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THESIS

THE CITIZEN-OFFICER IDEAL: A HISTORICAL AND  
LITERARY INQUIRY

by

Mark R. DeBuse

March 2005

Thesis Advisor:

Albert C. Pierce

Thesis Advisor:

Raymond E. Franck

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THE CITIZEN-OFFICER IDEAL: A HISTORICAL AND LITERARY INQUIRY

Mark R. DeBuse  
Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.S., U.S. Naval Academy, 1996

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March 2005

Author: Mark R. DeBuse

Approved by: Dr. Albert C. Pierce  
Thesis Advisor

Brigadier General Raymond E. Franck, USAF (Retired)  
Co-Advisor

Dr. Douglas A. Brook  
Dean, Graduate School of Business & Public Policy

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## ABSTRACT

Due to their unique expertise, military officers have always held a special position within Western society. Yet, while individuals who have demonstrated knowledge of warfare and prowess in battle have long been held in high regard by society and the members of their profession, it is those who have also demonstrated the ideals of citizenship and chivalry who serve as the icons for thoughtful military officers. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the evolution of the citizen-officer ideal—through a close study of historical and literary case studies. By establishing a common set of themes or values among completely separate exemplars of this ideal, a continuum joining Odysseus, Cincinnatus, Beowulf, and Gawain to Washington, Chamberlain, and Marshall might eventually be carried forward to the present and the modern military officer. Specific focus is given to the roles that classical notions of citizenship and the Code of Chivalry have played in shaping the ethos of the American officer.

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As a midshipman, I stumbled across a Trident Scholar Project written by Jeffrey McFadden, U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1979, entitled “Chivalry and the Military Officer: An Historical and Literary Inquiry.” Mr. McFadden’s work was the catalyst for my interest in this subject and has indelibly shaped my perspectives on officership and service. I have used his ideas on chivalry and the importance of literary influences throughout this thesis, but most extensively in the Sir Gawain chapter. (I have also essentially stolen his title.)

I owe the largest debt of gratitude to my advisors: Dr. Albert C. Pierce, Director of the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics at the U.S. Naval Academy, and Brigadier General Raymond “Chip” Franck of the Naval Postgraduate School. It goes without saying that both of these men are gentlemen and scholars of the highest caliber. I am grateful for their keen insights and for keeping me from straying too far off course. Anything that is good in this thesis is here because these two men made sure I did not leave it out—everything else is my fault. Their infinite forbearance of the many missed deadlines, and their patient, subtle corrections of my horrible typing, historical inaccuracies, and frequent abuses of the English language have made this endeavor much more accurate and readable than was otherwise possible. Finally, I appreciate the relative freedom I have been given—and have sometimes exhausted—to mull over this topic independently, thereby making it less of a graduation requirement, and more a vehicle for gaining a better understanding of my chosen profession.

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# I. PRELIMINARIES

## A. INTRODUCTION: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Due to their unique expertise, military officers have always held a special position within Western society. Yet, while individuals who have demonstrated knowledge of warfare and prowess in battle have long been held in high regard by society and the members of their profession, it is those who have also demonstrated the ideals of citizenship and chivalry who serve as the icons for thoughtful military officers. Inscribed inside the apse of the Memorial Amphitheater adjoining the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia are words from General George Washington's letter to the Provincial Congress dated June 26, 1775: "When we assumed the soldier we did not lay aside the citizen." Washington's remark is as profound in its meaning as it is simple in its structure, for it articulates the essence of the American military officer's ethos. Washington's life indicates that he would also conclude that when the soldier lays down his arms, he does not relinquish the obligations of citizenship.

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There is an intellectual component to being an officer—as well as to being a citizen—that requires a close study of history (among other things). Perhaps the most prominent advocate of this train of thought is James Stockdale, a self-proclaimed "Philosophical Fighter Pilot."

Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale describes his time in a communist prison camp as the crucible for his moral convictions. As a Lieutenant Commander in the early 1960s, Stockdale found himself a thirty-eight-year-old graduate student at Stanford University. He had been in the Navy for twenty years, almost entirely in the cockpit of fighter planes as a naval aviator and test pilot—very technical occupations. Sent to Palo Alto to earn a master's degree in international relations, so he could return to the Pentagon as a strategic planner, Stockdale gravitated instead to the philosophy department. An in-depth study of moral and political thought, from the Book of Job to

Socrates to Aristotle to Descartes, and on to Kant, Hume, Dostoevsky, Camus, and especially the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, opened Stockdale's eyes to what he calls a "broader relevance" to his life.<sup>1</sup>

In September 1965, just three years after leaving Stanford, Stockdale's A-4 "Skyhawk" attack jet was shot down while on a bombing mission over North Vietnam. As his parachute floated down in the middle of a small Vietnamese village, Stockdale remembers whispering to himself: "Five years down there at least. I am leaving the world of technology and entering the world of Epictetus."<sup>2</sup> Stockdale would spend seven and a half years as a prisoner of war, and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his inspiring leadership as the senior naval officer among American prisoners in Vietnam. Tortured fifteen times, placed in leg irons for two years, and kept in solitary confinement for four years, Stockdale would rely on his classical education in moral and political philosophy to combat the physical and mental brutality of his captors.

Stockdale advocates the study of history as a guide to the present and the future. Vicarious experience gained through a study of classical literature and philosophy can establish a moral and intellectual base from which one can more easily handle the uncertainty of both the present and the future.

In stress situations, the fundamentals, the hard-core classical subjects, are what best serve.... The classics have a way of saving you the trouble of prolonged experiences. You don't have to go out and buy pop psychology self-help books. When you read the classics in humanities, you become aware that the big ideas have been around a long time.... We didn't have to wait for Horney, Erikson, and Maslow to give us the notion of self-fulfillment or self-acquisition. They were there in Aristotle's treatises on psychology and ethics all along. Of course, modern psychotherapists have to touch them up a bit to bring them up to date by injecting a heady dose of personal individualism. This would have puzzled Aristotle. He would not have understood what good it does to discover the "real me." He thought that self-realization could not be achieved without service to the community, in his case the city-state. His time was not what Tom Wolfe called the "me" generation.<sup>3</sup>

Stockdale's writings contain two themes central to the military profession—selflessness and citizenship. In the famed "Hanoi Hilton" and other Vietnamese prisons, American POWs survived because of a simple motto—"UNITY OVER SELF"—developed by

Stockdale and passed along, through stone cell walls, via a tap code (the tap code of Polybius, a second-century Greek historian<sup>4</sup>). Stockdale attributes the success of American POWs in returning to their country with their honor intact to the formation of a society based on service to each other and the moral obligations that are inherent to such service:

We had a civilization to build, a civilization of Americans behind walls, a civilization of political autonomy that had the courage to rule itself responsibly with its own laws without contact with the parent country or its government in Washington for eight years....<sup>5</sup>

The military officer plays a vital role in the American Republic. He is a public figure appointed with the “special trust and confidence” of the President; he is responsible to his fellow citizens for the security of their nation and its values—a duty which extends well beyond the battlefield. It is not enough that he be a fierce fighter in war; an officer must be a consummate gentleman and an exemplary citizen at all times. Therefore, it is imperative that he keep the obligations of his commission—and the obligations of citizenship—at the forefront of his every action.

## B. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Winston Churchill famously said of an extravagant dessert, “This pudding has no theme.” The field of military ethics is immense, and no master’s thesis can be comprehensive. Therefore, this essay will be centered on the theme of *non sibi sed patriae*—“not for self, but for country.” In order to winnow down this theme of service even further, the concepts of citizenship and chivalry will be closely studied. An assessment of the roles these ideals have played in shaping the specific notions of competence and character, and more generally the ethos of the citizen-officer within a republic, will be the purpose of this thesis.

This study will be conducted through a historical lens. Admiral Stockdale would likely concur with the Roman philosopher Cicero: “To be ignorant of what happened before you were born is to be forever a child, what is a man’s lifetime unless the memory of past events is woven with those of earlier times?”<sup>6</sup> To that end, this study will trace the

development of the citizen-officer ideal from its origins to its institution in the American Republic. The “analysis of a profession is a systematic analysis of a biography—not simply the biography of a great leader, but a group biography.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the research methodology in this thesis will include a series of case studies of prominent military officers and statesmen—and in some instances, literary figures.

The historical and literary cases included in this essay have been selected based on their enduring contributions to Western society. Additionally, special consideration has been given to individuals who met the criteria of having served in high positions of civil leadership, following initial careers as military officers (or their historical equivalents). The biography of the citizen-officer finds its origins in ancient Greece and Rome. The Homeric heroes of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* provide a starting point for a discussion of moral excellence and citizenship. Cincinnatus, the great consul and general of the Roman Republic, will serve as the first historic case study discussed. As the study shifts into the Middle Ages and the development of the Germanic warrior societies of Europe and the origins of the Code of Chivalry are examined, literary figures will again be used, and the poems *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* will be considered. The reason for this foray into fiction is to examine the idealized form of chivalry, which is often obscured by the violent and bleak reality of life during this era of extreme adversity. Furthermore, the use of fiction and art throughout this thesis provides a means of analyzing the values of the culture as they relate to the public’s expectations of both officers and statesmen.

The concept of chivalry helped bring Western society out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, beginning a trend of thought that would lead to the Enlightenment and the American Revolution.<sup>8</sup> One man stands out as the epitome of the American citizen-officer—George Washington. It will be shown how the *translatio imperii*—the transfer of culture (in this case, the notions of classical citizenship and medieval chivalry) from one society to another—culminated in the one man who was both America’s first general and her first President.

Once the historical and literary influences of the citizen-officer ideal have been sketched, this thesis will conclude with a discussion of two men from different periods in

American history who embody the citizen-officer ideal and who have helped carry it forward to the present: Joshua Laurence Chamberlain, a hero of the Battle of Gettysburg and later the Governor of Maine, and George C. Marshall, distinguished general during World War II and architect of the rebuilding of Europe after that war.

One will note the very obvious leaps from the study of the Germanic warrior society at the turn of the first millennia to the chivalry of medieval knights during the 1400s and then to 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and finally 20<sup>th</sup> century America, and therefore naturally question whether or not something is lost by ignoring intervals of three and four hundred years of history and literature. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to examine the evolution of the citizen-officer ideal; so perhaps by establishing a common set of themes or values among completely separate exemplars of this ideal, the continuum joining Odysseus, Cincinnatus, Beowulf, and Gawain to Washington, Chamberlain, and Marshall might eventually be carried forward to the present and the modern military officer.

Furthermore, the case studies in this thesis are all statesmen and officers held in the highest regard. They voluntarily rose to the service of their country when it needed them. History is cyclical; internal or external distresses cause war and violence, which eventually give way to a new peace. Each of these citizen-officers lived and served at critical junctions in history when another cycle began. They served as officers in times of armed conflict, and continued their service in public office in order to secure the periods of peace that followed. These men remain the archetypes for yet another generation of citizen-officers. Their lives have been defined by courage, temperance, humility, and most importantly, by the subjugation of their personal interests for the benefit of their country—*non sibi sed patriae*.

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Stockdale, “Stockdale on Stoicism II: Master of My Fate,” The Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics Occasional Paper Series, number 2 (Annapolis, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> James B. Stockdale, “Stockdale on Stoicism I: The Stoic Warrior’s Triad,” The Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics Occasional Paper Series, Number 1 (Annapolis, 2001), 10.

<sup>3</sup> James B. Stockdale. Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot. (Stanford: Hoover Institutional Press, 1995), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Stockdale. Philosophical Fighter Pilot, 58.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey E. McFadden. “Chivalry and the Military Officer: A Historical and Literary Inquiry”, Trident Scholar Report No. 98, (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Academy, 1979), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Morris Janowitz, The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait, (New York, The Free Press, 1971), 35.

<sup>8</sup> Marvin Perry, Myrna Chase, James R. Jacob, Margaret C. Jacob, Theodore H. Von Laue, Western Civilization Ideas, Politics and Society, Fourth Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992) 428.

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## II. THE GREEK AND ROMAN LEGACY

### A. ORIGINS OF CIVIC EXCELLENCE IN ANCIENT GREECE

In order to understand the concept of citizenship—and thus the role of the citizen-officer in Western society—one must begin with an examination of its origins on the Ionian Peninsula in the *poleis*, city-states, of ancient Greece. Around 800 BC, the Hellenic world emerged from the Dark Age, a transitional period of three centuries during which Greek-speaking people first began to “conceive of nature as following general rules, not acting according to the whims of gods or demons.”<sup>1</sup> The great poet Homer lived during the century immediately following the Dark Age, and for all practical purposes Western literature begins with his epic works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, through these two poems, Homer became the first mold of the Greek perspective and character.<sup>3</sup>

Although the exact dates of the two poems are difficult to determine, it is generally held that *The Iliad*, which deals with the conclusion of the Trojan War, was written first. In it, Homer develops what will become a fundamental outlook of the Greek society; he shows—through the clash between the arrogant King Agamemnon and the vengeful Achilles—that there is a greater order to the world. According to British classicist H.D.F. Kitto, for Homer, “actions must have their consequences; ill-judged actions must have uncomfortable results.”<sup>4</sup> Later Greeks will articulate this notion in philosophical terms to mean that life is governed by *logos*, reason, rather than by myth and magic.

*The Iliad*, however, does more than set the stage for the rationalization of the Greek mind. It connects thought with action, and action with moral excellence. This concept of excellence is essential to an understanding of early Greek values, and Homer presents it in the form of the warrior’s heroic code:

A hero is one who willingly and eagerly confronts death, and three Greek words embody the heroic code: *áristos*, *areté*, and *aristreía*. *Áristos* is being the best at whatever is called for by the situation: in wartime, killing, in peacetime, husbandry.... To be known as the best requires

*aristreía*—exploits which gain for the warrior the prestige of having comrades consider him possessed of *areté*, merit. *Areté* can only be bestowed by others, not by self... [and]... fame and glory, *kléos*, can only be achieved through action.<sup>5</sup>

Living up to this heroic code was difficult because the Homeric hero is still human, and while he naturally “expresses a passionate desire to assert himself, to demonstrate his worth, to gain the glory that poets would immortalize in their songs—that is to achieve *arête*,”<sup>6</sup> man is also apt to give in to more base emotions. Nonetheless, Homer presents the link between actions and consequences. The Greek hero was required to consider his actions carefully, and then act accordingly, in order to avoid Kitto’s “uncomfortable results.” More simply put: *logos* is superior to passion—reason serves to temper emotion.

In *The Iliad*, Homer demonstrates the importance of reason by contrasting the actions of the story’s opposing warriors—Achilles and Hector. Achilles is the greatest warrior on either side during the Trojan War, but he withdraws from the campaign because of a rather petty disagreement with Agamemnon, the overall commander of the Achaean forces. Achilles’ decision is devastating. It deprives the Achaeans of their most competent battlefield commander. Yet perhaps more significantly, his withdrawal from battle deprives Achilles himself of the opportunity to achieve *aristreía* and maintain *arête* in the eyes of others.

Rather than engaging in battle, Achilles remains on the sidelines for a good portion of the battle for Troy “singing about fame and glory instead of achieving it.”<sup>7</sup> His entire identity as a great man and a great warrior is in jeopardy. During the poem, he falls into dismay, uttering, “We are all going to die...both brave and weak, so it matters little whether you do a great deal or nothing.”<sup>8</sup> In the heroic code, excellence is tied to action, so Achilles’ withdrawal from battle, in addition to not being heroic, is also irrational within the context of that code.

Homer holds Hector, the prince and defender of Troy, up as a foil to Achilles. He depicts Hector as a reluctant warrior, bolstered by a sense of rational responsibility. Hector is also portrayed as a more complete human than Achilles. He is less dashing than Achilles, humble in the face of battle. He is devoted to his wife and son, to his parents,

and above all, to Troy.<sup>9</sup> Homer shows Hector interacting with an array of different types of characters—particularly women—while Achilles associates almost exclusively with other warriors.<sup>10</sup>

Hector...does battle with Achilles, even though defeat and death seem certain. He fights not because he is a fool rushing madly into the fray nor because he relishes combat, but because he is a prince bound by a code of honor and conscious of his reputation and his responsibility to his fellow Trojans. In the code of the warrior-aristocrat, honor meant more than life itself.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, unlike the petulant, egocentric Achilles, who more closely resembles the meddling gods in the poem than a man of excellence, Hector is presented with considerable emphasis on his human qualities. While he occasionally shows anger and frustration, Hector is never as extreme in his emotions as Achilles is. Hector is depicted as a man of honor and dignity, in victory as well as in defeat.<sup>12</sup>

In *The Iliad*, Homer's ideal of the aristocrat-warrior associated *excellence* principally with valor on the battlefield, an early indication that the soldier had a special role to play within society, for it was through military action that excellence was attained. The poem, however, also sets the foundation for a more comprehensive meaning of *areté*, which is subtly introduced in the form of another character—Odysseus. Odysseus is a different breed of Homeric hero. He is the protagonist of Homer's second poem, *The Odyssey*, and appears in a minor but vital role in *The Iliad*.

In the first poem, Odysseus, like Hector, provides a contrast to Achilles. Odysseus is “intelligent and resourceful, descriptions not applied to other warriors. From the very beginning... he seems to take charge through speech and persuasion when decisions are to be made.”<sup>13</sup> His rhetorical skills astonish even the Trojans, yet the wily Odysseus is no slouch on the battlefield either. He is adept at unconventional tactics and despite his scheming, Odysseus is presented as an honorable man, “somewhat cool and calculating, and boundlessly energetic.”<sup>14</sup> The distinction between Odysseus and Achilles is alluded to during the wise Phoenix's appeal to the stubborn Achilles to rejoin the battle: “a man of true worth... is both ‘a speaker of words, and a doer of deeds.’”<sup>15</sup>

In *The Iliad*, there is a prevailing tension between thought and action, symbolized in the characters of Odysseus and Achilles, respectively. For instance, when Odysseus—along with Ajax and Phoenix—fails to persuade Achilles to fight, it is because a stalemate between the *mêtis* (cunning) of Odysseus and the *bíe* (might) of Achilles arises.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, success in the war rests on both *mêtis* and *bíe*, and each character must contribute his quality to the effort.

In *The Odyssey*, however, Homer has combined both traits—cunning and might—into one character—Odysseus—and “Hellenistic awareness takes a sophisticated step forward.”<sup>17</sup> *The Odyssey* is not merely a sequel to *The Iliad*; it is a significant work in its own right, for the sheer fact that Odysseus emerges as the new heroic model—a man who has “united nobility of action with nobility of mind.”<sup>18</sup>

*The Odyssey* is set ten years after Troy falls to the Achaeans, and the poem details the turbulent journey of Odysseus, the absent King of Ithaca, back to his threatened home and kingdom following twenty years of war and misfortune. While *The Iliad* sketched heroism against the backdrop of a war, *The Odyssey* portrays the hero during a time of peace. In order to show Odysseus’ *areté*, Homer devises all sorts of predicaments that hinder the hero’s swift return to Ithaca.

The adventures are in themselves timeless and placeless, belonging to Sinbad the Sailor as much as Odysseus. Somehow they have become attached to the name of one of the heroes who fought at Troy, in a definite historical context.... [T]hey are needed in order to keep... Odysseus [who early on]... does very little that is heroic, accepts humiliation, and at times looks [more] like a real beggar than a hero, in our minds as a man of truly great deeds....<sup>19</sup>

As Odysseus rises to the occasion in every trial along his journey, the reader begins to see him as a survivor, prepared “to accept humiliations and to conceal his feelings”<sup>20</sup> in order to succeed. Homer constantly portrays Odysseus as using his intellect and reason to solve problems as well as to rein in his emotions—a vital skill in an unfriendly world ripe with treachery. This image of Odysseus as the “wily opponent of giants and witches, who must use guile against overwhelming force and impossible odds,”<sup>21</sup> stands in stark contrast to the dauntless warrior seen in *The Iliad*’s Achilles. Odysseus finds himself in situations requiring much more depth than Achilles could

possibly manage. Achilles represents the aristocratic warrior seeking glory and accepting death if it comes—sort of a “Do your worst, and I will do mine” attitude. Achilles is too god-like, while “Odysseus stands closer to the common attitudes of men. He is brave and has fought well in battle, but... you simply cannot be Achilles in the cave of a Cyclops.”<sup>22</sup> Not every challenge can be overcome with brute force. Odysseus recognizes this limit of the heroic warrior ethos, and adds the element of reason to the operations of action and consequence.

In *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, Homer sets out the evolution of the early Greek hero from the dashing warrior set on achieving glory in battle, to the rational, humble man capable of excellence in almost any endeavor. In doing so, he plants the seeds of Greek humanism—man’s infinite capacity for self-realization through reason.

[T]he human actors... pursue their own aims and deal their own blows; the gods may help or obstruct, but success or failure remains their own. The gods have the last word, but in the interval men do their utmost and win glory for it.<sup>23</sup>

Homer’s image of the individual constantly striving for excellence defined social values for generations of Greeks to come, particularly the citizen-officers who came to realize that there is more to life than being a great warrior—they must at all times be exemplary citizens.

## B. EDUCATING FOR CITIZENSHIP

In contrast to the Near East, where religion continuously dominated Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, Greek society gradually secularized political life in the city-states. Religion was not abandoned, but operated alongside an emerging government based on “human intelligence as expressed through the community.”<sup>24</sup> *Poleis* were small—normally 5,000 male citizens<sup>25</sup>—and as a result, citizens were intimately involved with all cultural and political functions of their community. The increased reliance on human intelligence led to the recognition that human beings, not vengeful gods, caused community problems, which thus required human solutions. Participation in civic matters was the answer to the community’s woes. Additionally, it provided citizens with a greater

sense of belonging. “In the fifth century BC, at its maturity, the Greeks viewed their *polis* as the only avenue to the good life—the only framework within which man could realize his spiritual, moral, and intellectual capacities.”<sup>26</sup>

Evidence of the value placed on citizen participation in the affairs of the city-state is best seen in Athens. Historically described as a government of amateurs, Athens is the birthplace of democracy. Athenian politics were founded on the assumption that average citizens were capable of performing all functions of the *polis*' administration.

[T]here were no professional civil servants, no professional soldiers and sailors, no state judges, and no elected lawmakers. The duties of government were performed by ordinary citizens.... [T]he average citizen was [expected to be] capable of participating intelligently in the affairs of state and that he would, in a spirit of patriotism, carry out his responsibilities to his city. In fifth-century Athens, excellence was equated with good citizenship.<sup>27</sup>

The Assembly, a legislative body made up of every adult male Athenian citizen, met almost weekly to make laws and vote on all matters of public discourse. Additionally, a “Council of Five Hundred,” along with other magistrates, was selected to manage Athens' day-to-day governmental tasks. These individuals were chosen annually by lots, but could not serve more than twice during their lives. In a significant democratic advance, the Assembly ultimately authorized government pay for individuals serving in public positions, thereby lessening the burden on the average citizen, who frequently had to leave behind his livelihood during his year of service. It is significant to note that the only officials not selected by lot were the ten generals who commanded the army. Instead, the Assembly elected these officers directly <sup>28</sup>—further indication of the importance attributed to the military officer's role within the *polis*.

Because they viewed participation in government as so important, the Greeks adopted an educational system aimed at preparing citizens for their role in the *polis*. According to Stockdale, the Greeks believed that

One of the primary duties of citizenship [was] education. By education I don't mean just schooling. The idea of education is broader than that.... Schooling is a necessary element of education, but not sufficient completely to define it.... Military service is education.... [But also] any and every encounter with nature and society is education.”<sup>29</sup>

The Greek word for this comprehensive form of education is *paideia*, which encompasses the development of a person from childhood to maturity, that is, from merely living in the city-state to being a citizen of it.<sup>30</sup> One had to demonstrate his capacity for citizenship.

*Paideia* represented the construction of an individual into a person worthy of citizenship and able to strengthen the *polis* and the members in it. Man, to use Aristotle's famous phrase, is a political animal. People reach fulfillment not as individuals in the "state of nature" but in the context of political life in service to the state and to others. Only in the social and political arena could people exercise their *areté* (excellence, moral virtue), their character and abilities. Such a life of meaningful service, contributing to the common good, enabled a citizen to reach his *telos*, end-state. A person reached human completeness as a citizen of the *polis* through the exercise of virtue.<sup>31</sup>

To the Greeks, human nature was inescapably linked to citizenship. It was not enough to merely live in the city-state; rather, one must contribute to it. Being a citizen was not what you were, but rather what you ought to be. Perhaps the best evidence of how the Greeks perpetuated the importance of active citizenship is seen in the great Greek historian Thucydides' account of Pericles' Funeral Oration. Pericles was a talented military commander, statesman, and orator, who was a central Athenian figure during the fifth century BC. During his lifetime—often referred to as the "Age of Pericles"—Athens enjoyed unparalleled achievements in every area from drama and art to architecture and politics.<sup>32</sup>

During the first winter of the brutal Peloponnesian War with Sparta, Athens, following a long-held tradition, performed a public funeral in honor of her citizens who had been among the first to die in the war. During the two-day affair, a man, chosen for his "intellectual gifts and for his general reputation," would give an appropriate speech to honor the *polis*' fallen heroes.<sup>33</sup> Having been chosen this particular year, Pericles delivered what is generally considered the classic declaration of the Athenian democratic ideal.<sup>34</sup> Especially noteworthy is the oration's patriotic tone:

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands of not the minority but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before of the law; when it is a question

of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses.<sup>35</sup>

Whenever a citizen distinguished himself in any manner, he was chosen for public service as a reward for that merit, and the ideal of active citizenship was reinforced within Hellenic society. Yet, it was not enough to demonstrate excellence once; a public servant had to continuously maintain the trust bestowed upon him by his fellow citizens.

Despite their political advancements, the Greek city-states would not survive long after the Peloponnesian War. The twenty years of violent conflict that raged between Athens and Sparta would bring out the worst of man's behavior. Men became brutalized, and selfishness prevailed over civic-consciousness. Ultimately, the mentality prevalent in the Age of Pericles would be forgotten—at least temporarily—and the long years of fratricidal warfare would leave both Athens and Sparta vulnerable to attack from the Macedonians led by a young Philip II.<sup>36</sup> As internal factions emerged and began to vie for increased power, the nation became polarized, consensus was practically unattainable, and moderation of thought was abandoned or forced out. Consider Thucydides' writing after the war:

Love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils. To this must be added the violent fanaticism which came into play once the struggle had broken out. Leaders of parties professing to serve the public interest...were seeking to win prizes for themselves. In their struggle for ascendancy nothing was barred; terrible indeed were the actions to which they committed themselves, and in taking revenge they went further still. Here they were deterred neither by the claims of justice nor by the interest of the state.... Thus neither side had any use for conscientious motives; more interest was shown in those who could produce attractive arguments to justify some disgraceful action. As for the citizens who held moderate views, they were destroyed by both of the extreme parties.... As the result of these revolutions, there was a general deterioration of character throughout the Greek World.<sup>37</sup>

The self-interested attitudes of Greek citizens during and following the Peloponnesian War would result in the complete degeneration of their society. This was especially noticeable within the Athenian military, and there were disastrous consequences.

The Periclean ideal of citizenship dissipated as Athenians neglected the community to concentrate on private affairs or sought to derive personal profit from public office. The decline of civic responsibility could be seen in the hiring of mercenaries to replace citizen soldiers and in the hesitancy with which Athenians confronted Philip.<sup>38</sup>

Given the citizen-officer's position within the *polis*, as a commander of armed forces capable of violent action, personal restraint was essential to the fulfillment of his obligations to the city-state. If he abandoned moderation in political allegiances as well as in personal affairs, the citizen-officer would be transformed into an armed thug, a mercenary with no loyalty who could be bought for a given price.

From the earliest notions of *areté* contained in Homer's poems, the citizen-officer played a role in the development of a philosophy that fused the realization of human excellence with public service. He served for the honor of service itself and dedicated his special skills to the security of the *polis*, thus prompting Plato's remark in the *Republic*: "Now nothing can be more important than that the work of a soldier should be well done."<sup>39</sup> However, once professional officers abandoned the obligations of citizenship—to serve for the good of the state, rather than to advance their own personal gain—Athenian democracy fell.

### C. THE ROMAN REPUBLIC AND THE CINCINNATUS IDEAL

According to Stockdale, "At its best citizenship finds an equilibrium between two essential ingredients—that of rights and that of duties."<sup>40</sup> This concept is evident in Athens' monumental successes, and most especially in her disappointing failures. To Greek philosophers like Socrates, *sophrosyne*—moderation and self-discipline<sup>41</sup>—was the critical element in determining a citizen's success at achieving this balance, particularly those serving the public. The public's trust was essential to a leader's success, and it could only be established through demonstrated self-restraint. The Greeks were able to achieve such responsible, measured self-government within the confines of a single city-state, but they could not expand this system. Despite growing strife among competing factions (partially a result of the abandonment of civic virtue within the *polis*) and increased external threats from larger states like Macedonia, the Greeks could not

develop another form of government, nor could they easily form alliances. They simply did not desire a large political unit. Athens and Sparta—as well as a host of other settlements—existed as small, relatively autonomous communities. Unallied, the small Greek city-states were quickly becoming an anachronism. They could not compete against Philip’s powerful army.<sup>42</sup> Yet despite the Greek city-state’s ultimate decline, the political advancements Athenians made by associating excellence with good citizenship became the model for other nations, just as Pericles predicted it would in his famous oration.

The Romans were able to succeed where the Greeks failed. They escaped the narrow political binds of the small *polis*, and unified the entire Mediterranean world. This accomplishment was made possible by the adoption of a universal system of laws and citizenship. “Hebrews were distinguished by their prophets and the Greeks by their philosophers; Rome’s genius found expression in law and government.”<sup>43</sup> Unlike the Greeks, who often held their conquered enemies as slaves, Rome extended citizenship, with all of its rights and privileges, to the inhabitants of lands it incorporated. Roman history is generally divided into two distinct periods: the Roman Republic (509 to 27 BC) and the Roman Empire (27 BC to 476 AD). The discussion of Rome in this essay will be limited to the earlier period, during which the seeds of republican ideals were planted in Western civilization.

Rome started as a grouping of peasant communities scattered along seven hills near the Tiber River in central Italy. It became a republic in 509 BC when land-owning aristocrats, patricians, threw out the Etruscan monarchy that had controlled the region in the seventh and six centuries BC.<sup>44</sup> It has been said that good writers borrow ideas from other writers, and that great writers steal from them outright. The same is true of great nations. The success of the Roman Republic, and the Roman Empire that followed it, was the direct result of Rome’s extensive application of its predecessors’ strengths.<sup>45</sup> Among the practices borrowed were the Etruscans’ aptitudes for engineering and architecture; among those taken outright were the enduring political treatises of Greek philosophers.

As they absorbed the Etruscan and Greek practices, Romans emerged as a people marked by practicality. Even more than the Greeks, Romans sought to apply the human

mind to solving society's problems. The Romans took Greek philosophies and translated them into law. In time, they too abandoned the mystic aspects of religion and "hammered out a constitutional system that paralleled the Greek achievements of rationalizing and secularizing politics...."<sup>46</sup> Like the Greeks, Romans came to perceive law as a manifestation of the public will. This helped the Romans respond to internal conflicts while continuing to expand their influence in the Mediterranean.

Like their Hellenistic predecessors, the Romans believed that self-restraint was a requirement for living a moral life. Where Greek philosophies often dealt in the abstract, Rome—with its predilection for utilitarian approaches—sought *application* of the principles first presented by the Greeks. The Romans were less concerned with defining "a good life" than they were with the question, "How does leading a good life strengthen and sustain Rome?" Therefore, an essential element of Roman philosophy was the application of the Greek's thoughts about moderation in thought and deed. For the Romans, such temperance within its public servants produced the one virtue that was essential to sustaining a republican government—public trust. The Roman application of this concept of *sophrosyne* required Cicero and other Roman thinkers to refine and extend the earlier Greek notions of *areté* to mean more than just one possessing "moral excellence." To Romans, *areté* became a two-fold conception which revolved around the equally important elements of competence and character. Essentially, one must have both "the ability and the willingness to act in good faith, regardless of circumstances, towards the right purpose."<sup>47</sup> That is, competence and character must co-exist within a person if they are to be regarded as one who possesses *areté*. For instance, a person of impeccable ethics who is wholly incompetent in a certain duty inspires as little trust as a competent crook. To this end, reliability becomes the dominant expression of *areté* in a republican government.<sup>48</sup>

Critical to building the inner substance of trustworthiness...was the notion of *sophrosyne* (moderation). *Sophrosyne* means the wisdom of self-mastery and self-discipline, what Cicero calls "the science of doing the right thing at the right time"... [T]hose who lack self-discipline are absolutely slavish, and no "slave" to money, luxury, glory, sex, etc. could become a trustworthy leader. Slavishness showed a lack of courage, the inability to discipline the desires, and thus the absence of the inner strength to choose right from wrong. Only a person, according to Cicero,

who was free from worries produced by “slavishness” and indifferent towards outward circumstances could lead the dignified and consistent life of a statesman. Trustworthiness results, in part, from the self-discipline to acquire the skills and moral virtue necessary for competence and character plus the courage to choose right from wrong. Only in this way could the leader properly serve the followers and the state.<sup>49</sup>

So, building on Aristotle’s philosophy of moral virtue—that it was developed by habitual practice, the sum total of one’s daily choices of right over wrong<sup>50</sup>—the Romans combined the Greek notions of *areté* and *sophrosyne* to define the expectations for public servants within a republic.

For Cicero, trustworthy leaders “were those who were simple and genuine, and who set the example in terms of skill and the cardinal virtues—‘there was nothing that men did not think they could accomplish under such leadership.’”<sup>51</sup> Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus is the model of such leadership within the Roman Republic. Following the ousting of the Etruscans, the patricians assumed the dominant role within the Roman government, forming an oligarchic body known as the Senate. It was to this small social segment of Rome—comprising only some 140 families—that the legendary Roman general and consul was born in 519 BC.<sup>52</sup>

Only a child in the monarch’s last days, Cincinnatus numbered among the second generation of patrician rulers. With his father’s generation largely responsible for the birth of the young state, Cincinnatus and his fellow aristocratic peers assumed responsibility for Rome’s gestation. The second generation most likely had the more difficult task, for the aftermath of the royal family’s exile was no small matter. It effectively cut Rome’s paternal influence and set the state’s inhabitants free to live or die on their own.<sup>53</sup>

Before a detailed analysis of Cincinnatus can be accomplished, a description of the structural and cultural environment of early Rome is necessary. Structurally, there were three major patrician branches in the Roman government—the double consulate, the Senate, and the Centuriate Assembly—and there was one principal plebeian body—the representative tribunes, which were formed in 494 BC to provide a voice for the majority of the citizens.<sup>54</sup> The Centuriate Assembly was a popular forum, but voting procedures left control in patrician hands. The Assembly’s duties included electing consuls and other magistrates and making laws, which needed to be confirmed by the

Senate. The Senate could not make laws itself; instead, it functioned as an advisory body to the Assembly, controlled public funds, and was responsible for foreign relations.<sup>55</sup> The double consulate served as the executive branch, and consisted of two consuls elected annually by the Assembly. The advent of this shared-powers executive was effective in ensuring that neither consul could become too tyrannical. Collectively, they possessed overall command of the army, sat as judges, and had the power to initiate legislation. Instead of ruling by consensus, the two consuls frequently alternated on day-to-day duties. Each could veto the decision of the other, so in order to accomplish anything they had to work together closely.<sup>56</sup> During times of crisis, the Senate could authorize the consuls to appoint a dictator, who would possess absolute powers throughout the emergency. These powers, however, would expire after a period of six months.<sup>57</sup>

For all practical purposes, the Senate held all of the power within the early Republic. Consuls were elected annually, while senators served for life. The Assembly made laws, but the Senate controlled the public purse strings. This led to interesting dynamics within the government, particularly with regard to the consulate, where some consuls would ingratiate themselves with influential Senators in order to advance their political ambitions—or at least maintain their social status following their one-year appointment.

Culturally, Romans valued their citizenship above almost everything else. As President John F. Kennedy remarked in his famous speech at the Berlin Wall in June of 1963, “Two thousand years ago the proudest boast was ‘*civis Romanus sum*.’” By simply speaking this phrase, “I am a citizen of Rome,” Romans were guaranteed safety and justice wherever they might travel. Enemies came to fear Rome’s retaliation for infringements on Roman citizens’ liberties. Hence, when the centurion commanded the apostle Paul “to be examined by scourging,” Paul simply asserted, “*Civis Romanus sum*,” and asked, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a Roman citizen, and uncondemned?” Upon hearing that, the centurion went and told his chief captain, “Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.”<sup>58</sup> To the ancient Romans, however, this declaration was more than an assertion of individual rights or expression of patriotic pride; it was the sacred pronouncement of civic duty. Like the Greeks, Romans held that an honorable life could

be achieved only through one's active participation as a citizen. To this end, Cincinnatus is the perfect model of the ideal Roman citizen.

In its most often told form, the story of Cincinnatus presents this unlikely Roman hero as a hard-working, nearly destitute farmer who lived on the fringes of Rome with his wife. Yet despite his meager economic status, Cincinnatus was held in high esteem by his fellow Romans, and the city's officials periodically sought his wisdom and guidance on important issues.

One day, a delegation was sent across the Tiber to Cincinnatus' tiny plot of land to seek his help. When the officials arrived at the farm, Cincinnatus was working with his plow in the field. They informed Cincinnatus that the Roman army had been surrounded in a mountain pass by a band of savages that was preparing to slaughter all of the Roman soldiers. Furthermore, with the entire army in peril, Rome was left undefended. Upon hearing this grave news, Cincinnatus knew immediately that Rome was in trouble. He was worried about leaving his family, but knew he had to act if he were to help his beloved Rome. So he turned to his wife and said, "I fear, Racillia, our little field must remain unsown this year." Kissing her goodbye and promising to return as soon as he could, Cincinnatus left with the delegation to attend to the crisis and do what he could to save Rome.

When he arrived in the city, Cincinnatus quickly took charge of the confused situation. He rallied every able-bodied man into a makeshift army and set out to defeat the savages and save the Roman army. His victory was quick and complete, and when the army returned, Cincinnatus was a hero. His fellow citizens paraded him through the city streets. Cincinnatus had turned dire despair into unexpected joy. He had displayed all that the Romans felt best about themselves. His bravery and skill on the battlefield, and his trustworthiness, led the city's leaders to suggest that he should be declared the King of Rome. Yet true to his humble nature, Cincinnatus declined the offer and returned instead to his farm where Racillia and hard work awaited him.<sup>59</sup>

The real life of Cincinnatus is somewhat obscured in this modern story of the man; it is a tangled mess of myth, legend, and factual events.

Of their heroes, the Romans famously mingled contemporary figures, mythical traditions, and figments of the supernatural imagination to serve their everyday needs. A practical people, they used the hero to uplift the citizenry, inspire patriotism, and encourage Roman virtue. In the hero's role, the Cincinnatus story survived the ages [because] it so closely reflected the fundamental purposes of the Republican Rome—citizen service, selflessness, warrior ethos, self-denial, courage, family, sacrifice, and above all patriotism.<sup>60</sup>

While the folktale captures the essence of the Cincinnatus ideal, the historical story behind the great Roman's life is more fascinating. Why is such a noble man living in poverty, and how did he become so revered by his fellow citizens? The answers to these questions are what make the historical Cincinnatus more compelling than the folk hero. The real story is more interesting precisely because it is more human. Just as Homer's Achilles is too god-like, the folktale of Cincinnatus is too mythical. The real Cincinnatus, like Homer's more human characters Hector and Odysseus, is more captivating because he stands closer to the character of the common man, closer to the attitudes of the common citizen-officer.

The personal account of Cincinnatus removes him from the dehumanized hero's platform and presents him in real life as a decent, honorable, opinionated, flawed man who lived heroically in answer to his country's repeated calls. Based on what he believed and how he lived, he was revered by some, opposed by others, and respected by all. His shortcomings reflect personal and societal limitations.... Cincinnatus embodies the best of that society and some of its tragedy.<sup>61</sup>

By chance, Cincinnatus was born but a few years after the patricians had ousted the last Etruscan monarch, and consequently, "Cincinnatus and his country would come of age together."<sup>62</sup> As he matured, Cincinnatus' leadership ability was cultivated along with combat skills so as to achieve competence in a wide variety of areas, and through extensive didactic discussions, his moral character would also have been forged in order to gain the two-fold Roman definition of *areté*—competence and character—and establish the required trustworthiness for appointment to a position in the patrician-run government.

Cincinnatus learned his role in the republic by observing his father—"a wealthy landowner, statesman, and soldier due to his membership in the aristocratic order."<sup>63</sup>

Cincinnatus was expected to assume his father's place as a leading patrician, and thus his early education would have consisted of sitting by his father's side as the elder administered to his public duties.

The message imparted from father to son would have been the “gravitas,” or “weighty dignity” that marked a noble Roman. That message emphasized strength over delicacy, power over agility, mass over beauty, utility over grace, and fact over imagination..... Above all, Cincinnatus would have been raised to believe what he would one day exemplify: that Roman strength was clothed in dignity, Roman power accompanied by grace.<sup>64</sup>

At age 20, Cincinnatus participated in Rome's epic victory at Lake Regillus against the Latins, and he would continue to gain military experience in Rome's numerous border wars.<sup>65</sup> As Cincinnatus continued his military service, he earned leadership experience and achieved recognition for gallantry in war. His service as a Roman officer reflected the principles of the early Greek aristocratic-warrior: great deeds accomplished on the battlefield translate into acknowledgment by society as one possessing merit and excellence. Yet, like Homer's heroes, historical accounts of the young Cincinnatus describe him as more than a warrior; he emerged as “one of the best of his day at an agile fusion of thought and action.”<sup>66</sup>

Having been born into the ruling patrician class, Cincinnatus was—at least early on—the frequent target of considerable plebeian opposition. His strongly held aristocratic opinions did not often align with the attitudes of the majority of Roman citizens and his early military experiences served only to deepen his fierce conservatism.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, his military service had allowed him to garner the competence and character that Cicero asserted as prerequisites to establishing public trust. By consistently trying to put Rome's welfare above his own, Cincinnatus gradually earned the respect of both the social elite and the masses and accordingly amassed considerable political capital. Even so, it would not be until after he lost virtually everything that he would surface as a universal hero of the world's first republic.

It is historical accounts of the lives of his sons, particularly the infamous Caeso, that reveal the most about Cincinnatus' character.

...Caeso was a fiery, intimidating youth, who unlike his father was fiercely proud of his lineage and patrician heritage. A portrait of inherited nobility, Caeso was confident [and] brash.... Unlike his father, Caeso used his personal gifts—a strapping appearance, command of forensics, and strength of will—to verbally castigate his plebeian opposition.<sup>68</sup>

It is not surprising that Caeso quickly made determined enemies within the plebeian class. In fact, prominent patricians, interested in securing their own social status, encouraged his tactics and effectively promised him impunity.<sup>69</sup> Acting in desperation, the plebeian leader Verginius led a legal counterattack in 461 BC.<sup>70</sup> Caeso was publicly accused of a variety of offenses, and charges were levied. “At the time of his accusation, Caeso’s virulence had become legendary. As an idol among junior aristocrats, he was popularly believed to be directly or indirectly responsible for many acts committed by worshipful younger nobles.”<sup>71</sup> Consequently, many of the charges against Caeso were based more on emotion than fact.

Cincinnatus could not avoid getting involved with his son’s trial. Like any devoted father, he sought out individual citizens in canvasses to seek forgiveness for his son’s behavior and to repudiate any false charges. Cincinnatus’ appeals were well received by the people, but in the end Verginius succeeded in convincing the people to separate Caeso’s actions from those of his esteemed father. Caeso was found guilty, and had he not been released on bail and escaped to nearby Etruria, he would have been condemned to death.<sup>72</sup> The ultimate victim, however, was Cincinnatus, who had rounded up ten men to help share in the guarantee of the inordinately large bond of 30,000 pounds of bronze—too much for even a man of Cincinnatus’ standing to cover alone.<sup>73</sup>

As the patriarch of a Roman family and a man of unquestionable esteem, honor alone dictated repayment of the other ten by Cincinnatus. Selling all of his properties, livestock, and valuables, Cincinnatus crossed the Tiber outside of the city and moved into his one remaining hovel. On this humble plot, the four acres left to him after all debts were paid, he, his wife Racilla, and a few slaves worked the land.<sup>74</sup>

This is how the aristocratic Cincinnatus became impoverished. But if distressed at his new financial position, Cincinnatus never showed it. He remained a proud patrician, keeping his dignity throughout his son’s misfortune, and he eventually withdrew from public life altogether in order to tend to his meager plot of land. “He

maintained the qualities that ruled his entire life—humility, freedom from vanity, frugality, honesty, and integrity.... His immediate focus remained solely focused on one of the two greater Roman glories—the family. He stood ready to serve the other glory—the state—if ever called back into its service.”<sup>75</sup> Until such a time should come, Cincinnatus was content to wake every day with the sun, work throughout the daylight hours, and be in bed shortly after nightfall. Like any other small farmer of his time, Cincinnatus’ toil produced only subsistence for Racilla and his small group of slaves, whom he considered his responsibility; anything left over would be sold or traded to local merchants for the modest goods needed to continue the operation of the farm.<sup>76</sup>

The time did come when Rome would need Cincinnatus, but not for his martial skill to ward off a band of marauding savages as the folktale describes—at least not initially. Instead, Cincinnatus would first be called upon to save Rome from internal disorder. Only a few years after Cincinnatus withdrew to his farm, Rome was threatened by a growing mob of fortune-hunters, slaves, and exiles whose aim was to attack Rome, and hopefully incite Roman slaves within the city to rise up in rebellion.<sup>77</sup> The threat of attack was no small matter. A slave rebellion inside the walls of the city would be disastrous if Rome had to also defend itself from an outside enemy. To make matters worse, disgruntled plebeians sought political reforms by refusing to fight in defense of a patrician-ruled Rome.<sup>78</sup>

A bargain was reached, and the plebeians agreed to fight and were sworn into service. Rome’s defense was led by its two consuls—the brave and capable Valerius commanded the peripheral fortifications, while his equally adept counterpart Claudius was charged with command of the forces guarding the city’s walls and monitoring potential internal revolts.<sup>79</sup> Valerius’ forces engaged in vicious hand-to-hand encounters with the enemy, with the defenders eventually prevailing and pushing the invaders from the city. During the battle, however, Valerius was killed. His death was mourned by all of Rome, and Claudius announced a day for a special election to be held to select a successor to serve out the rest of Valerius’ one-year term. “In the voting, the eighteen centuries of the first class together with the eighty centuries of foot, elected the almost forgotten Cincinnatus.”<sup>80</sup> Therefore, Cincinnatus was not called to return to Rome to

rescue his beloved city from a band of savages. His fellow citizens sought his wisdom and strength of character to lead them in reestablishing order following the chaos of war, rather than his military expertise to command in war.

In response to his election, Cincinnatus simply gathered his belongings and returned to the city. During the course of his abbreviated tenure, he governed by the sheer will of his character and dominated the dual consulate, the patrician-led Senate, and the plebeian tribunes; the Romans rejoiced over a peaceful and stable Rome for the first time in many years.<sup>81</sup> In a series of initial speeches Cincinnatus rebuked the Senate for its ineffectual leadership, which had led to the conflict-ridden internal politics and the subsequent weakening of the state against foreign threats. Neither were the tribunes spared the consul's disdain, as he "viscerally reprimanded [them] for their ill-conceived, selfishly-derived encouragement for plebeians to refuse arms in defense of the city,"<sup>82</sup> and thereby holding Rome hostage for personal advantage while enemies marched on the city.

The rejuvenation of the Republic during Cincinnatus' tenure as consul was astonishing, particularly given the length of time he held the position—less than a year, because he was serving out Valerius' term. Along with his fellow consul, Claudius, Cincinnatus restored the courts of law, and justice and fairness rebounded tremendously. He "rose above class differences and displayed himself 'easy of access, mild, humane' towards all who sought his judgment."<sup>83</sup> The tribunes actually lost power during Cincinnatus' time in office, but the plebeians were content, their voice in government temporarily unneeded because of their consul's unbiased leadership.<sup>84</sup>

Even the partisan Senators were stirred by Cincinnatus' passion to work for the overall good of Rome. However, they seriously misjudged the character of the man who had strengthened the patrician class's standing.<sup>85</sup> When the tribunes reelected already sitting tribunes—an act as illegal as reelecting consuls—the often-petulant Senate pushed for a reelection of Cincinnatus to the consulate. Cincinnatus was irate in his response. He chastised the patrician body not only for their petty behavior, but more importantly for an act that would compromise the validity of established protocols and jeopardize the health of Rome:

Can I be surprised, gentlemen, that you have little authority over the commons? Your own actions nullify it: because the commons ignore a decree of the Senate against the re-election of magistrates, is that a reason for you wishing to do the same? Do you wish to compete with the commons in disregard of principle? Or imagine that political power is commensurate with irresponsibility? It was your decree, not theirs; and to ignore one's own declared policy is, for sheer levity, worse than to fly in the face of a measure passed by somebody else. You are merely copying the mob—whom no one expects to be politically rectitude [sic]. Well, do as you will; I at least refuse to follow the tribunes' lead or to allow myself to be reelected in contravention of the Senate's decree.<sup>86</sup>

The tension over the matter eventually subsided, but as Cincinnatus' term neared its end, patrician leaders again pressed him to consider reelection. Frustrated, Cincinnatus called together both patricians and plebeians and inveighed against any servant of Rome seeking to hoard power for himself. He set a date for a consular election, and steadfastly withdrew from consideration.<sup>87</sup>

His term as consul complete, Cincinnatus returned to Racilla and his plow and resumed the routine of a Roman farmer. Although his financial situation had not improved—it had perhaps even worsened—during his absence from the farm, Cincinnatus was content to live out the rest of his days providing for his family and ensuring the welfare of his slaves.

For the next year, Cincinnatus continued to work his land. But in 458 BC, Rome was in crisis again. Immediately following Cincinnatus' retirement as consul, the Romans signed a peace treaty, ending protracted hostilities with the neighboring Aequians. Not long after the pact was made, however, the Aequians surprisingly reneged on the deal and began attacking Rome's allies. The Aequians refused to accept Roman envoys, and the Romans eventually declared war. This is the historical basis for the threat in the folktale: one half of the army, led by one reigning consul, was sent to attack the Aequians, but became bogged down and surrounded in a mountain pass. The other half of the Roman army, commanded by the second consul, was deployed elsewhere, leaving Rome defenseless. Recognizing the dire situation in which Rome found itself—all armies deployed and both consuls gone—the Senate voted to appoint a temporary dictator. The indispensable Cincinnatus was elected.<sup>88</sup>

The image from the folktale is familiar, if not fully accurate: desperate Roman officials cross the Tiber. They are received by a bare-chested Cincinnatus propped up by a spade, who recognizing their solemn mood, immediately asks Racilla to bring his toga, so that he can properly receive the Senate's message. The delegation conveys the call-to-arms.

Measuring himself reluctantly to the task, Cincinnatus turned to Racilla and worried aloud, "This year's crop too will be ruined then, because of my official duties, and we shall all go dreadfully hungry."

This picture of Cincinnatus is immortal; it is the image forever captured for humanity. The reluctant farmer goes to save his people while worrying of his family's survival.<sup>89</sup>

The rest of the story is also familiar. The farmer-turned-commander rallied Rome. The enemy was defeated, and the trapped army and her country saved. Rome rejoiced for days, and Cincinnatus and his citizen-army were heralded as heroes. Yet as the celebration continued, the hero withdrew, again resisting patrician urges to extend his term in power—a period that ultimately lasted less than one month of the restricted six-month term.<sup>90</sup> Cincinnatus returned again to Racilla and his farm, humbly shrugging off offers of financial compensation from both the government and friends.

Cincinnatus' recognition that his position—and its corresponding power—belonged not to him personally, but to the people of Rome, is the principal ideal for all public servants in a republic, but it is especially valid for conquering commanders. He grasped

what other leading Romans in his position one day would not. On top of society, his glory shared by no man, Cincinnatus understood the necessity to prevent the rule of arbitrary dictate. Wise beyond his times, Cincinnatus saw what historian Finley Hooper captured of later Romans:

*It happened to the Romans, as it has with others since, that a people who failed to rule themselves became the willing subjects of a man and an army to enforce law and order.<sup>91</sup>*

The details regarding Cincinnatus' final years are sparse. It is known that while officials frequently consulted with him on a host of issues, he was never called upon to lead Rome again. It is assumed that he died in quiet satisfaction on his small farm.<sup>92</sup> His

life remains an example to republican governments. “Upright, hard working, honest,”<sup>93</sup> he served only for Rome’s glory, never for his own. His dedication to moderation of thought and habit enabled him to live a long life of virtue. As biographer Michael Hillyard explains:

His death forever cemented him as the polar opposite to Lord Action’s famous axiom, “all power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Paralleling the few other great heroes who possessed the noble gifts of sacrifice, humility, and service, Cincinnatus could have had it all—fame, glory, riches, and the farfetchedly ultimate prize—King of Rome. Instead he chose his wife, a four-acre farm beyond the Tiber River on the outskirts of town, and a lifetime of labor and contented poverty. He answered his country’s every call from the farm, and in turn, Rome never forgot.<sup>94</sup>

The history behind the tale of Cincinnatus is important to understand because it reveals the crux of Rome’s contribution to the citizen-officer ideal. Cincinnatus was not some mythical hero who was called from his farm one accidental day to lead an army and save a nation. He was a man, a Roman citizen—*civis Romanus*—who through extensive preparation and self-discipline gained the competence and character required by Rome to be trusted to fulfill a public position. Despite being born to a privileged family, he worked hard every day to develop the ability and integrity necessary to meet his obligations to his family and his country. So even when he had lost everything—save his wife and his reputation—he endured as one of Rome’s most trusted leaders until the day his country called for his help. He answered that call each time with great skill and selfless grace, and when his duties were complete, he returned all power and glory to his country. His only reward was the recognition of his fellow Roman citizens as one possessing areté.

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2 Iliad, *Epics for Students*. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997) 168.

3 Perry, 50.

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5 Wallace Gray, "Homer: Iliad" in *Homer and Joyce*, (Macmillian Publishing Co., 1985, 1-16); excerpted and reprinted in *Epics for Students*. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997) 193.

6 Perry, 47.

7 Gray, 193.

8 Ibid., 194.

<sup>9</sup> Lazaari, 178.

<sup>10</sup> Gray, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Perry, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Lazaari, 178.

<sup>13</sup> Gray, 197.

<sup>14</sup> Lazaari, 180.

<sup>15</sup> Perry, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Gray, 197.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Perry, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Jasper Griffin, in *Homer: The Odyssey*, (Cambridge University Press., 1987, 47-98); excerpted and reprinted in *Epics for Students*. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997) 328.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Perry, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> James B. Stockdale. *Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot*. (Stanford: Hoover Institutional Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Leadership: The Warrior's Art*, Christopher D. Kolenda, Ed., 11.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Perry, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Thucydides, 143.

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- <sup>34</sup> Perry, 62.
- <sup>35</sup> Thucydides, 145.
- <sup>36</sup> Perry, 64.
- <sup>37</sup> Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War. Trans. Rex Warner (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), 118.
- <sup>38</sup> Perry, 65.
- <sup>39</sup> Plato, The Republic, Benjamin Jowett, Ed. And Trans., (New York: P. F. The Colonial Press, 1901), 54.
- <sup>40</sup> Stockdale. Philosophical Fighter Pilot, 13.
- <sup>41</sup> Perry, 73.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.
- <sup>43</sup> Perry, 108.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Michael J. Hillyard, Cincinnatus and the Citizen-Servant Ideal, The Roman Legend's Life, Times, and Legacy. (United States: Xlibris Cooperation, 2001), 35.
- <sup>46</sup> Perry, 109.
- <sup>47</sup> Kolenda. 16.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid* , 17.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>52</sup> Hillyard, 38.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.
- <sup>55</sup> Perry, 110.
- <sup>56</sup> Hillyard, 56.
- <sup>57</sup> Perry, 110.
- <sup>58</sup> See Acts of the Apostles 16.37.
- <sup>59</sup> Hillyard, 19
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 19.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 72.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 71.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 72.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 73.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

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- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>70</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 76.  
<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 77.  
<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 78.  
<sup>74</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 82.  
<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 83.  
<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 79.  
<sup>78</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 81.  
<sup>80</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 84.  
<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 85.  
<sup>83</sup> Ibid.  
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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 86.  
<sup>87</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 91.  
<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 92.  
<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 99.  
<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 98.  
<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 107.  
<sup>93</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

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### III. BEOWULF AND THE GERMANIC HERO'S CODE OF HONOR

The evolution of a society initially based upon achieving martial glory and survival into one comprised of dedicated servants seeking to advance their culture's values and prosperity, is not unique to sophisticated societies such as Athens and Rome. A similar development is evident in other early European peoples, and thus adds an element of universality to the notion that there is more to being an officer than being a gallant warrior. Perhaps one of the best examples of this is seen in the tribes that populated Europe between the end of the Roman Empire around 476 AD and the death of Charlemagne in the year 814.

When the Roman Empire finally disintegrated and Roman legions abandoned England in the fifth century AD,<sup>1</sup> the Germanic Angles and Saxons migrated to the island and established several small, relatively primitive settlements over a period of a century and a half.<sup>2</sup> These peoples migrated sporadically, not necessarily in tribes or family groups, and appear not to have arrived under the rule of kings. Instead, the groups were based on kinship, with their loyalties normally given to a military leader—either of their own clan or a Roman-Briton already established on the island.<sup>3</sup>

The poem *Beowulf*—a heroic narrative of more than three thousand lines of what is now called Anglo-Saxon or Old English<sup>4</sup>—was composed during the latter part of the first millennium, sometime between the last half of the fifth century and the beginning of the tenth century. The original poet of *Beowulf* remains unknown, although a number of critics believe he was an early English Christian writing after the time of the poem's setting. While the poem was written in England, it details the events in the life of a Scandinavian prince, Beowulf, who “is the biggest presence among warriors in the land of the Geats, a territory situated in what is now southern Sweden.”<sup>5</sup> With its “once upon a time opening,”<sup>6</sup> the poem is part folktale, yet it has a definite historical context:

The wars between the Geats and the Swedes in *Beowulf* may represent remembered incidents on the continent. At the same time the wars may represent the continual struggle among the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>7</sup>

Despite some ambiguity with regard to specific historical parallels, the poem offers an excellent account of the culture of these early European warrior societies.

The development of the Germanic tribes is clearly similar to the rise of the Hellenistic society nearly a thousand years earlier. Like the Greeks, the Germanic peoples' earliest notions of excellence grew out of a warrior ethos. Consequently, it is not surprising that *Beowulf*, which is considered the first native English epic, has close thematic similarities to Homer's Greek epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. "The poem gains immediacy from its simplicity and universality, qualities it shares with the Homeric epics."<sup>8</sup> The Germanic society was held together by personal loyalties and a warrior's code of honor. "The mutual loyalty within the kindred and within the war band was the heart of Anglo-Saxon social organization."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, like Homer, the *Beowulf* poet presents a society in which actions are always linked with outcomes: "operations of cause and consequence...are inescapable."<sup>10</sup> Worthy actions bring honor to the individual and to the society, while contemptible deeds bring shame and humiliation to both. Therefore, the narrator echoes Homer by suggesting "as a universal truth the rule that in every nation the successful aspirant to honor must do praiseworthy deeds."<sup>11</sup>

Early in the poem, Beowulf is established as a great warrior when he crosses the sea to come to the aid of the Danes, who have been harassed for twelve years by a man-eating monster named Grendel. Beowulf saves the Danes from Grendel, as well as from the monster's mother who seeks retaliation against Beowulf and his fellow Geat warriors. Like the young Greek hero seeking *aristreiá* in order to achieve *areté*, the young Beowulf represents the Germanic hero seeking the same adventures and honor prized by *his* warrior society. As Seamus Heaney, a Nobel Prize-winning writer and the acclaimed author of *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, explains:

[Grendel and his mother] are the right enemies for a young glory-hunter, instigators of the formal boast, worthy trophies to be carried back from the grim testing-grounds—Grendel's arm is ripped off and nailed up, his head severed and paraded in Heorot. It is all consonant with the surge of youth and the compulsion to win fame, "as wide as the wind's home, / as the sea around cliffs," utterly a manifestation of the Germanic heroic code.<sup>12</sup>

Following his defeat of the two monsters, Beowulf returns to the land of the Geats and ultimately rules his kingdom for fifty years. Then one day, a fierce dragon begins to

menace the countryside surrounding Geatland, and Beowulf, bound by the heroic code, must once again assume the role of warrior. Although Beowulf defeats the dragon, he is fatally wounded. Yet his sacrifice earns him legendary status among the Greats.<sup>13</sup>

The similarities between Homer's works and *Beowulf* are not limited to the inclusion of a heroic code. Both poets present a simple story that contains themes that transcend the narrow margins of their poems' plots and signal changing values within the society at large. Through the journeys of Odysseus Homer shows the evolution of the warrior-hero into a citizen-officer and citizen-statesman. Likewise, the anonymous poet uses digressions from *Beowulf's* main storyline to bring in human elements that help depict how Beowulf's maturity mirrors that of the Germanic society; both ruler and ruled come to understand that glory and excellence have broader definitions than those initially offered in the warrior's heroic code.

*Beowulf* is, indeed, on one level a very simple story told with great elaboration. A man of great strength, courage, and generosity fights three monsters, two when he is a young man, the third in his old age. Other more complicated human events precede these, others intervene, others will follow, but those more realistic events are all essentially background.... In *Beowulf*, the narrator and characters use human experiences to understand the human condition and to find the noblest way to live their lives.<sup>14</sup>

As the poem progresses, Beowulf develops into a hero similar to *The Iliad's* Hector. Like the Prince of Troy, the Geat prince is driven by a sense of responsibility to his men and to those people he has vowed to protect.

There is, however, another aspect of Beowulf's character that marks a new theme within the citizen-officer ideal—one which was not as obvious in Homer's works—and that is the notion of a *gentle warrior*. Certainly Beowulf conforms to the Greco-Roman model as a hero driven by selfless patriotic duty, yet at the same time, there is an element of gentleness that emerges within his character. He returns from battle as unassuming as Cincinnatus, but instead of simply retiring to his previous life, he joins in the celebration by giving away the spoils of war he has spilt blood to win. Beowulf possesses affection for his fellow Geats that is manifested in his material generosity as well as in his generosity of spirit.

Beowulf... is different from other northern heroes and from the heroes of Greek and Roman epics.... He is unlike Achilles, unlike Odysseus, except in his love of family [and country]. He is a hero driven not by personal glory but by affection and duty.... [This is not to say that] personal glory is not without meaning to Beowulf. He tells Hrothgar that the best thing a man can do is lay up fame before death.... He happily accepts treasure and just as happily passes it on to others... duty, sympathy, and generosity are his primary motivations.<sup>15</sup>

Beowulf's generosity had a practical value within the Germanic warrior society. It strengthened the loyalty that his fellow warriors felt towards him as their leader. Furthermore, life in the more northerly territory of England was much harsher than in the warm Mediterranean climes enjoyed by Rome and Greece, and so sharing the spoils of war with his fellow Geats helped ease the bleakness of their difficult lives. Yet the results of Beowulf's kindness had an even more dramatic effect on his personal maturity than it did on his people's well-being. His generosity of spirit and imaginative sympathy for others increased his effectiveness as a leader, and is a significant contribution to the evolution of the citizen-officer ideal.

While it is tempting to characterize Beowulf as a "larger-than-life" figure, with his amazing exploits and his character, the *Beowulf* poet, instead, tempers Beowulf's mythical aspects with images of his human frailty. He "is a great man with limitations, in each of his fights he is severely challenged and clearly sees himself as relying on the help of God."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, many critics—starting with J.R.R. Tolkien in 1936—have noted a sense of futility within the poem.<sup>17</sup> Tolkien and many of his contemporaries had witnessed the devastation of World War I. Due to their personal experiences as foot soldiers in "The War to End All Wars," these critics were not blind to the limitations of a societal value system built on warrior standards alone, since they had "known violent, often pointless, death, often the death of friends. They did not cease to admire heroism, but they balanced it against what they knew of war's futility."<sup>18</sup>

"*Beowulf* creates a powerful impression of a great action moving irresistibly forward, advancing not steadily but abruptly in sudden lurches and turns toward a fearful event."<sup>19</sup> The poem's prevailing mood, however, is not one of unavoidable doom. Instead, there is sense of optimism: the sense of a transition from an old world plagued by despair to a new one marked by hope. By the end of the poem, Beowulf has evolved from a

youthful warrior into a wise king. As his responsibilities have increased, so has his understanding of glory and honor. The poet suggests that, unlike his ancestors and most of his contemporaries, and similar to Homer's Odysseus, Beowulf uses his rational abilities to temper the violent spirit of the warrior. When Beowulf returns to his homeland after defeating Grendel and his mother and rescuing the Danes, the young prince is honored by the Geatish king, Hygelac—Beowulf's paternal uncle:

Beowulf bore himself with valor;  
he was formidable in battle yet behaved with honour  
and took no advantage; never cut down  
a comrade who was drunk, kept his temper  
and warrior that he was, watched and controlled  
his God-sent strength and his outstanding  
natural powers.<sup>20</sup>

And earlier in the poem, Hygelac also cautions his gallant nephew:

O flower of warriors, beware the trap.  
Choose, dear Beowulf, the better part,  
External rewards. Do not give way to pride.  
For a brief while your strength is in bloom  
But it fades quickly; and soon there will follow  
Illness or the sword to lay you low.<sup>21</sup>

This key theme of self-restraint has been entirely skipped over in the main action of the story, the poem having jumped ahead fifty years to the end of Beowulf's life and his encounter with the dragon. Yet the poet, in a series of retrospectives (which critics have come to call the "*Beowulf* digressions"), subtly reveals a core component of the hero's character—martial grace. While engaged in battle, Beowulf was a fierce warrior, yet his decency was also evident. Through self-discipline, he was able to control his emotions even in the most heated contest. This graciousness was vital not only to inspiring his men during battle, but also to disarming his enemies following a victory.

Due to his strong affection for his uncle, Beowulf was deeply struck when Hygelac was killed in combat, while the young prince managed to survive because of his superb swimming ability. This tragedy offers another example of Beowulf's restraint and maturity, for when he returned from the battle in Friesland, where the king lost his life, Hygelac's widow, the fair Queen Hygd, privately offered the young Beowulf the throne.

The queen felt that her young son, Heardred, was not up to the task of ruling the kingdom after the king's death. Beowulf, in a manner reminiscent of Cincinnatus, declines to usurp his younger cousin's rightful claim to the throne.

...there was no way the weakened nation  
could get Beowulf to give in and agree  
to be elevated over Heardred as his lord  
or to undertake the office of kingship.  
But he did provide support for the prince,  
honoured and minded him until he matured  
as the ruler of Geatland.<sup>22</sup>

Beowulf respected the established order of succession. Had he illegally assumed the throne, chaos might have ensued, jeopardizing his nation's well-being. His decision to serve the new king, rather than to seek power for himself, demonstrated considerable restraint and dignity. Not until Heardred died prematurely as a result of combat, did Beowulf assume the responsibilities as ruler of Geatland.

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Analysis of *Beowulf* often focuses on the three agons (battles) of the poem—the two with Grendel and his mother in the land of the Danes and the final clash with the dragon. Heaney seems to warn, however, that by focusing on the three agons, the reader may miss the greater implication of the poem. He suggests that “another way would be to regard it as a poem which contemplates the destinies of three peoples by tracing their interweaving histories in the story of the central character.”<sup>23</sup> This method of study reveals that Beowulf's—and by extension the citizen-officer's—evolving role is often hard to separate from the overall development of the society he serves, for the true citizen-officer should reflect the essential values of his country and his fellow citizens.

The Danes are the first of the three peoples discussed in the poem and Hrothgar was their king:

The fortunes of war favoured Hrothgar.  
Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
young followers, a force that grew  
to be a might army. So his mind turned  
to hall-building: he handed down orders  
for men to work on a great mead-hall  
meant to be a wonder of the world forever.<sup>24</sup>

The Danes' prosperity under Hrothgar, however, was temporary. The once successful and vibrant people became paralyzed once Grendel began his attacks. Unable to respond effectively as the monster terrorizes them, the Danes fell into utter despair. "All were endangered; young and old / were hunted down by that dark death shadow."<sup>25</sup>

It was customary in many of the early warrior societies to segregate men and women, the thought being that such lodging conditions fostered a more aggressive spirit through imposed all-male fellowship.<sup>26</sup> The previously valiant warriors among the Danes, however, abandoned this practice when it was established that Grendel attacked only men sleeping in Heorot—Hrothgar's great mead-hall:

Then it was easy to find the man who got himself a  
more distant resting place, a bed in a private dwelling,  
when the hall-thegn's [sic] hatred was manifested to him,  
plainly declared by a sure sign; whoever escaped that  
enemy kept himself farther away and safer....<sup>27</sup>

Grendel took more than just the lives of some of the Danes; he robbed the remaining male citizens of their will to fight—their very manliness within a warrior society.

Enter Beowulf and the Geats. The contrast between these two peoples could not be more glaring. "The Danish scene represents a whole society in paralysis, the Geatish a man in action. The Danes meet frequently, consider deeply, risk their immortal souls searching for supernatural help, and lament their losses in an agony of helplessness,"<sup>28</sup> while the images of Beowulf are commanding and decisive. The poet uses phrases like "high-born and powerful" ...to describe the leader of the Geats. In fact, Beowulf's alacrity in preparing to come to the Danes' assistance seemed to ensure victory by itself.<sup>29</sup> The parallel to the Homeric hero is easily seen in the response of the watchman who receives Beowulf's war band at the coast: "Anyone with gumption / and sharp mind will take the measure / of two things: what's said and what's done"<sup>30</sup>. Recall Phoenix's plea to Achilles in *The Iliad*: "a man of true worth... is both 'a speaker of words, and a doer of deeds.'"<sup>31</sup> Unity of thought, words, and actions is what marks both the Homeric hero and the new Germanic hero represented by Beowulf.

The third people whose stories are woven throughout the poem are the Swedes. Never brought into the main action of the poem, the Swedes, however, are always there, “massing on the borders to attack”<sup>32</sup> their Geatish rivals. Their role becomes important as the poem concludes with Geatland threatened from all sides, yet possessing no one to rally the troops.<sup>33</sup> Beowulf is dead, and the Geats have no hero to call upon.

It is this tragic finale to the poem that best illustrates the changing values of the warrior society, and more specifically their king. As it existed initially, the Germanic heroic code centered on winning fame and reputation through great exploits in battle. Yet fame alone as a value does not ensure the peace, prosperity, and security of a culture. Only lasting achievements can alleviate the dire sense of futility that Tolkien and his contemporaries observed in *Beowulf*.

Beowulf and the rest of the characters are never allowed the luxury of assuming that any victory earns more than a respite...Good men and women can do their best, their fame is assured, but not their works.<sup>34</sup>

Due to the transient nature of peace during this era that was marked by nearly constant conflict, two norms began to be established within the warrior society, and Beowulf—initially as a battlefield commander and then as a king—embodied both.

The first norm regarded the treatment of the enemy following an engagement. Recall that Hygelac praised Beowulf as having been “formidable in battle yet behaved with honour/ and took no advantage....” The warriors’ treatment of their enemy was essential to lengthening the periods of peace between hostilities. Maltreatment of the enemy would only embitter them, and result in a prolonged war and the virtual assurance of later retaliations. In fact, early Germanic kings would sometimes go as far as to provide compensation to the widows of their slain enemies in the hope of preventing retribution from younger generations. These efforts to respect the dignity of one’s enemy are among the earliest traditions from which the modern Law of Armed Conflict was derived.

The second norm required the warrior to gentle his condition when returning to the society which he fought to protect. This tempering of the warrior spirit was necessary to ensure his acceptance back into the society, as well as to assuage the natural

apprehension of the populace during a time of recurring conflict. The battle won and his arms temporarily laid aside, his obligations as a member of the clan—as a citizen—could not be abandoned. There was no more important time for the community to come together than the period that followed a hard-fought war. The incremental progress made while securing gains or recovering from losses incurred during the course of hostilities determined the long-term health and advancement of the society. “The whole action of the poem happens within historical patterns where families and kingdoms rise and fall.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, it was essential that the returning warrior be integrated back into the society as quickly as possible. If the process of reintegration were hindered by residual elements of the warriors’ bellicose attitude, then the society was less likely to be fully recovered for the next battle. It is important to note that the bulk of the responsibility for reintegration rested with the warriors, and not with the members of the society. This was due entirely to the warriors’ inherent destructive power. However, that power was bestowed by the people, and therefore, had to be yielded back to the people upon the completion of the warriors’ duties.

“Over generations of critical attention *Beowulf* has proved its stature as a literary classic—as a major monument to an historic culture and as a visionary statement of issues of abiding relevance to people living in a community at any time.”<sup>36</sup> Yet the story also has specific insights into the development of the citizen-officer ideal, and no short discussion can do justice to the ethical themes and conflicts, which are as relevant to today’s citizen-officers as they were to Germanic warrior-kings of the first millennium. The poem, however, is defined by an awareness of the importance of the community over self-interest. Even in death, Beowulf “understood the stakes to be the survival and thriving of the human community,”<sup>37</sup> so he chose to engage the dragon and save the society from the immediate threat—he was, after all, a man of action. By doing so, he made the conscious decision to leave the future of Geatland in the hands of the next generation. Having done what he could in his lifetime, he, like his ancestors before him, left a model for future warrior-kings to follow. The implication is that

sacrifice of oneself for the life of civilized community, imperfect though it may be, is not an act of vain and self-deluding heroics, but a responsibility which the strong and the gifted may not repudiate, and which is in itself a victory against anarchy and elemental evil....<sup>38</sup>

Beowulf, representing the Germanic hero, evolved separately from the Greco-Roman tradition, but arrived at the same place—the recognition of how the martial values of courage, temperance, humility, and selflessness extend from the battlefield to the administration of a nation. *Beowulf*, however, does not simply validate the assertion that there is more to being an officer than being a gallant warrior; the poem also contributes to the further evolution of the citizen-officer ideal by introducing the element of martial grace—the generosity of spirit and empathy—which will be refined and built upon by the knights of the Middle Ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin Perry, Myrna Chase, James R. Jacob, Margaret C. Jacob, Theodore H. Von Laue, Western Civilization Ideas, Politics and Society, Fourth Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 215.

<sup>2</sup> Beowulf, Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997) 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Seamus Heaney, Beowulf, A New Verse Translation, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1995), x.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Lazaari, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Helen Conrad-O'Briain, for Epics for Students, (Gale Research, 1997); excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997), 42.

<sup>9</sup> Lazaari, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Conrad-O'Briain, 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> Heaney, xix.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

<sup>14</sup> Conrad-O'Briain, 43.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> George Clark, "The Heroic Age, Ideal, and Challenge" and "Afterward," In Beowulf, (Twayne Publishers, 1990); excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997) 45.

<sup>20</sup> Heaney, 149.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* xiv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>26</sup> Clark, 43.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Clark, 44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Heaney, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Perry, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Heaney, xv.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>34</sup> Conrad-O'Briain, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>37</sup> S.A.J. Bradley, "Beowulf", in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, translated and edited by S.A.J. Bradley, (David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1982) 408-11; excerpted and reprinted in Epics for Students. Ed. Marie Lazaari. (Detroit: Gale, 1997) 46.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

## IV. CHIVALRY AND *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* stands as a beautifully crafted alliterative poem that clearly defines the concepts of knightly virtue and the ideal of chivalry, which are essentially a formalized extension of the concept of martial grace introduced in the previous chapter's discussion of the Germanic warrior society. The poem is the work of yet another unidentified poet. It can be classified as a romance, or as J.R.R. Tolkien described it, "a fairytale for adults,"<sup>1</sup> which follows the adventures of King Arthur's most noble knight, Gawain. Before taking a closer look at *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, however, it is necessary to discuss the elements of the chivalric code as it applied to knights during medieval times as well as the political and cultural environment of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

### A. THE ADVENT OF CHIVALRY

The 14<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century was a time of extreme disorder. It was "a violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering and disintegrating age."<sup>2</sup> During the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a mini-Ice Age enveloped Europe, destroying countless crops. Famine and poor health were prevalent even before the worst epidemic in human history—the Black Death—struck between 1348 and 1350, killing an estimated one third of the population living between India and Iceland.<sup>3</sup> The remaining two thirds lived on in a state of apprehension that bordered on panic. The Holy Crusades had been a continuous drain on both the material and the human capital of Europe since the first was launched in 1095 to quell the Turkish threat. The wars in the Middle East gave way to a nearly unbroken succession of Anglo-French conflicts, culminating in the devastating Hundred Years' War.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a series of assassinations, including the murders of England's Richard II and France's Louis of Orleans, only added to the political and social instability of the time.

But eventually, the population began to grow again, and trade with the Middle East expanded. Feudalism, "in which 'an oath between lord and vassal was the only form of government,'"<sup>5</sup> began to evolve, marking the rise of a defined class system ruled by a

monarch. With a system now centered on a king rather than a feudal lord, a concerted effort was made to bring order to the masses. Due to the expansion of Christianity throughout Europe, kings hoped religion might facilitate the establishment of stability, so they sought a fusion of the political and spiritual hierarchy.<sup>6</sup> Christianity, however, was not much more successful for Europeans than early religions had been for the Greeks at bringing social tranquility to a society. The extreme bleakness of their lives left many Europeans of the time with little or no faith in a benevolent God. Heresy and pagan superstition plagued Christianity throughout the Middle Ages. Of course the Church's influence was extensive, providing a moral base for the society, but during the Middle Ages—as in Greek and Roman times—religion's emphasis was on life after death. In the meantime, “life itself was merely suffering from original sin, and torment could only end through the salvation of death.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, a sense of helplessness prevailed throughout Europe. The dilemma was clear: “How could a ruler bring a people together when they were all convinced the world was coming to an end? Literature provided the answer.”<sup>8</sup>

Before the invention of the printing press, English and French minstrels and troubadours (or “scops” as they were known in the 14th century) wandered the countryside, singing ballads about great men and their heroic deeds. In a manner similar to that of the ancient Greek and Germanic poets, these scops began the oral tradition in both French and English literature, passing their stories from generation to generation.<sup>9</sup> With each recounting, the legends of men like Roland and Arthur grew to be the equals of Odysseus and Hector, and listeners were inspired. Like *The Iliad*, the poems and ballads celebrated the goodness inherent in every man and the humanistic philosophy that man could contribute positively to his world and achieve some measure of peace before he died. Recognizing the growing popularity of the stories, Christian leaders infused the tales with their own themes in the hope that examples of piety as well as courage might fuel emulation. The priests were successful. “Romances” began appearing, as Cistercian monks translated numerous stories, including *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, *The Song of Roland*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.<sup>10</sup>

The common theme among these stories, as well as Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which was published in 1485, was chivalry—from the French “cheval,”

or horse.<sup>11</sup> In medieval times, owning a horse set the noble man apart from others. In fact, in every language (except English) the word for knight means the man on horseback—in French it is “chevalier.”<sup>12</sup>

“The status of nobility derived from birth and ancestry, but had to be confirmed by ‘living nobly’—that is by the sword.”<sup>13</sup> The criteria for maintaining one’s status as a noble were “fluid and inexact.”<sup>14</sup> But the practice of arms was the one certain function said to have been assigned to the second of the three estates established by God,<sup>15</sup> each of which was given a duty to be completed for the good of the whole society. The clergy made up the First Estate because they were closest to God. The Third Estate was far from homogeneous, being made up of peasants and skilled craftsmen, as well as physicians and lawyers.<sup>16</sup> As protector of the other two estates, the noble’s role was not fighting for fighting’s sake but rather “in defense of...justice and order. He was supposed to protect the people from oppression, to combat tyranny, and to cultivate virtue.”<sup>17</sup> Like the Roman patrician, the medieval aristocrat saw it as his responsibility to protect the society. This often resulted in considerable condescension on the part of the nobility towards “the mud-stained ignorant peasant [who] was considered incapable by his contemporaries in Christianity, if not by its founder.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, chivalry, as an ideal, had a positive impact on medieval society at-large.

[It was] a concept which would serve as a cultural bridge between the ages of Arthur, Charlemagne, and Charles the Bold. What became vitally important in these ancient tales was not the conflicts themselves, but the “pictures of manners,” the modes of thinking which transformed the ordinary man into an [sic] heroic and ennobled one. This, then, was a moral and spiritual goal towards which every man could look, a life of courtesy to equals, invincible strength, compassion to weakness, valor, justice, modesty, loyalty to superiors, and devotedness to the church.<sup>19</sup>

At the outset, chivalry’s foundation was, in a manner, simply the extension of feudal obligations, and it was closely tied to military commitments of fiefs.<sup>20</sup> In return for their toil, serfs were granted protection. Yet because there were no written contracts between the lord and his serfs, a man’s word was held sacred. Likewise, the verbal agreement between a king and his knights was sacred—this is part of the basis of the traditional oath taken by officers today. A king’s rule was essentially martial;

consequently, knights received special recognition from society for their service to God—in the name of their king.

Chivalry was an “aesthetic ideal which ultimately took the form of an ethical one.”<sup>21</sup> Since around the time of the first Crusades, it had been a somewhat flowery ideal associated with the emerging European aristocracy of the Second Estate. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, however, it enjoyed widespread appeal with the members of the Third Estate as well. Chivalry was an ideal that revolved around the desire to emulate the perfection of an imaginary past; the bourgeois and merchant class, like the nobility, sought to gain identity and status by associating themselves with some “long-forgotten” model of ceremony and etiquette. It was as if they sought to soften the harshness of their world by establishing the moral value of manners. They believed, as Goethe eventually articulated, “There is not an outward sign of politeness which has not a profound moral foundation.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, chivalry was not just a pretentious set of social rules established by the aristocracy in order to set themselves apart from the masses. It may have begun that way, but ultimately it became identified as the outward expression of virtue. To the common man, it was an ideal that made all men equal, for nobility was the result of goodness, the reward for merit.

## B. KNIGHTLY CHIVALRY

Chivalry originated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century as a means of uniting the martial and religious spirits of armies going off to fight in the great crusades.<sup>23</sup>

With the help of Benedictine thinkers, a code evolved that put the knight’s sword at the service, theoretically, of justice, right, piety, the Church, the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed. Knighthood was received in the name of the Trinity after a ceremony of purification, confession, [and] communion. A saint’s relic was usually embedded in the hilt of the knight’s sword so that upon clasping it as he took his oath, he caused the vow to be registered in Heaven.<sup>24</sup>

While the Church provided chivalry with its initial moral foundation, the ideal eventually developed its own principles, “and bursting through the pious veils”<sup>25</sup> were the distinctive elements of prowess and courtly love.

Prowess, that combination of courage, strength, and skill that made the chevalier *preux* [valiant], was the prime essential. Honor and loyalty, together with courtesy—meaning the kind of behavior that has since come to be called “chivalrous”—were the ideals, and so called courtly love the presiding genius.<sup>26</sup>

The concept of courtly love, which required the knight to remain in a persistent amorous condition, was intended to gentle the condition of the fighting man, to make him more polite, and thereby to uplift the entire manner of medieval society. “Largesse was the necessary accompaniment. An open-handed generosity in gifts and hospitality was the mark of a gentleman and had its practical value of attracting other knights to fight under the banner and bounty of the *grand seigneur*.”<sup>27</sup>

Prowess was not simply male bravado. To fight in combat during this period required tremendous physical stamina and skill. Fighting on horseback or afoot, while wearing 50 to 60 pounds of plated armor and clashing “in collision with an opponent at full gallop while holding an eighteen-foot lance half the length of an average telephone pole, [or] to give and receive bows with sword or battle-axe that could cleave a skull or slice off a limb in a stroke,”<sup>28</sup> was not for the weak.

The knightly virtues of prowess and the gentlemanly nature required by courtly love seem irreconcilable, yet the dissimilarity of the two principles was by design. They were a complement—each tempering the other, and thereby bringing balance to the knight’s character. The volatility of the Middle Ages made maintaining the equilibrium in a knight’s demeanor no easy task. Peace was even more sporadic during this period than in the time of Beowulf and the Germanic tribes. A knight’s was not an easy life. It was harsh and monotonous. Prowess was not easily achieved, *areté* not easily won.

“Knights who are at the wars...are forever swallowing their fears,” wrote the companion and biographer of Don Pero Niño, the “Unconquered Knight” of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. “They expose themselves to every peril; they give up their bodies to the adventure of life in death. Moldy bread or biscuit, meat cooked or uncooked; today enough to eat and tomorrow nothing, little or no wine, water from a pond or a butt, bad quarters, the shelter of a tent or branches, a bad bed, poor sleep with their armor still on their backs, burdened with iron, the enemy an arrow-shot off. ‘Ware! Who goes there? To arms! To arms!’ With the first drowsiness, an alarm; at dawn, the trumpet. ‘To horse! To horse! Muster! Muster!’ As lookouts, as sentinels, keeping watch by day and by night, fighting without cover, as

foragers, as scouts, guard after guard, duty after duty. 'Here they come! Here! They are so many—No, not so many as that—This way—that—Come this side—Press them there—News! News! They come back hurt, they have prisoners—no, they bring none back. Let us go! Give no ground! On!' Such is their calling."<sup>29</sup>

The intermittent hostilities of the time kept the kingdom in a constant state of flux. Knights would come and go from their assigned duties with little or no warning. Thus, while the Anglo-Saxons represented in *Beowulf* could afford the unofficial norms of martial grace—generosity of spirit and sympathy to others—the medieval knights required a more structured code of manners.

The expectation contained in the knight's Code of Chivalry was explicit: after participating in gruesome battles, the knight would return to his kingdom, and to his lady love, as a "gentled man." Therefore, the contribution of chivalry to the citizen-officer ideal is the formal acknowledgement of two modes of behavior for the warrior: brutal and unyielding while engaged in battle, gracious and generous and gentle *everywhere* else.

It is difficult to determine the impetus for the rise of chivalry, but whether it was initially a stuffy set of rules on good manners designed by arrogant aristocrats to set themselves apart from the commoners, or a practical necessity for sustaining a warrior class within a society dominated by persistent violence, matters little. For in the end, it became a moral code whose overarching principle was that courtesy is a major manifestation of virtue.

Additionally, as chivalry evolved from an aesthetic and pragmatic ideal to an ethical standard, it took on elements that marked it as universal. Foremost among these aspects was that the oath taken by a knight was a pledge of loyalty to a set of principles that transcended the narrow confines of the previous practice of giving sworn promises of service to an individual ruler or a single state. Kings and states rise and fall, but moral truths should remain constant. That chivalry was regarded as universal—an ideal shared by all Christian knights with the sworn obligation to shed blood for one's brethren—is an enormous contribution to the citizen-officer ideal. It endures today in the oath taken by all American officers, which is sworn not to the President or a particular political party, but rather to the support and defense of the *Constitution of the United States*. The

importance of a sworn oath within a society, which grew out of a feudal system in which the verbal agreement between lord and vassal often determined survival, must not be underestimated. The “pledged word, was chivalry’s fulcrum.... A knight who broke his oath was charged with ‘treason’ for betraying the order of knighthood.”<sup>30</sup>

### C. SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

The process of becoming a knight was similar to how a young Greek might be proffered up for service to the *polis*. When a boy had shown promise he was chosen by older knights to begin a curriculum, which included the rudiments of hunting and falconry. His academic instruction would consist of:

- Grammar – the foundation of Science
- Logic – differentiates True from False
- Rhetoric – the source of Law
- Arithmetic – the foundation of Order
- Geometry – the science of Measurement
- Astronomy – the most noble of sciences – connected with Divinity and Theology
- Music – analogous to Medicine (body harmony)<sup>31</sup>

A liberal—that is to say, a well-rounded—education was essential to an aspiring knight, for it formed the basis of his future moral development. Notice the manner in which each of the subjects above is described—“truth,” “order,” and “harmony”—all chivalrous precepts.<sup>32</sup> At age fourteen, the knight’s education turned from the study of “letters” towards the qualities of the “gentleman.” Courtesy and etiquette were emphasized, as were martial skills like horsemanship, jousting, and swordplay.<sup>33</sup>

This brings us to Sir Gawain. Gawain was one of four sons of Morgause, King Arthur’s sister. Yet Gawain and his brothers were afforded no special treatment because of their status as the king’s nephews. If he wished to be admitted to Arthur’s court, each was expected to complete his studies in letters and arms, and then prove his merit in his own right

The four of them did just that. In a battle against seven thousand of their uncle’s enemies, each exhibited considerable courage, but Gawain stood out from the others. “In this terrible contest, Gawain split the chief from ‘crown to breast’; winning him a place of

honor at the Round Table.”<sup>34</sup> He demonstrated himself worthy in one of the tests that underscore chivalry’s character: great deeds done in the face of great adversity. He was recognized with a place among the most heroic of Arthur’s knights, and he quickly became the most noble of the gentlemen present at the Round Table. Gawain resembles the Greek hero Odysseus: like the King of Ithaca, he enjoyed “high reverence and observance in speech and countenance.”<sup>35</sup> He was a man of great words as well as great deeds.

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a poem told in four parts. The story begins at Christmastide in Arthur’s fabled kingdom of Camelot. The king and his court have gathered on New Year’s Eve to celebrate. A lavish dinner is held in a grand hall and the poet describes a festive scene, full of gaiety and merrymaking. However, the hall is silenced by an interruption:

Another noise that was new drew near on a sudden...  
when there passed through the portals a perilous horsemen,  
the mightiest on middle-earth in measure of height,  
from his gorge to his girdle so great and so square,  
and his loins and his limbs so long and so huge...  
and green all over glowed.<sup>36</sup>

The stranger introduces himself simply as the Green Knight. With the entire court still stunned, the huge intruder—unarmored but holding a battleaxe in proportion to his size—offers a challenge while simultaneously questioning the honor of Arthur and his men:

...it is not combat I crave, for come to that,  
On this bench only beardless boys are sitting...  
If any in this household is so hardy in spirit,  
Of such mettlesome mind and so madly rash  
As to strike a strong blow in return for another  
I shall bide the first blow, as bare as I sit here.  
If some intrepid man is tempted to try what I suggest,  
Let him leap towards me and lay hold of this weapon,  
Acquiring clear possession of it, no claim from me ensuing.  
Then shall I stand up to his stroke, quite still on this floor—  
So long as I shall have leave to launch a return blow  
Unchecked.<sup>37</sup>

...Claim I!  
And yet a respite I'll allow,  
till a year and a day go by.  
Come quick, and let's see now  
if any here dare reply!

The Green Knight has come to challenge Arthur's esteemed court and the very principles of chivalry that Camelot rests on. His challenge is a Catch-22: "Chivalric principles insist that [the knights] fully respond to the very blatant accusations of 'beardless boys,' yet at the same time, forbids the slaying of an unarmed man, wearing no armor."<sup>38</sup>

The court remained in fearful silence as the members absorbed the stranger's words. The juxtaposition of the previous scene's celebration and this dreadful challenge by a veritable green giant was powerful. The Green Knight, sensing the lack of courage he had expected, continued to taunt the court incessantly:

What is this Arthur's house, the honor of which  
Is bruited abroad so abundantly?  
Has your pride disappeared? Your prowess gone?  
Your victories, your valour, your vaunts, where are they?  
The revel and renown of the Round Table  
Is now overwhelmed by a word from one man's voice,  
For all flinch for fear from a fight not begun!<sup>39</sup>

Finally, Arthur could tolerate it no longer. The king rose and grabbed the axe to accept the challenge, but Sir Gawain interceded, displaying both loyalty and humility as he comes to his king's aid. As he came forward, he earnestly requested that the king yield the challenge to him:

From beside the queen Gawain  
To the king did then incline:  
"I implore with prayer plain  
that this match should now be mine.  
...I am the weakest, I am aware, and in wit feeblest,  
and the least lost, if I live not, if none would learn the truth...  
and since this affair is so foolish that it nowise befits you,  
and I have requested it first, accord it then to me!"<sup>40</sup>

All evidence thus far in the story is to the contrary. The reader has been told that Gawain was among the most capable and revered of Arthur's knights. Gawain's humility is simply another sign of his virtue, and the king yields, "graciously enjoining him/that his

hand and his heart should be hardy alike.”<sup>41</sup> Gawain took the axe, swore an oath of honor to meet the Green Knight’s requirement to find the ghastly challenger a year from now in order to receive a blow in return, and then with one swift and bloody swing lops off the giant’s head. To the utter astonishment of the court, the Green Knight reaches down and picks his head up from the floor. Holding the bloody mass in his hand, he turns to Gawain and reminds the courageous knight of his promise, then mounts his horse and gallops away.

Meanwhile,  
the king and Gawain  
at the Green Man laugh and smile;  
yet to men had appeared, ‘twas plain,  
a marvel beyond denial.<sup>42</sup>

Here is seen one of chivalry’s major contributions to the ethos of the military officer. The terror of the scene was real and the members of the court discomfited. In battle, however, troops draw strength and comfort from the conduct of their commander. This does not mean that Arthur and Gawain were not afraid. They were, but while in their hearts “marveled,” they “let no sign of it be seen.”<sup>43</sup> Their training in the chivalrous ideal allowed them to control their fears and thereby bring order to disorder.

Chivalry’s aim to establish order from confusion is not limited to combat. Its application can be extended beyond the battlefield to life in general. As John Gardner explains in his analysis of *Sir Gawain*:

Given the fallen condition of man, the best defense one has to offer in the test which is life on earth, the time trial of Nature, is the careful ordering of one’s dimmed soul in order to direct one’s rational part, one’s irascible part, and one’s concupiscent part as nobly as possible.<sup>44</sup>

This is an important concept to the furthering of the citizen-officer ideal. The Romans, especially Cicero, believed that self-discipline is an essential trait for any public servant. Without it, one may become a “slave” to forces that distract him or her from acquiring the character and competence necessary to earn the requisite trust to serve in public positions. Yet while the Romans and Greeks asserted the importance of *sophrosyne*, they offered little guidance on how to achieve such moderation. Knightly chivalry offers

clear rules. It seeks to establish order to the three parts of the soul—rational, irascible, and concupiscent—through formalized manners. Other parts of the poem clarify this notion.

Therefore, returning to the story, one finds Gawain ten months later, preparing to set off on his journey to find the Green Knight and fulfill his pledge. In the interim, one learns that Gawain’s acceptance of the challenge is not understood by many of his peers. One of his fellow courtiers comments:

By Christ, it is evil  
That you lord should be lost  
Who lives so nobly.<sup>45</sup>

By “lost,” he meant imprudent. The courtier felt that Gawain has rashly undertaken an adventure and that the normally reasonable knight’s arrogance had “blinded him to the true peril of the situation.”<sup>46</sup> In doing so, Gawain experiences the isolation common to so many other leaders whose peers and subordinates do not understand the consequences of inaction. Aside from King Arthur himself, Gawain was perhaps the only knight who realized that the [Green Knight’s] challenge was “a test of Arthur’s court and its chivalric concept of order itself.”<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the second part of the poem, Gawain was forced to endure numerous trials and tribulations. The poet’s aim is identical to Homer’s efforts in *The Odyssey* to display the hero as more than a warrior. Such journeys are commonly referred to as “epicycles,” and in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell describes their purpose further:

A hero sets forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.<sup>48</sup>

Like Odysseus, Gawain prevailed in every test along the way. He encountered such “fabulous forces” as dragons, wolves, “warred and wild” men, bulls, bears, and boars. He weathered freezing sleet and bitterly cold nights. He endured “peril and pain, in parlous plight”<sup>49</sup> and emerged as courageous, but more so as humble and persistent, as he constantly prayed to God for strength and endurance.

Finally on Christmas Eve, Gawain arrived at a castle where a man and his beautiful wife offered him shelter. After hearing his story about the purpose of his journey, the man invited Gawain to stay with them until New Year's Eve. The Green Knight's chapel was not far away, and Gawain could rest and be entertained in the castle—presumably by the man's alluring wife—while the man himself hunted during the day. The host suggested that at the end of each day, he and Gawain will exchange whatever “winnings” each may have earned.

Recall the chivalrous ideal that a knight is a man of both physical and moral strength. Having survived a multitude of physical tests during his journey, Gawain now faced a single moral test. While his host was off enjoying the sport of hunting, Gawain “sported” with the castle's mistress. “Each morning, the host's wife entered Gawain's bedroom, sat beside him, and made some very concerted efforts to rob him of his chastity. The problem becomes: how does one maintain Christian and chivalric codes without insulting or failing service to a lady.”<sup>50</sup> Fortunately, Gawain was a man of words as well as action, and was able to successfully parry the wife's advances with aplomb and diplomacy. “No matter how pressing or perplexing the temptress' questions become, the knight always has an answer which does not insult her, but keeps her advances at bay.”<sup>51</sup> During the first two days in the castle, Gawain was so gracious in his defense that he was able to escape the wife's advances with only a few innocent kisses as his “winnings”—a reward that he duly exchanged for his host's hunting trophies on both days.

The poet presents the intricate idea of courtesy throughout the story. There is clear correlation between outward actions and inner substance.

The courteous man is noble, religious, decent, graceful, eloquent, compassionate, humble, grave; he is capable of both love and chastity, frank in attitude but reserved in behavior, and aware of all the delicacies of personal relationship and public demeanor which go to make up civilized life... it is “courteous” for inner values to correspond to outer. In courtesy external cleanliness signifies inner purity, good manners are a sign of moral goodness, appearance is reality.<sup>52</sup>

This is an apt notion. Courtesy is more than simply fashion; it is more than sophistication in appearance. In its idealized form, it manifests itself as a “sensitivity of spirit that pervades personal relationships.”<sup>53</sup> It was not enough for a knight to just be

polite. There was an element of intellectual rigor in the decision to be courteous that is not readily apparent to modern observers. In medieval society, laws were *proscriptive*, that is to say they were prohibitory in nature (e.g. “Thou shalt not...”). Chivalry, on the other hand, was *prescriptive* in nature; it sought to establish norms of behavior through the establishment of long-standing traditions (Its tone would have been “Thou shalt...”).<sup>54</sup> Simply put, a knight was to treat everyone with dignity. The infusion of this sense of altruism into the warrior class has produced a unique attitude within the citizen-officer ideal. Chivalry insisted upon distinction of rank, yet simultaneously respected the value of all stations within the knighthood. This is the historical foundation for “good order and discipline” within the modern military scheme—and it is a precept that will later prove essential in a republican society espousing egalitarian values.

On his third day at the castle, the mistress made a third attempt to seduce the poor knight, but Gawain was again able to put her off with just a few polite kisses; however, she prevailed upon him to accept her girdle as a token of her affection, professing that it will protect his life. Gawain accepted the gift, but when his host returned that day, Gawain was unable to exchange it for the spoils of the hunt. Whether he was unable to give up the girdle because he valued it too much, or because doing so would have highlighted his failure, is uncertain. Nevertheless, the garment comes to represent Gawain’s human flaw.

Finally New Year’s Eve arrived, and Gawain bid farewell to the mistress. As his host escorted Gawain to the Green Knight’s chapel, he told Gawain that the Green Knight is wholly unmannered, and suggests that Gawain, being so virtuous, may find it difficult to deal sensibly with the giant:

For he is an immoderate man, to mercy a stranger  
For which churl or chaplain by the chapel rides  
Monk or mass-priest of man of other king,  
He thinks it as convenient to kill him as keep alive  
himself.<sup>55</sup>

Needless to say, this description is the antithesis of chivalry. Furthermore, one can only imagine what might be running through Gawain’s head as he approaches the chapel. In the past year, he had confronted head-on the difficulties inherent in living according to the

chivalric code. His closest friends and family doubted his judgment. He had to endure two grueling months of physical and mental challenges while searching out the Green Knight. Then, there was his failing—however minor—to completely resist the attractive mistress in the castle. Now, his generous host has just confirmed what he has suspected for a year—he is going to have his head sliced off by a remorseless green giant. “One would only concede that just about any behavior on Gawain’s part after all of that would be understandable.”<sup>56</sup> Yet, remembering Arthur’s example, he arrived at the chapel and met the Green Knight with perfect composure.

Head bent, Sir Gawain bowed,  
And showed the knight flesh bare.  
He behaved as if uncowed,  
Being loath to display his care.<sup>57</sup>

Through adherence to the chivalry’s precepts, Gawain has conditioned his moral willpower. His calmness, as the Green Knight prepared to strike his “unchecked” blow, was evidence not only of remarkable self-control, but also of his keen awareness of human nature—an understanding that his fulfillment of his promise effectively rebuts the very purpose of the Green Knight’s terror tactics, because it affirmed chivalry’s virtue at the same time.<sup>58</sup>

The Green Knight raised the battleaxe, and twice he feigned terrible blows. With his third, he gently nicked Sir Gawain’s neck. Gawain had been prepared for the worst. Stunned, he questioned the Green Knight. At this point it is revealed that the Green Knight is actually his host from the castle, and the two feigned blows were for the times Gawain exchanged his winnings with the hunter as he had sworn, and the third was for his concealment of the mistress’ girdle. The full meaning of the allegorical girdle is revealed; it represents Gawain’s flaws. Gawain was not perfect, but no man is. Everyone has his or her minor faults. At its best, chivalry guards against the major pitfalls in life while accommodating minor failings, as long as the perpetrator acts with humility and benevolence. The audience, which at the time consisted of knights-errant themselves, can “sympathize with the hero, ‘because he is human, because he is the hero, and because by entering his predicaments we can realize our own.’”<sup>59</sup>

Gawain's journey was not over. The hero must return to his home and share the boons of his adventure. Having endured a year of demanding physical and moral challenges and ultimately a symbolic death and rebirth, Gawain, because of chivalry's influence, was able to recognize that even the most ardent of idealists makes mistakes. Those "mistakes do not make the ideal any less important, and the fact that Gawain errs, makes him a better than the ordinary man, who would not err, because he has not the courage to risk failure or setback."<sup>60</sup> Gawain's example is able to be understood by the common man, yet is sufficiently out of his easy and immediate reach that it spurs him onto greater things.

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<sup>1</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Sir Orfeo, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975.), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), xiii.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey E. McFadden. "Chivalry and the Military Officer: An Historical and Literary Inquiry", Trident Scholar Report No. 98, (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Academy, 1979), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 9

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Tuchman, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> McFadden, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Tuchman, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>31</sup> McFadden, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 33.

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- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Tolkien, 28.
- <sup>37</sup> McFadden, 37.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid. 38.
- <sup>40</sup> Tolkien, 36.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid. 37.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid. 41.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> McFadden, 39.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid. 40.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> McFadden, 43.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid. 46.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid. 47.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid. 48.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid. 49.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid. 50.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid. 51.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.

## V. AMERICA AND GEORGE WASHINGTON

Any examination of the role of the military officer in a republic should include George Washington. For the purpose of this thesis, Washington is essential not merely because he is both America's first military officer and her first President, but because he stands as the historical figure who so ably combined the ideals of selfless service and personal courtesy. These two characteristics—patriotism and civility—make Washington the quintessential “officer and gentleman,” that is, he is the very embodiment of the two major themes traced in this thesis: good citizenship and knightly chivalry.

In this chapter, Washington's emergence as the archetype of the American military officer will be demonstrated. That discussion will include a study of his dedicated patriotism, which often results in comparisons to the Roman Cincinnatus, as well as an examination of his persistent adherence to a set of 110 rules for civil behavior. In order to accomplish this analysis, Washington will also be examined through a focused inspection of some of the historic depictions of him made by artists of his era. But first, it is necessary to discuss the culture of colonial America in order to understand the social forces which helped mold the nation's leading forefather.

### A. COLONIAL AMERICA: THE BIRTH OF A UNIQUE NATION

The cover of the June 28, 2004, issue of *U.S. News and World Report* touts it as a “Special Issue,” aimed at defining why the United States of America is unique among nations. However, one need only scan the first paragraph of the first article—aptly entitled “A Place like No Other”—to determine that the magazine's endeavor itself is not unique. People have been trying to explain America's distinctive character for “almost as long as there has been an America,”<sup>1</sup> and no one accomplished it earlier or more capably than Alexis de Tocqueville in his classic book *Democracy in America*. Since its first publication in 1835, political scientists and pundits from every perspective have used de Tocqueville's insights to draw conclusions about American society. *Democracy in America* has endured because as one reads it, it often seems that the young French

aristocrat's insight is so uncanny and his predictions so accurate that the author was not merely explaining the American identity, but rather also helping to create it.<sup>2</sup>

There are many elements that contribute to America's unique character, but none is more evident than the abundant opportunity and natural resources that the New World provided early European settlers. So spectacular was the virgin continent to the arriving colonists—most of whom were political or religious refugees—that it swelled the already intense optimism that had enabled them to endure a grueling transatlantic journey for the simple chance at a new beginning. This apparent gift of Providence was the first observation de Tocqueville made in his book:

Those coasts, so admirably adapted for commerce and industry; those wide and deep rivers; that inexhaustible valley of the Mississippi; the whole continent, in short, seemed prepared to be the abode of a great nation yet unborn.

In that land the great experiment of the attempt to construct society upon a new basis was to be made by civilized man; and it was there for the first time, that theories hitherto unknown, or deemed impracticable, were to exhibit a spectacle for which the world had not been prepared by the history of the past.<sup>3</sup>

Timing was everything. What better place than America, with its untapped resources and distance from established civilizations, to initiate new political, social, and economic systems?

America, de Tocqueville argued, is the only country—at least at the time of his writing—in which it had been possible to clearly identify the starting-point of a great people. Before America, “the spirit of analysis has come upon nations only as they matured; and when they at last conceived of contemplating their origin, time had already obscured it, or ignorance and pride had surrounded it with fables behind which the truth was hidden.”<sup>4</sup> The colonists of the sixteenth century are almost as well known to us as our contemporaries. For at the period when the first Europeans landed on the shores of North America, they were already fully formed in their national characteristics. But more importantly, “as they had already attained that stage of civilization at which men are led to study themselves, they have transmitted to us a faithful picture of their opinions, their manners, and their laws.”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, America is unique in more respects than its

timely founding by optimistic colonists on an untouched continent—its history is better known to us than other countries’; therefore, it follows that our inferences should be more valid.

The immigrants who arrived in America over the course of several decades differed in many ways. They came for different reasons and established different means of governing themselves. Yet they were also similar in many respects. Most of them, were British, and had been raised in a country that “had been agitated for centuries by the struggles of faction, and... their political education had been perfected in this rude school; and [thus] they were more conversant with the notions of right and the principles of true freedom than the greater part of their European contemporaries.”<sup>6</sup>

These egalitarian notions were only strengthened by the harsh reality of life in the colonies. “There are no surer guarantees of equality among men than poverty and misfortune”<sup>7</sup>—both of which were common in the wild New World. Of course, there were occasions when persons of high social rank were forced to America because of some quarrel or scandal in Europe, and laws were made to accommodate their higher status. However, the difficulty in farming most of Britain’s territorial possessions along North America’s eastern coastline made colonial America ill-suited for a landed aristocracy like that seen in England at the time. “It was realized,” de Tocqueville explains, “that in order to clear this land, nothing less than the constant and self-interested efforts of the owner himself was essential; the ground prepared, it became evident that its produce was not sufficient to enrich at the same time both an owner and a farmer.”<sup>8</sup>

Aristocracy finds its basis in land. It is not by birth or privilege alone that an aristocracy is constituted and maintained, but rather through the passing of property to successive generations. In the colonies, land was sectioned off into small pieces and cultivated by the owner himself, thereby gradually siphoning off the lifeblood of a true aristocracy, leaving a relatively uniform population that was dominated by middle-class Anglo-Americans.<sup>9</sup> However, Britain’s influence on her colonies, while lessened significantly by distance and the realities of a new continent’s geography, was still strong; as de Tocqueville pointed out, “no man can entirely shake off the influence of the past; and the settlers, intentionally or not, mingled habits and notions derived from their

education and the traditions of their country with those habits and notions that were exclusively their own.”<sup>10</sup> For example, despite the colonies’ initial social uniformity, the English law of primogeniture eventually created some social barriers in the New World, too. The law made the eldest son the heir to his father’s estate, thus temporarily perpetuating the landed aristocracy.<sup>11</sup> This was especially evident in the South.

The northern colonies, like their aristocratic southern neighbors, often restricted voting rights to property owners as well. However, land-ownership was less of a factor because a merchant class made up of “ardent sectarians and daring innovators”<sup>12</sup> dominated the New England communities, and were able to achieve remarkable successes through hard work and collaboration, enabling them to purchase the land required to secure a voice in public matters. According to de Tocqueville, the immigrants who founded the New England states were distinct from other settlers both in America and in other parts of the world.

Nearly all colonies have been first inhabited by men without education and without resources, driven by their poverty and misconduct from the land which gave them birth, or by speculators and adventurers greedy for gain. Some settlements cannot even boast so honorable an origin; Santo Domingo was founded by buccaneers; and... the criminal courts of England suppl[ied] the population of Australia.<sup>13</sup>

Even in Virginia, the immigrants who founded Jamestown in 1607 were initially speculators searching for gold and silver; their restless spirit endangered that historic settlement.<sup>14</sup>

The colonists who landed on the shores of New England, however, were starkly different. Whereas most initial settlements are made by rough adventurers and explorers without families, these men arrived accompanied by their wives and children, and thus brought with them better elements of order and morality than most prospectors did. Additionally, these “Pilgrims,” as they came to be known, were neither nobles nor commoners, “and we may almost say neither rich nor poor. These men possessed, in proportion to their number, a greater mass of intelligence than is to be found in any European nation of our time. All, perhaps without a single exception, had received a good education, and many of them were known in Europe for their talents and their acquirements.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet what distinguishes the first New Englanders most was the objective of their undertaking. Their migration to America was not born of necessity. In fact, they gave up enviable stations in Europe; many abandoned considerable commercial holdings and social positions. It “was a purely intellectual craving that called them from the comfort of their former homes; and in facing the inevitable sufferings of exile their object was the triumph of an idea.”<sup>16</sup> The Pilgrims were but the first members of a broader group known as Puritans to arrive in New England. The Puritans have come to be regarded as an austere religious sect, but there was much more to Puritanism than religious dogma. Many of its main principles

corresponded in many points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories. It was this tendency that had aroused its most dangerous adversaries. Persecuted by the government of the mother country, and disgusted by the habits of a society which the rigor of their own principles condemned, the Puritans went forth to seek some rude and unfrequented part of the world where they could live according to their own opinions and worship God in freedom.<sup>17</sup>

The tremendous influx of Puritans and other religious refugees to America’s northeastern coast, where countless natural harbors made urbanization and commerce easy, swelled the population of New England well above that of the southern colonies. Consequently, the mood of the American colonials as a whole gradually shifted away from English aristocracy towards a more democratic system of government. “Like a beacon on a hill, which, after it has diffused its warmth immediately around it, also tinges the distant horizon with its glow,”<sup>18</sup> the principles and values of the New England states—notably self-reliance, industriousness, tolerance, and community—gradually spread to the other colonies.

The distinctive American character was shaped by several unique historical forces. The great leveling tendencies of a crude frontier life, coupled with the abundant opportunity of a virgin continent and freedom from obligations to a feudal lord meant that a hard-working, industrious immigrant could find considerable prosperity in colonial America. England’s American colonists could be generally characterized as an energetic,

ambitious, resourceful, and independent-minded people. With every passing year they became less willing to heed what they viewed as the arbitrary authority of an overseas monarch.<sup>19</sup>

## B. APPRENTICESHIP OF AN AMERICAN KNIGHT

It was the winter of 1777, and George Washington was extremely disheartened. He had just forfeited Philadelphia to the red-coated British regulars; a group of conniving generals was scheming to take his command; and criticism from the new Congress over his ragtag army's recent defeats had been sharp and unrelenting. This last difficulty was the hardest to stomach since his constant pleas for better supplies and more funds had been unanswered by the civil leaders, and he was now forced to watch his soldiers endure a long, harsh Pennsylvania winter on the wind-swept hills of Valley Forge. Despite the freezing temperatures, the men were forced to work all day. They lived in flimsy tents, half-frozen and half-starved, constantly fatigued because of sleepless nights caused by their incessant shivering—funds were not available even for blankets. Most had inadequate boots or no boots at all, and as they had taken to wrapping their frozen, cracked feet in old rags in order to build cabins in which to weather the bitter winter, their comings and goings could be easily traced by following the crimson red footprints they had trudged throughout the snowy camp. Though offered more comfortable quarters in a nearby home of a colonial sympathizer, Washington remained with his men. He refused to leave, preferring instead to live in a tent as they did and eat what they ate.

No monumental battle was won at Valley Forge, but every American child learns about that grueling winter in elementary school. It was the lowest part of the Revolution for Washington. Never had the war for independence seemed so helpless. He was frustrated by matters off the battlefield, and the morale of his men was as low as it could be. Yet he was there, leading his men and administering to their needs. He kept his calm, dignified manner, and in doing so, kept their spirits up. He kept them busy working to improve their living arrangements and military training, thereby simultaneously improving their physical and mental well-being. Even though no battles were won, no positions gained or lost, or any important decisions made at Valley Forge, it is one of the

most well-known moments in Washington's storied life. This is because the events of that difficult winter symbolize all that embodies America's first President: his astonishing physical endurance; his tremendous patience and calmness under any circumstance; and most importantly his ability to hold together a group of people—at the time, the Continental Army, and later, America herself—during the most trying of times.

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Where did America find such a man? It is difficult to capture the complete image of George Washington in the limited space of one chapter in a master's thesis. Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Thomas Flexnor expressed his reservations about condensing his four-volume biography of Washington into a single book:

Compare, for instance, the magnitude of tasks faced by biographers of Washington and Lincoln. Washington lived eleven years longer than Lincoln. While Lincoln was a major national figure for only some seven years (from Douglas debates to his assassination), Washington was for twenty-four years (from his election as commander in chief to his death) the most conspicuous and influential man in the United States. For seventeen of those years, comprising the war, the Constitutional Conventions, and the Presidency, he was from day to day actively engaged in great events. Before all of that, his role in the French and Indian War made him internationally known when he was hardly twenty, an age at which Lincoln was still an obscure frontiersman.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the thousands of pages that have been written about him, the real George Washington continues to elude us today. Consider noted historian Gary Wills' description of the monument in the capitol city that honors his name:

Other leaders are accessible there—Lincoln brooding in square-toed rectitude at his Monument, a Brady image frozen in white, throned yet approachable; Jefferson democratically exposed in John Pope's aristocratic birdcage. Majestic, each, but graspable.

Washington's faceless Monument tapers off from us however we come at it—visible everywhere, and perfect; but impersonal, un compelling. Yet we should remember that this monument, unlike the other two, was launched by public funds. When government energies were stalled, in the 1830s, subscriptions kept the project alive. Even when Congress took over the project, stones were added by the citizenry, those memorial blocks one can study while descending the long inner stairway. The classical control of the exterior hides a varied and spontaneous

interior—an image of the puzzle that faces us, the early popularity of someone lifted so high above the populace. The man we can hardly find was the icon our ancestors turned to the most easily and often. We are distanced from him by their generosity; their willingness to see in him something almost more than human.<sup>21</sup>

Yet if the *translatio imperii*—the transfer of culture (in this case, the notions of classical citizenship and medieval chivalry) from one society to another, which led to this great American—is to be accomplished, his human side must be discovered. Both Flexnor and Wills have stripped away Washington’s iconic layers and revealed the man’s more human characteristics in their respective works *Washington: The Indispensable Man*. and *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment*. These two books provide the foundations for the discussion of Washington that follows.

No “American is more completely misunderstood than George Washington. He is generally believed to have been, by birth and training, a rich, conservative British-Oriented Virginia aristocrat. As a matter of fact, he was, for the environment in which he moved, poor during his young manhood.”<sup>22</sup> He had never, nor would he ever, set foot in England. He had less formal education than the famously self-educated Lincoln, who, like so many other future Presidents, had diligently studied law and other politically useful subjects. Washington’s cumulative schooling barely exceeded what one would consider elementary grades.<sup>23</sup> George’s father, Augustine Washington, was a descendent of a family of British settlers that had prospered modestly in rapidly advancing colonial America. Yet no Washington had ever pierced the social or political circle known to Cincinnatus’ ancestors, and it was assumed that had “George’s childhood proceeded smoothly, he would have been raised in the conventional manner of the minor Virginia gentry”<sup>24</sup>—the upper middle class of the King’s colony.

But Washington’s childhood did not proceed smoothly. At age eleven, his father died, and George’s hopes for more advanced studies in England, as his father and older brothers had done, died too. Following the British law of primogeniture adopted by Virginia, the bulk of Augustine Washington’s estate fell to his eldest two sons, and young George found a surrogate father in his half-brother Lawrence. It is Lawrence Washington who sparked George’s interest in a military career. Lawrence had become an officer in an American Regiment of the British regular army, and his adventures on an expedition to

the Spanish West Indies would inspire George to seek a career for himself in the army.<sup>25</sup> In addition to martial ardor, Lawrence Washington's influence on his younger brother extended to social ambition as well. Lawrence married a daughter of William Fairfax, a minor British noble, yet probably Virginia's most powerful man. It was through Lawrence's association with the first family of Virginia that George got his initial glimpse of life among society's upper caste. "Perhaps the first indication of George's unusual qualities was the way in which the young boy was taken into the bosom of the Fairfax clan."<sup>26</sup> More important than any education George would receive in school were his experiences at Belvoir—the Fairfax mansion—and the practical lessons gained while accompanying a surveying party over the Blue Ridge Mountains at age sixteen in order to plot out Fairfax lands along the frontier of the Shenandoah Valley.<sup>27</sup>

The surveying trip marked the beginning of Washington's apprenticeship. Recall that in the fourteenth century, "the process of becoming a knight began at age seven, where a young boy chosen by older knights, began his education."<sup>28</sup> Washington's curriculum was not much different from that of a young aspirant to knighthood; it was simply adapted to meet the requirements of life in the New World:

Washington studied practical surveying; swam across a river swollen by snow melting in the mountains; met a party of Indians carrying one scalp who, when inspired by a gift of rum, performed a war dance; got lost in the Blue Ridge Mountains, where he encountered a rattlesnake. He found it all exhilarating. During thirty-one days of blustery March and April weather, he gave the American West a part of his heart he was never to regain.<sup>29</sup>

For the most part, Washington had gone on the surveying trip for the fun of it, and while he did not make the customary vows of a new knight, the young man returned to Virginia dedicated to the chivalrous ideal of seeking out adventure—of pursuing a life less ordinary.

Washington was ambitious. His interactions with the Fairfax family had opened his eyes to a world of affluence. He knew he had to make a name for himself if he was to be successful in raising himself from his place as the third son of a minor Virginia planter to the top of the colony's social pyramid. "Although he never lacked for food or warm clothes, he would have been ashamed to take the friends he was making to his mother's

run-down farm. On one recorded occasion, he could not get away to some dances because he could not buy feed for his horse.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, while Washington was ambitious—a trait that often has a pejorative slant—he was also grounded by a healthy dose of humility that accompanied his modest beginnings. In future events, his ambition would be manifested as a stubborn will to improve himself and to win, rather than as self-serving haughtiness.

So, at age seventeen, Washington established himself as a surveyor. His early reconnaissance of the lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains provided him with enough money to make his first land purchase at age eighteen. (His chosen profession also helped hone the eye needed by a future general fighting an insurgency war against a vastly superior enemy.) Thus, Washington, despite being initially faced with social restrictions based on the old British system, had managed, through hard work and discipline, to acquire the professional skills to be a competent surveyor and the resultant means to become a landowner. Having pulled himself up by the bootstraps and acquired a vote in Virginia’s public matters, he was now well on his way to fulfilling the quintessential “American Dream.”

As Washington was gaining his first foothold in upper-class Virginia, tragedy struck. His revered brother Lawrence died of virulent tuberculosis.<sup>31</sup> The loss of his older brother and mentor saddened Washington, but it also opened a door that would change the direction of his life. At the time, every colony supported a volunteer militia. Lawrence Washington had held the office of Adjutant General of Virginia. As such, he was charged with ensuring that the militia possessed basic martial skills, such as being able to march in formation. When Lawrence died, George sought and obtained the office. Therefore, Washington found himself “at the age of twenty, [with] the title of major and the responsibility of training militia in skills he did not himself possess.”<sup>32</sup> He was undaunted, and with what would become characteristic determination, he set about developing the qualities necessary for an officer with his newly awarded responsibility. Like Cincinnatus, he understood that his public duties would require the self-discipline to increase his level of competence if he were to maintain the necessary trust to keep his new office—and demonstrated ability would, he hoped, earn even greater responsibilities.

### C. WASHINGTON: RULES OF CIVILITY & DECENT BEHAVIOR

Even as a very young man, Washington was said to have possessed the physical attributes of a great warrior. Tall and broad-shouldered, his appearance alone commanded respect. “Reports of Washington’s strength—his quick reflexes, his horsemanship, his grace as a dancer—were true, and had a great deal to do with the magnifying of his feats,” explains Wills, “He *looked* the victor even in defeat.”<sup>33</sup> However, when he was still a teenager, Washington made a conscious decision to temper his imposing image by meticulously copying down 110 rules of behavior in a notebook. “The Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation” was first compiled by French Jesuits in 1559. It was a set of maxims called *Bienséance de la Conversation entre les Hommes* (Decency of Conversation among Men). “The Jesuits, besides being missionaries, scholars, and all-purpose shock troops of the Pope, specialized in educating the children of the powerful. A guide to gentlemanly behavior would provide a popular service, and the Jesuits’ rules were translated into Latin and several modern European languages.”<sup>34</sup> Most of the rules deal with nuances of etiquette, rather than moral imperatives. However, they are not simply outdated, stuffy etiquette precepts. The rules address moral issues, albeit in a roundabout manner.

They seek to form the inner man (or boy) by shaping the outer. They start with hats and posture and table manners and work inward. The key is set in rule #1: “Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present.” The effect of all the rules taken together is to remind you that you should not just do whatever you feels [sic] right, or the first thing that comes into your head; rather, you should always be mindful of other people, and remember that they have sensibilities, and feelings of self-respect, that deserve your respect.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, these 110 rules are similar in precept to the code of chivalry, in teaching that politeness “is virtue gone to seed.”<sup>36</sup> Certainly life in the rugged New World was coarse, and in that regard, as in medieval times, etiquette and good manners made daily life more bearable. Yet Washington’s rules of behavior and chivalry differed considerably in the context of their times. Unlike the knights of just a few centuries earlier, and unlike even Beowulf, colonists in the New World were relatively free of hostilities. Armed men were not constantly flowing in and out of the communities on

their way to and from battle, and thus there was no great requirement for the warrior to soften his martial spirit in order to be accepted back into the general society. Nor was there the pressing need to attract aspiring warriors to their cause.

Life in the New World was coarse, and manners certainly served to alleviate the harshness of frontier life. More importantly, however, politeness facilitated the development of America's democratic society. Good behavior eased the few cultural differences that existed between the different sects of immigrants by advocating that everyone should be treated with respect, regardless of cultural or religious background. More than a generation after Washington's death, American poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson articulated this point well:

Manners aim to facilitate life, to get rid of impediments, and bring the man pure to energize. They aid our dealing and conversation, as a railway aids travelling, [sic] by getting rid of all avoidable obstructions of the road, and leaving nothing to be conquered but pure space.<sup>37</sup>

And so, at age fourteen—several years before he began the public life of an officer—Washington not only set about developing the virtues that would define his character—especially near-perfect self-control—but he also began to hone his “awareness of the human environment—the sense that we navigate life through crowds of people who are, for all their differences of class and character, like ourselves”<sup>38</sup> and therefore deserve to be treated appropriately. It is this last element that, in the context of American egalitarian principles, gives Washington's rules their moral dimension.

Washington's efforts as a teenager would pay off in his public life as an officer and a statesman. The trajectory of his career brought him in contact with the entire spectrum of personalities. In dealing with diverse groups, from the aristocratic elite of British society like the Fairfax family to the Indian scouts he encountered during his surveying of the Shenandoah Valley, proper decorum and humility were essential to his success. As Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, President of the Constitutional Convention, and ultimately the first President of the United States, he interacted daily with generals (British, French, and American) as both allies and enemies; with fiery Scotch-Irish militiamen and pacifist Quakers; with blacks, both slaves and freemen; with Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews; with Southern plantation owners

and Northern merchants. Emerson asserts that “the rulers of society must be up to the work of the world, and equal to their versatile office: men of the right Caesarian pattern, who have great range of affinity.”<sup>39</sup> Washington enjoyed this same affinity because the rules for gentlemen-like behavior he had learned as a young man enabled him to treat people with equal respect.

Gentlemanly behavior should not be confused with fashion. The true gentleman is not superficial, not subject to change based on the company he is in. Rather, he is always genuine and treats all with equal respect. Emerson again helps explain:

There is something equivocal in all the words in use to express the excellence of manners and social cultivation, because the quantities are fluctuating, and the last effect is assumed by the senses as the cause. The word *gentleman* has not any correlative abstract to express the quality. *Gentility* is mean, and *gentillesse* is obsolete. But we must keep alive in the vernacular, the distinction between *fashion*, a word of narrow and often sinister meaning, and the heroic character which the gentleman imports... although our words intimate well enough the popular feeling, that the appearance supposes a substance. The gentleman is a man of truth, lord of his own actions, and expressing that lordship in his behavior, not in any manner dependent and servile either on persons, or opinions, or possessions. Beyond this fact of truth and real force, the word denotes good-nature or benevolence; manhood first, and then gentleness.<sup>40</sup>

#### D. DIDACTIC IMAGES FOR AMERICAN CITIZEN-OFFICERS

The French and Indian War was George Washington’s crucible. His time as the principal commander of the Virginia militia was plagued with mistakes and full of hard-learned lessons. He was almost killed by an Indian scout hired to guide him through an area of the Ohio River valley claimed by both Britain and France. Later, he was persuaded by Indian allies of the British to use the native’s tactic of ambush to attack a French contingent. The party turned out to be on a diplomatic mission, and thus Washington had almost ignited hostilities on American soil between the two European superpowers of the time. To add insult to injury, when the French counterattacked and he sustained considerable losses, Washington was forced to surrender. On the advice of an

ill-speaking translator, he signed a treaty accepting all blame for attacking and “murdering” the French envoy. Officials in England were furious, and their disdain for their colonial cousins increased.

Yet time and again, the tall Virginian proved indispensable to British commanders. He was the one British subject who knew every inch of the frontier and who also had knowledge of the Indians’ hit-and-run tactics. Serving as a volunteer aide to General Braddock, the British officer commanding the regular army in western Virginia and Maryland, Washington proved his mettle by saving the British troops from annihilation after Braddock was mortally wounded. When a second British general appointed him the commander of the lead element attacking Fort Duquesne, Washington again saved the day. When two columns of British regulars stumbled upon each other in the dense forest and clouds of smoke, Washington rode between the two lines, knocking up firing musket barrels with his sword.

Washington’s good fortune in battle is more fitting to mythology than factual history. Nevertheless, it fueled his popularity and won him the early and total confidence of his fellow colonials. This faith, too early won, might have been a liability to his continued success, for he lacked the experience that normally accompanies such great responsibility. Like many young officers, he at times completely bungled the execution of his duties because he lacked the depth of knowledge about the matters in which he was engaged. And while he was constantly self-deprecating, and therefore, seemingly aware of his inadequacies, “in action he could be rash, brash, impolitic, over-self-confident. He made dreadful mistakes.”<sup>41</sup> But he always learned from them, and these miscues serve to make the historic Washington more human and thus more appealing to the common man—to the common soldier he commanded, and to the fledgling nation of provincials he would ultimately lead to independence.

The image of George Washington that emerges from his first war is a far cry from the grave and gloomy old man immortalized on the dollar bill. Instead it is one of a young, vibrant leader tempered by humility and dedicated to service. He stands closer to the attitudes of his contemporary Virginia planters than to the pretentious European generals he had closely observed over a period of five years. He increasingly valued

demonstrated ability in his own men, believing, like the Greeks, that promotion and selection for higher responsibility should be based solely on merit. Perhaps this part of his philosophy has its roots in the fact that he was repeatedly denied a commission in the regular British army simply because of his status as a colonial—and it was fueled by the seemingly endless string of inept aristocratic British officers with whom he came in contact.



Figure 1. *George Washington by Charles Willson Peale, 1772*<sup>42</sup>

One of the first portraits of Washington captures the essence of his service during the French and Indian War and foreshadows his later years of service to America. In his *George Washington* (Figure 1), artist Charles Willson Peale depicts Washington wearing the British militia uniform of the 22nd Regiment of Virginia (blue coat with scarlet facing) and a Wolfe's hat. The uniform is less important than Peale's presentation of Washington's posture. "For Aristotle, all motion originated from the right, in the heavens as well as in man's body. It was a maxim of Greek medical literature—passed down from Parmenides to Aristotle to Galen—that the right side of the human body was more male than the left side: 'Right, male; left, female.' In terms of vitality and power, Aristotle claimed, 'the right has the Right.'"<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, it became common practice in art to refer to the right side of the body (viewer's left) as the powerful side, while the left side (viewer's right) became associated with the gentler side of the subject's disposition. Moreover, the left side represented compassion since that was the anatomical location of the heart. In fact, "Aristotle thought the heart's presence there was compensatory, to help the 'weak' side of the body."<sup>44</sup>

Early paintings of Washington emphasize his ordinary aspects, portraying him as just another citizen. According to historian Wills, American artists took great care to show Washington, even in his military days, as the model of a peaceful citizen. “There was less emphasis on the glory of battle than on dutiful service.”<sup>45</sup> Consequently, in this early portrait of Washington, Charles Willson Peale has hidden the right hand, inside the left breast—the side of compassion—of Washington’s uniform blouse, so that while the hand of strength and dominance is hidden, Washington’s orders protrude conspicuously from his left pocket.

Thus was born the convention of representing Washington as the citizen-officer just ordered to report. There are numerous renderings of Washington as the humble, self-sacrificing citizen-officer, including John Trumbull’s famous *General Washington at Verplanck’s Point* (Figure 2). Trumbull’s painting is one of several that help to humanize the historic image of George Washington. Washington was renowned for his equestrian skills—“Thomas Jefferson had described his fellow Virginian as the best horseman he had ever seen.”<sup>46</sup> Yet, Washington is rarely depicted on horseback as the gallant combat commander. If mounted, he is typically yielding to another, as in Trumbull’s later painting *Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown* (Figure 3). More frequently, however, Washington is shown dismounted as in the painting of Verplanck’s Point.

In Trumbull’s *General Washington at Verplanck’s Point*...the horse nibbles at his own joint...the [artistic] device was famous...it lowered the horse’s head below the human figure’s... The pose is that of a man responding to his country’s call. Washington’s step-grandson said of the work: “The figure of Washington as delineated by Colonel Trumbull is the most perfect extant.” He especially praised the stance, the large hands, the florid complexion. But what is more interesting is the conception. We are given no ruler, no capering emperor, or domineering conqueror, like Napoleon in the Alps. This is a citizen officer under orders. Cincinnatus.<sup>47</sup>

This comparison is apt. Twice during his five years of service in the Ohio and Shenandoah valleys, Washington resigned his commission—and he would later make history with two other memorable resignations. Like Cincinnatus, he returned to his farm, his duty seemingly complete and his interests inclined to simpler, more peaceful matters. Yet his thoughts remained close to those years of war with the French and Indians, constantly mulling over his experiences. “As his character and his world view expanded,

more meanings became clear to him. He accurately defined his failures and worked out the reasons he had failed. The results of this practiced self-education were to prove of the greatest importance to the creation of the United States.”<sup>48</sup>

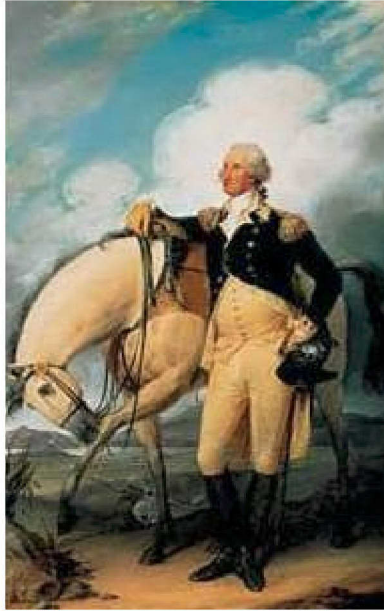


Figure 2. *General Washington at Verplanck's Point* by John Trumbull, 1790<sup>49</sup>

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During the Revolution, America suffered one of its worst defeats at Charleston in the spring of 1780. The American commander at Charleston, General Benjamin Lincoln, had been personally cautioned by Washington not to end up trapped in the city, but Lincoln failed to heed Washington's warning and the British ended up capturing both the city and the entire American force—"twenty-five hundred Continentals and two thousand militia."<sup>50</sup> Almost worse than the capture of the whole garrison was the humiliation that the British commander General Henry Clinton wrought on the American force. "Clinton expressed his disdain for the rebels by refusing to grant 'the honors of war' traditionally accorded a defeated army which had fought well."<sup>51</sup> His actions were in effect a refusal to recognize the American force as an army at all.

Years later, when he received a letter from Lord Cornwallis, the British commander at Yorktown, requesting "a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours... to settle terms for the surrender of the [British] posts,"<sup>52</sup> Washington—in addition to his

surprise at the earlier-than-expected good fortune—was skeptical of Cornwallis' intentions, especially the length of the truce, and responded with a demand for ““your Lordship’s proposals”” during a two-hour cease-fire.”<sup>53</sup> As Cornwallis read through a series of proposed surrender terms, one stipulation left him in a state of utter dismay. Washington had demanded, “The same honors...be granted to the surrendering army as were granted to the garrison of Charleston.”<sup>54</sup> When Lincoln and his forces had been denied their honors by Clinton at Charleston, one of the humiliations was that the American force could not march to the surrender with its battle flags flying; the standards had to remain cased. “If the same strictures were applied to Cornwallis, his army would be disgraced before all of Europe. But Washington was adamant.”<sup>55</sup> Cornwallis, through representatives, asserted that he had not been responsible for the terms Clinton had forced on Lincoln at Charleston, and therefore could not be held to Washington’s conditions. The American side responded “it was not individuals that were concerned, but nations.”<sup>56</sup>

Trumbull’s *Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown* (Figure 3) captures the culminating act of the British surrender to America. The victors formed two ranks on the sides of the main road near the town, the French on the left and the Americans, in the traditional place of honor, on the right. The British troops marched through the files that stretched nearly a half-mile, and as they reached the far end where Washington, Lincoln, and other senior officers from both sides of the alliance waited, Washington recognized the slow, melancholy tune the British band was playing as “The World Turned Upside Down”<sup>57</sup>—a fitting tune for the occasion.

When the lead column came into view, Washington could see that the officer leading the surrender was not Lord Cornwallis. The British general had feigned illness, rather than be present at the surrender. Instead he sent a subordinate, Brigadier General Charles O’Hara. When O’Hara reached the enemy officers, he offered his sword to the senior French official, Rochambeau, whose aide interposed: “You are mistaken. The Commander in Chief of our army is on the right.”<sup>58</sup> Washington refused to accept the sword as well, indicating instead that General Lincoln (who had been humiliated at Charleston) would receive the honors this day. In Trumbull’s painting, Lincoln is depicted in the foreground, accepting the surrender—and his delayed honor. Meanwhile,

Washington blends into the background. He is mounted, but his act of deference to Lincoln allows him to assume a position among his men as just one of many citizen-soldiers.



Figure 3. *Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown* by John Trumbull, 1781<sup>59</sup>

Washington's stubbornness on the surrender issue might seem petty, especially since it prolonged the surrender negotiations and left open the possibility—however slim—for British reinforcements to rally to Cornwallis' aid. Washington was not unsympathetic to Cornwallis' sentiments—he realized Cornwallis was not directly responsible for the insult to General Lincoln at Charleston. Nevertheless, he recognized the larger importance of the surrender. Like so many other times in his public life, first as commander-in-chief and later as President, Washington was setting a precedent for how America would be regarded on the world stage. It took courage. He stood firm, and when the chance to accept the honor was offered him, he graciously deferred personal recognition in order to credit a subordinate, thereby softening what might have otherwise been seen as an act of pure vanity.

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There is more to the enduring image of Washington than that of the dutiful, humble servant of the state. He is not simply a patriot, who loves his country and supports it by answering the call to arms. He is more precisely a reluctant leader, one who is empowered by his country, but did not seek such power, and would prefer to possess and use it for the shortest possible time. “I shall constantly bear in mind,” Washington wrote from New Jersey during the height of the war in 1777, “that as the sword was the last resort for the preservation of our liberties, so it ought to be the first to be laid aside when those liberties are firmly established.”<sup>60</sup> Nothing is more republican in concept: the people yield their power to representatives for a set period of time. Washington understood this perfectly, and it is evident in two of the defining acts of his public life—the surrender of his commission at Annapolis and his refusal to seek a third term as President. Both involve his voluntary rejection of the opportunity for absolute power.

Perhaps that is why Wills describes Washington as a “virtuoso of resignations,” asserting that he “perfected the art of getting power by giving it away.”<sup>61</sup> It was a philosophy born of his close study of those 110 rules of civil behavior. The act of resignation requires great tact and the awareness of others’ sensibilities. Rule number one was: “Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present.” This was particularly true of the resignation at Annapolis. Washington feared that an American victory might be for naught if the unity of the colonies disintegrated soon after hostilities ended. He wished to advance his support for a strong centralized government following the war, but feared that since such a proposal fell more in the political than the military realm, it might be seen as a way of promoting his career. Therefore, in order to add moral authority to his suggestion, he decided to circulate a letter to the 13 governors, coupling his recommendation with a vow to resign his military commission and also to seek no future public office.<sup>62</sup>

It was not only the context, but also the timing, of his resignation that required delicacy. The situation with the army during the nearly two years of “phony peace” between the victory at Yorktown and the actual departure of British troops from American soil was a difficult task for Washington to manage. Worried that any rumors of

peace with Britain might be an enemy trick aimed at hastening the disbanding of the American army, Washington was obligated to keep his forces from getting complacent lest hostilities be reignited. This was a difficult balancing act to maintain, since any extensive measure to strengthen his army might be interpreted as his clinging to power at the very moment he wanted to surrender it, in order to fulfill his promise to resign the position of commander-in-chief once independence had been won.<sup>63</sup>

To make matters worse, Washington's officers and men had not been paid for their service in a long time, and they were growing suspicious that Congress was unable or unwilling to honor its recruitment pledges. "Even where this discontent did not lead to actual or threatened mutiny, it threatened public good will, the pride in the fighting forces, on which Washington hoped to base his plea for a union that would reflect the *continental* consciousness forged within his Army."<sup>64</sup> Following the victory at Yorktown, Washington had hoped to return to Mount Vernon for the first time since the war began, but, as he wrote in a letter, the mood of the Army "will oblige me to stick close to the Troops this Winter [1782] and try like a careful physician to prevent if possible the disorders getting to an incurable height."<sup>65</sup>

However, Washington's presence in the camp at Newburgh that winter was not enough to quell the soldiers' complaints, and mutinous talk grew under the encouragement of Washington's old rival Horatio Gates, who was also present in the camp. "What made the matter doubly tricky was the fact that some members of Congress, who desired the stronger union that Washington was sponsoring, thought they could advance their cause by playing on the Army's grievances.... Nothing could stand a greater distance from Washington's moral argument for increased authority than any attempt to *seize* power, or to form it on a military basis."<sup>66</sup>

Washington was incensed that officers under his command might be receptive to such talk, so he gave abnormally stern warnings to Alexander Hamilton, indicating he knew that his former *aide-de-camp* and Robert Morris were among the schemers. He cautioned that "the Army (considering the irritable state it is in, its sufferings and composition) is a dangerous weapon to play with."<sup>67</sup> This is one of the earliest examples of Washington's keen sense of political matters, for while addressed to his friend

Hamilton, the warning was intended for a wider audience. He was forewarning anyone who wished to meddle with the army for political gain that they “might create such divisions in the Army as would weaken, rather than strengthen the hands of those who were disposed to support Continental measures,”<sup>68</sup> and that if that happened, Washington would be obliged to oppose them. Therefore, while it is this strong rebuke of his officers at Newburgh that is often cited as the precedent for establishing civilian supremacy over the military, Wills argues, “At least as important were these early warnings sent to the schemers in Congress.”<sup>69</sup>

At the same time that Washington was strong-arming political meddlers, he deftly handled the rest of his disgruntled officers. Using considerable tact, he held a special officers’ call in order to preempt any mutinous cries to revolt—Washington had become aware that an anonymous letter suggesting such measures was circulating through the camp. Instead of reprimanding the officers or lecturing them, he praised the army’s virtue and painted their dire circumstances as yet another opportunity to display that virtue.

You will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism and patient virtue, rising superior to the pressures of the most complicated sufferings; and you will, by the dignity of your Conduct, afford occasion for Posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to mankind, “had this day been wanting, the World had never seen the last stage of perfection to which nature is capable of attaining.”<sup>70</sup>

The crowning touch of his address to the officers was pure pedagogical theater. Washington paused to read an excerpt from a Congressional dispatch he had received, and as he did so pulled from his pocket his newly acquired reading glasses. The necessity for the spectacles was unfeigned—the draft of the rest of his remarks had been written in his own large and unmistakable script so he could read it—but the drama of the moment had been carefully planned in order to punctuate his point. As he adjusted the dispatch in front of him to bring it into focus, the words he spoke brought many of the officers present to tears: “Gentlemen, you must pardon me. I have grown grey in your service and now find myself growing blind.”<sup>71</sup>

His point was not lost. He had volunteered to serve under the promise to resign when independence was secure, but he also refused to be paid a salary—only expenses—and as he had not been paid either, he inspired his men to follow his example.

Washington knew his men well, and they responded by silencing their talks of mutiny. He had a talent for “shaming his men into actions above themselves, and then praising what he had made them become.”<sup>72</sup> Having shamed them into their better selves, Washington came to the officers’ ardent defense by writing a letter endorsing the army’s grievances to Congress. There was no mention of his meeting; he wanted no part in recording any division between him and his officers.<sup>73</sup>

With the mood of the army more patriotic, and the signing of a definitive treaty with Britain the following September, Washington mailed his circular letter to the governors and prepared to deliver his resignation to the Continental Congress. He arrived in Annapolis on December 19<sup>th</sup>, and left a note for Thomas Mifflin, the President of Congress, inquiring how his resignation should be submitted:

I take the earliest opportunity to inform Congress of my arrival in this City, with the intention of asking leave to resign the Commission I have the honor of holding in their Service. It is essential for me to offer my resignation, whether in writing, or at Audience; I shall therefore request to be honored with the necessary information, that being apprized of the sentiments of Congress I may regulate my Conduct accordingly.<sup>74</sup>

It was arranged that he should appear before Congress on the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Thomas Jefferson and others had prepared a formal, written thank you for the general. In an emotional parting and with his hand shaking, he offered what he hoped would be his last public address:

Having now finished the work assigned to me, I retire from the great theater of Action; and bidding an affectionate farewell to this August body under whose orders I have so long acted, I here offer my Commission, and take my leave of all the employments of public life.<sup>75</sup>

Washington, for all of his affection for proper conduct, hated the pomp and lavishness he had come to associate with the British royal court. Determined to start anew, he instead—consciously or unconsciously—resurrected the ancient example of Cincinnatus by calmly trading both the laurels and spoils of victory for the tranquility of his farm at Mount Vernon and the dignity of private citizenship.

During the Revolution, Benjamin West—an American-born artist in the patronage of the British crown—is purported to have been asked by King George III what

Washington might do after the war was over. When West stated that he believed the general would return to his Virginia farm, the king replied, “If he does that he will be the greatest man in the world.”<sup>76</sup> Word of Washington’s selfless act quickly spread to Europe, and in London, West’s student, John Trumbull, was quick to chronicle the moment. In a letter to his brother he wrote that it

excites the astonishment and admiration of this part of the world. ’Tis a Conduct so novel, so inconceivable to People, who, far from giving up powers they possess, are willing to convulse the Empire to acquire more.<sup>77</sup>

Trumbull would later immortalize the act on canvass too in his *The Resignation of General Washington* (Figure 4), which is paired with his painting of the Declaration of Independence in the Capitol Rotunda in order “to show the range of civil heroism.”<sup>78</sup> Washington is the central figure of the scene, but he stands lower than Mifflin—who represents the supremacy of civilian government. In the right side of the painting, Washington’s riding cloak is visibly flung on a chair, suggesting the swiftness of his ride to Annapolis, the unwavering yield of power at the earliest possible hour. The actual chamber in Annapolis has windows, but Trumbull left them out of his painting and broadened the pilaster behind the general in order to advance confidence in the republic’s stability. There is also a light with no discernable source, thrown upon the symbolic background, “the light of virtue derived from the act itself, making the architectural support of the whole fabric glow.”<sup>79</sup>



Figure 4. *The Resignation of General Washington* by John Trumbull, 1824<sup>80</sup>

Washington always intended his act of resignation to be simple. Therefore, he would be pleased with the manner in which most artists have represented him—and especially delighted with how his countrymen have come to regard him. So deliberate were the early efforts to present him as the model citizen-officer of a new egalitarian nation, and so quickly were those efforts embraced by the populace, that later artists were unexpectedly met with ridicule when their works appeared even the least bit grandiose.

For instance, as early as the 1840s—only two generations after Washington’s death—Horatio Greenough’s sculpture (Figure 5) was met with considerable criticism. Nathaniel Hawthorne voiced the popular sentiment of the artist’s bare-chested depiction of America’s most revered man when he quipped, “Did anyone ever see Washington naked? It is inconceivable. He has no nakedness, but I imagine was born with his clothes on and his hair powdered, and made a stately bow on his first appearance in the world.”<sup>81</sup> However, it was not just changing tastes in art that had doomed Greenough’s unveiling. The statue’s nudity would have been acceptable since classicism was the dominant style in America at the time,<sup>82</sup> but Greenough’s project had been commissioned during the 1820s in Andrew Jackson’s administration, and by the time it was completed and hauled

into the Capitol Rotunda during John Tyler's term, the public view of Washington had been "shrunk by moralizing adulation"<sup>83</sup> by the likes of Parson Weems. "The work offended by its pomp and grandiosity. That is ironic, since Greenough thought he was fashioning an image of perfect humility."<sup>84</sup>

The statue shows Washington's legacy to republican government, and its classical mode conjures up the image of Cincinnatus. The right hand points to heaven in recognition of the source of laws man must live by, the "left hand returns his sword to the people, having completed his service to them. The right hand would offer the sword for *use*, in exhortation. The left hand must be used for surrender."<sup>85</sup> Greenough in his own words:

I have made him seated as first magistrate and he extends with his left hand the emblem of his military command toward the people as the sovereign. He points heavenward with his right hand. By his gesture, my wish was to convey the idea of an entire abnegation of self.<sup>86</sup>



Figure 5. *George Washington by Horatio Greenough, 1824*<sup>87</sup>

One might call these artists propagandists. (Wills does.) These educated and skilled men deliberately sought to portray America's first President in a didactic manner in order to mold the character of the new nation. They had to; there were no long-held traditions at the time of the Revolution—or for years following it—that could be held up as truly “American.” Washington was it. Washington was the symbol of America well before there *was* an America.<sup>88</sup>

New governments need symbols of stability. Machiavelli and Rousseau thought this was the reason so many states had been founded on divine oracles.... Even when Madison was proposing, in *The Federalist*, a new government, he asked that it be treated as an old one, given that “veneration, which time bestows on everything”.... Washington's importance to the nation lay in his capacity for eliciting the veneration not yet given to less personal symbols of republican order. He was the embodiment of stability within a revolution, speaking for fixed things in a period of flux.<sup>89</sup>

Washington continues to set the same example for the American military officer. For what more important function does an officer provide—to his men or his nation—than a symbol of probity and strength in times of conflict and chaos? Before there was a flag or a Constitution, there was Washington, “steadying the symbols, lending strength to them instead of drawing it from them.”<sup>90</sup> More importantly, Washington's example is so alluring to the military profession because his emergence as a great man is perfectly aligned with republican principles. He is an American Cincinnatus. His character and competence were not divine gifts, but rather the result of a life-long determination to acquire the necessary skills and moral foundation so that when his time came, he would be ready to assume the mantle of leadership. His early efforts to learn practical skills like surveying and record-keeping, and his life-long resolve to adhere to the Jesuits' 110 rules of proper decorum, enabled him to act with courage and conviction during times of great uncertainty, when there were no established examples to follow.

#### E. MR. PRESIDENT

His war won, his resignation given, Washington was finally free after nine years to return to his beloved Mount Vernon and Martha.

At length, my dear Marquis," he wrote Lafayette, "I am become a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac, and under the shadow of my own vine and my own fig tree. Free from the bustle of a camp and the busy scenes of public life, I am solacing myself with those tranquil enjoyments which the soldier who is ever in pursuit of fame; the statesmen whose watchful days and sleepless nights are spent devising schemes to promote the welfare of his own...and the courtier who is always watching the countenance of his prince...can have very little conception. I am not only retired from public employments, I am retiring within myself, and shall be able to view the solitary walk and tread the paths of private life with heartfelt satisfaction. Envious of none, I am determined to be pleased with all, and this, my dear friend, being the order of my march, I will move gently down the stream of life until I sleep with my fathers."<sup>91</sup>

Washington sincerely desired to remain out of public life, and for a few brief years he was able to do just that. He busied himself with the matters of running Mount Vernon and in graciously entertaining the frequent visitors he had to his home on the Potomac. He greatly expanded the acreage of the estate, installing gardens and meandering paths. He experimented in agricultural advancements to improve the yield of his soil, bread mules, and enjoyed daily horse rides at sunrise around his property.

However, *The Articles of Confederation*, which had been drafted by the Continental Congress following the war, proved to be insufficient to meet the requirements of the growing United States. Washington had long advocated a stronger federal government, capable of negotiating problems between the several states and defending their common interests if necessary. When he settled into his retirement, Washington believed "The people must *feel* before they will *see*; [and] consequently are brought into measures of public unity."<sup>92</sup> Yet the movement towards sound self-governance which he surely expected had progressed painfully slowly, and by 1786, a developing crisis led Washington to "wonder whether all efforts to strengthen the government might not be, in fact, too late."<sup>93</sup> It what history would record as Shays' Rebellion, mobs of angry farmers in the western settlements--frustrated that no matter how hard or effectively they worked, they could not reduce their debts--took to threats of armed violence. In the end, it was a minor insurrection and proved to be little more than an impassioned protest, but the terror and panic it provoked throughout the states, was enough to spur the Continental Congress to move up a previously scheduled convention. Among other items of business, the convention was to include negotiation of a settlement

between Maryland and Virginia for plans to build a Potomac River canal—a project in which Washington had had a vested business interest. Washington actively shunned invitations to speak as a witness on the project, lest he be viewed as trying to influence the deal. However, there was now great pressure on the General to attend the convention and lend his counsel to the Congress as it debated modifications to *The Articles of Confederation*.

It was surprising the variety of worries that crowded into Washington's mind. Since he had publicly stated that he would never return to public life, would he be accused of indecision, of devious ambitions? Or, if he stayed at home, would he be accused of failing to put his shoulder to the wheel because he wished the American republican experiment to collapse so that he could make himself king?....And then there was the fact that his beloved wife was in a state of consternation: she had grounded her happiness, so she tearfully reiterated, on the belief that nothing could possibly happen that would destroy her tranquility by calling her husband back to public life.<sup>94</sup>

Ultimately, Washington could not escape the fact that the convention represented the best opportunity to follow the military victory with a political victory that would finally demonstrate to the world that a free society could govern itself without anarchy ensuing.<sup>95</sup> He had to go.

When the convention met, it unanimously elected Washington to serve as its president. The office prevented his active participation in the discussions; “however all remarks were titularly addressed to him, and the room was small.”<sup>96</sup> The outcome of this Constitutional Convention, as it has come to be called, is well-known. The efforts of the bright, selfless men who gathered there to develop a government of powers shared among three branches of government—a legislature, a judicial body, and an executive—have been well chronicled, and still the picture that emerges is captivating. Among these great men, Washington stood out. Unable to participate directly, his calm, presiding presence still dominated the gathering.

His face was clearly visible to everyone. Often he listed torpidly. His wartime aide John Laurens wrote, “When the muscles of his face are in a state of repose, his eye certainly wants animation.” But “his countenance, when affected either by joy or anger, is full of expression.” Many

delegates were to remember how the proceedings of the convention were influenced by his “anxious solicitude” at angry disagreement, his pleasure at fruitful compromise.<sup>97</sup>

Washington remained apart from all of the discussions, but he was extremely attentive to the decisions regarding the executive. One of the proposals was for a three-man panel with representation from the major sections of the country. If this were adopted, he could happily retire to Mount Vernon, but as soon as the President was established as a single individual, there was little doubt among the delegates as to who that individual would be. It was decided that the President would be elected separately from the other branches, and he could be indefinitely reelected. He was to carry out many important functions, including Commander in Chief of the armed forces. He was unconstrained by statutory advisors, and was able single-handedly to limit the acts of Congress through a veto power, yet the Legislative Branch needed two-thirds consensus to overrule him. He could be removed from office only for criminal or treasonous acts, or by the will of the voters. “A delegate explained, ‘Many of the members... shaped their ideas of the powers to be given the President by their opinions of his [Washington’s] virtues.’ The impress of Washington’s prestige remains in the strength allowed the President of the United States”<sup>98</sup>—a strength given to one man during a time frightened by the absolute power of kings.

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Washington did not aspire to the historic office to which he was unanimously elected. Yet once he resumed public life, he was committed to doing his utmost to fulfill, what in his typical diffidence, he saw as a responsibility greater than his ability. Thucydides said, “Of all manifestations of power, restraint impresses men most.”<sup>99</sup> Washington understood this well. It was a lesson brought forward from his youth, when he had studied the Jesuits’ precepts for civil behavior. The last of these rules, number 110, may reveal the core of Washington’s Presidency: “Labour to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience.”<sup>100</sup> Washington had the unenviable responsibility of establishing the precedent for a position unprecedented in the

history of the world. The incremental conditioning of his moral will-power as a young man allowed him to act in accordance with a conscience that put service above self-interest.

The importance of Washington's presidency is a subject worthy of voluminous discussion, For the purpose of this thesis, however, it is sufficient to address two of Washington's defining characteristics as President. First, with regard to his official duties, Washington meticulously strove to adhere to the letter of his responsibilities as outlined in the Constitution. He was extremely aware that any perceived encroachment on the powers of the other two branches of government could result in tremendous conflict that would bring about the end of America's republican experiment. He considered every action carefully and planned for the effects that each decision would have.

This leads to the second defining characteristic of his presidency. Washington strongly felt that in order to fulfill his Constitutional duties, he needed absolute candor from his cabinet. He wanted his closest advisors to mirror what he viewed as the guiding precept of a responsible republican government, that is, the maintenance of an atmosphere of mutual respect, which permitted rigorous, impassioned debate. As such, he selected not only the most able and knowledgeable men, but also gave specific consideration to differing perspectives. This approach was critical to the success of the republic. In the end, it required all of Washington's skill and energy to manage his two most valued advisors and their different political philosophies.

Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton clashed on almost everything. They were "two geniuses, two rivals, two egos,"<sup>101</sup> and when all was said and done, they would found the two political parties that are still harping at each other today. "Hamilton [was] handsome, ambitious, slippery and great. An emigrant from the West Indies, born out of wedlock, [he] hustled and strove his way to the right hand of Washington during the Revolution."<sup>102</sup> He was a talented and voracious writer. As the principal author of the *Federalist Papers*, he used his skill as a writer to sell the American public on the U.S. Constitution. Later, he would use it to launch lacerating, anonymous attacks on his political enemies in a public newspaper he secretly funded. Hamilton pictured America as

a centralized country governed by a strong executive who was aided by a mercantile aristocracy. He saw a nation of industry with financiers and other businessmen held together by a central banking system under the umbrella of high tariffs.<sup>103</sup>

Jefferson, on the other hand, was “refined, ambitious, profligate with money but wonderfully efficient with ideas. He was Hamilton’s only real equal.”<sup>104</sup> Jefferson’s ideal America was a decentralized confederation of states governments. He envisioned a country of yeoman farmers. Preferring democracy to aristocracy, he was wary of anyone who sought to concentrate power.<sup>105</sup>

What held the first administration, and for that matter the republic, together was the mutual respect Hamilton and Jefferson shared for President Washington. For his part, Washington had long ago learned how to manage diverse personalities. Nevertheless, the demands of public life began to wear on the President. He had never sought the presidency, nor wished for a second term, and now that he was getting older, he desired nothing more than to be able to watch from Mount Vernon and “see the nation continuing on a virtuous path that would lead the rest of the world to liberty.”<sup>106</sup>

Washington was not unconcerned about America’s future. Indeed, several threats to the Republic remained. However, like Beowulf, he was confident that the nation would be safe in the hands of future generations. Therefore, there was but one remaining public duty, a final selfless act to ensure that the fledgling government remained in the hands of its citizens. In order to impart his intended message and not cause any unnecessary anxiety within the public, Washington took great care in crafting his departure from the presidency. The first step was drafting a farewell address, which like the circular letter he had written to the thirteen governors prior to his resignation at Annapolis, was to be published months before the end of his term. “He saw the election as a potential demonstration to the entire world that republican institutions were, in their purity, viable.”<sup>107</sup>

Next, Washington took great care to remain a voice of moderation during his last months in office and while the election of his successor took place. His actions in public mirrored the words of his written farewell, in which he thanked the nation for the great honor it had bestowed upon him by allowing him to serve it for so long. Aside from a

graceful goodbye, the farewell address provided Washington with an opportunity to provide one last piece of advice. As with the resignation in Annapolis, the timing of Washington's farewell and his retreat from public life again added moral authority to the recommendation he wished to make:

The Nation which indulges towards another an habitual hatred or an habitual fondness, is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, with of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest. Therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.<sup>108</sup>

Washington was clearly worried about an infant America becoming entangled and bogged down in foreign alliances, yet his concern for the danger of immoderate attitudes also included domestic political allegiances. Washington was echoing Cicero's discourse on the need for moderation of thought and deed in public matters. In fact, Washington used language similar to that used by Cicero—"a slave to its animosity or to its affection"—to make his point about the political relationships with other nations—and within a nation.

Having personally establishing the precedent that a President should serve at most two terms, Washington eagerly awaited his final retirement to Mount Vernon. His voluntary relinquishment of power "would be the culmination of his own career, his final gift to the world."<sup>109</sup> On Inauguration Day, Washington provided America with his last didactic gesture. After he had been sworn in as the new Vice President,, Thomas Jefferson motioned for Washington to precede him as they left the dais. "Washington stepped back, indicating that he was simply a citizen again and would follow the new Vice-President."<sup>110</sup> (This was yet another reflection of his rules for behavior, Rule 33: "They that are in dignity or in office have in all places precedence...."<sup>111</sup>)

Washington returned to his home on the Potomac and lived out the rest of his days in relative serenity. He continued to live the dignified life of a country gentleman, entertaining frequently and tending to his farm. In one of the few of his precedents that seem to have been forgotten, Washington resumed his previous title of "General," and actively shied away from those who addressed him as "President" or the "Former

President.” To him the title belonged with the man in the office. It was yet another sign of the deep respect he held for the proper order of things.

The same order was true on his deathbed. At age 67, Washington took his last morning horse ride. It was a snowy day, and he came down with an acute sore throat and other flu symptoms. It was most likely some sort of staph or strep infection, for which the medicine of his day could have done nothing. The action that his two physicians took was to draw off several pints of blood. It was a painful and utterly useless treatment prevalent at the time.<sup>112</sup> Washington finally told the doctors, “I feel myself going. I thank you for your attention. You had better not take any more trouble about me; but let me go off quietly; I cannot last long.”<sup>113</sup> (Rule 44: “When a man does all he can though it succeeds not well blame not him that did it.”<sup>114</sup>)

Henry Lee’s famous eulogy of Washington endures today as an accurate reflection of America’s sentiments toward her first general and her first President. Unfortunately, the second phrase of the sentence is too often left out: “First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life.”<sup>115</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Michael Barone, "A Place Like No Other," U.S. News & World Report 28 June 2004: 38.
- <sup>2</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1945), edition introduction page.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid. 25.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid. 27.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid. 28.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid. 29.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. 44.
- <sup>11</sup> Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1975), 70.
- <sup>12</sup> de Tocqueville, 43.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid. 31.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid. 31.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Bailey, 70.
- <sup>20</sup> James Thomas Flexnor, Washington: The Indispensable Man, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), ix.
- <sup>21</sup> Wills, xix.
- <sup>22</sup> Flexnor, 3.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>28</sup> Jeffrey E. McFadden. "Chivalry and the Military Officer: An Historical and Literary Inquiry", Trident Scholar Report No. 98, (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Academy, 1979), 14.
- <sup>29</sup> Flexnor, 7.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid. 8.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 9.
- <sup>33</sup> Wills, xxii.

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Brookhiser, editor, Rules of Civility: 110 Rules That Guided Our First President in Peace and War, (America: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays and English Traits. (The Harvard Classics, 1909–14). Essay XII: “Manners”, 1844. (see [www.bartleby.com](http://www.bartleby.com)) August, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Brookhiser, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Emerson

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>42</sup> *George Washington* by Charles Willson Peale, 1772, Washington & Lee University, [http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/faq/govern\\_a.html](http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/faq/govern_a.html)

<sup>43</sup> Garry Wills, Cincinnatus George Washington & The Enlightenment, (New York: Doubleday & Company 1984), 56.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 84.

<sup>48</sup> Flexner, 38.

<sup>49</sup> *General Washington at Verplanck’s Point* by John Trumbull, 1790, Henry Francis Du Pont Winterthur Museum, [www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2002/winterthur/winterthur.pdf](http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2002/winterthur/winterthur.pdf) (August 2004)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>51</sup> James Thomas Flexnor, George Washington in the American Revolution (1775-1783), (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968), 460.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 458.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 459.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 460.

<sup>55</sup> Flexnor, *Indispensable Man*, 164.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 461

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 462.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 464.

<sup>59</sup> *Surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown* by John Trumbull, 1781, held at the Yale Art Gallery, <http://xenophongroup.com/mcjoynt/trumbull.htm> (August, 2004)

<sup>60</sup> Chris Mathews, American: Beyond Our Grandest Notions, (New York: Free Press, 2002), 65.

<sup>61</sup> Wills, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid. 7.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid. 8.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid. 9
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid. 12.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid. 13.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid. 14.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid. 15.
- <sup>80</sup> *The Resignation of George Washington* by John Trumbull, 1824, United States Historical Society, Washington, D.C.
- <sup>81</sup> Ibid. 68.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid. 72.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid. 68.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>85</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup> *George Washington* by Horatio Greenough, 1824, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian Institute, <http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/webzine/greeh01x.html> (August 2004)
- <sup>88</sup> Wills, xxi.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> Flexnor, 182.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., 198
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid., 200.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., 202.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid. 207.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., 209.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid. 72.

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<sup>100</sup> Richard Brookhiser, editor, Rules of Civility: 110 Rules That Guided Our First President in Peace and War, (America: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 88.

<sup>101</sup> David Von Drehle, "Origin of the Species," The Washington Post Magazine, 25 July 2004: 15.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 359

<sup>107</sup> Flexnor, 356.

<sup>108</sup> Mathews, 64.

<sup>109</sup> Flexnor, 356.

<sup>110</sup> Wills, 107.

<sup>111</sup> Brookhiser, 48.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>113</sup> Flexnor, 401.

<sup>114</sup> Brookhiser, 56.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 240.

## VI. CHAMBERLAIN AND MARSHALL

The two officers and statesmen discussed in this chapter echo the citizen-officer ideal in their own way, having adopted and built on Washington's model to meet America's needs during their distinctly different times. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, described by biographer John J. Pullen as "a very perfect knight," is yet another example of the gentleman-soldier produced by early American society. He embodies the citizen-officer ideal during the American Civil War. Chamberlain, however, is not just a nineteenth century George Washington. He exhibits most of the same great characteristics as Washington, but there is also evidence in him of a different attitude with regard to service than that of Washington.

George C. Marshall is a study in character. His faithfulness in maintaining excellent, nonpartisan relationships with leaders from every political party earned him the unprecedented respect of Congress and of the American people. The study of Marshall also provides insight into the modern citizen-officer ideal. He departs somewhat from the image of the great combat commander—the mounted Washington boldly leading the American engagement at the Battle of Monmouth or the unyielding Chamberlain holding the line at Little Round Top. In his superb execution of the U.S. Army's global operations in World War II, Marshall allowed room for the brilliant staff officer to emerge no less virtuous than his valiant predecessors.

### A. CHAMBERLAIN: "ONE OF THE KNIGHTLIEST SOLDIERS"

Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is probably best known for his role in holding the Union Army's position on Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg. However before the war's end, this unassuming college professor from Maine, who served in more than 20 engagements and was wounded six times before completing his service to the Union as a brevetted Major General, would be recognized by his contemporaries for much more than his battlefield prowess.

Born Lawrence Joshua Chamberlain in September of 1828, he was named after the heroic Commodore James Lawrence who gave the famous command "Don't give up the ship!" during the War of 1812. "The eldest of five children, young Lawrence was raised as a Puritan and Huguenot (French Protestant) in a household which prized good manners, cheerfulness, morality, education, and industry."<sup>1</sup> Although he was raised in a more stable household than young George Washington, Chamberlain's youth resembled Washington's in many ways. He loved the outdoors, enthusiastically taking part in such activities as swimming and sailing, but he most enjoyed horseback riding at breakneck speeds through the Maine countryside.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Washington had lost his father at an early age and was mentored during his childhood by his older brother, Chamberlain was the life-long beneficiary of a Puritan father's disciplined example. "While plowing the rough fields, he learned from his strict and taciturn father that sheer willpower followed by positive action could accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. Lessons [such] as these would later be applied to challenges in his adulthood, resulting in great success."<sup>3</sup>

Lawrence's father had served as a military officer, and the elder Chamberlain hoped his oldest son might do the same. Lawrence actually attended a military school as a teenager, where "he fitted for West Point,"<sup>4</sup> but in the end, the influence of his religious mother would lead him down a different path. Like any knight-errant, Lawrence desired a life of adventure, and while the idea of a West Point education appealed to his martial spirits, service in the peacetime army held no attraction to him. Therefore, "after much consideration on the matter, Lawrence agreed to enter the ministry if he could become a missionary in a foreign land, a popular career choice of the time."<sup>5</sup>

In 1848, Chamberlain matriculated at Maine's Bowdoin College where he started going by his middle name, Joshua. While he carried himself with the bearing befitting a young knight, he was also extremely shy and spoke as little as possible, because he was often embarrassed by a tendency to stammer. With concerted effort he overcame the impediment. By his third year at Bowdoin, he had been recognized with awards for both oratory and composition—achieving the first element of Homer's model of the citizen-officer: becoming a man of great words. After completing his undergraduate studies at Bowdoin, Chamberlain completed a theology degree at Bangor Theological Seminary and also earned a master's degree from Bowdoin. He had "mastered multiple languages

in preparation for a career in the ministry overseas. In all, he was fluent in nine: Greek, Latin, French, German, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, and Syriac.”<sup>6</sup> Despite this preparation, he never served as a minister, and instead accepted a position as a professor of rhetoric and oratory at Bowdoin in 1856.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Chamberlain felt compelled to offer his services to the Governor of Maine. He had been granted a leave of absence from Bowdoin to study in Europe, but to the college’s displeasure—and his wife’s trepidation—he accepted a commission as a lieutenant colonel in the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine. Like Washington, he was given a rank well beyond his capabilities. With determination equal to the young Virginia major, however, Chamberlain quickly learned the art of arms by observing several West Point officers as they transformed “more than 900 unskilled men into trained and disciplined soldiers.”<sup>7</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, with Chamberlain in command, completed the long march from Maine to Antietam and saw action in some of the fiercest battles of the war, including Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. It would be at Gettysburg and Petersburg, however, where the Maine regiment and its professor-turned-officer/commander would earn their fame—achieving the second element of Homer’s model of the citizen-officer: becoming a man of great deeds.

At Gettysburg, Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine saw action on the second day of the battle, July 2, 1863, when they were ordered into position at the far left of the Union line on a hill called “Little Round Top.” Recognizing the huge advantage of holding the elevated ground, Confederate General John Bell Hood’s brigades immediately advanced up the rocky hill and began to engage the Union line. Several Union officers were killed in the ensuing clash, including Chamberlain’s commander Colonel Strong Vincent, who had ordered Chamberlain to hold the Union’s ground at all costs and not to retreat under any circumstances. Learning that his men’s ammunition was almost exhausted and the enemy’s advance had not been arrested, Chamberlain’s situation was desperate. He made the quick decision to counterattack, and ordered a bayonet charge down the hill, thereby saving the Union’s position.<sup>8</sup>

Several years after the war ended, Congress would award Chamberlain the Medal of Honor for his decisive action on Little Round Top, but the true measure of

Chamberlain's effectiveness as an officer lay not in his gallantry—though his feats at Gettysburg and elsewhere were precisely that—but rather in the gentleness of his measured personality that endeared him to both his men and the officers appointed above him.

The soldiers admired his skill and bravery, and appreciated his acts of kindness and courtesy towards them. The attention he paid to the sick or wounded in his command, and the time and care he took in sending home the personal effects of those who died would long be remembered. Moreover, the men saw in him a humble man, as Chamberlain often chose to endure the same conditions as them, sleeping on the ground in the harshest of climates.<sup>9</sup>

Chamberlain's actions off the battlefield resonated with his troops, as Washington's did with his men at Valley Forge and elsewhere, because they were genuine, lacking the condescension that too often permeates the interactions of commissioned officers and enlisted personnel.

Chamberlain continued his gallant service at Petersburg, where he suffered near-mortal wounds. Demonstrating the same disregard for his personal safety as Washington had during the French and Indian War and the Revolution, he was struck by a round that “passed through the pelvis and bladder,”<sup>10</sup> shattering bones in both hips and destroying tissue that would never fully heal. Showing tremendous composure, Chamberlain continued to fight; at one point he bore the battle colors of the regiment himself when the standard bearer was killed right next to him. He refused treatment for his own wounds until all of his men were safe and more seriously wounded soldiers had been treated. Upon hearing that Chamberlain's injuries might be fatal, General Ulysses S. Grant made him a Brigadier General, “in what is said to have been the only instance of a promotion on the battlefield given by Grant. Chamberlain was admitted into the Naval Academy hospital at Annapolis with little hope for his survival, but as his will to live was strong, he would not remain hospitalized for very long.”<sup>11</sup>

Chamberlain rejoined Grant's forces and continued to distinguish himself, now as the commander of a brigade. In one battle, he launched another daring bayonet charge. During that same fight, his horse was shot from underneath him, and perhaps recalling the guile of Odysseus from his studies at Bowdoin, Chamberlain eluded enemy capture

by posing as a Confederate Officer. Due to his inspiring leadership and skill, President Abraham Lincoln brevetted him to Major General.<sup>12</sup>

Despite his obvious skill and bravery in battle, Chamberlain's ultimate honor would come when General Ulysses S. Grant appointed him to receive the first flag of surrender at Virginia's Appomattox Court House. The crushed Confederate troops, commanded by General John B. Gordon, were anticipating bitter humiliation. Instead, Chamberlain ordered his troops to receive the enemy with honor and respect. For this magnanimous act, Gordon remembered Chamberlain in his memoirs as "one of the knightliest soldiers of the Federal Army."<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain recalls the surrender in his book *The Passing of the Armies*:

The momentous meaning of this occasion impressed me deeply. I resolved to mark it by some token of recognition, which could be no other than a salute of arms. Well aware of the responsibility assumed, and of the criticisms that would follow, as the sequel proved, nothing of that kind could move me in the least. The act could be defended, if needful, by the suggestion that such a salute was not to the cause for which the flag of the Confederacy stood, but to its going down before the flag of the Union. My main reason, however, was one for which I sought no authority nor asked forgiveness. Before us in proud humiliation stood the embodiment of manhood: men whom neither toils and sufferings, nor the fact of death, nor disaster, nor hopelessness could bend from their resolve; standing before us now, thin, worn, and famished, but erect, and with eyes looking level into ours, waking memories that bound us together as no other bond;—was not such manhood to be welcomed back into a Union so tested and assured?

Instructions had been given; and when the head of each division column comes opposite our group, our bugle sounds the signal and instantly our whole line from right to left, regiment by regiment in succession, gives the soldier's salutation, from the "order arms" to the old "carry"—the marching salute. Gordon at the head of the column, riding with heavy spirit and downcast face, catches the sound of shifting arms, looks up, and, taking the meaning, wheels superbly, making with himself and his horse one uplifted figure, with profound salutation as he drops the point of his sword to the boot toe; then facing to his own command, gives word for his successive brigades to pass us with the same position of the manual,—honor answering honor. On our part not a sound of trumpet more, nor roll of drum; not a cheer, nor word nor whisper of vain-glorying, nor motion of man standing again at the order, but an awed stillness rather, and breath-holding, as if it were the passing of the dead!<sup>14</sup>

There is no clear record of why Chamberlain was appointed to receive that first flag of surrender at Appomattox, but it is unlikely that Grant could have chosen a better officer to represent the Union. Chamberlain asked, and it was approved, that his former command, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, be among the units present at the surrender. He humbly felt that all of his successes in the war had been the direct result of the brave men whom he had been privileged to command, and he eagerly wished to share this final honor with them. The magnanimity shown by Chamberlain that day “sounds like a paragraph from one of the ancient annals of chivalry.”<sup>15</sup> His decision to welcome the Confederate troops back into the union for which he had fought so hard, was extremely magnanimous, especially in light of the many serious wounds he had personally suffered. It was also courageous. Chamberlain risked alienation at home in the northeast, where families were still suffering the grief of loved ones lost.<sup>16</sup> Yet somehow he rose to a higher plane, and without malice, made the first act of reconciliation.

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Chamberlain was forever changed by his experiences in the Civil War. He had achieved a sense of fulfillment that coincided with his chivalric sense of adventure, and he was not eager to leave the service of his country.

The last official communication [from the Army of the Potomac’s] headquarters, which read “By order of special order No. 339, current series, from Adjutant General’s office, this army, as an organization, ceases to exist,” drew an emotional comment from Chamberlain. He wrote, “Cease to exist! Are you sure of that? .... The War Department and the President may cease to give the army orders, may disperse its visible elements, but cannot extinguish them.... This army will live, and live on, so long as soul shall answer soul, so long as that flag watches with its stars over fields of might memory....”<sup>17</sup>

Chamberlain’s response may seem to be in conflict with Cincinnatus’ and Washington’s example of the magnanimous relinquishment of power. However, it was not power to which Chamberlain was clinging, but rather the unique spirit of an army of volunteers. His association with that army had left him with a sense that he was part of something larger than himself.

There were good reasons why the Army of the Potomac remained with him.... One of the first large armies to have its roots in a democracy and

an unmilitary society, it had learned the business of war through on-the-job training, a hard method of military education, and had survived so much agony to become one of the greatest armies that ever marched. Its members had qualities of intelligence, literacy, courage, and character unlooked-for in soldiery. In going from being an excellent college professor to becoming an outstanding general, Chamberlain may have been remarkable, but he was not unique; thousands of men made the same transition from civilian to military excellence. His association with these men and his success in this army had made the military life attractive to Chamberlain.<sup>18</sup>

Chamberlain now had ambitions for an epic life. Although he had enjoyed his professorship at Bowdoin, the thought of returning to grading papers no longer appealed to him. After Gettysburg, he wrote to his wife Fanny, “Let me say no danger and no hardship makes me wish to go back to that college life again. I can’t breathe when I think of those last two years. Why I would spend the rest of my whole life in campaigning rather than endure that again.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, Chamberlain was released from the Army in August of 1865. Predictably, it was distinct comedown from his battlefield command, and he was now faced with the uncertainty that accompanied his return to civilian life. There was really nothing else for him to do but return to teaching. A year after returning home, he was offered a commission in the regular army, but the prospect of peacetime duty in some far away fort chasing Indians was not alluring enough. Besides, the lasting effects of the injuries he suffered at Petersburg made that an unwise career choice, and he opted to remain at Bowdoin.<sup>20</sup>

Soon after he resumed his teaching duties, the college’s president resigned and Chamberlain assumed the position. It ended up being a temporary assignment, as a reluctant Chamberlain was persuaded to run for Governor of Maine. He had been touring the state lecturing about Gettysburg and his experiences during the war, when he caught the eye of the state’s Republican Party leadership. As an engaging speaker with wide-ranging appeal as both a war hero and distinguished professor, Chamberlain was a shoe-in to win. There were concerns among some of the Radical Republicans that controlled the party after the war. Suspicions swirled: “What about that foolish salute he gave the Confederates at Appomattox Court House?”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the Republican bosses saw a winner in Chamberlain and concluded it was best to have him in their camp.

For his part, Chamberlain was cautiously beginning to warm to the idea. His lecture circuit had brought him into contact with citizens throughout Maine, and he began to sympathize with them about issues affecting the state, particularly education and the declining local economies. Chamberlain won his first election, but “as a neophyte politician was stepping into a situation he probably did not fully comprehend.”<sup>22</sup> Nor did the Radical Republicans accurately assess the difficulty they would have in controlling their newly elected governor.

Among Chamberlain’s political weaknesses was the absence of “the skill necessary to move easily and gracefully out of difficult situations.... He lacked the thick protective, rhinoceros hide that a politician needs. And where matters of principle were concerned, he had little talent for compromise, the art by which most things get done in the political world. He would speak and act according to his won beliefs.”<sup>23</sup> While these facts may have troubled the radical elements of his political party, it did not seem to hurt his support among the citizens of Maine. Marshall was elected to three subsequent terms as governor.

In 1871, Chamberlain left the governorship and assumed a quieter life as the President of Bowdoin. He settled back into his home in Brunswick, with his wife Fanny and their two children. He bought a twenty-six-foot sloop and “intended to spend many hours cruising over the sparkling blue waters and among the green islands of Casco Bay.”<sup>24</sup> He planned and completed ambitious home renovations, while leading modest education reforms at the college. After his tenure as governor, Chamberlain was content in his quiet academic life, and preoccupied himself with securing private endowments for the needed improvements to Bowdoin’s facilities and curriculum.

In early 1879, however, chaos began to embroil Maine. A bitterly contested election for control of the state’s legislature teetered on the verge of armed riots. Six years earlier, after leaving the governorship, Chamberlain had accepted the position as the commanding general of the state’s militia. There was little requirement or need to employ such a force, and Chamberlain had spent very little time doing any real soldering. Now, however, the sitting legislature had given him the order to secure the peace and the safe transfer of power to the legitimate government while a recount was conducted. Over

the course of twelve days tensions came to a head as each party maneuvered for control. Chamberlain refused to call the militia to duty unless absolutely needed and deftly managed the enraged parties on both sides.

In the end, the disputing parties yielded to Chamberlain's suggestion of arbitration by the state's Supreme Court. When the legally elected governor notified Chamberlain of the court's decision, Chamberlain immediately tendered his resignation. "Much of what happened in Augusta in those winter days may have been consigned to the dungeons of history, but one thing is clear. Chamberlain had preserved the peace and protected the institutions of the state without a gun cocked or a soldier called to duty."<sup>25</sup> In a local paper, Chamberlain was hailed as "the heroic holder of the fort, the noble soul that stepped into the gap, assumed the responsibility, and saved the state from anarchy and bloodshed."<sup>26</sup>

During his remaining years in private and public life, Chamberlain displayed the same "stubborn insistence on doing whatever he thought to be right, without regard for political pressures or popular opinion."<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain biographer, John J. Pullen, maintains that Chamberlain's character and attitude contributed to a decline in his popularity during the "Gilded Age" of America's history. When he died in 1915, at the age of 83, his funeral was held with tremendous fanfare in Maine. Yet Chamberlain soon slipped into obscurity—a fact which seems ironic, even tragic, given his great contributions to the nation. In recent years—the last ten or so—Chamberlain's reputation for a legacy of service has seen a resurgence because of the work of authors like Michael Shaara, whose books *Killer Angels* and *Gods and Generals*, in which Chamberlain is a central hero, were best-sellers and have been made into motion pictures.

Part of Chamberlain's allure is that his service falls within the American tradition of the citizen-officer, a tradition he described in his own words at the dedication of the 20th Maine Monuments at Gettysburg on October 3, 1889:

The lesson impressed on me as I stand here and my heart and mind traverse your faces, and the years that are gone, is that in a great, momentous struggle like this commemorated here, it is character that tells. I do not mean simply nor chiefly bravery. Many a man has that, who may become surprised or disconcerted at a sudden change in the posture of affairs. What I mean by character is a firm seasoned substance of soul. I

mean such qualities or acquirements as intelligence, thoughtfulness, conscientiousness, rightmindedness, patience, fortitude, long-suffering and unconquerable resolve....

We know not of the future, and cannot plan for it much. But we can hold our spirits and our bodies so pure and high, we may cherish such thoughts and such ideals, and dream such dreams of lofty purpose, that we can determine and know what manner of men we will be whenever and wherever the hour strikes, that calls to noble action.<sup>28</sup>

Unwilling to act in haste, but always ready to lead the action when his county and its ideals are threatened is part of the “seasoned substance” of the American citizen-officer. In the interim, he is a reluctant warrior, preparing for future perils, while continuing to serve his community and his country in peaceful, productive endeavors. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain epitomizes this ideal.

#### B. GEORGE C. MARSHALL: CIVIS AMERICANUS

George Catlett Marshall remains arguably the most respected citizen-officer in American history since George Washington. He served for 43 years in the United States Army. Although he distinguished himself as key member of General John J. Pershing’s staff in the First World War, he did not rise to national prominence until President Roosevelt appointed him Chief of Staff of the Army in 1939, a position he held for the duration of World War II. *Time Magazine* put the significance of General Marshall’s service during World War II in historical context when it selected him as its “Man of the Year” for 1943 over the likes of Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin.

In the year 1943 came a certainty: the partisans of life had grown stronger than the mechanized conspiracy of death. The Allies had started to break the Axis...

What was it that had tipped the scales? For tipped they were, irrevocably. What was it that had restored roundness and balance to the globe? The cause was plain: the U.S. had actualized her strength. The great Republic was armed.

The Man who, more than any other, could be said to have armed the Republic was George Catlett Marshall, Chief of Staff....

The American people do not, as a general rule, like or trust the military. But they like and trust George Marshall. This is no more paradoxical than the fact that General Marshall hates war. The secret is that American democracy is the stuff Marshall is made of.

Hired by the U.S. people to do a job, he will be as good, as ruthless, as tough, as this job requires. There his ambitions stop. “He has only one interest,” said one of his intimates, “to win this damned war as quick as he can, with the fewest lives lost and money expended, and get the hell down to Leesburg, Va., and enjoy life.” He shuns all avoidable publicity, he is a man of great personal reserve, but the U.S. people have learned why they trust General Marshall more than they have trusted any military man since George Washington: he is a *civis Americanus*.<sup>29</sup>

Yet Marshall was more than a brilliant military leader during the most devastating war in the history of the world; he was also one of the principal architects of the peace that followed. He served successively as President Truman’s special envoy to China, Secretary of State, President of the American Red Cross, and finally as Secretary of Defense. When he finally retired to his Virginia home in 1951, he had completed nearly 50 years of service to America. In 1953, he became the only professional soldier ever honored with the Nobel Peace Prize.

After delivering the 1947 commencement speech at Harvard, in which he offered his initial vision for the rebuilding of Europe, Marshall was presented with an honorary degree. The accompanying citation called him “a soldier and statesman whose ability and character brook only one comparison in the history of the nation.”<sup>30</sup> The allusion is clearly to Washington, and the substance of the compliment—“ability and character”—is a reiteration of Cicero’s two requirements of a trustworthy public servant (competence and character). Marshall possessed both traits in abundance, but equally important were the self-discipline and personal restraint he demonstrated in developing Cicero’s two essentials. As with Washington, these virtues did not make him an easy person to approach. Marshall was “a man of firm religious belief who considered one’s devotions private and divorced from politics, a man capable of tumultuous outbursts of temper who strove to control his anger, a man constrained to duty and service to the state.”<sup>31</sup> Yet underneath this austere surface was a man of incredible warmth and humility. His “hard-won serenity came not from egotism, but from a certainty born of self-knowledge, self-discipline, and the sure grasp of his profession.”<sup>32</sup>

In his youth, Marshall was a mediocre student, and the contributions he would eventually make to the nation, indeed to the world, certainly could not have been predicted from the gawky, reticent sixteen-year-old who arrived at Virginia Military Institute in 1897.<sup>33</sup> Academically, Marshall was barely an average cadet during his four years in Lexington, but he enjoyed the rigid atmosphere provided by the Institute and excelled in the military science and leadership portions of the school's curriculum. During his final year, he made a name for himself as a hard-nosed tackler on the football field, and more visibly as Cadet First Captain, commanding the entire Corps of Cadets.

Graduation from VMI did not guarantee Marshall the commission he coveted, especially given the state of the U.S. Army at the turn of the century. Despite its recent colonial acquisitions resulting from the Spanish-American War, the U.S. was slow to grow a military capable of protecting its new overseas interests and asserting its newfound power among the world's leading nations.

Americans probably do not dislike military service more than other people but they have a historically ingrained and generally healthy distaste for large standing armies as well as an aversion to paying for them in peacetime. The facts of geography and fortunes of history, reinforced by democratic theory, permitted America to develop a tradition of waging war with volunteers quickly raised to fight and as quickly disbanded afterward.<sup>34</sup>

Between conflicts, a small army was maintained in order to provide a group of professional officers and enlisted men from which to build the necessary forces when future security threats would emerge. The principle was sound, but in practice Congress persistently "treated the Army with neglect rather than wise frugality."<sup>35</sup>

While a commission in the peacetime Army had held no attraction to Joshua Chamberlain, George Marshall wanted nothing more than to serve, and was more than willing to settle for garrison duty in the peacetime Army. He had found his niche at VMI. Through diligent application, he had acquired focus, skill, and self-confidence. "'Ambition,' he said later, 'had set in.' But it would be more accurate to say that ambition had hit upon an appropriate goal, or that the young man, driven from his earliest days by the passion to excel, had found in himself as a cadet the excellence that pleased him."<sup>36</sup>

The determination with which Marshall pursued a commission in the U.S. Army would have impressed George Washington, who was never able to obtain the same in the British regular army. In 1901, it was extremely rare for commissions to be given to anyone other than graduates of West Point. Therefore, a determined young Marshall traveled to Washington, D.C., and with two letters of introduction in hand, walked into the White House.

I had no appointment of any kind....The old colored man (the head usher) asked me if I had an appointment. I told him I didn't. He said I would never get in, that there wasn't any possibility. I watch people, some ten or fifteen, go in by appointment, stay ten minutes, and be excused. Finally, a man and his daughter went in with this old colored man escorting them. I attached myself to the tail of the procession and gained the President's office. The old colored man frowned at me on his way out but I stood pat. After the people had met the President, they also went out, leaving me standing there. Mr. McKinley in a very nice manner asked what I wanted and I stated my case. I don't recall what he said, but from that I think followed my appointment or rather my authority to appear for examination.<sup>37</sup>

Marshall's biographer, Forrest C. Pogue, could not confirm whether President McKinley actually intervened and that "history did indeed turn on that moment of charming brashness,"<sup>38</sup> but it is a nice thought. Moreover, it illustrates a drive and candor that would become characteristic of Marshall—a directness that was born not of egotism, but rather of a sense of purpose and a desire to serve his country.

Marshall passed the written examination required of all aspiring officers at the time, received his commission as a Second Lieutenant, and was promptly ordered to the Philippines for assignment to an infantry company. Although hostilities on the islands were over, Marshall's regiment remained in occupation. Marshall quickly discovered the realities of garrison life in the post-war Army. His "day's work was normally finished by nine-thirty or ten in the morning. The rest of the day was a struggle with idleness and ennui."<sup>39</sup> The men comprising his company were an unruly bunch, and a cholera epidemic among the local population only made discipline and morale more difficult to manage. Despite the dreariness of his situation, Marshall made the best of it. In addition to learning the fundamentals of a company-grade officer, he observed first-hand the

difficulties an occupying army faced in a foreign country—“new of course to him, and also largely new to America”<sup>40</sup>—this experience would eventually prove invaluable to him as Chief of Staff of the Army.

After two years, Marshall welcomed his second set of orders; he was finally escaping the jungle and returning stateside. His next assignment was to Fort Reno in Oklahoma Territory, and it continued “his education in the rugged life and test[ed] his stamina and love for the Army.”<sup>41</sup> At Fort Reno, Marshall again experienced more of the tedium of peacetime service. His company’s garrison duties were light and the atmosphere was dominated by the culture of the “old Army” and its traditions—“essentially the traditions of spit and polish.”<sup>42</sup> With nothing else to do, the Army was preoccupied with the meticulous appearance of equipment and personnel. “‘The immaculate uniform,’ wrote one officer who knew the Army well at this period, ‘the varnished wheel spokes, the glistening metal work, the shining pots and pans, that shocking speck of dust on a locker shelf—all these were the things occupying the mind of our 1904 officer.’”<sup>43</sup>

Marshall certainly had his predilections for neatness, yet he valued such order only as the basis for maintaining efficiency and effectiveness within the Army, not as the sole basis of the military profession.<sup>44</sup> Having previously mastered the responsibilities of garrison duty—drills, inspections, administration—during his tour in the Philippines, Marshall normally completed his official duties by noon each day.<sup>45</sup> He filled the remainder of his time diligently studying Army professional manuals. He took a number of required examinations, and “was found to be proficient in military law, field engineering, military topography, international law, hippology [equine science], troops in campaign, and security information. It was an impressive list...”<sup>46</sup>

What began at Reno was a life-long effort by Marshall to learn his profession inside and out, and to stretch his understanding of all operating elements of the Army—infantry, artillery, engineers, logistics. His efforts paid off when he was offered a chance to attend the Infantry and Cavalry School at Fort Leavenworth—later renamed the Army School of the Line. The schools at Leavenworth were in the process of being revitalized, and Marshall appears to have been the lucky beneficiary of timing.

For a long time, Leavenworth, with its remote location in Kansas, had been regarded by many senior Army officers as a “convenient place to shuffle off deadbeats.”<sup>47</sup> By 1903, however, the Army had recognized the need to upgrade and formalize the professional training of its officer corps. Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell, who was then the commandant of the schools at Leavenworth, began to insist that regimental commanders choose better qualified officers to attend the initial course. While at Fort Reno, Marshall had distinguished himself on a grueling special assignment to map the southern borders of Texas. His performance on this trip probably precipitated his selection to the School of the Line. That same year, 1906, Bell was promoted to Chief of Staff of the Army, and continued to regard improvements at the schools in Leavenworth as vital to the strengthening of the Army. Therefore, it was soon directed that henceforth no officer below the rank of Captain would be selected for any of the professional schools at Leavenworth. Thankfully, Marshall had been selected just before these orders took effect and he was allowed to attend.

At the time, Marshall was still a Second Lieutenant and would not be a Captain until 1916. Thus, had he not been selected in 1906, he would have missed out on the ten years of training that prepared him for the important staff positions he ultimately filled in the first World War.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Marshall now found himself a Second Lieutenant in a school now designed for officers two grades more senior than him. Many of his classmates had served in combat operations during the Spanish-American War or the Philippines Insurrection. Nevertheless, Marshall—like Washington—made up for his inexperience with a steady determination to gain the competence expected of him. Through sheer hard work, he stood number one in his class at graduation. He was subsequently selected to continue at the school for an additional two years as an instructor for the courses he had just competed himself.<sup>49</sup>

Marshall adds a new element to the citizen-officer ideal. He is the only case study presented in this thesis who can be considered a *career* military officer. Cincinnatus, Washington, and Chamberlain were obviously talented commanders, but they began their careers in other vocations. Cincinnatus was a farmer, Washington a surveyor, and Chamberlain a college professor. Washington eagerly sought to give up his powers as soon as his duties were completed. And while Chamberlain was reluctant to leave the

service which he found so fulfilling, he had no desire to remain in the peacetime Army. Marshall, on the other hand, served in uniform for 43 continuous years, and endured with quiet resolution the cyclical buildups and draw-downs of American military strength.

In the 1930s, the American Army found itself caught between demands for a more adequate defense and the traditional American opposition to maintaining large military forces in peacetime. Frustration was the lot of many officers, eroding their will to achieve and creating an unfortunate gulf between them and the civilian authority. General Marshall managed to survive, and grow, and to retain his confidence in the process of democracy.<sup>50</sup>

Modern professional officers, therefore, may find it easier to relate to Marshall's experiences as an officer serving during both peace and war. Cicero would maintain that there should be no difference in the approach to service—or the qualification for service—between talented amateurs, like Washington and Chamberlain, and professionals, like Marshall. Both types are needed in a republic, and thus both still require the self-discipline and personal restraint to acquire the requisite level of competence and character. Nevertheless, the manner in which Marshall acquired these attributes in a pre-World War I U.S. Army, and then used them during the interwar period, provides a model from which later officers have drawn considerable inspiration.

Marshall's service, particularly during the First World War, also highlights the extent to which the citizen-officer ideal has evolved. Recall that in the early Hellenistic world, recognition of excellence was achieved through gallant displays of physical prowess on the battlefield. As Greek humanism evolved, the definition of excellence was extended to the broader context of any service to the city-state, and in addition to martial glory, selfless civil service was rewarded as well. This accommodation of two types of excellence has continued to evolve, primarily through the contributions of rare individuals like Cincinnatus, Washington, and Chamberlain, who have been recognized for excellence in both areas of public service. Yet until Marshall there persisted the notion that an officer, even one capable of greater contributions outside the military realm, must still demonstrate his mettle as a *battlefield* commander.

Marshall, however, broke this mold. He never commanded a combat unit in battle. Instead, as a young Captain and later a Major serving with the 1st Infantry Division in France, he garnered a reputation as the indispensable staff officer.

Taciturn General [General John J.] Pershing never concealed the fact that he considered Marshall the A.E.F.'s outstanding staff officer. Nor was Pershing alone. Many an Allied colleague readily admitted that Marshall, at 37, was author and director of the most outstanding large-scale troop movement of World War I: during two crucial weeks before the Meuse-Argonne operation he shifted more than 500,000 men and 2,700 guns with such perfection that the Germans learned of the maneuver an all-important 24 hours too late.<sup>51</sup>

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Upon returning home from France after the First World War, Marshall was asked by the Superintendent of VMI to speak to the cadets at his alma mater about what attributes he had observed in successful combat leaders during the war. Marshall cited “optimism, stamina, love of one’s soldiers, determination and loyalty” as traits that “distinguished successful officers from the common pack.”<sup>52</sup> But of all the qualities of leadership that Marshall valued the most, candor and loyalty were the most important. The two qualities were inseparable and represented the essential integrity that the officer’s commission had been based upon. In Marshall’s mind, the true measure of fidelity for the responsible officer sometimes required frank dissent. Blindly telling the boss what one thought he wanted to hear was essentially self-serving and disloyal to the superior, the service, and the country. “Marshall gave—and expected to get—the unvarnished facts of a case and he developed early in his career a reputation for straightforwardness and integrity that in his later career gave him enormous credibility with President Roosevelt, the Congress and the American people.”<sup>53</sup>

By all measures, Marshall had demonstrated in France a level of military competence that few of his peers and many of his seniors would only aspire to, but it is two anecdotes from Marshall’s Pre-World War II career that perhaps reveal the full measure the man—his unyielding character. The first happened in 1917 when Marshall was then a major serving on the staff of the 1st Infantry Division deployed in France. One day during a routine inspection, General John J. Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Force, criticized the division commander in front of his

subordinates for the poor level of combat readiness. Marshall, convinced the humiliation as well as the criticism was unfounded, quickly came to his commander's defense. Pershing attempted to ignore the major's protests, but when the general turned to depart, Marshall chased him down and grabbed Pershing's arm,

and according to Marshall's own recollections, practically forc[ed] the general to listen. An extraordinary lecture followed, which identified Pershing's Headquarters as the source of the problems. Pershing's offer to look into the situation did not satisfy the now thoroughly-aroused Marshall, who figured he was already in it up to his neck and "might as well not try to float but to splash a bit." There was no need to look into it, he told Pershing, "it's a fact."<sup>54</sup>

Marshall's fellow officers were astonished by Marshall's rashness and were convinced their friend had gone too far and would be swiftly relieved of all his duties. A number of them even bade him farewell. Pershing, however, respected Marshall's frank outburst, and instead of relieving the young officer, he consulted Marshall often on matters relating to the division. By the next summer, Marshall was a newly promoted colonel billeted to Pershing's personal staff, and within two years, he was serving as the general's aide-de-camp.

Marshall was lucky. Most general officers would not have tolerated such behavior in a subordinate. "Pershing's reaction to candid counsel was unusual; Marshall had never before seen a man who would listen so intently to severe criticisms. 'Pershing never held it against you personally,' he marveled. 'He might not agree with you in any degree, but he listened to very, very frank criticisms in regard to his actions.'"<sup>55</sup> Pershing's example would indelibly shape Marshall's own perspectives on leadership and service.

The second anecdote involves an incident that occurred when Marshall, then the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, attended his first meeting with President Roosevelt in 1939. The White House had indicated a desire to propose to Congress a plan to manufacture 10,000 airplanes, the apparent aim being the much-needed strengthening of the Army's Air Corps. Marshall presumed the meeting's purpose was to discuss that proposal. However, FDR's real goal was to supply the planes to Britain and other European democracies, hopefully forestalling the impending war—and American

involvement. Congress shared the country's isolationist sentiments of the time and would never support the direct sale of the aircraft to the European countries, thus the need for the subterfuge.

Marshall was shocked by FDR's plan and astonished that no one else had questioned the president's proposal. After his presentation, FDR indicated that he thought that he had made a good case for his program. The discussion then ran around the room, finding much soothing support for the proposal, until FDR turned to Marshall sitting quietly off to the side. 'Don't you think so, George?' he asked.

Marshall later admitted a flash of irritation over "such a misrepresentation of our intimacy. He was never a first-name man. "I don't think the President ever did that again," he said later. At the time his response was more direct: "I am sorry, Mr. President, but I don't agree with you at all." Accounts by participants recount that a startled look came over FDR's face and the conference abruptly ended.<sup>56</sup>

After the meeting, associates of Marshall who had either been present at the meeting or had heard about it, greeted him in the same manner as his fellow officers had after witnessed his tirade with Perishing. "'Well, it's been nice knowing you,' said Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau. As with the rest, Morgenthau made it obvious that he believed that Marshall's bluntness had just ended his army career."<sup>57</sup>

But the President never again mentioned the incident—and he soon stopped calling Marshall by his first name. Roosevelt respected Marshall's candor and the importance the general placed on his advisory position. Furthermore, Marshall was intolerant of contentious behavior. In the chivalrous tradition, there was no room for rancor or bad manners; discussion should be frank, but also lubricated with decorum least other barriers to truthfulness arise. "I never haggled with the president," Marshall later recalled. "I swallowed the little things so that I could go to bat on the big ones. I never handled a matter apologetically, and I was never contentious."<sup>58</sup>

In April of 1939, Roosevelt selected Marshall to fill retiring General Main Craig's post as the Chief of Staff of the Army. Without consulting anyone else, Roosevelt called Marshall to the White House to give him the news:

"General Marshall, I have it in mind to choose you as the next Chief of Staff of the United States Army. What do you think of that?"

“Nothing, Mr. President,” Marshall replied, “except to remind you that I have the habit of saying exactly what I think. And that, as you know,” he added, “[that] can often be unpleasing. Is that all right?”

Marshall recalls that Roosevelt grinned and said, “Yes.” Marshall remained persistent. “Mr. President, you said yes pleasantly. But I have to remind you again that it may be unpleasant.” The President continued to grin. “I know,” he said. But he did not add “George.”<sup>59</sup>

Again, Marshall’s frankness had been received with a promotion instead of the predicted resentment and dismissal. He had coveted the new position, but would not ingratiate himself to the President in order to obtain it. There was no quibbling or conniving, only the assertion of loyalty through honesty. Roosevelt—to his credit— recognized the value of an independent voice.

It is important not to gloss over Marshall’s selection as Chief of Staff of the Army, for at the time it was a selection that went against the commonly held sentiments of what type of officer should be selected to be the senior officer of the Army; and therefore Roosevelt’s selection says a great deal about Marshall’s character, and the President’s trust in the general. Some experts of the time felt that “the top commander of fighting men must have led soldiers in battle,”<sup>60</sup> while others maintained that he ought also to be a West Pointer.<sup>61</sup> Marshall met neither of these requirements. While he had commanded a regiment in China for three years during the interwar period, it had not been in combat. His chief distinction had been earned in World War I as a brilliant staff officer. Furthermore, in contrast to a West Point education, Marshall had attended VMI, which he himself felt had inadequately prepared him for a broader understanding of his profession, specifically the lack of humanities and other courses that would have provided insight into the national and international problems of the period.<sup>62</sup>

Yet Marshall had, over the course of four decades of service, prepared as best as anyone could for the requirements of high command.

Judged by today’s requirements for high command, no institution—civilian or military—at the turn of the century provided proper grounding in languages, international relations, troop management, or psychology of leadership. Lacking such instruction, the officer of an earlier era had to train himself. And for this he needed a belief in himself, an intense desire to know, the capacity to grow, the trait of self-discipline, and the compulsion to excel in his chosen field. Marshall had them all.<sup>63</sup>

The breadth of Marshall's experiences was ultimately one of his greatest strengths. He may not have mastered the details of *every* branch of the Army—no commander can. Still he had achieved, through a series of varied assignments, a remarkable understanding of the challenges of modern warfare. As a young officer, Marshall's drive to succeed often resulted in his avoidance of those subjects and activities which he knew he could not perform well. However, he became increasingly aware that such an approach might prove dangerous in the end, and he began intentionally seeking out opportunities involving tasks for which he had little aptitude.<sup>64</sup> By deepening his knowledge in a wide range of areas, Marshall increased his ability to handle the uncertainty which naturally accompanies new and greater responsibilities.

As Washington was well aware, one's ego is often the largest impediment to diffusing such situations. Marshall understood this too, and his courteous nature and unassuming humility undoubtedly enhanced his ability to get things done. Perhaps the most difficult task Marshall had during World War II was managing the different personalities of his principal commanders, a group that included George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley, and Dwight Eisenhower. In 1943 alone, *Time Magazine* reported on "a few ill-mannered moments," which gave Patton "more fame than he had won on four battlefields" and that MacArthur "was dragged, willingly or not, into hectic pre-convention politics at home"<sup>65</sup>—distractions that must surely have infuriated Marshall, but which he deftly handled nevertheless.

During the war, Marshall enjoyed the same respect from Congress that he did from Roosevelt. In hearings before both the House and the Senate, he was a refreshing presence. His meticulous knowledge of the facts and refusal to have any part in partisan tactics was welcomed by members of both political parties. However, it was once again his unflinching honesty on even the most uncomfortable of facts that won him the most respect.

He would tell the truth even if it hurt his cause, Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn remembered. Of all the men who ever testified before any committee on which I served, Rayburn said, there is no one of them who has the influence with a committee of the House that General Marshall has. The reason was simple, he continued, it is because when he takes the witness stand, we forget whether we are Republicans or Democrats. We

remember that we are in the presence of a man who is telling the truth, as he sees it, about the problems he is discussing.<sup>66</sup>

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On November 19, 1945, President Harry S. Truman presented General of the Army George Catlett Marshall with a second Gold Oak Leaf Cluster to the Distinguished Service Medal. Marshall felt strongly that it would be improper to accept such honors while men were dying and he was still Chief of Staff of the Army. Having successfully avoided all American decorations and most of those offered by foreign countries, this was the only official decoration given to Marshall by his country for his six years of service during the war.<sup>67</sup> Given Marshall's humility, he would have refused this one too had he not submitted his letter of resignation the previous week to President Truman. Truman, who considered Marshall "the greatest military man this country has ever produced,"<sup>68</sup> reluctantly accepted the resignation, but insisted on the decoration. The award citation, written prior to some of Marshall's greatest accomplishments, is a noteworthy assessment. It reads in part:

In a war unparalleled in magnitude and in horror, millions of Americans gave their country outstanding service, General of the Army Marshall gave them victory.

Statesman and soldier, he had courage, fortitude, and vision, and best of all a rare self-effacement. He has been a tower of strength as counselor to two Commanders in Chief. His standards of character, conduct, and efficiency inspired the entire Army, the nations and the world. To him as much as any individual, the United States owes its future. He takes his place at the head of the great commanders of history.<sup>69</sup>

Marshall was ready to finally return to his home in Leesburg. There was no packing to be done; a few days earlier General Marshall and his wife Katherine had quietly moved out of the Chief of Staff's quarters and made room for Marshall's relief, General Eisenhower, and his wife. Marshall was happy to slip out of Washington with as little fanfare as possible, and for her part, Mrs. Marshall was eager to begin "all the quiet years ahead."<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, those years would have to wait. As they entered their Virginia home, the Marshalls were greeted by a ringing phone.

The General answered quietly, abruptly. He said nothing more, and Mrs. Marshall went up for a nap. When she came back downstairs she heard the

radio announcing that President Truman had just appointed General Marshall as his Special Ambassador to China—“He will leave immediately.” To his transfixed wife the General explained that the telephone call he had answered so briefly had been from the President. “I could not bear to tell you until you had had your rest.”<sup>71</sup>

It would be the first of several calls to service that prevented a peaceful retirement to their Virginia home. Now it was China, later it would be to lend “his support and leadership [to] the evolution of a foreign policy tailored to meet America’s new responsibilities, his duels with Vyacheslav Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, over the future of Germany and above all, his leadership in formulating and selling the Marshall Plan first to Europeans and then to his countrymen.”<sup>72</sup>

Following his tenure as head of the State Department, Marshall accepted a Presidential appointment as President of the American Red Cross. Each of Marshall’s new appointments brought a flood of congratulations from old friends and his many acquaintances. But records indicate that none was received with greater praise “on the wisdom of this selection than any others. The letters reflect the esteem in which he was held by many admirers, who seemed to welcome the chance to keep him longer in the public eye.”<sup>73</sup> That a man of Marshall’s prestige had been willing to accept this position brought the Red Cross an infusion of new support in the form of increased donations of both time and money. Marshall could have—as Truman later admitted he had intended the General should—simply let the lending of his name to this important cause be his contribution, “but he did not want a sinecure; he wanted to work his passage. Nearly sixty-nine, weakened by an operation, he set about his new assignment as though he had never before served his country.”<sup>74</sup> Still, Marshall enjoyed the work and with the war in Korea begun, the responsibilities of the Red Cross had increased significantly.

In 1950, President Truman called on Marshall’s services yet again. The scene seems more fitting to a Hollywood production than reality.

General and Mrs. Marshall were vacationing at a Huron Mountain resort in Michigan in August 1950 when he was called to the telephone of a country store nearby. It was the usual rural scene with local citizens sitting around and peering covertly at the elderly visitor as he came to take his phone call from Washington. They had been told, of course, that the U.S. President was on the phone, waiting to speak to the Former Secretary of

State. Aware that he could be overheard, Marshall was laconic and brief. The onlookers heard little more than “Yes, Mr. President,” for Truman only asked that Marshall drop in to see him when he was next in Washington. The phone call opened the way for Marshall’s third recall to active duty since his retirement as Chief of Staff five years previously.

This time Marshall was asked to take over the beleaguered new Department of Defense in order to shore up American military strength as war with Korea loomed. Marshall accepted Truman’s offer, but informed the President of his intention of serving only six months in the position, (He later acquiesced to Truman’s pressure to remain in office for a full year.) In that year as Secretary of Defense, Marshall was his usual efficient self. He augmented America’s military strength, secured additional United Nations military aid in Korea, and strengthened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which he had helped create in 1948. He also decisively supported Truman in one of the biggest controversies in American military history—the relief of General Douglas MacArthur, the U.N. Supreme Commander in Korea. “In congressional hearings during May 1951 Marshall testified for seven days. MacArthur’s removal, he stated, stemmed from ‘the wholly unprecedented position of a local theater commander publicly expressing his displeasure at and his disagreement with the foreign and military policy of the United States.’”<sup>75</sup> Finally, in September of that same year, three months before his seventy-first birthday, Marshall escaped to Leesburg, Virginia, concluding nearly 50 years of military and civil service.

Many scholars and average citizens alike have wondered why General Marshall took on these last difficult assignments after so many years of superb accomplishment in the military. The answer is as simple as the challenges were complex: he was a man of solid character who felt he owed a debt to his country.

The Duke of Wellington, on being reproached for accepting a relatively minor position, explained “I am *nimmukwallah* as we say in the East; that is, I have ate of the King’s salt and therefore, I conceive it to be my duty to serve with unhesitating zeal and cheerfulness, when or whenever the King or his government may think proper to employ me.”<sup>76</sup>

The Duke was much like Marshall. Both spoke plainly and without theatrics during times when bombastic oratories from military and civilian prima donnas dominated the world stage.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, these two great generals shared the same

notions about service. “Marshall considered himself a retained servant of the Republic. He saw it as his obligation to the United States to serve the country as envoy extraordinary to China, Secretary of State or Secretary of Defense, whatever the emotional or physical cost.”<sup>78</sup>

In his paper presented at the 1999 Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics, Colonel Charles F. Brower asserted: “In today's context it is almost impossible for us to imagine that such a man [as George C. Marshall] ever existed.”<sup>79</sup> Brower may have a point. Aside from deftly managing the mobilization of the U.S. Army from its dreadful state in post-World War I isolationist America to a fighting force capable of global coalition operations, Marshall served with equal or even greater distinction as a statesman, safeguarding the peace after he had won the war.

Marshall, like the other men discussed in this thesis, was not immortal. His accomplishments were larger than life, but he was not. He was unassuming, actively avoiding publicity as best he could while holding the most visible positions in American government. Like Washington, he was a mediocre student in his adolescence. Through gritty determination Marshall rose to the top of his class at the Virginia Military Institute. Over the course of his half-century of service that followed, he repeatedly forestalled his retirement to private life in order to answer his country's call to duty. His service was characterized by unmatched competence, unrelenting character, and a seemingly unlimited capacity for selflessness. He is *civis Americanus*, and he continues to be a “paragon of professionalism and officership... and his...career serves as a comforting reference point for thoughtful officers to guide upon when they feel they are in danger of losing their ethical and professional bearings.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the excellent biography presented on “Joshua L. Chamberlain's Pages” found on-line at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6732/jlc.html> (August, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Pullen, 13.

<sup>11</sup> See the excellent biography presented on “Joshua L. Chamberlain's Pages” found on-line at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6732/jlc.html> (August, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, The Passing of the Armies: The Last Campaign of the Armies, (Pennsylvania: Stan Clark Military Books, 1994), pp. 260-261.

<sup>15</sup> Pullen, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 17

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Excerpted from Chamberlain's remarks at the Dedication of the 20th Maine Monuments at Gettysburg, October 3, 1889 available at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Aegean/6732/jlc.html> (August, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> “Time Man of the Year, 1943” Time Magazine, 3 January, 1944. Available online at: <http://www.time.com/time/special/moy/1943.html> (August, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> Forrest C. Pogue, George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945-1959, (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987), 514.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 515.

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- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Forrest C. Pogue, George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880-1939, (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 58.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 59.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid. 57.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., 64.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid., 65.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 73.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 80.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., 83.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 84.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 85.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 84.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 85.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 93.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Pogue, Statesman, 516.
- <sup>50</sup> Pogue, Education, xv.
- <sup>51</sup> “Time Man of the Year, 1943” Time Magazine, 3 January, 1944. Available online at: <http://www.time.com/time/special/moy/1943.html> (August, 2004).
- <sup>52</sup> Colonel Charles F. Brower, US Military Academy, “George C. Marshall: A Study in Character,” Paper presented at JOINT SERVICES CONFERENCE ON PROFESSIONAL ETHICS (JSCOPE) 1999 (XXI), 28-29 January 1999.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Pogue, Education, 346.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid., 47.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 346.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> “Time Man of the Year, 1943” Time Magazine, 3 January, 1944. Available online at: <http://www.time.com/time/special/moy/1943.html> (August, 2004).

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Pogue, Statesman, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 416.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> U.S. Department of Defense History Available online at [http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef\\_histories/bios/marshall.htm](http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef_histories/bios/marshall.htm) (August, 2004)

<sup>76</sup> Pogue, Statesman, x.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> U.S. Department of Defense History Available online at [http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef\\_histories/bios/marshall.htm](http://www.defenselink.mil/specials/secdef_histories/bios/marshall.htm) (August 2004).

<sup>80</sup> Colonel Charles F. Brower, US Military Academy, "George C. Marshall: A Study in Character," Paper presented at JOINT SERVICES CONFERENCE ON PROFESSIONAL ETHICS (JSCOPE) 1999 (XXI), 28-29 January 1999.

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## VIII. FINAL THOUGHTS

At the heart of this thesis is the assertion that there is more to being a military officer than simply the ability to command other warriors in battle. A quick survey of the profession of arms reveals that the paragons of the military profession are individuals who possessed much broader talents than the capacity to wage war. Furthermore, most of these men went on to serve with equal and sometimes greater distinction as leading citizens within their societies.

In order to validate these observations, a systematic approach was needed. The method chosen aimed to treat the study of a profession as a biography—a biography not of a single great individual, but of a profession, using exemplary individuals from different time periods and different locales. The individual case studies comprising this group needed to be representative of significant periods throughout the history of Western Civilization. Since the author of this study is himself an American officer, and this project is a requirement in a course of graduate study at an American military school, there was a natural inclination to trace the branches of this evolution toward the United States. The methodology, however, should likely be valid for other European cultures as well.

The decision to use literary in addition to historical cases was made for two reasons. First, certain significant periods of study provided few verifiable historic figures, and it seemed appropriate simply to fill those gaps with fictional characters who embodied the social and cultural expectations of those periods. Secondly, literature, particularly stories that attempt to teach a moral lesson, provide clues to the most deeply held values of a society. When selecting the individual case studies, special consideration was also given to individuals who met the criteria of having served in high positions of civil leadership, following brilliant careers as military commanders. Only Sir Gawain fails to meet these criteria. Cincinnatus, Washington, Chamberlain, and Marshall, however, far exceed both standards, each having answered the call to service two and three times, and then unassumingly retiring to a quieter life. The purpose here was to

show the continued obligation of service felt by those individuals, who having once fully dedicated their lives to the service of their country, find it difficult not to answer the call to further service.

Two concepts drive the evolution of the citizen-officer ideal. The first is the notion of participative citizenship offered first by the Greeks, and later extended by the Romans. Initially, it developed in Athens and other Greek city-states by associating excellence with service to the state. The Romans, specifically the philosopher Cicero, further defined moral excellence as possessing the self-discipline necessary to acquire both the requisite level of competence and the strength of character that would allow an individual to be trusted with the important duties of public service. The second is the warrior's intentional gentling of his demeanor. It is first detected in the Germanic clans depicted in *Beowulf*, but is articulated much more precisely in the Middle Ages in the Code of Chivalry. Chivalry ultimately takes on the quality of a moral ideal that is dependent on personal restraint and self-discipline, and it offers the first formal curriculum for a young man to achieve Cicero's two traits of a trusted public servant—competence and character. Around the time of the Enlightenment, citizenship and chivalry are translated to the American colonies. George Washington may not have been the first American to embody both selfless civil service and knightly courtesy, but he is certainly the most identifiable exemplar of the two ideals.

Of course, the traits represented in the two ideals are not exclusive to the profession of arms. A sense of civic duty and a courteous nature have frequently been detected in public servants with no ties to the military. However, it is important to note that both of these ideals grew out of a warrior class. In the Hellenistic world, the word for moral excellence was *areté*, and at the time it could be achieved only through demonstrated gallantry on the battlefield. As Greek humanism, the belief in man's infinite potential for achievement through the use of his rational faculties, developed, *areté* took on a broader meaning; it was extended to include civil as well as martial achievements. Similarly, chivalry grew out of what was known as the "Second Estate," the nobles who felt it was their moral obligation to protect the rest of medieval society through military action. They were the knights, who swore an oath to live in accordance with the ideals of chivalry. To this day, young officers continue to dream of battlefield

heroics, yet the complexity of modern military and the huge advancements in technology have expanded the meaning of noble military service to include the warrior who does not meet the enemy face-to-face and the indispensable staff officer as well. Therefore, the last case presented, General George C. Marshall, represents a special lesson for the vast majority of modern officers. He was a career soldier, who never led a unit into direct combat with the enemy, yet emerged as perhaps the most respected general from the largest conflict in the history of the world. The explanation is clear, and in perfect keeping with the citizen-officer ideal translated to him by the more gallant, but no more virtuous exemplars in this thesis. His career of service was governed by courage, moderation, humility, and most importantly, the subjugation of his personal interests for the benefit of his country—*non sibi sed patriae*, “Not for self, but for country.”

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Certainly the examination of paragons of the military profession was reason enough to undertake this thesis. However, in addition to the themes discussed above, there is another concept which runs subtly throughout the entire continuum of historic and literary case studies. It is a commentary on how military officers ought to be educated. It is a huge topic—a debate that dates as far back as Athens and Sparta—and which is worthy of its own thesis. Nevertheless, given the course of study that this thesis was written for—“Leadership, Education and Development”—it seems appropriate to revisit the thoughts and example of some of our paragons, even if only for the purpose of provoking further study.

If the central argument of this thesis is accepted—that there is more to being an officer than simply being an adroit battlefield commander—then an argument can also be made that the education of an officer should not be limited to those subjects narrowly relating to warfare. *Areté* in the Greek world was comprehensive. Hellenistic leaders like Alexander the Great—whose personal tutor was Aristotle—were expected to be the best at every endeavor. Cicero advocated a curriculum that consisted of both a technical (competence) element and a moral (character) element for aspiring officers and other public servants. Cincinnatus embodied this Roman ideal. Gawain was a product of chivalry’s equal emphasis on brave exploits in war and courtesy in everything. In the American examples, Washington echoed the chivalrous ideal, as did Chamberlain, whose

study of languages and rhetoric increased his ability to lead his men. Few people rival Marshall's competence when it comes to military strategy and logistical operations, yet even he advocated an educational curriculum for American officers that placed greater emphasis on political science, languages, and international relations.

Certainly, an understanding of engineering and science is necessary in modern warfare. A commander would be ineffective if he did not possess an understanding of the fundamental capabilities and limitations of the weapons systems used by his and other units. Yet history has shown—as has this thesis—that an understanding of the moral and psychological aspects of warfare is equally as important. This is no more evident than on the ground in current military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the necessary decentralization of the command structure has left young Marine and Army officers repeatedly in situations beyond their experience levels. These scenarios are so politically and ethically complex that even the smallest misstep can spark an incident in the international media that can derail America's political objectives and possibly jeopardize national security. It is a practical impossibility for officers to acquire the breadth of operational experience necessary; on-the-job training is inevitable and even desirable in most cases. Yet the essential elements of decision making can be acquired vicariously through a study of classical literature and history. Recall Admiral Stockdale's observation cited at the beginning of this thesis:

In stress situations, the fundamentals, the hard-core classical subjects, are what best serve.... The classics have a way of saving you the trouble of prolonged experiences....When you read the classics in humanities, you become aware that the big ideas have been around a long time....<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it seems prudent to occasionally reevaluate officer education programs and ensure that the humanities and social sciences continue to receive the proper level of consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> James B. Stockdale. Thoughts of a Philosophical Fighter Pilot. (Stanford: Hoover Institutional Press, 1995), 24.

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