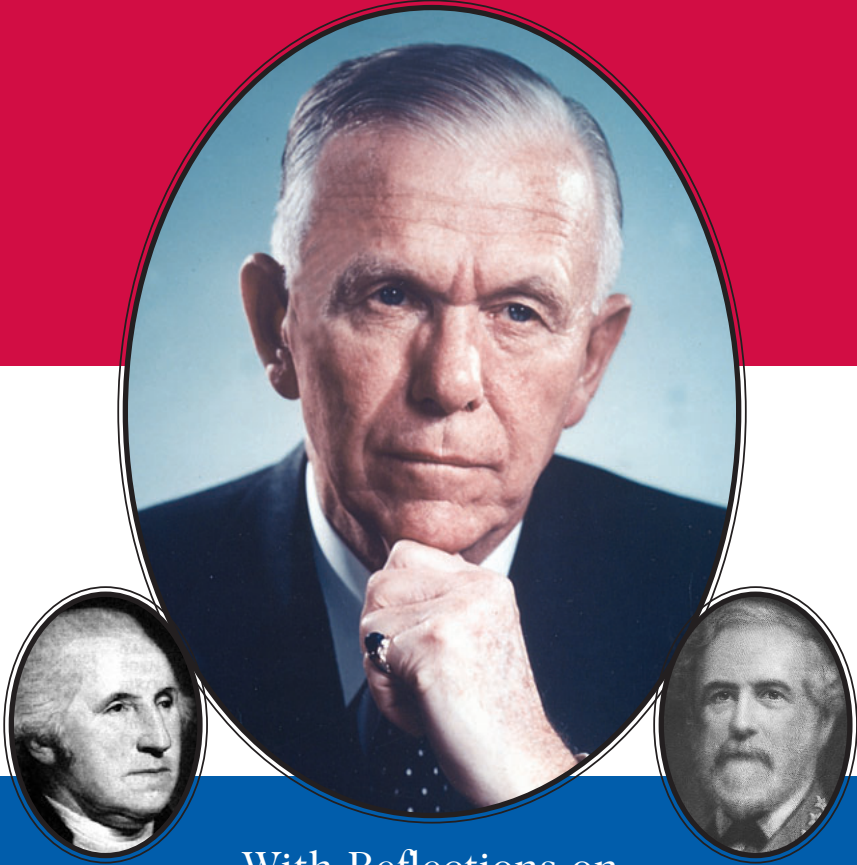


THE CHARACTER OF GEORGE MARSHALL



With Reflections on
George Washington
and Robert E. Lee

Institute for Honor, Washington
and Lee University
George C. Marshall Foundation
Virginia Military Institute

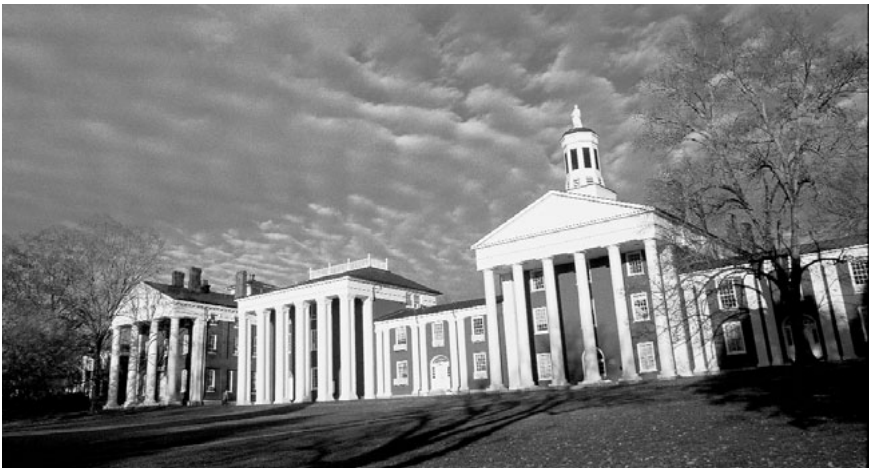
In cooperation with:
Center for the Study of the Presidency
Abshire-Inamori Leadership Academy,
Center for Strategic and
International Studies

DAVID M. ABSHIRE

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George Washington
and Robert E. Lee

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The Colonade at Washington and Lee University

PREFACE

Washington and Lee University's Institute for Honor held its fourth annual weekend seminar February 25-26, 2005. In a unique collaboration with the Virginia Military Institute and the George C. Marshall Foundation, the Institute focused on the character and career of George C. Marshall, arguably the greatest soldier of the twentieth century.

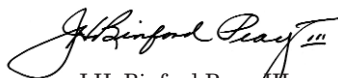
Trusted by Eisenhower, Churchill, and Stalin alike, Marshall was the central architect of the Allied victory in World War II. Through the Marshall Plan and his years of service as Secretary of Defense and Secretary of State, Marshall won the peace as well, rescuing Europe and much of the rest of the world from the pervasive devastation and disorder that might well have led to another World War. The Institute's keynote address was delivered by Ambassador David M. Abshire, President of the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Also speaking in the program were Brig. Gen. Charles F. Brower IV of VMI and Larry I. Bland of the Marshall Foundation.

Established in 2000 through a generous endowment from the Washington and Lee University class of 1960, the Institute for Honor seeks to promote the understanding and practice of honor as an indispensable element of society. Its mandate is to provide an educational and resource management facility dedicated to the advocacy of honor as the core value in personal, professional, business, and community relations. The 2005 program, "Leadership with Integrity: The Character and Career of George C. Marshall," attracted an enrollment of 179 participants, the largest in the Institute's history.

We are grateful to everyone who participated in the Institute, particularly the Washington and Lee students and the VMI cadets. Everyone who attended came away with a renewed respect and appreciation for the man President Harry Truman called the "greatest of the greats." We hope you will enjoy this publication of Ambassador Abshire's keynote address.



Thomas Burish
President
Washington and
Lee University



J.H. Binford Peay, III
Superintendent
Virginia Military
Institute



Harry H. Warner
President
The George C. Marshall
Foundation

MANY HISTORIANS WOULD ARGUE that FDR and Churchill were the two greatest men of the twentieth century. Together they saved Europe and the world from Hitler's tyranny and Japan's imperialism. Why then, would these two giants choose George C. Marshall as the greatest man they ever knew? After all, Roosevelt was a charismatic speaker and political personality who took America through the Great Depression and the Second World War. Churchill was an extraordinary writer, classical orator, and accomplished historian. He combined these abilities to mobilize a defeatist nation during World War II. Why then, with all their talents did each not choose the other but Marshall as the greatest?

Indeed, George Marshall lacked many of the characteristics of Roosevelt and Churchill, including that of being Prime Minister or President. Moreover, he lacked the charisma and speaking abilities of his military peers, such as MacArthur and Patton. Given his flat tone of voice, Marshall would not have been able to deliver Shakespeare's Henry V St. Crispin's Day speech before the Battle of Agincourt with the vigor Churchill would have displayed. Finally, Marshall was not as able a writer as Eisenhower and MacArthur. So I ask again, why did FDR and Churchill say that Marshall was the greatest man they ever knew? In search of answers, this essay explores the unusual character of Marshall and from where it came.

As I researched this perplexing issue for my speech and essay, I found the answer to be stunning. It cuts to the heart of what is the most sacred part of truly great character-based leadership. It makes us think that maybe we live in an age of diminished expectations. Under close examination, the most stunning characteristic about Marshall is that he was not a leader of blind ambition who sought power and self-aggrandizement but, to the contrary, he was an unparalleled servant-leader. Such leadership was based on the qualities which were learned here at the Virginia Military Institute: above all, integrity, honor, duty, and sacrifice. These qualities elicited trust in those who dealt with him. Even Joseph Stalin made the claim that he would trust his life to Marshall.

In the course of my inquiry, I searched for predecessors of George Marshall. I found two Americans: George Washington and

Robert E. Lee. Both, in fact, were role models of Marshall. It was these two who formed the imprint of his legacy.

Let's review the evidence. George Washington, like Marshall, was not charismatic or flamboyant, nor was he as brilliant as Hamilton or Jefferson. While a great leader, Washington was not a great strategist and lost more battles than he won. Yet, he won the Revolutionary War. He saved his country three times because his model character, trustworthiness, and patriotism allowed him to rally more brilliant minds around him. His historic leadership and integrity made possible our successes in the Revolutionary

Washington's historic leadership and integrity saved his country three times.

War, the Constitutional Convention and the first Presidency of the United States. Like Marshall, Washington was neither a brilliant writer nor a charismatic speaker. Like Marshall, Washington would time and again pass up power, as he did in the famous encounter at Newburg after the war when the disgruntled, unpaid continentals wanted to make him king for life. In his refusal of such power Washington made character king, not himself.

When King George III asked his American portrait painter what the victorious Washington would do after the war, the painter replied that Washington would "go to Mount Vernon." To this the King said, "If so, he will be the greatest man in the world." Such a sacrificial act was unknown and incomprehensible in Europe, where monarchs dominated with tyranny and struggled for unabashed power.

As for Marshall's second forerunner, I turn to Robert E. Lee. While Lee never sought vain expressions of himself, he was imposing. Lee had an extraordinary presence, possessed untold good looks, was at the top of his class at West Point, had an impeccable military career, and a truly brilliant military mind. In 1861, a newly elected Abraham Lincoln learned of Lee's incomparable capabilities and offered him command of the Union armies. If Lincoln had succeeded, the Civil War would have been very short. Lee was surely among the nineteenth century's finest military geniuses — surpassing even the ability of the masterful Napoleon, who was ultimately defeated in his later campaigns by his own hubris.

In contrast, Lee lacked hubris. He was always modest and quietly religious. Contemplating Lincoln's offer and the growing

momentum behind Southern secession, he took to his knees and prayed for answers. Uneasy with slavery, like Washington, and not favoring secession, he settled his moral quandary by concluding that he could not take up arms against his own people and his own state.

Despite his final decision to support the Confederate cause, why did Lee become so respected by the citizens at large and, ultimately, by Lincoln and Grant? After the war, when there was a move before a court to try Lee as a traitor, Grant announced that if the motion proceeded, he would resign his commission and his command. If a former enemy held so much respect for Lee, it was likely earned. Despite his good looks, his marriage into the wealthy Custis family, and their relation to George Washington, Lee exuded integrity as a servant leader. In addition, he always held himself accountable and never shifted responsibility to others. At the end of his defeat at Gettysburg, despite having been let down by Jeb Stuart on the first day and Longstreet on the third day, Lee took his army from the battlefield conceding, “It is all my fault.”

After the bloody Civil War, this great general, like Marshall after World War II, gave himself to reconstruction and reconciliation, first by passing-up lucrative financial opportunities and then by becoming a progressive and innovative educator devoted to Washington College

After the bloody Civil War, Lee—like Marshall after World War II—gave himself to reconstruction and reconciliation.

and “practical education” as a part of the reconstruction of the South. His strides included establishing studies in international law, implementing the first-ever efforts toward a school of journalism, emphasizing modern languages, and implementing a “junior fellows” program. Lee’s innovative vision extended even into the business arena when he suggested — a decade before the Wharton School — that a full-scale business school should be established.

Further, we also recall the account of a service at St. Paul’s Church in Richmond after the war where a black man, a freed slave, was first to kneel at the communion rail. The white congregation froze. Yet General Lee arose and knelt next to the man — no longer a slave, now a fellow citizen. The startled and shamed white congregation followed suit.

So there we have it: Washington, then Lee, then Marshall. As

I contemplated the question of Marshall's greatness, I thought, what a remarkable coincidence that I would deliver my speech on Marshall at Washington and Lee University, which was given its first endowment by Washington and much later led by Lee. I deliver this lecture in the Lee Chapel, built by Lee, close to VMI, where young Marshall trained, and adjacent to the George C. Marshall Foundation. With these two early American role models in mind, let us examine Marshall's character in greater depth.

While he was deeply influenced by his knowledge of both Washington and Lee as a cadet at VMI, Marshall was, by his own account, not a model student. However, he was a model cadet, an exemplary First Captain, and said he first learned how to manage men at VMI. This art of managing people was key to everything that

At that moment, Marshall decided it was time to make the "sacrifice play."

followed in his career. After graduation, he served in the Philippines

and further honed his leadership abilities. With his country mobilizing for the First World War, Marshall directly appealed to the VMI Commandant to assist him in becoming one of the first soldiers sent to serve overseas. Soon he was in the First Infantry Division deployed to Europe.

General "Black Jack" Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, played a large role in building George Marshall's character. Their first fiery meeting occurred in France when Pershing visited the headquarters of the First Division, where Marshall had become acting Chief of Staff. It became obvious to young Marshall that Pershing had inappropriately blamed the flustered Division commander for the Division's poor performance. In Marshall's opinion, Pershing's anger was based on ignorance of the facts and was clearly off-base. However, the division commander was on the defensive and too afraid to explain the circumstances to an impatient Pershing.

At that moment, Marshall decided it was time for him to make what he later called the "sacrifice play." With multiple facts and cutting analysis, he spoke up to Pershing about scarce supplies, inadequate quarters, and insufficient motor transport — in other words, lack of support, which made good performance impossible. As a surprised and rebuffed Pershing marched off muttering "we have our

problems too,” everyone figured Major Marshall was finished, a bright career washed up. Quite to the contrary, Pershing returned again and again to see the forthright major, from whom he could get the “straight scoop.” After the war, Pershing asked Marshall to be his aide. The two became extremely close and Pershing became Marshall’s primary mentor.

But, we are ahead of our story. In March of 1918, German General Ludendorff launched a spring offensive hoping to win the war before the full arrival of the American Army. *Marshall mastered the art of making minor concessions for greater objectives.* General Pershing lent hard-pressed General Foch four divisions, thus beginning Marshall’s experience with America’s French and British allies, who had become stultified by the grinding war of attrition in the trenches. As Division Operation Officer in May, Marshall saw fierce fighting at Cantigny, repeatedly visiting the front lines in this first American offensive. In July, Pershing had Marshall, now a Lieutenant Colonel, transferred to his headquarters where he served as deputy under that great intellectual mentor Colonel Fox Conner, AEF’s chief of operations. Shortly thereafter, Marshall, by then a full Colonel, became the architect of the destruction of the St. Mihiel salient. Later, his plan to maneuver 400,000 soldiers from that battle into successful combat 60 miles away in the Meuse-Argonne earned him the nickname “The Wizard.” In his many operations, Marshall learned the friction of working with the prickly French. While never sacrificing his principles, he became a master in the art of making minor concessions for greater objectives. He disciplined himself to make his criticisms constructive, for in retrospect, he recognized that his sometimes undisciplined criticisms of the AEF headquarters often backfired.

To fast forward again in our story, just as Pershing and Fox had been mentors of Marshall, Marshall followed suit as the Assistant Commandant of the Infantry School from 1928 to 1932. He became the mentor of many young officers passing through Fort Benning, Georgia and kept a black book of the most promising. Many of these officers were the generals that Marshall promoted and organized to win WWII.

Marshall’s role as a character mentor was matched by his role as a strategic and tactical mentor. Reflecting upon his World War I



VMI Graduating Class



As Chief of Staff WW II



Marshall at Fort Benning, GA

With Ridgeway and VanFleet in Korea

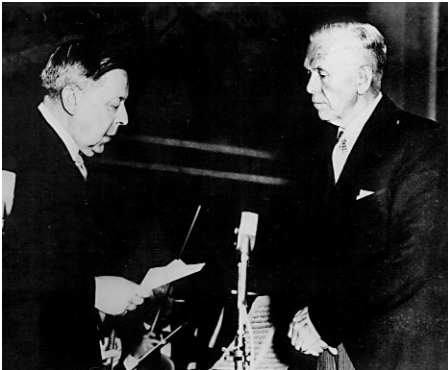




With President Truman



As Secretary of State



Receiving the Nobel Peace Prize



At Harvard



At Quebec Conference

experience, he reformed the Infantry School by breaking the rigid emphasis on defensive trench-warfare tactics that he so detested on the Western Front. In doing so, Marshall — along with J.F.C. Fuller in Britain and Colonel Heinz Guderian in Germany — anticipated the maneuver warfare of the Second World War.

In 1938, an exchange between a junior General Marshall and President Roosevelt vividly reveals Marshall's strategic vision and integrity. The meeting, which included many senior ranking officials, was Marshall's first meeting with the President. President Roosevelt, carrying the legacy of his naval expertise as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, lectured the group on his strategy to prepare against Hitler. The President believed that naval power was important, but a powerful air force — which could threaten, deter and, if need be, defeat the dictator's aims — was even more essential. At that time, the army was a small factor in Roosevelt's strategy. After the lecture, Roosevelt, expecting agreement, gauged the opinion of people in the room. When he came to Marshall, the junior member at the end of the line, the President said condescendingly, "George, I am sure you agree." Everyone watched in awe as Marshall glared at his Commander in Chief, and responded, "No, Mr. President, I disagree." He then insisted that America's defense would require balanced forces. It was the first Pershing encounter all over again.

As the stunned group filed out, gray heads whispered that the inexperienced Marshall had done himself in and would not be back. Not so. Like Pershing, Roosevelt accepted and admired Marshall's integrity, and he would never again address him as George, but always as General. It was clear that this man of extraordinary integrity and cool analysis had moved this great war leader and politician. Surely, Roosevelt often manipulated others and the truth. Nevertheless, Roosevelt recognized character tempered with wisdom and, to his great credit, he wanted it nearby. That is why he promoted Brigadier General George Marshall over thirty-three Generals to make him Chief of Staff and eventually overall grand strategist and the organizer for victory in World War II.

It is interesting to fast forward again. In 1943, the time had come to name the Supreme Allied Commander of Operation Overlord, the invasion of Europe, in what would be the greatest battle yet in the history of the world. Roosevelt recognized that those who go down in

history are not the organizers of victory, but instead the theater commanders who meet and defeat the enemy. Certainly, Marshall had earned the supreme command. The position would be his for the asking. Yet, to Roosevelt and to the Congress as well, Marshall had become the indispensable man in the nation's wartime capital. In a touching moment, Roosevelt said, "If you go, I will not sleep well at night." The servant leader sacrificed the command of the invasion by responding, "I will stay," in yet another play of sacrifice.

Not only was Marshall, in the words of Winston Churchill, the "true architect of victory" in World War II, he became the architect of the American response to the emerging Cold War threat when he was named Secretary of State in 1947. He transformed the State Department by hiring a powerful Policy Planning Staff, headed by George Kennan, author of the concept of containment. Marshall's tenure has been called the Golden Age of innovation and creativity in the State Department. He was a critical part of the initiation of the Truman Doctrine

and its aid to beleaguered Turkey and Greece, both vulner-

Ever the servant leader, Marshall sacrificed the command of the invasion by responding, "I will stay."

able to Communist takeover. He was the author of the Marshall Plan to save and restore a war-torn Western Europe. As Truman said, "We are the first great nation to feed and support the conquered." The genius of the plan was that it also helped the Europeans to help themselves, a goal we are pursuing in Iraq today. Finally, Marshall was the initiator of what became the greatest alliance in human history, NATO. All of this highlights the fact that Marshall was a visionary, even more adept at building bridges than in planning their destruction.

In each of these accomplishments he combined his frankness with decisiveness. Marshall was also capable of combining great civility and inclusiveness when dealing with Republican Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee Arthur Vandenberg, garnering his support for both the Marshall Plan and the NATO Treaty. It was not surprising then that, after Marshall retired, Truman called him to duty as Secretary of Defense in the face of the communist aggression against South Korea.

It is possible to speak in volumes of Marshall's excellent orga-

nizational abilities, his brilliance as Roosevelt's grand strategist, or his acumen as a Cold War diplomat. Instead, I chose to focus on Marshall's honor, his character and his servant leadership. His abilities as an organizer, strategist and statesman flowed from and were magnified by the character that gave him wisdom and commanded trust. It was this towering character that enabled him to influence and move others.

Several years ago, I gave a lecture in Chicago at Loyola University entitled "Crises of Character in Leadership." (It is available online and in printed form.) I noted that these crises pervades all sectors of our society: businesses, athletics, education, even the clergy and, indeed, the Presidency, where one recently resigned and another was impeached. Robert Huntley also spoke about this challenge in the corporate world in last year's lecture for the Institute for Honor. This crisis of character-based leadership in America yearns

The crisis of character-based leadership in America yearns for the refreshing reminder of Marshall.

for the refreshing reminder of Marshall. In contrast to these failures, he put honor,

duty and service to others ahead of self promotion or aggrandizement. He was willing to sacrifice himself and his career when he spoke out to Pershing and to Roosevelt. Marshall moved beyond servant leadership and practiced sacrificial leadership.

Although these virtues can be traced back to a time even before Plato, these virtues of character are conspicuously uncommon in public life today. As I study and work with the Presidency, I know how easily a President becomes isolated and often intentionally cut off from dissenting views. If only a member of Nixon or Clinton's staff had spoken up and said early on, "Get it all out," these Presidencies may have come through untainted. When I was called back from NATO by President Reagan on December 26, 1986 to take charge of the Iran-Contra investigation, I had an easier job than most. When Reagan first phoned me he already knew his Presidency was in deep trouble. Over the next three months, I met with the President alone in the White House a dozen times. My job was set up so that I reported to him alone to "tell it like it is" and for me to be utterly frank with him. Previously, he had been so misled by subordinates; he did not want to be misled by me.

Unfortunately, most Presidents do not invite such candor. There are so many cases in Presidential history that I have studied and witnessed where, especially in a group meeting, no one would dare speak up about trouble. I have seen this in the Oval Office and, indeed, on corporate boards. Although there may be a price for speaking up, staying quiet is even more costly. How did Marshall get away with it, survive, and in fact go up and not out? I believe it was the integrity and selflessness he radiated. He clearly had no agenda of his own, only the agenda of his leader and his country. He was so different from the brilliant and mercurial Douglas MacArthur, who, in his famous dissents, was suspected of ambition and political motives. No such suspicion ever emerged about Marshall. He exuded sacrificial leadership born out of servant leadership. I can not help but notice how hard this is to come by today. Just as Pershing and Roosevelt needed him nearby, so does our society continue to need the commanding example of George Marshall, a man modeled after Washington and Lee.

There are many instances in history where advisors would not speak up to a President.

It is the duty of us all to develop new ways to promote the legacy of Washington, Lee and Marshall's character. A great first step from this hallowed ground at the juncture of these American giants is to follow and promulgate the towering example set by, what we in the Lee Chapel might call, the secular trinity of Washington, Lee, and Marshall.

This essay is drawn from an address given on Friday, February 25th, 2005 to the Institute for Honor at Lee Chapel in Lexington, Virginia before an audience from Washington and Lee University, the Virginia Military Institute, and the George C. Marshall Foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David M. Abshire is President of the Center for the Study of the Presidency, co-founder and long-time head of the Center for Strategic and International Studies until 1999 and now also President of the Richard Lounsbery Foundation. His numerous positions in government have included Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, NATO Ambassador and Special Counselor to the President with Cabinet rank. Abshire is a graduate of the United States Military Academy and served as a company commander during the Korean War. He holds a Ph.D. in American History from Georgetown University and is the author of six books. He has been decorated by seven heads of government.

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