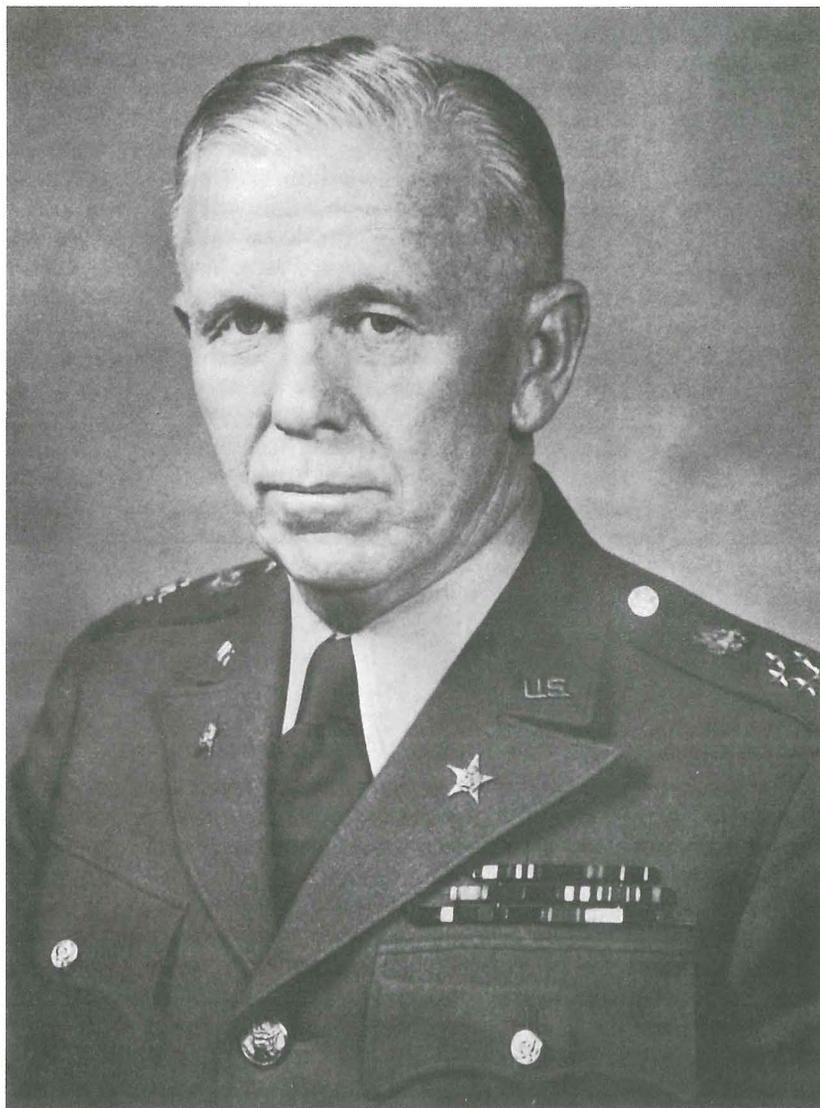


**General of the Army George C. Marshall**

**The George Washington of the  
20th Century**

By  
LTC David Saltman, AUS (Ret)



*General of the Army George Catlett Marshall, 1880-1959*

Photo credit: George C. Marshall Foundation

Reprinted from: *Officer Review / December 1995*

*Distributed by the*  
George C. Marshall Foundation

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# General of the Army George C. Marshall The George Washington of the 20th Century

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## Prologue

*George Marshall and George Washington have much in common: neither one is fully understood by the general population. In the Revolutionary War, George Washington was appointed a General by Congress to command a rebel army of citizen-soldiers in 1775. At war's end in 1783, he resigned his commission to retire to his home in Mount Vernon, VA. He was unanimously elected president of the United States in 1789 and served two terms until 1797. He was a brilliant leader in war and peace, serving his country with unselfish patriotism. He died in 1799. One and one-half centuries later, in World War II, history repeated itself.*

George Marshall was born at Uniontown, PA, December 31, 1880. He attended Virginia Military Institute, excelled in leadership and became First Captain during the 1900-1901 school year. He graduated from the VMI Class of 1901 and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant with a date of rank of February 2, 1901.

In World War I he saw men shipped overseas with no field training and vowed that this must never happen again. He fumed because bravery was recognized only after long delays. He insisted that the value of medals and battlefield promotions lay in prompt recognition as a model of leadership and valor for all to see. As Chief of Operations of First U.S. Army, he gained wide recognition for his role in preparing the Meuse-Argonne offensive. From 1919 to 1924 he was Aide-de-Camp to General John J. Pershing, giving him valuable military education which he utilized effectively at the Infantry School at Fort Benning, GA from 1927-1932.

During his tour at Fort Benning he became commandant and made

many changes in the curriculum. He kept a careful record of those officers he considered the most capable. Among his students were 150 future generals of World War II and an additional 50 who became instructors. Hundreds more were field grade officers. He identified talented officers, helped train and educate them, then saw to their promotion several years later. Marshall was a shrewd judge of character and capability, who later picked for high command those whose characteristics were passionate devotion to the professional mastery of their subjects, tactics, strategy and logistics. Among his greatest assets were his high standards, his integrity, concentrating always on the task at hand; his self-control, exceptional patriotism and profound humility.

Marshall's insight was extraordinary. Using his talents as a teacher, he insisted that officers study the first six months of a war when arms and men are lacking, versus the closing phases when supplies and troops are plentiful. Before he went to Washington in 1938 as Chief of War Plans, he had learned much about the supervision and training of the citizen-soldiers who were in the National Guard and the Reserve. He knew well the importance of integrating them with the Regular forces in time of war.

As outstanding leaders, both George Marshall and George Washington had learned how to challenge men to give their best. They set an example by their own zeal and dedication. Both encouraged subordinates to be independent and creative. They asked questions and were good listeners. Said Marshall: "Soldiers will tolerate almost anything in an officer except unfairness and ignorance."

At the Infantry Officer Candidate School, Marshall emphasized that good leadership requires an officer to have the complete respect of

his men. A great leader overcomes all difficulties, for campaigns and battles are nothing more than a long series of difficulties to be overcome .... The power of an army cannot be measured in mere numbers. It is based on a high state of discipline and training, on readiness to carry out its mission whenever the Commander-in-Chief and Congress decide. Any compromise of these requirements minimizes the effectiveness of our military power. We are always in need of leaders.

Marshall was transferred to Washington in 1938. His brilliant work as Chief of War Plans and Deputy Chief of Staff in 1938-1939 convinced President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Marshall was the most qualified leader who could meet the great military challenges of war.

On September 1, 1939 he was appointed Army Chief of Staff, by coincidence the day that Hitler invaded Poland—the day that marked the beginning of World War II. Marshall's keen mind absorbed endless detail that he could recall at will. His testimony before Congress was straightforward, never making false statements to accomplish his goals.

In 1939 the Army had a peacetime force of less than 200,000 men, ranking it seventeenth among the world's armed forces. At its peak, this force grew to over eight million in World War II. The awesome task of enlisting personnel and the vast war materiel needed to equip an army (including air force units which were an army responsibility, initially), is a great tribute to the outstanding leadership of George Marshall.

In the Spring of 1940, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau was so impressed by Marshall's outline of America's defense needs that he brought him to see the President. Roosevelt said he was not ready to pressure Congress. Marshall walked over to the President and asked for three minutes of his time. The president listened intently to the list of critical requirements outlined by Marshall, who concluded: "Mr. President, if you do not do something immediately, I greatly fear what will happen to this country." The President was convinced and asked Congress for a billion-dollar budget.

In World War II General Marshall was a global commander, in charge of ground and air forces in nine theaters throughout the world. His many burdens included persuading Congress to appropriate funds for ever-increasing manpower and materiel, as well as influencing industry leaders to keep pace with the ever-expanding military needs. He spent six long years as the architect and builder of the most powerful army in American history.

Marshall's dedication to his country above all else is a model of leadership at its best. Old friends were bypassed if they could not meet his stringent high standards of building the best fighting force possible. This regrettable situation occurred because older officers never had the opportunity to handle large units of division size or higher. Many suffered physical exhaustion, a serious defect of the function of command. Said Marshall: "Leadership in the field depends on strong physical stamina, the ability to withstand hardship and lack of sleep, yet have enough energy to command and dominate men on the battlefield."

As Chief of Staff he made constant visits to his troops and made lists of those items that needed correction. Such mundane things as shortages of shoes, blankets, hospital supplies, laundry facilities or whatever were targeted for immediate action. His concern for the morale of his troops came first, even while handling a global war.

He was convinced that men fought better if they understood why they were in the service and what they were contributing to the nation's defense. "Morale wins the victory because it provides courage and hope, confidence and loyalty. It is the *esprit de corps*." In the new army, where millions of citizens were called into the service, respect for leadership rather than fear motivated the new citizen-soldier to seek a greater leadership role. Within a month of the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, officer candidate schools were established for all branches of the Army.

In bearing the burden of enlarging manpower and materiel on two fronts, he set rigid standards for himself. "I cannot afford the luxury of sentiment—that is for others" he

told his wife. "I cannot allow myself to get angry for it is too exhausting. My brain must remain clear at all times."

In order to maintain high morale, he established Post Exchanges to keep up with the troops overseas. He directed that hot Thanksgiving turkey dinners be supplied to all troops even in the front lines. ("I was a beneficiary of this legacy on Thanksgiving 1944, pleasantly surprised to eat a hot turkey dinner in my mess kit, while standing up in a German pillbox we had captured earlier.")

People were at ease in his presence because he did not talk down to anyone. He listened attentively to all the essential facts before he reached a conclusion or announced a decision. He never tried to impress anyone for he inspired the confidence of a leader. One of Marshall's strong principles: "Leadership requires taking responsibility, not asserting rank and privilege".

House Speaker Sam Rayburn tells why General Marshall had so much influence and respect from Congress. "When General Marshall takes the witness stand to testify, we forget whether we are Republicans or Democrats. We know we are in the presence of a man who is telling the truth about the problem he is discussing."

He was persuasive with Congress on extension of the draft, with periodic requests for enormous appropriations as the army expanded. His presence was awe-inspiring. He had an unwavering commitment to the supremacy of national over personal interests, the ability to delegate authority while accepting full responsibility, a combination of dignity and humility.

By 1943, the problem arose of who would be overall commander in Europe, which entailed the cross-Channel invasion of France. This was a position that Marshall would have relished, but he left that critical decision to President Roosevelt. Said the President: "I feel I could not sleep at night with you out of the country." After this remark, General Marshall made two important decisions: General Dwight Eisenhower would be the supreme commander in Europe and General Douglas MacArthur would be the supreme commander in the Pacific.

General Marshall wrote to each parent or wife when a man was killed in World War II. Toward the end of the war he sent printed cards personally. This was a man of unusual character, who cared about the smaller details as well as the big ones because he considered all of them important.

The alliance between Roosevelt



Generals Eisenhower, Marshall and Arnold leave a DUKW amphibious 2.5-ton truck to visit American installations in Normandy, 12 June 1944.

Credit: The George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia

and Marshall was unbreakable. Marshall had become very effective in his dealings with Congress. Although Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Roosevelt relied heavily on General Marshall as the architect and chief strategist of the war. When Roosevelt died in April 1945, his successor, President Harry Truman was keenly aware of Marshall's military and administrative genius. Among all the British and U.S. Chiefs of Staff, Marshall was the leading figure in developing a global force, in sharing resources and production with allied forces around the world. Winston Churchill's tribute is as follows:

"During my long and close association with successive American administrations, there are few men whose qualities of mind and character have impressed me so deeply. He was a great American, wise in war, understanding in counsel, resolute in action. In peace he was the architect who planned the restoration of the battered European economy. He always fought victoriously against defeatism, discouragement and disillusion. Succeeding generations must not forget his achievements and his example."

In demobilization after World War II, he advocated a much smaller peacetime active force so as not to be a heavy tax burden on United States citizens. His plan was to maintain a citizen-soldier concept, reserve forces to supplement the regular establishment. They would receive periodic training throughout the year and constitute a pool which could be called upon in time of national emergency.

At one point in his career, Marshall was asked by the commanding general of Virginia Military Institute what advice he would give a young officer going to war. In substance, he wrote:

1. When conditions are difficult and the command is depressed and pessimistic, you must be cheerful and optimistic.
2. When evening comes and everyone is exhausted, hungry and in low spirits, put aside your personal fatigue, display energy in checking the comfort of your units and

prepare for tomorrow.

3. A successful officer should show loyalty to his chiefs. In your efforts to carry out their plans or policies, the less you approve, the more energy you must direct to their accomplishment.

4. The more alarming the reports and conditions viewed in battle, the more determined should be your attitude. Never ask for relief of your unit and never hesitate to attack.

Although General Marshall left his post as Army Chief of Staff in November 1945, one month later President Truman needed his services and sent him to China as his official ambassador. When he returned a year later, in 1947, he was appointed Secretary of State. In 1949 at the age of 68, he was still in the service of his country.

While Secretary of State, Marshall made a speech at Harvard University on June 5, 1947 outlining the serious predicament of war-torn Europe. The physical destruction and economic dislocation of World War II threatened a complete breakdown of social and commercial life. It is only logical, emphasized Marshall, that the United States should do whatever it could to assist in the return of economic health to the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace. Our policy is not directed against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos. The recovery initiative must come from the European nations themselves.

The reaction in Europe was positive. Congress appropriated \$13.3 billion for recovery over a four-year period. The aid supplied critically needed materials to get production started again. This released productive energy many times the value of the goods involved. The program received world-wide recognition and was popularly referred to as "The Marshall Plan."

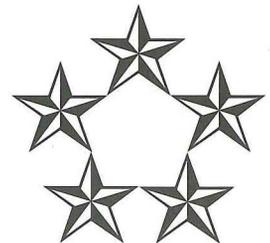
In 1949, at the age of 69 and although in poor health, his next assignment was President of the American Red Cross which position he held from 1949 to 1950.

In 1950 at the outbreak of the Korean War, he was recalled to military service again, this time as Secretary of Defense from 1950 to 1951.

President Harry Truman shared Churchill's admiration for Marshall when he stated: "To my mind, General George Marshall typifies George Washington in many ways as a man of great personal force, intellect, vision and inborn leadership. He, in his own way, rates the distinction of being first in war, first in peace, and first in his role of helping to rebuild and reshape the post-war free world."

General Marshall's service to his country was a lifelong period of leadership and devotion that clearly marks him as the most outstanding American of the 20th Century. In 1953 he received the Nobel Peace Prize, a great international tribute to the first military man in history to receive such a distinctive award.

General of the Army George C. Marshall died on October 16, 1959 at the age of 78. His legacy of leadership continues on. Every year the top ROTC students from all over the United States convene in Lexington, VA for the Marshall ROTC Award Seminar, a fitting climax to the programs which have been developed as a living memorial to one of America's greatest leaders. 



*Preserving and promoting in American Society the ideals and values of disciplined selfless service, hard work, integrity and compassion of George Catlett Marshall.*