

“What I Like About Warren Rudman:

George Catlett Marshall

In

Two and a Half Pages”

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In October, 2006, I had the honor to attend the AUSA's annual Marshall Dinner in Washington, D.C. Attended by the Army's big "brass", it is an occasion to recognize a person who has best personified the selfless service exhibited by George C. Marshall. That year the honoree was former U.S. Senator Warren Rudman of New Hampshire. In his acceptance speech, Rudman paid tribute to the man whose name has become synonymous with just such service: "If you have ever read anything at all about the contribution that George Marshall made to this nation, one message is clear. Virtually no one truly belongs in his class. It would have been an honor for me to carry his boots let alone receive an award in his name."

"If you reflect on the arc of his life, and what it meant to this nation, it is just staggering. When Marshall started his career, this country was just a kid...yet by the end of that career, and through his vision, America had become the architect of peace...the indispensable nation in the largest war in the history of humanity."

"More importantly, we had laid the foundations of the modern Army and armed forces to provide global stability. We had poured the cornerstones of global democracy. And through his Marshall Plan, we had planted the seeds of a global economy...in the long sweep of history, I would go so far as to say he will rank with Washington and Jefferson."

Indeed, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill named Marshall as the greatest man of the twentieth century. Why? Better yet, why is he given only scant mention in our history books? Surely he lacked many of FDR's and Churchill's endearing characteristics. Moreover, he lacked the charisma and speaking abilities of his military peers, such as MacArthur and Patton. Nor was he as able a writer as Eisenhower. Perhaps the

answer is found elsewhere.

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. He was what former Ambassador David Abshire called, “a servant-leader.” “Such leadership was based on qualities he learned at VMI: integrity, honor, duty, and sacrifice. Even Joseph Stalin made the claim that he would trust his life to Marshall.”

From his time at Fort Benning as Assistant Commandant, comes this illustrative example. Marshall called an officer on the carpet because his troops did not have stoves and blankets in the field, saying, “Get every damn one of those things tonight. Not tomorrow. Tonight. We are going to take care of the troops first, last and all the time.” Marshall believed personal integrity conferred more authority than rank, which he never used to make a point. But he scared the living hell out of people. Gen. George Patton, who was no shrinking violet, said that if he had to choose between facing Marshall in an interview or facing a whole Nazi Panzer division, the decision would be easy: face the Panzers.

Marshall believed that he had a solemn duty to “speak truth to power.” In 1938, the general had his first meeting with Roosevelt. Present were many senior ranking officials and military. As a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, the President believed that naval power was important, but air forces were more important. At the time, the Army was a small factor in his strategy. Following the lecture, Roosevelt, expecting agreement, gauged the opinion of people in the room. Coming 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." As graying heads filed out of the room, most thought that Marshall had done himself in and would not be back. To the contrary, Roosevelt admired the general's integrity and would never again address him as George, but always as General.

Marshall believed in being candid and direct. Churchill was once arguing to delay the invasion of Europe in favor of an attack on Rhodes. Listening politely for a while, Marshall finally had had enough, saying, "You can plan all you want. But not one American soldier is going to die on that goddamn beach."

Gen. Marshall became the architect of the American response to the emerging Cold War threat when he was named Secretary of State in 1947. He established a "Policy Planning Staff" headed by George Kennan, author of the concept of containment.

Now Marshall believed in extreme loyalty. His view was that you select talented people you put your trust in them and then let them do their job. He told Kennan that he was to write a master plan on how to deal with the Soviet Union. So, here's Kennan, a brilliant mind who sees 389 different dimensions to the problem, and you have the grand strategy for the fate of the western world hanging in the balance! It doesn't get any bigger than that! Kennan tells Marshall, "Mr. Secretary, I am going to need more guidance from you." Marshall paused for a few seconds, looked at him and said precisely two words: "Avoid trivia."

Warren Rudman continued. "One of the things that I always loved about Marshall was he didn't believe that anyone, regardless of rank, should take himself too seriously.

One time, Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, in full uniform, came to Marshall's house to give him a report. It turned out that Marshall was out in the rain, picking corn in his vege-

table patch. After a few minutes in the rain and the mud, Smith started to get a bit testy and he said, "General, do I have to stand out here to make my report?" And Marshall said, "No Smith, of course not. Turn over that bucket and sit down."

George Marshall's abilities as an organizer, grand 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. Marshall was willing to sacrifice himself and his career when he spoke out. He radiated selflessness. Whereas a MacArthur was suspected of ambition, Marshall wasn't.

Ambassador Abshire has researched what leaders like Marshall took as examples for their lives. Who did he emulate? He found two: George Washington and Robert E. Lee. Washington, like Marshall, was not charismatic or flamboyant, nor was he as brilliant as Hamilton or Jefferson. Washington was not a great strategist and he lost as many 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 war, the Constitutional Convention and the first Presidency of The United States. Like Marshall, Washington would time and again pass up power, as he did at Newburg when the continentals wanted to make him king for life. His refusal made *character* king, not himself. George III supposedly was astonished that Washington wanted to return to Mount Vernon following the war, rather than assume power in the new nation.

Robert E. Lee was an imposing man. He had an extraordinary presence, good-looking, was at the top of his class at West Point, and possessed a brilliant military mind. Had he

accepted Lincoln's offer of the command of all Union armies, the War of Northern Aggression would undoubtedly have been shorter.

In contrast, Lee lacked hubris. He was always modest and quietly religious. He garnered the respect of Lincoln and Grant. When there was a move to try Lee as a traitor, Grant announced that he would resign his commission and his command. Despite what happened at Gettysburg, Lee took his army from the battlefield conceding, "It is all my fault."

After the war, Lee, like Marshall after WWII, gave himself to reconstruction and reconciliation, first by passing up lucrative financial opportunities and then by becoming a progressive and innovative educator. (Lee established studies in international law, journalism, modern languages, and a full-scale business school).

Abshire draws the conclusion that today's politicians and /or public figures do not possess these traits of character. To quote, "If only a member of Nixon's or Clinton's staff had spoken up and said early on, 'Get it all out,' those presidencies may have come through untainted." (If only Monica Lewinsky had said as much)!

On December 26, 1986, Abshire was given the task of informing President Reagan, by his order, on how Iran-Contra went down. "Over the next three months, I met with the President alone in the White House a dozen times." "My job was to be utterly frank with him...unfortunately, most Presidents do not invite such candor. I have seen it in the Oval Office and I have seen it on corporate boards. George Marshall spoke out when it was needed and managed to not only survive, but thrive. It is the duty of us all to promote that legacy."

Warren Rudman summed up his acceptance speech with another example. "You can

say all you want about the theory of light footprints and high-tech warfare. But as far as I am concerned, you can save that for the classroom. At the end of the day, if you don't have enough boots on the ground, you have more instability, not less. And for families all across the country, that means you have more kids coming home without arms and legs, not less... that's just wrong. It's time we put the issue right in front of the people, right on the kitchen table."

Rudman continued, "More than 60 years ago, at the height of WWII, George Marshall stood before an audience... and pleaded for resources that he believed essential. This is a man who didn't shrug at casualty figures. He had them on top of his desk and made sure that the President saw them every week! 'Just once in the history of this country,' Marshall said, 'I'd like to see the American soldier be given a fair break in the terrible business of making war.'" That's classic George C. Marshall – direct, candid, loyal. We could use some of that today.