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CHAPTER 1
General George C. Marshall
The leader

It is not mentioned much nowadays that for the United States, World War II began with a series of dismissals across the top ranks of the military. Less than two weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Adm. Husband Kimmel and Army Lt. Gen. Walter Short were jettisoned from their posts atop the American military establishment in the Pacific, along with Maj. Gen. Frederick Martin, Short’s air commander. Even less remembered is that Kimmel, who once had been an aide to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, held the post only because his predecessor, Adm. James Richardson, had been fired by the president a year earlier. The following year, the commander of one of the first Army divisions to fight the Japanese, the 32nd Division’s Maj. Gen. Edwin Harding, was relieved by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, along with many of his regimental and battalion commanders. When Lt. Gen. George Kenney arrived to take over the air operation in the Pacific in mid-1942, his first act was to remove five generals he deemed to be “deadwood,” along with forty colonels and lieutenant colonels. Adm. Harold Stark, the Navy’s top officer, was ousted from his post in March 1942. He was hardly alone:
One-third of the Navy’s submarine captains were relieved during the first year of the war. On the North African front, where American soldiers first fought the Germans, the senior tactical commander of those forces, Maj. Gen. Lloyd Fredendall, was fired.

The officer presiding over this dynamic and ruthless system of personnel management was Gen. George C. Marshall, who back in Washington was winnowing the ranks of the Army, forcing dozens of generals into retirement because he believed they were too old and lacking in energy to lead soldiers in combat.

“I hate to think that fifty years from now practically nobody will know who George Marshall was,” President Franklin Delano Roosevelt remarked to Gen. Dwight Eisenhower one day in Tunisia during World War II. FDR was correct. Though rarely memorialized by the public today, George Marshall not only was the senior American general of World War II; he was, effectively, the founding father of the modern American armed forces. Under him, the United States for the first time developed a superpower military, a status it has retained for the past seven decades. Far more than George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, or even Dwight Eisenhower, this “coolly impersonal” man (as his subordinate Albert Wedemeyer called him) shaped the military of his time so profoundly that his work lives on into the twenty-first century, sometimes evident in the way Army leaders have operated in Iraq and Afghanistan. Specifically, Marshall’s unusual and very American concept of what sort of person constitutes a good general still influences the promotions today’s leaders bestow on younger officers. It would be difficult to understand today’s Army without knowledge of Marshall’s career—and especially his powerful sense of duty and honor.

Marshall formally became chief of staff of the U.S. Army on September 1, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland. “Things look very disturbing in the world this morning,” he wrote in a thank-you note to George Patton’s wife. Such understatement reflected the man. It is not unfair to call Marshall colorless. He might have taken it as a compliment, as an implicit recognition that he did his duty even at the cost of personal advancement. He intentionally left no memoir of his service leading the military during the nation’s greatest war. There is no weapon or installation named for him, as there is a Bradley Fighting Vehicle and an Abrams tank. Indeed, in the snowy reaches of remote northern New York, there is even a Fort Drum, honoring Gen. Hugh Drum, the “stubborn, pompous, occasionally ignorant” officer who inexplicably had been Marshall’s leading rival for the Army’s top slot. There is no Fort Marshall.

George Marshall was born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, fifteen years after the end of the Civil War. In 1901, he graduated from the Virginia Military Institute, where he marched before Stonewall Jackson’s widow. He soon joined the Army, which then was recovering from its low ebb of the 1890s, the decade when the frontier officially closed and the last of the Indian wars ended. The Army expanded rapidly in the wake of the Spanish–American War of 1898, almost quadrupling in size to 100,000. As part of that growth, George Marshall received his commission. In this newly energized force, he stood out as a young officer. Marshall was temporarily posted to Fort Douglas, Utah—originally placed on a hillside overlooking Salt Lake City to keep an eye on Brigham Young’s nascent and hostile Mormon empire. One of his commanders there was Lt. Col. Johnson Hagood. When asked in an evaluation form if he would like to have Marshall serve under him, Hagood, who himself would rise to major general, wrote in December 1916, “Yes, but I would prefer to serve under his command.”

**Marshall and the Great War**

The formative event of Marshall’s life would be World War I. Several years after that conflict began, the United States sent into it a
constabulary military whose sole experience with large-scale industrial-era combat had been the Civil War, a conflict the Europeans—correctly or not—perceived as a generally amateurish domestic brawl. The U.S. Army was unprepared at the outset of the Great War and was not much better at its close, when, as historian Conrad Crane put it, “foreign leaders still considered the American Expeditionary Forces poorly organized and ignorant of modern warfare.”

The United States declared war in April 1917, when the war had been under way for more than thirty months, and the first large groups of draftees reported for duty only in September of that year. The initial American casualties came in November, and it took many more months after that first foray to get large numbers of American troops into combat. The American buildup may have been key to the outcome of the war, because it encouraged the Allies to hold on, but the first solely American offensive was not launched until September 1918. The armistice was declared just eight weeks later. For the Army as a whole, the war was too brief a venture to be transformative, but it was a life-changing experience for some officers in the middle of it, notably George Marshall.

Marshall’s first memorable encounter of the war in France came in October 1917. It was not the Germans he confronted, but rather the man who would become his mentor, Gen. John “Blackjack” Pershing, the senior American commander in the war. Reviewing American soldiers training in France for trench warfare, Pershing blew up at what he perceived to be a shambles of an operation, with ill-trained soldiers and leaders apparently ignorant of how to train effectively or even how to follow Army directives. In front of a group of officers, Pershing chastised Maj. Gen. William Sibert, the commanding general, as well as Sibert’s chief of staff, who had arrived only two days earlier. “He didn’t give General Sibert a chance to talk at all,” Marshall recalled.

Marshall walked up to Pershing in an attempt to explain the situation. The irate commanding general shrugged and turned away. Marshall, a mere captain, then did something that could have cost him his promising career, laying his hand on Pershing’s arm and insisting that he be heard out. “General Pershing, there’s something to be said here, and I think I should say it because I’ve been here longer,” he said. He then let go with a torrent of facts about the hurdles the division had faced in training its soldiers. Confronting the commander of the U.S. Army in France was a risky move, but it also showed moral courage. After Pershing departed, several comrades consoled Marshall in the belief that he had just destroyed his military career. Pershing’s opinion of Sibert remained unchanged—the next day Sibert’s name headed a list of eleven generals Pershing sent to Washington, D.C., describing the group as ineffectual. By the end of the year, Sibert, the first commander of an American division ever sent overseas, had been relieved.

Sibert’s successor, Maj. Gen. Robert Bullard, began his command by emphasizing to subordinates that the dismissals did not necessarily end with Sibert’s departure, “telling them they’d be ‘relieved’ without any hesitation upon the part of General Pershing if they did not ‘deliver the goods’; they must succeed or lose their commands.” Bullard noted in his diary that Pershing was “looking for results. He intends to have them. He will sacrifice any man who does not bring them.” This was not an idle observation, as Bullard, Marshall, and others would see. Maj. Gen. Clarence Edwards, the commander of the 26th (“Yankee”) Division, composed of National Guard units from New England, was popular with his men but considered irascible by others, and he was removed from his command by Pershing.

Pershing often used a two-step process to remove generals, first shunting them off to a minor post in France and then, after a
short interval, shipping them home. In this way he ousted two division commanders on the same day. On October 16, 1918, he removed the 5th Division’s Maj. Gen. John McMahon and the 3rd Division’s wonderfully named Maj. Gen. Beaumont Bonaparte Buck. One possible reason for the removal of Buck was a rumor that he intended to lead a bayonet charge. Buck apparently did not lead that attack; he survived the war and did not die until 1950, at the age of ninety, after doing a “vigorous fox trot” on a dance floor with his thirty-four-year-old wife. All told, Pershing relieved at least six division commanders and two corps commanders during World War I. Lower-ranking officers were also judged severely, with some fourteen hundred removed from combat positions and sent to the U.S. Army officers’ casual depot at Blois, France. (American soldiers often pronounced the town’s name “Bloooey,” giving rise to the slang expression, popular in the 1920s, of “going bloooey”—falling apart.)

In his policy of swift relief, Pershing was perhaps more sweeping than some other commanders in American wars, but he was well within American military tradition, as demonstrated as far back as the Revolution and the Civil War, when relief of generals was common. During the War for American Independence, Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler was relieved after the fall of Fort Ticonderoga, New York, in July 1777, and was accused of dereliction of duty by Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates. An inquiry cleared Schuyler of the charge, but he resigned from the Army and went home. Gates himself went on to disastrous defeat near Camden, South Carolina, which then led to his own relief. During the Civil War, Stonewall Jackson famously fired a brigade commander who told him something could not be done. President Lincoln also relieved a series of commanders of the Army of the Potomac—Irvin McDowell, George McClellan, John Pope, McClellan again, Ambrose Burnside, Joseph Hooker, and George Meade. Pershing was also acting consistently with his French allies: In the first weeks of the war, Marshal Joseph Joffre, the French commander, relieved two army commanders, nine of twenty-one corps commanders, thirty-three of seventy-two infantry division commanders, and five of ten cavalry division commanders. “These changes weeded out the higher commands and rejuvenated the list of general officers,” Joffre wrote.

Marshall was one of the younger men who rose swiftly during the war. After their first confrontation, Pershing kept an eye on Marshall. Marshall impressed his fellow officers with the central role he played in organizing U.S. military operations in the war, simultaneously planning the two great American offensives: in Saint-Mihiel on September 12, 1918, and, beginning two weeks later, in the Meuse-Argonne sector, which involved moving 200,000 troops out of the front line and 600,000 fresh troops into it. Marshall also played a key role in the formation of the first division ever fielded by the American Army in Europe. Initially, it was simply called “the combat division,” because at that time it was the only one of its kind. That unit later became the 1st Infantry Division, also known as the “Big Red One.” “Colonel Marshall’s greatest attribute was his ability to reduce complex problems to their fundamentals,” remembered Benjamin Caffey, who served under him as a young staff officer and would later become a general himself. James Van Fleet, another World War I soldier who went on to become a general, simply remembered that Marshall emerged from that war with a reputation as a “brilliant planner.” After the war ended, Pershing asked Marshall to become his aide, a post the younger man filled for five years, the longest tour of duty he would have in his Army career until he became chief of staff himself.

Perhaps the key lesson of World War I for Marshall came from observing Pershing in March 1918, when the outcome of the conflict was still much in doubt. The French army appeared near
collapse after the previous year’s mutinies. The British were in shock after seeing a generation of young men lost in the mud of Belgium and northeastern France. The Germans were resurgent after the Russian collapse had enabled them to transfer some fifty infantry divisions to the Western Front, and they were pushing deeper into France. “The French and British had no reserves,” Marshall remembered in a lecture he gave six months after the war ended. American firepower had not yet been brought to bear, and many doubted how an American force experienced mainly in chasing Indians and bandits on the Mexican border would perform when fighting among the armies of the great powers of Europe. Amid the resulting mood of imminent disaster, Pershing stood out as calm, cheerful, and determined. “In the midst of a profound depression he radiated determination and the will to win,” Marshall wrote in his little-known memoir of World War I. That lesson would become key to how Marshall thought of generalship and especially how he selected senior leaders. In observing Pershing, Marshall learned to one day look for an Eisenhower.

**Marshall’s list**

Scholars disagree over whether or not Marshall actually maintained a “little black book” of promising young officers to keep in mind for future promotions or whether that is just an Army myth. No such booklet or list has ever been found, nor even documents indicating that it existed.

Yet Marshall did have a very clear sense of the qualities he looked for in promoting officers. His ideas about what makes a good leader would go a long way toward determining who would become a general in World War II—and toward determining how the Army would think about generalship for decades afterward. In a letter he wrote in November 1920, not long after he became aide-de-camp to Pershing, he listed the qualities of the successful leader, in the following order:

- “good common sense”
- “have studied your profession”
- “physically strong”
- “cheerful and optimistic”
- “display marked energy”
- “extreme loyalty”
- “determined”

At first glance, this list might seem unexceptional, even Boy Scoutish. Yet it merits closer examination. Heeding a lesson of World War I, Marshall placed a premium on vigor, implicitly excluding the older officer from promotion, especially the “château general” who rarely left the comforts of his headquarters to fight in the trenches with his troops. Marshall instead valued the man who wanted to be in the middle of things.

Marshall’s list emphasizes character over intellect. He did so consciously, tailoring his template to fit the particular circumstances of the United States. The quiet pessimist might be effective in other militaries, he argued, but not in a democratic nation that, protected by the world’s two great oceans, tended always to pursue a “policy of unpreparedness” for war. Given that tendency, which inevitably meant leading ill-trained and poorly equipped units into demoralizing battles, he decided that the American military needed the optimistic and resourceful type, quick to estimate, with relentless determination, and who possessed in addition a fund of sound common sense, which operated to prevent gross errors due to rapidity of decision and action.
The opposite sort of leader, the man prone to looking at the negative side, must be excised promptly. The units led by these “calamity howlers,” he wrote with evident distaste, were “quickly infected with the same spirit and grew ineffective unless a more suitable commander was given charge.”

Marshall also was solidly in the American tradition in valuing effectiveness over appearance. He was a reserved man, but not a fussy one. During a 1933 inspection tour, he walked into one Army post and found the commander and another officer asleep. He then went into a supply room and surprised a lieutenant who was working in his undershirt. “You may not be in proper uniform,” Marshall reassured the embarrassed man, “but you are the only officer I found working here.”

Marshall’s list is significant for what it omits. He was ambivalent about the brawler and the adventurous cavalryman. He wanted generals who would fight, but not men who would command recklessly or discredit the military with their personal behavior. “You can sometimes win a great victory by a very dashing action,” he once said. “But often, or most frequently, the very dashing action exposes you to a very fatal result if it is not successful. And you hazard everything in that way.” He trusted even less the outlier, the individualist, the eccentric, and the dreamer—all well represented in the nineteenth-century American military, especially by heroes of the Union such as Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman, and more so by those of the Confederacy, such as J. E. B. Stuart and Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, whom Marshall had studied “religiously,” according to his official biographer.

In contrast to those two latter-day cavaliers, Marshall called for steady, levelheaded team players. He wanted both competence and cooperativeness. The biggest difference between American commanders in World War I and World War II would be that in the latter war, they were adept at coordinating the efforts of the infantry, artillery, armor, and aviation branches, especially in breaking through enemy lines and then exploiting that penetration. As German field marshal Gerd von Rundstedt put it after being captured in 1945, “We cannot understand the difference in your leadership in the last war and in this. We could understand it if you had produced one superior corps commander, but now we find all of your corps commanders good and of equal superiority.”

Yet Marshall was not looking for conformists. He believed in the respectful, confidential expression of dissent, as he had demonstrated by bluntly confronting Gen. Pershing during World War I.

**Marshall and President Roosevelt**

Marshall’s willingness to be blunt with President Franklin Roosevelt about military matters was a major reason he eventually was chosen to be chief of staff of the Army. On the afternoon of November 14, 1938, well before he had become chief of staff, Marshall and eleven other senior government officials gathered at the White House. It was two months after British prime minister Neville Chamberlain’s meetings with Adolf Hitler in Munich and just five days after Kristallnacht, in which Nazi mobs launched nationwide attacks on the Jews of Germany and on their shops and synagogues. The issue at hand at the White House meeting was whether to commission the construction of ten thousand warplanes. That was a heady number, given that at the time the Army Air Corps possessed about 160 fighter aircraft and just 50 bombers. In Marshall’s view, the proposed program was wildly unbalanced, overemphasizing machines without properly considering everything else that must be done in order to create a modern air force, such as the time and the huge amount of funding required to recruit and train aircrews, to build and staff the bases they
would need, and to manufacture the ammunition and bombs they must have if war came. But no one else at the White House meeting seemed concerned. When Roosevelt polled the room, Marshall later recalled, the others present were agreeable and "very soothing." Marshall said nothing until he was asked.

"Don't you think so, George?" Roosevelt inquired, in what may have been the sole instance of his using Marshall's given name. (Marshall took offense at the usage, thinking that it misrepresented their relationship. He would find ways to make it clear that he preferred to be addressed as "General Marshall.")

"I am sorry, Mr. President, but I don't agree with that at all," Marshall responded. He recalled that "the president gave me a very startled look." Roosevelt likely thought that Marshall, who had been pushing for military readiness, would be pleased with the move. But Marshall wanted balanced preparation, not an aircraft construction program he saw as likely to cause huge problems. He may also have suspected that Roosevelt privately intended to manufacture the aircraft and ship them to the British and the French instead of building up the American force. Marshall's approach to generalship was to speak truth to power. His relationship with Roosevelt was not intimate, but FDR was learning that Marshall would tell him what he thought.

At this time, Roosevelt viewed military mobilization from two distinct perspectives. He would say later that he felt he had been walking a tightrope between keeping American isolationists in the camp of his New Deal happy while he tried to counter the rise of foreign fascism. His public statements showed no inclination to go to war. On September 3, 1939, three days after the Nazis invaded Poland, he pledged in a "fireside chat" that the United States would remain neutral in the new European war. He remained wary of rapid expansion of the military, especially as the 1940 election approached. Seeking an unprecedented third term during that year's presidential campaign, he promised not to send American boys into foreign wars.

On May 13, 1940, Marshall would again have occasion to confront the president. This time it was in a tense meeting on whether to rapidly expand the size of the Army. It was three days after the Germans had ended the "Phony War" period by invading France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Just that morning, the Luftwaffe had conducted the largest air strike in history, carpet-bombing French units near Sedan and enabling three Panzer divisions, led by Heinz Guderian and Erwin Rommel, to punch a hole through the French line. French troops were running from the battlefield, and their commanders were paralyzed and panicky. On the same day, Queen Wilhelmina and the Dutch government had fled to London, where Neville Chamberlain had resigned as prime minister three days earlier, a victim of his own failed policy of appeasement. His successor, Winston Churchill, in his first speech as the new prime minister, told the British people, "I have nothing to offer you but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.

Marshall spent the morning with Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr., explaining the nature and rationale of a major increase in the size of the military. Then, joined by War Department officials, the two walked over to the White House to see the president, who made it clear to Marshall and Morgenthau that he "was not desirous of seeing us," as Marshall recalled. Roosevelt disliked the Army expansion proposal and tried to quell dissent by calling an end to the session prematurely. Morgenthau said he supported the manpower increase, but "the president was exceedingly short with him," Marshall said. When Morgenthau finished, FDR shrugged him off: "Well, you filed your protest."

Morgenthau asked if the president would hear out Marshall. Roosevelt responded that he didn't need to listen to the new Army chief, because, he said airily, "I know exactly what he would say.
There is no necessity for me to hear him at all." Marshall's two civilian overseers—Secretary of War Harry Woodring and Assistant Secretary Louis Johnson—sat mutely, offering Marshall no support. For Marshall, that dismissal was almost a repeat of his confrontation with Gen. Pershing decades earlier. But this time the stakes were infinitely higher—this involved not just the reputations and careers of a few officers, but possibly the future of the nation and, indeed, of the world.

Roosevelt ended the meeting. Marshall stood, but instead of leaving the room he walked over to the president and looked down on him. "Mr. President, may I have three minutes?" he asked.

"Of course, General Marshall," Roosevelt said. He did not invite Marshall to sit back down. When the president started to say something else, Marshall interrupted him, fearing that otherwise he would never get another word in. Marshall spoke in a torrent, spewing out facts about military requirements, organization, and costs. "If you don't do something . . . and do it right away, I don't know what is going to happen to this country," he told Roosevelt. "You have got to do something, and you've got to do it today."

He finally had the president's attention. "We are in a situation now where it's desperate," Marshall continued. "I am using the word very accurately, where it's desperate. We have literally nothing, nothing, and unless something is done immediately, and even then it takes a long, long time to get any return on it, we are caught in a dreadful position of unpreparedness. And with everything being threatened the way it has been, I feel that I must tell you just as frankly and vehemently as I can what our necessities are."

Morgenthau wrote in his diary that Marshall "stood right up to the president." It worked. The next day the president asked Marshall to draw up as soon as possible a list of what the military needed. Marshall would later recall this meeting as a turning point in FDR's military policy.

Marshall's attitude toward his dealings with Roosevelt provided a model of civil-military discourse. It was, most of all, frank—at least on Marshall's side. Yet it was not close. As chief of staff, Marshall would insist on remaining socially and emotionally distant from the president, seeing it as necessary to maintaining a professional relationship. Nowadays, most senior officers would leap at the chance to spend time with the commander in chief during his more relaxed moments. For example, before the Iraq war, Gen. Tommy R. Franks, then chief of the U.S. Central Command, overseeing the Middle East, visited President George W. Bush at the latter's ranch in Crawford, Texas, as Marine Gen. Peter Pace would do later as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Marshall was wary of such intimacies. "I found informal conversation with the president would get you into trouble," he later explained. "He would talk over something informally at the dinner table and you had trouble disagreeing without creating embarrassment. So I never went." He refused even to laugh at the president's jokes. The first time he ever visited Roosevelt's home at Hyde Park, New York, was for the president's funeral. But he and the president were perhaps the best wartime civil-military team the nation has ever had.

Marshall prepares for war

Even before he became chief of the Army, Marshall was thinking about how to oust the nonperformers in the Army's senior ranks. In the spring of 1939, war was on the horizon. Marshall had been told he would be the next Army chief, but he had not yet taken that office. He embarked on a sensitive mission to South America to secure agreements to freely move American forces by air and sea across the South Atlantic. The trip was spurred by American worry about growing pro-German sentiment within the Brazilian military, most notably evidenced by a German invitation to the
chief of the Brazilian army, Gen. Pedro Aurélio de Góis Monteiro, to lead Nazi troops on a parade in Berlin. Accompanying Marshall was Col. Matthew Ridgway, a rising young officer.

It is difficult to imagine nowadays, but for ten days during the voyage to Rio de Janeiro aboard the USS Nashville, Ridgway and Marshall sat on the forward deck of the light cruiser and simply talked. More or less cut off from the world, they discussed the future of the Army, about which Marshall held two great concerns. The first was the need to get more money out of Congress to expand, equip, and train the military. The second was how to find and promote good officers to lead that growing force. "He knew from his own experience in WWI and from his extensive reading of our military history of the political and other pressures which had resulted in the appointment to high command in past wars of so many mediocre and even incompetent officers," Ridgway recalled.

The South American mission was a success, with landing and port rights secured, even though Gen. Góis Monteiro went on to accept the Grand Cross of the Order of the German Eagle the following year. For a spell during World War II, the American air base that was established at Natal, in northeastern Brazil, would become one of the busiest airports in the world, used as a ferrying point into Africa, whose coast was about eighteen hundred miles to the east, and also for antisubmarine patrols over the mid-Atlantic.

Marshall returned to Washington with a battle plan for rapid change in the ranks of the Army's senior officers. "The present general officers of the line are for the most part too old to command troops in battle under the terrific pressure of modern war," Marshall said in October 1939, a month after being sworn in as chief of the Army, in an off-the-record comment to a journalist. "Most of them have their minds set in outmoded patterns, and can't change to meet the new conditions they may face if we become involved in the war that's started in Europe." At Marshall's behest, in the summer and fall of 1941, 31 colonels, 117 lieutenant colonels, 31 majors, and 16 captains were forced into retirement or discharged from the active-duty force. In addition, some 269 National Guard and Army Reserve officers were let go. All told, Marshall estimated that, as chief of staff, he forced out at least 600 officers before the United States entered World War II.

"I was accused right away by the service papers of getting rid of all the brains of the army," he said. "I couldn't reply that I was eliminating considerable arteriosclerosis."

Marshall removed officers in part to convey a sense of urgency. When the commandant at Leavenworth, Brig. Gen. Charles Bundel, told him that updating the complete set of Army training manuals would take eighteen months, Marshall offered him three months to do the job. No, it can't be done, Bundel responded. Marshall then offered four months. Bundel again said it was impossible. Marshall asked him to reconsider that statement. "You be very careful about that," Marshall warned.

"No, it can't be done," Bundel insisted.

"I'm sorry, then you are relieved," Marshall informed him, in an exchange that evoked Stonewall Jackson's relief of a colonel in the Shenandoah Valley campaign, an episode Marshall almost certainly knew about. (While on the march in the Shenandoah, Jackson had ordered a colonel to pull together his brigade, which had divided into two or three parts. "It's impossible, General; I can't do it," the officer said. Jackson responded, "Turn your command over to the next officer. If he can't do it, I'll find someone who can.") Marshall replaced Bundel with Brig. Gen. Lesley McNair, who went on to play a major role during the war, overseeing all Army training until he was killed by an Army Air Force fragmentation bomb that fell six miles short in Saint-Lô, France, in July 1944.
Marshall rarely let slip his fierce temper, but he did so when politicians questioned his efforts to get new men into the leadership of National Guard divisions. At one meeting at which his judgment about moving a general was questioned, he gave members of Congress an ultimatum: “I am not going to leave him in command of that division. So I will put it to you this way: If he stays, I go, and if I stay, he goes.” When Justice Felix Frankfurter passed along a criticism he had heard from a friend in the Army Reserve about the relief of Guard officers, Marshall tartly replied that “most of our senior officers on such duty are deadwood and should be eliminated from the service as rapidly as possible.”

The United States had not yet entered World War II, but Marshall had determined that most of the top generals in the Army were too aged for combat, and that just below them were many officers who were also far past their prime. Eisenhower stated in his memoirs that one of the beneficial side effects of the big Louisiana Maneuvers, staged in August and September 1941 with several hundred thousand troops in two opposing forces, was their demonstration that “some officers . . . had of necessity to be relieved from command.” Only eleven of the forty-two generals who commanded a division, a corps, or an army in those maneuvers would go on to command in combat. Just one of the prewar Army’s senior generals, Walter Krueger, would be given top command in World War II. Decades later, Eisenhower said that those removals had been key steps to victory in World War II. In his old age, he listed the names of a series of officers who, because they were discarded, are now forgotten by history: “a whole group of people . . . There was Marley, Charley Thompson—what’s his name—McKieffer, Daily, Benedict . . . By God, he [Marshall] just took them and threw them out of the room . . . He got them out of the way, and I think as a whole he was right.” The corollary to swift relief is, of course, rapid advancement of others, usually younger officers. “I was the youngest of the people that he pushed up into very high places,” Eisenhower continued.

Today’s officers sometimes fret about “personnel turbulence,” but their lives look unruffled compared with the first two years of Marshall’s leadership. He took over an Army of just 197,000 people, a number that included the infant Air Force. Under Marshall, the Army grew in just two years to 1.4 million in the summer of 1941, and two years after that it had reached nearly 7 million, finally peaking in 1945 at 8.3 million. The newcomers were overseen by a new generation of commanders who were being pushed hard. Once those new leaders were in place, Marshall told military journalist George Fielding Eliot, he would put them through their paces to gauge who among them was really capable. He elaborated:

I’m going to put these men to the severest tests which I can devise in time of peace. I’m going to start shifting them into jobs of greater responsibility than those they hold now . . . Then I’m going to change them, suddenly, without warning, to jobs even more burdensome and difficult . . . Those who stand up under the punishment will be pushed ahead. Those who fail are out at the first sign of faltering.

Those who passed the tests moved quickly. At one point Marshall, irked by the erratic quality of staff work in the Army Air Force and wanting to reward talent and maturity when he saw it, promoted a major directly to brigadier general, skipping altogether the ranks of lieutenant colonel and colonel.

The nature of the force was changing rapidly. The U.S. Army not only leaped into the front ranks of the world’s armed forces but in just a few years would be transformed into the premier mechanized military on the planet. The unprecedented mobility
that the Americans developed carried deep implications for personnel policies. Most notably, the speed at which the Army could move would make mental flexibility in leadership even more valuable. As manpower ran short, this suppleness enabled the American military to get by with far fewer divisions than had been planned. As military historian Russell Weigley explained, “If there was a justification for the risk of raising only 89 divisions, much of the justification must be that divisions could be shifted wherever they were needed with a promptness that no other army could match. In combat, too, they could move with unparalleled rapidity.”

Marshall’s inclination to remove unsuccessful officers intensified once the United States had entered the war. At one point he ordered a general to France immediately but was informed that the man had declined to leave so quickly, because his wife was away and his household furniture was not packed. Astounded, Marshall called the general, whom he had known as a good friend for years. “Was that a fact?” Marshall recalled asking.

“Yes, I can’t leave here now,” the general responded.

“Well, my God, man, we are at war and you are a general,” said a puzzled Marshall.

“Well, I’m sorry,” the officer said.

“I’m sorry too,” Marshall concluded, “but you will be retired tomorrow.”

This take-no-prisoners attitude was instilled in subordinates. To understand just how wide and broad the cuts were, consider the swift decline of the career of Maj. Gen. James Chaney, Eisenhower’s forgotten predecessor in Britain. A veteran pilot, Chaney had been sent to England as an observer of the Battle of Britain. When the United States entered the war, he was named the commander of American forces in the British Isles.

Eisenhower, visiting England, found Chaney “completely at a loss” in understanding the state of the war. Chaney and his staff were working peacetime hours, and British officials did not seem to know what the American general was supposed to be doing in their country. Eisenhower reported back to Marshall, who soon informed Chaney that he was being replaced. “I deem it of urgent importance,” Marshall told him, “that the commanding general in England be an officer who is completely familiar with all our military plans and affairs and who has taken a leading part in the military developments since December 7.” Hence, Marshall informed Chaney, “I am assigning Eisenhower to the post.” Marshall’s cold-bloodedness was evident when Chaney returned to the United States and Marshall declined to meet with him. In May 1943, less than a year after his removal from London, Chaney was stuck overseeing a boot camp outside Wichita Falls, Texas. Chaney’s aide in England, Charles Bolte, received a similarly brisk dismissal. One day, Ike said, “Well, you better go along, too.”

Though Marshall and his commanders were quick to punish incompetence, they believed in second chances. The system of relief during Word War II could be forgiving. Bolte, for example, recovered from his earlier setback. During the war, he commanded a division in Italy and eventually rose to four-star rank. Indeed, at least five Army generals of World War II—Orlando Ward, Terry Allen, Leroy Watson, Albert Brown, and, in the South Pacific, Frederick Irving—were removed from combat command and later given another division to lead in combat.

Teamwork was a core value for Marshall. Simply failing to show a spirit of cooperation was, for him, reason enough to remove a senior officer. Early in the war, he seriously considered relieving Brig. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr. as the Army commander in Alaska for failing to get along with his Navy counterpart. Buckner was the son of the Confederate general of the same name, who
was most noted for surrendering Fort Donelson to Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in February 1862. He was sent to Alaska in 1940 as an aging colonel. When a new Navy admiral, Robert “Fuzzy” Theobald, showed up a few years later, the two soon clashed. In August 1942, Buckner unaccountably chose to read aloud to his hot-tempered counterpart a poem mocking the Navy’s fears of operating in the wild Bering Sea. The performance provoked a wave of naval indignation that soon reached Marshall. (Marshall was long familiar with Buckner’s tendency to shoot off his mouth, having cautioned retired Marine Maj. Gen. John Lejeune a decade earlier against hiring Buckner as commandant of the Virginia Military Institute for “fear . . . that his habit of talking a great deal might involve him in difficulties.”) Perhaps because he had expected such behavior, Marshall ultimately decided against relieving Buckner from the Alaska post. However, the Navy sacked Theobald early in 1943, relegating him to running a Boston shipyard.

In 1944, ironically, Buckner would go on to lead a board that looked into the most controversial combat relief of the war: the firing on Saipan of Maj. Gen. Ralph Smith, commander of the Army’s sluggish 27th Division, by Marine Lt. Gen. Holland M. “Howlin’ Mad” Smith. (“The interesting question,” observed retired Army Lt. Col. Wade Markel, “is not why Holland Smith relieved Ralph Smith, but why it took him so long.”) Marshall later dispatched Buckner to Okinawa, where at the front line in June 1945 he waved off a Marine officer’s warning to remove his helmet because its three shiny stars were likely to provoke Japanese artillerymen. Minutes later, as Buckner stood arms akimbo, a Japanese shell exploded next to him, making him the highest-ranking American officer to be killed by enemy fire during World War II.

Perhaps the most significant point about Marshall’s approach to generalship in World War II was that it tended to create an incentive system that encouraged prudent risk taking. “A flexible system of personnel management that rapidly identified proven leaders and placed them in appropriate positions of responsibility helped accelerate the process of change during World War II,” concluded Markel, a specialist in personnel policy. “The temporary promotion system and its accompanying culture . . . offered unlimited advancement to those who could produce success, and summary dismissal to those who couldn’t. Confronted with these stark options . . . the capable found a way to succeed and were accordingly rewarded; the incapable were, of course, replaced by the capable.”

In other words, while sometimes mistaken and occasionally brutal to individual officers, the Marshall system generally achieved its goal of producing military effectiveness. To understand how, the best place to begin is with Dwight D. Eisenhower, who just a year before the start of World War II was still a lieutenant colonel, not even in command of a regiment, let alone the armies of millions he would oversee a few years later.
CHAPTER 2
Dwight Eisenhower
How the Marshall system worked

On December 12, 1941, five days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Dwight D. Eisenhower sat in his office at Fort Sam Houston, the Army base on the scrubby outskirts of San Antonio. He had been promoted to brigadier general ten weeks earlier. His telephone rang. "Is that you, Ike?" he heard someone say over the line. Eisenhower recognized Col. Bedell Smith’s voice.

"Yes," Eisenhower replied. Smith worked in the War Department, in Washington, D.C. He had a message for the young brigadier general: George Marshall wanted Eisenhower to come to the capital immediately.

Whether facing a single battle, an extended campaign, or an entire war, generals often do their most significant work before the major fighting begins. That was the case with Marshall, who made his most important personnel decision of World War II on that Friday, December 12, 1941. Marshall’s genius in selecting Dwight Eisenhower was to recognize the potential match between Ike’s qualities and the unique challenges of being the supreme commander of a multinational force in a globe-spanning war.

Marshall had witnessed friction and strife between the United States and its British and French allies in World War I, and he had thought for decades about how to avoid a repetition. He knew he needed someone who could lead a team and enforce its rules. He also calculated that, because the United States was secure on its own continent, when it went to war it would do so overseas, and that necessarily would mean working closely with the militaries and governments of other nations whose aims and interests would not necessarily jibe with those of the United States. Whoever led American forces would need to be able to function well within a coalition framework, and probably also lead it. Out of hundreds of possible candidates, he eventually picked Eisenhower as the man for the job.

When that phone call came through, Ike’s heart sank. He knew that Bedell Smith’s call could mean only one thing. “The chief says for you to hop a plane and get up here right away,” Smith said. “Tell your boss the formal orders will come through later.”

“How long?” asked Ike.

“I don’t know,” Smith said. “Just come along.”

Ike hurried home to collect the suitcase that his wife had packed for him, not knowing that he was embarking on a journey that would lead him to become the Allied commander in Europe and then, a decade later, president of the United States. It was not inevitable that Eisenhower would be chosen for top command. “Had Drum or another officer become chief of staff instead of Marshall, the roster of World War II generals would have looked very different,” commented historian D. K. R. Crosswell.

Marshall did not know Eisenhower well. The young officer had spent much of the previous decade working as the top aide to Douglas MacArthur, who was perhaps Marshall’s opposite in temperament, and indeed might have tried to sidetrack Marshall’s career in the early 1930s. Marshall might have considered Eisenhower in the camp of the petulant former Army chief, but he nevertheless picked Eisenhower from relative obscurity, tested him,
and then groomed him for supreme command. At the time Eisenhower was tapped, he was writing to George Patton, pleading for a position of command. "I suppose it's too much to hope that I could have a regiment in your division," Ike implored his old friend. "But I think I could do a damn good job of commanding a regiment."

In some ways Eisenhower did not fit the Marshall template. Most notably, he did not have a reputation for being aggressive, and he lacked combat experience. But in other categories he more than compensated. It is easy to forget now, as we try to peer past World War II and President Eisenhower, what it was about Ike the prewar Army officer that caught Marshall's eye. Marshall knew something that is now forgotten: that Eisenhower was a surprisingly sophisticated man, well read and well traveled. During World War II, his public relations aide depicted him as a normal fellow who liked to relax with a Western dime-store novel. Eisenhower allowed this to happen, and likely encouraged it, but in his last volume of memoirs he went out of his way to note that as an officer in the interwar period, he had prepared diligently for his profession, for example reading Clausewitz's *On War* three times. Once, after World War I, a friend asked him why he was reading so many books about Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Ike responded that he was doing so because that was where the next big war would be fought.

Ike also was cosmopolitan, having lived between the wars in Panama, the Philippines, and France, as well as near Washington, D.C. Behind his grinning farm-boy persona there existed an innovative military thinker, as well as fierceness in both ambition and temper. During the interwar period, he worked with Patton, exploring how to use tanks as more than protection for infantry. His work got him in hot water with his own leaders, so much so that after an article by him appeared in the November 1920 issue of *Infantry Journal*, he was called before the chief of the infantry branch and ordered to desist or face a court-martial. "Particularly, I was not to publish anything incompatible with solid infantry doctrine," which maintained that tanks needed to move only as fast as a soldier could walk, as the Army held that the combat task of the tank was to escort the foot soldiers.

British generals in the war tended to treat Eisenhower as a strategic lightweight, and many historians have followed their lead. But there is ample evidence that if he was not a strategic designer himself, he brought to his post a solid understanding of strategy, especially in the key task of translating broad strategic concepts into feasible operational orders. Marshall understood that Eisenhower had a talent for implementing strategy. And that job, Marshall believed, was more difficult than designing it. "There's nothing so profound in the logic of the thing," he said years later, discussing his own role in winning approval for the Marshall Plan. "But the execution of it, that's another matter." In other words, successful generalship involves first figuring out what to do, then getting people to do it. It has one foot in the intellectual realm of critical thinking and the other in the human world of management and leadership. It is thinking and doing.

The opening for Eisenhower to be called to Washington was created by trouble on the staff of the Army during the dizzying days after Pearl Harbor. Frank McCarthy, Marshall's junior aide (and decades later the producer of the movie *Patton*), remembered that on the day of the attack, Brig. Gen. Leonard Gerow, the chief of the War Plans Division, which oversaw military operations, "was nervous as a girl, terribly disturbed and concerned, and he didn't seem to be making good decisions. He didn't radiate confidence,
let's put it that way." In the wake of that performance, Marshall had one comment, McCarthy said: "Get that fellow Eisenhower." Ironically, Ike had been Gerow's study partner at Command and General Staff College.

As he hurried to leave San Antonio for Washington on that Friday afternoon in December 1941, Eisenhower was far from pleased. "This message [of summons from Marshall's office] was a hard blow," he would remember. Ike already had missed combat in one world war, having been assigned to a stateside training job. Now it looked as if he would be sidetracked into another staff job. "I hoped in any new war to stay with troops," Eisenhower later explained. "Being ordered to a city where I had already served a total of eight years would mean, I thought, a virtual repetition of my experience in World War I."

But this would prove to be perhaps the most momentous weekend of Eisenhower's life, the beginning of both his climb to the top of the military and his subsequent political career. He had missed the last passenger train heading east that day from San Antonio, so he had an Army cargo aircraft fly him along the treetops through stormy weather to Dallas, where he caught up with the eastbound Blue Bonnet Express.

Finding all the train's seats taken, he sat on his suitcase in an aisle. William Kittrell, a Texas lawyer he knew, came across him perched there. "General, I've got a drawing room back there; would you like to come back and sit?" he said. Kittrell was an attorney for Sid Richardson, the oil tycoon, who was relaxing in his own special railcar. Eisenhower accepted the invitation, and the three talked and played poker for much of their ride to Washington, D.C. Early on Sunday, December 14, Eisenhower detrained at the capital's Union Station, where he was met by his brother Milton. Eleven years later, Richardson, the card-playing oilman, would become a major financial backer of Eisenhower's presidential campaign—opposing a more conservative group of Texas oilmen backing Ike's old boss, Gen. Douglas MacArthur.

A few hours after arriving in Washington, Eisenhower entered the office of Gen. Marshall, with whom he would have an encounter even more fateful than the one on the train. He didn't know the Army chief well, having met him only twice and having spoken to him for only about two minutes each time. Marshall clearly had heard good reports about the newly minted brigadier general, as he had invited him to come teach at the Infantry School at Fort Benning. But on this first Sunday following Pearl Harbor, when Ike came into his office in the Munitions Building, Marshall got right to the point. "I walked into his office and within ten seconds he was telling me the problem he wanted me to attack. . . . He just said, 'Look, there are two things we have got to do. We have got to do our best in the Pacific and we've got to win this whole war. Now, how are we going to do it? Now, that is going to be your problem.'" In summary, the question was, Marshall said, "What should be our general line of action?" Both knew what that meant: Where do we draw the line and begin to fight? And do we abandon our men in the Philippines? This was the kind of trial Marshall had in mind when he shared with George Fielding Eliot his thoughts about testing rising officers.

"Give me a few hours," Eisenhower requested. It was a difficult assignment, but the kind that Ike particularly relished. He would write decades later that "I loved to do that kind of work. . . . Practical problems have always been my equivalent of crossword puzzles."

"All right," the Army chief agreed, turning away and then leaving the office to make Sunday calls on Gen. Pershing and Secretary of War Henry Stimson.

Eisenhower sat quietly in a nearby office in the Munitions Building, which would be torn down in the 1960s and eventually replaced by, among other things, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.
"The question before me was almost unlimited in its applications," Eisenhower later wrote. When Marshall returned that afternoon from his round of visits, Eisenhower gave him a three-page typed memo that laid out what he thought the American approach to World War II should be. The Philippines, Ike wrote, were beyond hope. Don't be sentimental. Give up the islands, and leave American and Filipino friends there to their fate, while giving them what small aid we can. Fall back and regroup. Nor should the Army heed the panicky calls of West Coast politicians for military protection for their cities, which would divert desperately needed troops and gear. Rather, the initial focus of American military operations against Japan should concentrate on faraway Australia, which would have to be the launching platform for the counteroffensive. Thus, the top military priority in the Pacific would be to keep open the air and sea lanes to it, which meant holding Hawaii, Fiji, New Zealand, and the other islands along the route, as well as Australia itself. That task was essential, and to carry it out successfully was worth almost any risk and expenditure.

Marshall read the memo, then looked up. "I agree with you," he told the young brigadier. Eisenhower had passed his first major test. It was not a test of national strategic planning, but almost certainly one of personality and intellect. That is, Eisenhower in his memo simply elaborated on strategic decisions that the American military establishment had been mulling for the previous decade, when it was all but ignored by the public during the depths of the Depression. In the early 1920s, the Navy's War Plan Orange, written for a conflict with Japan, had called for aggressively defending Manila, but by the early 1930s the plan had been revised in a cautious manner and called for forfeiting the entire Philippine archipelago. In 1939, Maj. Gen. John DeWitt, commandant of the Army War College, emphatically stated in an internal discussion of war plans that "we cannot, even as conditions are today, reinforce the Philippines.

We are going to lose them right away. We are 9,000 miles away; the Japanese [are] next door." This conclusion was made policy in a series of secret discussions between the American military and the British military starting in January 1941. The Navy's "Rainbow 5" global war plan stated in May 1941 that "no Army reinforcements will be sent to the Philippine Coastal Frontier."

So, rather than looking for strategic guidance, Marshall was more likely seeing if Ike had sufficient ice in his veins to recommend that thousands of his old friends and comrades in the Philippines be abandoned, condemning them to death or a war spent as prisoners of the Japanese. Marshall also probably wanted to gauge how much of a hold Gen. MacArthur still had on Ike. It is not clear whether Marshall knew that, in 1938, MacArthur had put aside Ike as his senior staff member and replaced him with the sycophantic Richard Sutherland, who would serve MacArthur throughout World War II—faithfully, except for repeatedly disobeying orders to get rid of the mistress he kept nearby. Ike found out about his demotion only when he returned from leave. When he protested, MacArthur coldly told him he was free to seek another assignment.

At any rate, Eisenhower passed Marshall's first test. Marshall looked up from the memo and immediately gave the brigadier another one: Tell me how to implement this. Ike later would recall how Marshall concluded the conversation on that grim Sunday in December 1941. "Eisenhower," Marshall said, "the department is filled with able men who analyze their problems but feel compelled always to bring them to me for final solution. I must have assistants who will solve their own problems and tell me later what they have done." Ike thought to himself that as Marshall spoke, his eyes were "awfully cold."

Prioritizing tends to be a forgotten aspect of strategy. The art of strategy is foremost not about how to do something but about
what to do. In other words, the first problem is to determine what the real problem is. There are many aspects to any given problem, but the strategist must sort through them and determine its essence, for there lies the key to its solution. Eisenhower clearly understood the need to separate the essential from the merely important. In March 1942, he and an aide drafted a long memo for Marshall that differentiated primary war aims from lesser ones. The three primary goals, they wrote, had to be “the security of England, the retention of Russia in the war as an active ally, and the defense of the Middle East.” (Holding the Mideast prevented the possible linkup on land of German and Japanese forces in, perhaps, Iran and also kept open the supply line to Russia, at a time when keeping Russia in the war was indeed essential.) Everything else was secondary, they noted, in a classic summary of the nature of strategic decision making: “All other operations must be considered highly desirable rather than in the mandatory class.” The implication of that conclusion, they continued, meant that victory in Europe had to take precedence over winning in the Pacific. Again, this was not original thinking. If anything, it made explicit the Army’s version of a quiet understanding that already existed with the British. But it showed a clear grasp of how to implement that understanding.

Eisenhower himself also could be coldly calculating about risk. In his memoirs, he recalled making the decision to put fourteen thousand soldiers aboard the Queen Mary and send it through submarine-infested waters, knowing that its lifeboats and rafts could hold only eight thousand. He had calculated that, while it lacked armed escort, the ocean liner was fast enough to outstrip German submarines—but not if it encountered one by chance. He had experienced some anxiety when the ship put into a Brazilian port and an Italian radio transmission was intercepted reporting its presence and, later, the direction in which it sailed.

Six months later, in October 1942, Eisenhower would write to Marshall from London, laying out a fairly clear plan for the remainder of the war. Looking forward through the fog and chaos of war is never easy, but Eisenhower, having settled into his new post as U.S. commander for operations in Europe, made it look so when he confidently wrote—even before U.S. forces were engaged against the Germans in North Africa in “Operation Torch”—that he could envision “launching a decisive blow in the spring of ’44.” In this scenario, “the summer of ’43 would be used for building up the necessary forces in Great Britain, firmly establishing ourselves in favorable positions in the Southwest Pacific and exploiting TORCH.” That, of course, would prove to be a prescient sentence.

Marshall knew that he could tutor the bright, ambitious Eisenhower in strategic planning in part because Ike already embodied Marshall’s insistence on a team spirit in his senior leaders. Military historians tend to dwell on Eisenhower’s personal cooperativeness, and indeed he was cooperative, unusually so—with other branches of the military, with civilian American officials, and with representatives of other nations. It was a quality not shared by many of his Army peers, some of whom seemed to revel in distrusting the British. It may have been Ike’s most important personal asset. “Some men reach the top through a tremendous intellect, a ruthless disposition, a burning ambition, or an utter disregard for the feelings of others,” wrote Maj. Gen. Sir Francis de Guingand, chief of staff through most of World War II to Gen. Bernard Montgomery, who certainly excelled at disregarding the feelings of others. But this was not the case with Eisenhower, de Guingand continued:

I think his success was largely due to his great human qualities: his sense of humor, his common sense and his essential honesty and integrity. He inspired love and unfailing loyalty; he had a magic touch when dealing with conflicting issues or clashes of
personalities; and he knew how to find a solution along the lines of compromise, without surrendering a principle. He is, in fact, a great democrat.

Ike’s British subordinates also found him very American. “Here was somebody who seemed eager to cast aside conventions and get on with the job” was the first impression he gave to Maj. Gen. Sir Kenneth Strong, his intelligence chief for most of the war. “He seemed to represent a new and interesting world.” (Interestingly, one of the officers on his staff Strong deemed “most able” was Enoch Powell, who before the war was a brilliant professor of Greek, during the war turned sharply anti-American, and after the war would become prominent as an anti-immigration politician in the British Parliament. Powell’s edition of Thucydides’ Peloponnesian War is still studied and respected.) The sort of man who became a general in the American military was different from the British mold of minor aristocrats and country gentlemen. One officer who shot to prominence, J. Lawton Collins, was the offspring of Irish immigrants. Maurice Rose was the son of a rabbi. Several other senior generals, such as Clarence Huebner, Courtney Hodges, Ben Lear, Walter Krueger, and Troy Middleton, had risen from the enlisted ranks. An armor general, Ernest Harmon, was an orphan. One of the fastest risers in the Army of World War II, the paratrooper James Gavin, had been adopted out of an orphanage by a Pennsylvania coal-mining family and, not wanting to become a miner himself, had run away from home as a teenager to join the Army.

**Marshall and Ike mature**

Both Marshall and Eisenhower made several major mistakes during the war. Most notably, Marshall repeatedly advocated invading Europe earlier than the British wanted to. Had the Allies landed in France in 1943, as he advised, they would have been pitting less experienced troops against a veteran German army that still enjoyed adequate air support, which would have made the Normandy landings a far riskier proposition than they were a year later. He and Eisenhower also opposed Operation Torch, the U.S.-led foray into North Africa in late 1942, which in retrospect probably was essential as a shakedown campaign for the green American forces and their untried commanders. Marshall also seemed to have a tin ear on issues of race and perhaps could have done far more to integrate the armed forces during World War II than he did.

Many of these mistakes were made in 1942 as Marshall and Eisenhower settled into their roles atop the U.S. military in a global war. Eisenhower’s letters to Marshall that year have little of the confidence and certainty he would show by the end of the war, when he would address Marshall almost as a peer. In late 1942, after the Operation Torch landings in North Africa and the difficulties over Eisenhower’s awkward political embrace of Adm. François Darlan, who had collaborated with the Nazis, followed by the shock of fighting the Germans in Tunisia, Eisenhower even wondered whether he might be replaced. This was probably the most vulnerable point he experienced during the entire war. “At any moment, it is possible that a necessity might arise for my relief and consequent demotion,” he told his son. “If so, you are not to worry about it… If it becomes expedient to reduce me, I would be the first to recommend it.”

Marshall and Ike also were shaky—and perhaps not completely candid with each other—in one of their first major personnel decisions, the selection of a frontline American commander for the Torch campaign in Africa. When Marshall suggested Lloyd Fredendall to Eisenhower as the field commander, Ike expressed a bit
of doubt. "He was not one of those in whom I had instinctive confidence," he wrote, somewhat too delicately, to the Army chief. Yet Fredendall was Marshall's top pick, as of course Eisenhower had been. By December 1942 Eisenhower had warmed to Fredendall, telling Harry Butcher, the Navy reservist who was Eisenhower's personal aide and confidant during the war, that he considered him and Patton his two most competent subordinate commanders.

"Patton I think comes closest to meeting every requirement made on a commander," he dictated to Butcher. "Just after him I would at present rate Fredendall, although I do not believe the latter has the imagination in foreseeing and preparing for possible jobs of the future that Patton possesses." On February 4, 1943, Eisenhower even recommended that Fredendall be promoted to lieutenant general, along with two other men. That day he also sent a letter to Fredendall urging him to make sure his subordinate commanders were not staying too close to their command posts. "Generals are expendable just as is any other item in an army," he advised.

So it was all the more shocking to Ike a few days later when he visited Fredendall at his headquarters to see how the corps commander was situated. "It was a long way from the battle front," some seventy miles in the rear, he later wrote, in "a deep and almost inaccessible ravine." Two hundred Army engineers who should have been helping vulnerable combat units dig in and establish defensive positions instead were tunneling into hillsides to provide secure quarters for Fredendall's staff. Eisenhower's contempt for Fredendall's overcautiousness was clear in a line from his memoirs: "It was the only time, during the war, that I ever saw a divisional or higher headquarters so concerned over its own safety that it dug itself underground shelters." This comment is especially striking in the context of the book in which it appears. Aside from that sentence, Eisenhower is unfailingly courteous in discussing his former subordinates.

Motoring on to the front, Ike was shaken by the lackadaisical attitude of American troops facing the Germans. He inspected frontline troops who had been in Tunisia's Fair Pass for two days and was astonished to see that they had not set out a minefield or otherwise prepared their defenses. He told them to do so at first light and left at 3 A.M. Two hours later, before the sun rose, the entire unit was captured by attacking Germans. That event, he noted, was the beginning of the humiliating battle that came to be known as Kasserine Pass, the worst defeat of American ground forces in Europe or Africa during World War II. In about a week, Allied losses, most of them American, amounted to three hundred killed, three thousand wounded, and nearly four thousand missing, most of them taken prisoner. Some two hundred tanks also were lost. "The proud and cocky Americans today stand humiliated by one of the greatest defeats in our history," Ike's aide Butcher recorded in his diary. "This is particularly embarrassing to us with the British." One of the few bright spots at Kasserine was the performance of a 9th Infantry Division artillery battalion, commanded by one Lt. Col. William Westmoreland, that wheeled into place and opened fire in time to blunt a German armored attack.

Eisenhower emerged from the Kasserine episode sobered, with relief on his mind. "Our people from the very highest to the very lowest have learned that this is not a child's game," he wrote in a chastened letter to Marshall. American troops emerged from the fighting, he said after the war, "bedraggled...tired...down." The defeat at Kasserine Pass was especially painful to Eisenhower because it added to a string of Allied losses—Dunkirk, Bataan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Surabaya, and Tobruk—that he termed in his memoirs "the black reminders."

Eisenhower decided to make some changes. On February 24, as the Kasserine fight was ending, he wrote to his old friend Leonard "Gee" Gerow, then commanding the 29th Division, about the
need to “ruthlessly” weed out “the lazy, the slothful, the indifferent or the complacent. Get rid of them. . . . For God’s sake don’t keep anybody around that you say to yourself, ‘He may get by’—He won’t. Throw him out.” His first major personnel move was to fire Brig. Eric Mockler-Ferryman, his G-2, or intelligence chief. This was a controversial choice, because Mockler-Ferryman was British. Indeed, Ike’s intelligence officer had to be British, because the Allies were relying on the U.K.’s “Ultra” intercepts of secret German communications. The firing came at a time when there was already much muttering among the British about the poor quality of the Americans’ training and leadership. Gen. Montgomery commented in his diary that the American forces were “complete amateurs”—a harsh but not entirely unfair assessment of the undertrained, ill-equipped units he observed. Lt. Gen. Sir John Crocker, the British commander in the area, wrote in a letter to his wife, “Believe me, the British have nothing to learn from them.” Crocker shared his views with reporters, criticizing the American 34th Infantry Division, a National Guard unit that had been federalized in February 1941. This was noticed by the Americans: “The s.o.b. publicly called our troops cowards,” Patton wrote in his diary. British officers might have rightly wondered whether Ike would be as tough on his American subordinates as he had been on his British staffer.

Eisenhower told Marshall that he was thinking of relieving Fredendall, having detected in him a “peculiar apathy.” He already had received internal reports that during a battle in late February, Fredendall had been found asleep at eleven in the morning two days in a row. The same day, he was told that, contrary to what he had believed, the British were not impressed with Fredendall and were especially unhappy with the quality of planning done by his staff. Eisenhower added a postscript to the letter. “My own real worry,” he wrote, “is his apparent inability to develop a team.” That word meant so much to Marshall. The report of Allied concern might have been the deciding factor. If the British did not want Fredendall either, it was not only easy but necessary to move him out. Two days later, Eisenhower removed Fredendall, and by March 11 the ousted general was headed back to the United States, where he was given a meaningless promotion and the oblivion of a training command.

Eisenhower turned over Fredendall’s command to Patton and gave him two clear orders. The first came from knowing Patton well. Don’t be personally reckless, he told his old friend. The second was a lesson Eisenhower himself was mulling. He told Patton “to be cold-blooded about removal of inefficient officers. If a man fails, send him back to General Ike and let him worry about it.” When Ike met the British intelligence officer who would replace the one he had fired, he instructed him that “if I thought anyone was not making the grade or was creating difficulties I was fully empowered to sack him on the spot. ‘Hire and fire’ was the slogan.”

Patton made an impression on the frontline troops. It was hard not to notice him. Lt. Col. Westmoreland, leading his artillery battalion, was struck that “Patton would parade around with his boots, yellow britches, his Ike jacket, two pearl-handled revolvers, and a shiny helmet with three stars all over it. His jeep looked like a motorized Christmas tree sprinkled with stars.” Another rising officer, Col. James Polk, would describe Patton later in the war as resembling “a Wild West cowboy ready to go fox hunting.”

The night he succeeded Fredendall, Patton noted in his diary, “I think Fredendall is either a little nuts or badly scared.” It was a devastating epitaph for a career. Patton also cast a skeptical eye on one of his division commanders, Orlando Ward, writing not long after taking command that “Ward lacks force . . . . The division has lost its nerve and is jumpy.” On the other side of the Atlantic, Gen. Marshall had gotten wind of Ward’s naysaying, prompting him to write a letter to the general, who had served under him in
the high-profile position of secretary of the Army's general staff, warning that he was giving "the impression of a degree of pessimism which was disturbing to me... Naturally I am deeply interested in you and your career, but I am much more interested, through necessity, in the development of the fighting spirit in our Army." But Patton did not act against Ward until he heard from British Gen. Harold Alexander, who wrote to him, "In my opinion General Ward is not the best man to command the American First Armoured Division." It was the final blow. In his memoirs, Eisenhower presents the removals of Fredendall and Ward as necessary for improving the morale of American forces: After the Kasserine defeat, "the troops had to be picked up quickly."

Like Gen. Chaney, who had preceded Ike in London, Ward was sent back to the United States. But unlike Chaney, Ward was permitted to see Marshall, perhaps because Marshall had a message for him: Stop talking about how the Germans are more effective than the Allies. Ward was forgiven his indiscretion, in part because he had been speaking the truth but probably also because he had been relatively close to Marshall before the war, often walking home with him after work along Washington, D.C.'s Connecticut Avenue. Ward was sent to train troops in Texas and then made commandant of the artillery school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. By the end of the war he was commanding another combat division in Europe, the 20th Armored. After the war he briefly commanded V Corps.

Ernest Harmon was instructed by Patton to head east and replace Ward as commander of the 2nd Armored. "Fine," he said. "Do you want me to attack or defend?"

Patton replied in a typically brusque fashion, according to Harmon's account. "What have you come for, asking me a lot of goddamned stupid questions?"

"I didn't think it was stupid," Harmon said, holding his ground—always important in dealing with Patton. "I simply asked a very fundamental question: whether I am to attack or defend."

Patton wouldn't tell him, so he decided on his own to attack, which was almost always the right attitude in World War II.

The victory in Tunisia, site of ancient Carthage, in May 1943 was the first win for the Allies in the west. It carried additional meaning for Eisenhower, who as a boy had read extensively about the heroes of the worlds of ancient Rome and Greece, and especially about the Carthaginians. "Among all the figures of antiquity, Hannibal was my favorite," he remembered. Meditating on his triumph in Tunis, Eisenhower came to a conclusion that may seem odd in today's context:

Immediate and continuous loyalty to the concept of unity and to allied commanders is basic to victory. The instant such commanders lose the confidence of either government or of the majority of their principal subordinates, they must be relieved.

He seems to be saying here, between the lines, that Fredendall and Ward were sacrificed for the larger goal of preserving Allied unity. Driving home the point, Eisenhower added, "This was the great Allied lesson of Tunisia." In other words, in coalition warfare, generals must be relieved not just when they lose the confidence of their own leaders, but before that, if they lose the backing of allied leaders.

Not long after the firings of Fredendall and Ward, Gen. Marshall released his second report on the state of the U.S. military, the first issued since the United States had entered the war. In an appendix, he used the opportunity to discuss what he looked for in a general:

... men who have measured up to the highest standards of military skill, who have demonstrated a comprehensive understanding
of modern standards of warfare and who possess the physical stamina, moral courage, strength of character and flexibility of mind necessary to carry the burdens which modern combat conditions impose.

This description, which came after the initial wave of reliefs—Short in the Pacific, Fredendall in Africa, and senior officers on the Army General Staff at the Pentagon—was similar to the list he had drawn up after World War I, except that here Marshall had added “flexibility of mind” as a requirement. The setbacks of 1941 through early 1943 had refined his formula for managing generals. They would adapt and succeed—or be replaced. But they would not be micromanaged, at least not by Marshall and Eisenhower. As Ike put it, “if results obtained by the field commander become unsatisfactory the proper procedure is not to advise, admonish, and harass him, but to replace him by another commander.”

The risk of relief is the price senior officers pay in order not to be oversupervised. This is somewhat counterintuitive—nothing is more intrusive than removing a commander—but subsequent history indicates that it makes sense. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the U.S. Army started turning away from the practice of relief, meddling by superiors would increase notably. The tradition would die altogether in the Vietnam War—where, not coincidentally, one of the enduring images of the conflict would be that of lieutenants and captains looking up to see their battalion, brigade, and even division commanders hovering above them in helicopters.

CHAPTER 3
George Patton
The specialist

The Marshall template for generalship was not a rigid mold. It made room for exceptions, especially at higher levels of command. Marshall would put up with George Patton and some other outliers because their combat effectiveness made them irreplaceable.

Even now, more than six decades after his death, Patton remains one of our most remarkable generals. “You have no balance at all,” Marshall’s wife once scolded the young Patton, correctly, years before World War II. Maj. Gen. Ernest Harmon, one of his peers, wrote that he was “strange, brilliant, moody.” The blustery Patton behaved in ways that would have gotten other officers relieved, but he was kept on because he was seen, accurately, as a man of unusual flaws and exceptional strengths. Marshall concluded that Patton was both a buffoon and a natural and skillful fighter. Ike cast himself as Patton’s defender, writing to Marshall early in the war that “General Patton has . . . approached all his work in a very businesslike, sane but enthusiastic attitude.” It is hardly usual to go out of one’s way to reassure a superior that a subordinate is “sane.”
The closest Patton came to disgrace was in mid-1943, as the Sicily campaign wound down, when he mistreated two hospitalized privates, one of them recovering from battle fatigue (what is now called post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD). On August 3, 1943, Patton walked into the tent of the 15th Evacuation Hospital and asked Pvt. Charles Kuhl of the 1st Infantry Division what his ailment was. "I guess I can't take it," responded Kuhl. Then, according to a report filed at the time by Lt. Col. Perrin Long, a Medical Corps officer, "The General immediately flared up, cursed the soldier, called him all types of a coward, then slapped him across the face with his gloves and finally grabbed the soldier by the scruff of his neck and kicked him out of the tent. The soldier was immediately picked up by corpsmen and taken to a ward tent." Kuhl ultimately was diagnosed as suffering from chronic dysentery and malaria. It was a display of extreme indiscipline by an officer who was expected to set an example. It also was flatly un-American.

On August 10, Patton subjected Pvt. Paul Bennett to similar harsh treatment. Bennett actually had been evacuated against his wishes and had asked to return to his artillery unit, even though he was "huddled and shivering." Patton asked him what he was suffering from. "It's my nerves," Bennett said.

"Your nerves, hell, you are just a goddamned coward," Patton shouted. He then slapped Bennett and said, "Shut up the goddamned crying. I won't have these brave men here who have been shot at seeing a yellow bastard sitting here crying." He then slapped him again, Long recounted, so hard that the private's helmet liner was knocked into the next tent. Patton ordered a hospital officer to discharge Bennett back to the front. "You're going to fight," he told Bennett. "If you don't, I'll stand you up against a wall and have a firing squad kill you on purpose." Patton then reached for his pistol and said, "I ought to shoot you myself, you goddamned whimpering coward."

There was little question about the facts of the matter. Patton had proudly recorded both incidents in his diary, writing of Pvt. Bennett that "I may have saved his soul, if he had one."

Patton's obtuseness about striking soldiers might be better understood if we recall that both he and Eisenhower had observed the exploits of Douglas MacArthur. Both men had been present in July 1932 when MacArthur, then the Army chief of staff, presided over something far harsher than a slap: the teargassing and routing of "Bonus Marchers," Depression-stricken World War I veterans who came to Washington by the thousands to demonstrate in favor of early payment of a cash bonus not due until 1945. MacArthur exceeded or perhaps ignored his orders, not only clearing out the marchers but burning their encampment, not far from the U.S. Capitol. MacArthur would contend that "not more than one in ten" was a veteran, and those who were tended to be "hardcore" Communists, drunks, and criminals. For his part, Eisenhower said that he had advised MacArthur against getting involved. He also said that when he informed MacArthur at the time that orders had arrived from President Hoover instructing MacArthur not to cross the Anacostia River to the marchers' camp, MacArthur responded, "I don't want to hear them and I don't want to see them," and then crossed over the bridge.

Eisenhower went out of his way in 1943 to save Patton, though there were ample grounds for his relief. In addition to the slapping incidents, Patton had violated Marshall's insistence on teamwork with the Allies in Sicily by shooting out ahead of his orders and launching a questionable drive through the western end of the island when the German foe was concentrated in the eastern end. Despite these blunders, Eisenhower hoped to sidestep Patton's removal. He wrote a harsh letter to Patton instead, demanding that he apologize to his troops. Ike pocketed the contrite letter Patton wrote to him in response and also persuaded three
reporters who knew about these incidents not to file stories about them. Just a few days later, Eisenhower was lobbying Marshall to promote Patton to the permanent rank of major general, which was approved. “George Patton continues to exhibit some of those unfortunate personal traits of which you and I have always known and which during this campaign caused me some most uncomfortable days,” he wrote to Marshall. “His habit of impulsive bawling out of subordinates, extending even to personal abuse of individuals, was noted in at least two specific cases. I have had to take the most drastic steps; and if he is not cured now, there is no hope for him. Personally, I believe that he is cured.”

Months later, in November 1943, news of the slapping incidents leaked. In a war being fought in the name of democracy, it was devastating to have an American general behaving like a barroom bully. Eisenhower had recognized this when he ordered Patton to apologize to his enlisted men and to tell them that he “respected their positions as fighting soldiers of a democratic nation.”

Despite Ike’s hopes, Patton was not cured. In the spring of 1944, with the slapping controversy barely past, Patton again made headlines, wisecracking at a public event in Knutsford, England, that it was “the evident destiny of the British and Americans to rule the world.” In the wake of that outburst and the headlines it provoked, Ike commented to Marshall of Patton that “apparently he is unable to use reasonably good sense in all those matters where senior commanders must appreciate the effect of their own actions upon public opinion.” Ike made it clear to Patton that he was on the thinnest of ice, informing his old friend, “I am thoroughly weary of your failure to control your tongue and have begun to doubt your all-round judgment, so essential in high military position.” He wrote to Marshall that “frankly I am exceedingly weary of his habit of getting everybody into hot water.”

But again, Ike did not remove Patton, explaining to Marshall that he found his colleague “admittedly unbalanced but nevertheless aggressive,” and so useful to the cause. James Gavin, who knew Patton and served under him in Sicily, concluded that Eisenhower probably would have been justified in relieving Patton, “but he couldn’t spare him. Generalship in that high echelon is a rare commodity, and Georgie had it. Patton had it.”

There also was an oddly personal element in Eisenhower’s handling of Patton. Ike seemed to take a certain pride in protecting the old cavalryman. Part of this was due to their long-standing friendship, and no doubt a sense of obligation. When the war began, it had been Patton who looked out for Eisenhower. As Ike’s colleague Wedemeyer reportedly said to Eisenhower during an argument about what to do with Patton, “Hell, get on to yourself, Ike—you didn’t make him, he made you.” Patton also told Eisenhower early in 1942, “You are about my oldest friend,” and a year later Eisenhower used the same phrase in return. But Gavin was correct: Most of all, Ike knew he needed Patton as a matter of military effectiveness.

Ike’s appreciation of his old friend would always be far more limited than that of German officers, who reportedly saw Patton as one of the best overall Allied generals. “He is the most modern general and the best commander of armored and infantry combined,” a German prisoner of war, Lt. Col. Freiherr von Wangelheim, told his captors.

Eisenhower’s final word on Patton would come more than two decades later, in his last memoir, At Ease. There he repeatedly praised Patton as “a master of fast and overwhelming pursuit” and “the finest leader in military pursuit that the United States Army has known.” It is a revealing superlative, at once lofty and limited. That is, he calls Patton the best, but at something that is described narrowly. He doesn’t call Patton the best general or the best combat leader, nor even the best at waging offensive warfare; he
makes it clear that in his view Patton excelled at the single task of hounding a retreating enemy. Narrow as that mission is, it was precisely the job the American military faced in Europe in late 1944 and early 1945, and that is likely the primary reason Patton was never sent home in disgrace. On balance, Eisenhower was right to keep him. And the modern American military probably is worse for not having a few senior commanders with a dose of Patton's dynamism and color in them.

CHAPTER 4
Mark Clark
The man in the middle

Like Patton, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark was close to Eisenhower, but he was far less effective on the battlefield. Clark was also a difficult man to like. "It makes my flesh creep to be with him," Patton once wrote in his diary. Ten months later Patton noted that "anyone who serves under Clark is always in danger." As the American commander in the secondary theater of Italy in 1943 and 1944, Clark fired two corps commanders—that is, generals overseeing groups of divisions. A strong case can be made that, if someone had to go, it was Clark who should have been relieved rather than his two subordinates. He was, perhaps, never quite bad enough to relieve but not quite good enough to admire.

Patton was not always a reliable reporter, but his wariness of Clark was borne out in Italy in the fall of 1943 and the following winter. Following the Sicily campaign, American and British forces, on September 9, 1943, landed at Salerno, on the Italian mainland about thirty miles southeast of Naples. It was Clark's first battle command of the war, and, by his own account, the assault was a "near disaster." By the standards of the German army, the counterattack was not particularly fierce. Nonetheless, by September 12 it