

WINNING ESSAY 1

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There stands a soldier in the middle of Uniontown, Pennsylvania. His look of determination, loaded musket, and bronze tint make him conspicuous to any passerby who roams through the five-way intersection which he watches. Behind the soldier, a series of nineteen flags tower above the streets below in unison as a symbol of prosperity. For the most part, Uniontown is a quiet place, situated on the border of the Keystone State and submerged in the rolling hills of the Appalachian Mountains. One would not expect a hero of international fame and notoriety to have been born here, and yet across the road from the soldier, on a bench flanked by a series of plaques, sits the statue of one, George Catlett Marshall Jr.

Marshall's story began in Uniontown over one hundred years ago on a cold New Year's Eve. The fourth child born of George Catlett Marshall Sr., a wealthy coke businessman, and Laura Emily Bradford Marshall, George C. Marshall grew up in Uniontown before leaving for the Virginia Military Institute to pursue a career in the armed forces. After graduating, Marshall was commissioned as a second lieutenant of Infantry in February of 1902, in time to serve in the Philippine-American War. Marshall would continue to rise through the ranks of the military in the lead-up to World War I, during which he achieved the position of assistant chief of staff for the newly created 1st Division.

This role put him in prime position to be the first soldier of the AEF to step foot on European soil, and one of the first to enter the trenches of the Western Front. In addition, his dauntless planning in the Battle of Cantigny delivered the first American victory of the Great War. The culmination of Marshall's triumphs came not on the battlefield, but from Washington, when on September first, 1939, Marshall was sworn in as Army Chief of Staff by Franklin D. Roosevelt, just hours after the invasion of Poland. While serving as Army Chief of Staff, he organized the largest military expansion in American history, had a role in selecting the majority of American generals, and helped plan the D-Day Invasion.

Most importantly, on December 16, 1944, Marshall was the first American general promoted to the five-star rank of General of the Army, placing him on par with his European counterparts. For his part in planning and carrying out the Allied victory, Winston Churchill once called him the "Organizer of Victory", while Harry Truman once stated "Millions of Americans gave their country outstanding service. George C. Marshall gave it victory." After the war, a change began to take shape in Marshall, transforming the five-star general into a peacekeeper. Shortly after retiring from his position as Army Chief of Staff, Marshall was sent on a mission to broker a peace deal in the Chinese Civil War.

Although a failure, Marshall remained committed to maintaining peace with the new Communist government in his position as Secretary of State, against the wishes of the Department of Defense and voices within his own department. While serving in his position as Secretary of State, he began the

program which he is possibly most famous for today, the Marshall Plan. Through it, American aid would be sent to Europe in order to help rebuild from the destruction caused by World War II. In many ways Marshall not only won peace in Europe but also provided for its continued existence, while enhancing American interests in the region and preventing the spread of Communism into Western Europe.

For his work on the Marshall Plan, and other post-war achievements such as advocating for peace in the Middle East, bringing the Netherlands to negotiate with Indonesia, and serving as President of the American Red Cross, Marshall was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953, the only American army official to gain such recognition. On a bench, only a stroll away from where he was born, sits the statue of George C. Marshall as he watches over the soldier whom he organized the victory of and the flags of the nations whom he helped rebuild. The entire scene, and the story of Marshall's life, highlights America's role as both a sword and shield against the forces of tyranny.

Through his military career spanning service from the Philippines to Europe, and later his organization of the armed forces in World War II, we see his life as a personification of America's willingness to defend liberty aggressively. However, through his career post-war in the fields of diplomacy and government aide, we see his life as a personification of America's willingness to defend liberty peacefully. George C. Marshall is a unification of these two necessities, as at America's best, we understand the need for a soldier, as well as the need for a diplomat.