A TRIBUTE TO GENERAL
GEORGE C. MARSHALL

BY FORREST C. POGUE*

MY INTENTION tonight was to speak to you of General George C. Marshall as a Pennsylvanian—with emphasis on his formative years in his native town of Uniontown. However, I was informed a short time ago of the General’s death. I should like, therefore, to speak of him not only as a Pennsylvanian, but as a great American and world leader—one who led this country’s armies in its greatest war and who labored afterwards to heal the wounds of war.

We are inclined to remember the fighting generals and to forget the chiefs of staff who make victories in the field possible. President Roosevelt in 1943 understood this, and it was for this reason that he wanted Marshall to lead in Europe the army which he had organized and trained since 1939. You are aware of the furor which arose when it was suggested that Marshall leave Washington. Some critics said that he was being kicked upstairs in order that a more pliable general could be placed in his position in Washington. At Cairo near the end of 1943 the President asked Marshall to choose his assignment. The General, who wanted the job of leading the cross-Channel forces, declined to make the decision and said he would serve where he was assigned. The President replied that he could not sleep well at night with Marshall out of Washington, and the decision was made to give the Supreme Command to General Eisenhower.

It is certain that the magnitude of Marshall’s work as Chief of Staff would have made him long remembered, had he dropped

*This is a summary of remarks made by Dr. Forrest C. Pogue, director of the George C. Marshall Research Center, Lexington, Virginia, at the dinner meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association at Lehigh University, October 16, 1959. His original topic was “The Formative Years of a Great Pennsylvanian—George C. Marshall.” Shortly before his speech, word came to the banquet hall that General Marshall had just died at the Walter Reed Hospital in Washington. Dr. Pogue changed the nature of his address, and gave a glowing tribute to the General’s entire career.
from public life in 1945. He had taken an Army and Army Air Corps of some 200,000 in 1939 and seen them grow to more than eight million at the war's end. He had played an active role in the making of war plans, in the development of new weapons, in the heightened production of war materials, in the selection of many of the army's commanders. Men like Eisenhower, Bradley, Clark, Patton, Hodges, Stilwell, and Bedell Smith had risen to prominence in part because of his backing.

And he continued to back them in action. When the fearful breakthrough in the Ardennes threatened the Allies with a serious setback, and murmurings rose against the Supreme Command, Marshall gave orders that no messages should go from the Pentagon which would add to Eisenhower's problems. He ordered that all possible reserves be sent. And to the General he cabled: You are doing a fine job, go on and give them hell.

This was the man whose sense of duty led him to accept the burden of the China Mission a few days after he had resigned as Chief of Staff—the man who took up the job of Secretary of State and then later returned to the Pentagon as Secretary of Defense when war flared in Korea.

From what beginnings did this man come? My initial title indicated that Pennsylvania helped form him. But he was more than that. One writer—Charles O'Neil—has suggested to me that he combined both southern and northern traditions. It occurs to me that the same may be found in his choice of heroes—Franklin and Lee. One may find in him the practical Yankee common sense of Franklin, and the great devotion to duty of Lee.

Marshall's family came initially from Virginia. His great-great-grandfather—the uncle of Chief Justice John Marshall—came with his family to Kentucky in the 1790's about the time that John Marshall's father and brother moved there. His great-grandfather and grandfather practiced law and held local office and made their mark in Kentucky affairs in their home in northern Kentucky (Augusta). Like many Kentucky families, this one was divided when the Civil War came. Two of his father's brothers fought for the South. His mother's uncle—a well-known surgeon—organized the Home Guards in Augusta to oppose an attack by southern cavalry under Basil Duke, a distant relative of the Marshalls. His mother's father, his father's father, and his father
helped defend the town. While unsuccessful, they inflicted sufficient losses on Duke's men that they changed their plans for a move toward Cincinnati.

The General's mother, while born in Kentucky, had a Pennsylvania mother—a Stuart from Pittsburgh. This and other family connections helped to bring his mother and father to Pittsburgh and Uniontown soon after the Civil War. His father became
interested in the coal business and then founded a partnership to make coke ovens. He prospered in the 1870's and was associated for a time with H. C. Frick and other business leaders of the area. Young Marshall's youth was spent in well-to-do surroundings. He went for a time to private school, but financial reverses in the 1890's led to his enrollment in public school. For several years during this formative period he was acquainted with hard times.

Although Marshall grew up in a community that was rapidly becoming industrialized, he still was able to touch through the traditions of his birthplace the pioneer days of the country. His home in Uniontown faced directly on the National Pike, and it seemed to him as if he was joined to the stream of history which had flowed from east to west along that road. A few hundred feet away stood an ancient inn in which many American dignitaries had stopped while on the way east or west. A short bicycle ride took him to the home of Albert Gallatin. James G. Blaine and Philander Knox were born in an adjoining county. Fishing expeditions led him out along Braddock's trail, and picnics were held in the vicinity of Braddock's grave. Near him were points where George Rogers Clark and Anthony Wayne had organized their expeditions. Fort Necessity and the grave of Jumonville were close at hand. It was hard for him to escape a sense of history. However, he reflected in later years that his teachers had told him little of the history which lay all around and left it largely for him to discover for himself.

Marshall's father, justly proud of his family's history, constantly reminded his son of his heritage. But George Marshall, Jr., never took eagerly to genealogy. When he was shown a book on the Marshall family, he was interested only in the fact that it mentioned a legend to the effect that one of the Marshall ancestors had married Blackbeard the pirate—a fact which he proudly related to his young schoolmates until his father put a stop to it.

Not only did Marshall learn history from his environment, he drew from it a certain simplicity of manner and a democratic attitude which he never lost. He was impressed by the fact that people of his community looked down on a young man if he did not work. A product of both public and private schools, he believed thoroughly that every child in a democracy should get part of his education in a public school. It was probably here that he became
convinced that the soldier was first a citizen—that civilian control came first. The idea of a military man imposing his views on political leaders who had been chosen by the electorate was foreign to his thinking.

But Marshall did not become a soldier by accident. He had decided by 1897, when he went to the Virginia Military Institute, that he wanted a military career. From the beginning he worked to be the best soldier there. Although not high in his scholastic standings at first, he pushed his way upward until he was fifth in his class in his senior year. But in military matters he was first each year. At the end of his first year he was made First Corporal, at the end of the next year First Sergeant, at the end of the third year, First Captain.

At VMI there was many soldierly object lessons. In this school where Stonewall Jackson had taught before going to the battlefield, he had many reminders of that stern soldier. In the chapel of Washington and Lee University, which stood on the adjoining campus, was the tomb of Robert E. Lee, and nearby was the home where Lee had lived his last years, as president of Washington College, attempting to work for understanding as he once had worked for victory. The stories of these two men told by professors, some of whom had fought under them, helped to build more strongly than ever the idea of devotion to duty. Once a year he participated in the ceremony on the anniversary of the battle of New Market in which the corps of cadets had fought and several had died. As the names of the dead were called, a cadet from the proper company stepped forward to answer that the man had died on the field of honor.

There is no time to recite all the things which made him great. He learned his first lessons as an officer in the Philippines in 1902-03. As a student in the School of the Line at Fort Leavenworth he learned the business of soldiering so well that he graduated first. In the first World War he was a part of the first contingent which went to France and he was chief of operations of the 1st Division when it went into battle. Later he became chief of operations of the First Army and at General Headquarters he helped make plans for the St. Mihiel battle, and he was responsible for moving in the troops who participated in the Meuse-Argonne offensive. When the war ended Pershing made him an aide and from
Young Lieutenant Marshall.
1919-24 he served in Washington. This was followed by three years in China where, as executive officer of the 15th Infantry, he became familiar with the problems of that unhappy country.

One of his most important contributions was made as assistant commandant in charge of instruction at the Infantry School, Fort Benning, between 1927-32. Here he developed new doctrines and trained leaders who were to be active in the second World War. His staff and students included Bradley, Hodges, Collins, Ridgway, Stilwell, Bolté, and Bedell Smith. In his next two appointments—Chicago and Vancouver Barracks—he became familiar with the Middle West and the Far West. He learned something of citizen soldiers from service with the National Guard and in his work with the Civilian Conservation Corps. He learned a great deal in this period of the temper of the American people. He gained an understanding of what was necessary to get their backing when war preparations began.

In 1938 he was brought to Washington as chief of war plans and a few months later became deputy chief of staff of the Army. Early in the next year, Roosevelt announced that he would become Chief of Staff on General Craig's retirement. Marshall was actually sworn in on September 1, 1939, the day on which German troops invaded Poland. His career after that date you know full well. You are aware of his efforts in war and in peace—his proposal for European Recovery—his recognition in the Nobel peace award in 1953.

Marshall was marked by great simplicity of manner. However, he was not an easy man to know. He was no back-slapper or glad-hander, but he had sympathy for people and was capable of great warmth and friendliness. For many years he labored at stern self-discipline and it was this which gained for him the reputation of being cold and aloof. What he strove for was not coldness but the substitution of reason and judgment for passion and prejudice. You will find some of these qualities in his heroes—Franklin and Lee. They are joined in the character of Washington.

It seems to me that General Marshall summed up his thinking in the last speech he made to the cadets at VMI. Speaking to them in 1956, he pressed them to follow the precepts which he had followed. In words which, I believe, he would be glad to have as an epitaph, he concluded:

"Don't be a deep feeler and a shallow thinker."