

Volume 7

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Leadership Series

**Speaking Truth to Power: George
Cattlett Marshall**

Lead: With the shadow of war hanging over Europe, the Army's new deputy chief of staff spoke his mind to a startled Commander in Chief.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: It was not the first time George Catlett Marshall had spoken to his superiors with unusually frank if not brutal candor. In fact he had a reputation for it. He was not a pest about it, nor did he use it as an attention getting device, nor did he

seek to gain say or embarrass those set above him. He seemed to have the uncanny ability to choose the moment in which an honest assessment secured respect and appreciation rather than irritation.

In the fall of 1917 he was a staff officer in the 1st Division of the American Expeditionary Force in France. On an inspection trip General John Pershing was unusually, and to Marshall's mind too, severe in his criticism of the division's readiness. To the horror of his fellow officers, Marshall disputed Pershing's critique. So impressed was the General with this honesty and Marshall career record that he eventually made Marshall his aide.

In 1938 in the wake of the Munich agreement, FDR was anxious to respond to German aircraft construction so he proposed to build ten thousand planes a year without increasing the forces necessary to support them. Toward the end of the meeting, the President turned to Marshall, with whom theretofore he had had little contact and said, “Don’t you think so, George?” The general replied, “I am sorry Mr. President, but I don’t agree with that at all.” A year later FDR reached 34 names down the list of senior generals and picked Marshall as Army Chief of Staff. Author Eric Larabee says that one of the most powerful components of Marshall’s leadership

was his ability at the right moment to follow the Quaker adage of speaking truth to power. This series celebrates the tenth anniversary year of the Jepson School of Leadership at the University of Richmond.

This is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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