

## Scholar: Gen. George Marshall understood the wise use of authority

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POWNAL — A lack of emphasis in the Army educational system and a promotion system that does not allow dissident views is what is keeping the United States Army from producing another Gen. George Marshall, according to an expert on U.S. diplomatic and military history who spoke at the Pownal Solomon Wright Library on Sunday.

Marshall, a military leader that went on to become Secretary of State, the third Secretary of Defense and win a Nobel Peace Prize, had a real understanding of authority and how it should be used, according to Mark Stoler, historian and biographer of Marshall.

Stoler said that when he was earning his Master's Degree in history at the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s he had long hair and a strong dislike for authority but then he found Marshall. Through Marshall, Stoler realized that it was not authority, it was abuse of authority — which Marshall would not tolerate.

"I've studied a lot of things but Marshall has a place in my heart," said Stoler. "He really understood authority."

Stoler, who earned his doctorate in military and diplomatic history, spent years teaching in various military schools, including the U.S.

Military Academy at West Point with an interest in the points where the military and diplomacy meet. Because of that, he was asked to write a biography of Marshall in 1989.

Marshall blurred those lines and despite holding a low rank in the Army, was not afraid to speak out, said Stoler. Key military planner and general during World War I John Pershing heard criticism from Marshall and instead of firing him, Marshall became one of Pershing's best friends.

"They developed almost a father/son relationship," said Stoler. "Pershing introduced him to the top planners and diplomacy."

Despite knowing diplomacy and planning up close, Marshall advanced up the ranks very slowly. After participating in a variety of small assignments, Marshall finally took the reins of training at Fort Benning.

"He revolutionized the curriculum at Fort Benning. It became known as the spirit of Benning," said Stoler.

Marshall taught modern warfare and many officers that trained under him became leading war planners during World War II. From 1932 to 1936, Marshall took many assignments working with civilians before he was brought back to Washington to become the Army chief of staff.

"He was appointed by Roosevelt, jumping over 33 officers that had higher ranks than he," said Stoler. "He did to Roosevelt exactly what he did to Pershing, talk back to him."

As Nazi forces were growing, Marshall advocated for a buildup of the U.S. Army. Before the United States entered World War II, Marshall increased the military from 175,000 to 1.4 million, said Stoler.

"He purged old and ineffective officers and replaced them with young ones," said Stoler. "He had a little black book with what became known as Marshall's Men."

Marshall's Men was a list of soldiers that Marshall thought highly of including Dwight D. Eisenhower. Roosevelt and Marshall often had heated debates about military planning, said Stoler. Then Pearl Harbor happened, and Marshall, being a top planner, received a lot of the blame. Stoler said that the blame was not deserved because nobody could have expected the attack.

Marshall took on the role of leading a global war with allied forces. When the United States planned the invasion of Europe through Northern France, Marshall received one of the biggest compliments in history and Eisenhower took one of the biggest assignments.

According to Stoler, Roosevelt asked Marshall multiple times if he would like to lead the forces into France but Marshall refused to answer, stating that Roosevelt was in charge. Eventually, Eisenhower led the forces and Marshall stayed in Washington and Roosevelt said that he could not sleep at night knowing that Marshall was out of the country, said Stoler.

In 1947 Marshall retired for one day before President Harry S. Truman called and asked him to go to China as an ambassador in an attempt to avoid a civil war. Marshall failed though but still became the secretary of state.

"Marshall is considered one of the greatest secretary of states," said Stoler. "He is the creator of American foreign policy. He is the model of the 20th century soldier."

Marshall and his staff generated the Marshall Plan, a program to rebuild up Western Europe after World War II, intended in part to create a balance of power throughout the globe. He later was appointed as the third secretary of defense and with all that he did, Marshall was twice named man of the year by Time magazine and won a Nobel Peace Prize for the Marshall Plan.

Stoler said that Marshall faced failures and much criticism, including being accused of being a traitor and of 'losing China.'

Marshall was a humble and very honest man, said Stoler. When asked about certain actions, Marshall took full responsibility for his role, said Stoler.

"He has the presence of authority. He was blunt and honest," said Stoler. "He understood the civilian mentality."

While building up the military Marshall would request officers to wear plain clothes to avoid being seen as militant. And when he was said to be indispensable, Marshall responded by saying that there are many men in Arlington Cemetery that are indispensable, said Stoler.

Stoler came to Pownal in part of a grant from the Vermont Humanities Council's speaker series. Stoler retired from teaching full-time at the University of Vermont after 37 years, and now is teaching for one-year at Williams College, in Williamstown, Mass.

"We're a small library but we're able to make use of the grants," said Library Director Linda Hall. "I usually have three or four major speakers a year."

According to Hall, the