

The Golden Age, Revisited: George C. Marshall's Press Work, 1939–45

War in History
1–22

© The Author(s) 2018

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0968344518774955

journals.sagepub.com/home/wih

**Thomas Crosbie**

Royal Danish Defence College, Denmark

Abstract

It is often assumed that the Second World War marked a golden age of the US Armed Forces' control over the mass media. However, few scholars have examined the degree to which press matters occupied the time and attention of the highest levels of military command – if at all. The daily work of Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall reveals a rather more complex portrait. If the era was indeed a golden age for the army, it was made so in part through persistent effort by both public affairs agencies and at least one top army commander.

Keywords

George C. Marshall, press work, public affairs, Second World War

The evolving relationship between military commanders and the mass media has long been the subject of interest for scholars¹ and soldiers² alike, but much remains unknown. It has often been assumed that, in the American context, the Second World War marked the most stable period in this relationship, a golden age of unquestioning press obedience to military command and unflagging public interest in (if not always support for) military

- 1 E.g. Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York, 1960), pp. 395–414. For contemporary discussions, see the journal *Media, War & Conflict* or Dennis McQuail, 'On the Mediatization of War: A Review Article', *Communication Gazette*, 68.2 (2006), pp. 107–18.
- 2 E.g. Lloyd J. Matthews, *Newsmen and National Defense: Is Conflict Inevitable?* (Washington, DC, 1991); Cantigny Conference Series, *The Military and the Media: Facing the Future* (Wheaton, IL, 1998); Major General Tony Cucolo, 'The Military and the Media: Shotgun Wedding, Rocky Marriage, Committed Relationship', *Media, War & Conflict*, 1.1 (2008), pp. 84–9.

Corresponding author:

Thomas Crosbie, Royal Danish Defence College, Copenhagen 2100, Denmark.

Email: thcr@fak.dk

affairs. However, few scholars have examined the degree to which press matters occupied the time and attention of the highest levels of military command – if at all.

By carefully examining the daily work of Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, we can glean a rather more complex portrait of this golden age of media–military affairs. Marshall has been called ‘the principal military architect of the Western democracies’ ultimate victories over the Axis powers’.³ As chief of staff, Marshall occupied a pivotal position connecting the most powerful uniformed service to its civilian leadership, and Marshall’s unique personality made him particularly effective in the role. His unglamorous but unstinting bureaucratic labours have also left us with a remarkably detailed record of his contribution to the war. His vast archives reveal that he was consistently occupied by a number of characteristic press concerns, sometimes casting the press as allies in the war, other times positioning the press as opponents in a struggle to shape public opinion.

I argue that Marshall’s leadership of the US Army included persistent engagement with press concerns. These gave rise to three strategic preferences: a preference for anticipating the needs and expected output of journalists; a preference to persuade journalists to voluntarily align their interests with those of the Army, and thereby act as a conduit for Army propaganda; and finally, a less pronounced preference to misdirect the press and the public when it would benefit the war effort. If this era was indeed a golden age from the army’s perspective, this happy state of affairs was the result of constant effort by both public affairs agencies and at least one top army commander.

A Golden Age

In what sense are we justified in describing the Second World War as the American military’s golden age of press relations? That this war marked an ideal alignment of media and military interests is repeatedly affirmed by scholars of war correspondence and military media management. It is the culmination of an oft-repeated story of incremental improvement (from a military perspective) in relations with journalists. The Crimean War (1853–6), waged shortly after the invention of the telegraph, is commonly taken as the starting point of this story.⁴ William Howard Russell, often called the first war correspondent,⁵ galvanized the British public with his highly critical news reports from the field of combat. This impact came as a surprise to the military, which had essentially ignored Russell’s presence on the battlefield.⁶ Russell and the other telegraphic front-line

3 Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (Bloomington, In., 1984), p. 421.

4 Michael MacDonagh, ‘Can We Rely on Our War News?’ *Fortnightly Review*, 63.374 (1898), pp. 612–26; Philip Knightley, *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam* (New York, 1975), p. 4; Miles Hudson and John Stanier, *War and the Media: A Random Searchlight* (Phoenix Mill, 1997).

5 Knightley, *The First Casualty*, offers a few possibilities for the first war correspondent, including Thucydides, Willem van de Velde, Henry Crabb Robinson, or G.L. Gruneisen. Most scholars name William Howard Russell, e.g. MacDonagh, ‘Can We Rely’ and Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*.

6 According to MacDonagh, ‘Can We Rely’, ‘His movements were not in the slightest degree restricted; he had perfect freedom of action; he could go where he pleased; and what he wrote was subject to no censorship; but he was unable to procure rations for himself’ (61).

correspondents of the Crimean War enjoyed a high degree of access to potential news, but at the cost that they could not or would not comment on military action, reporting instead on logistics, living conditions, and the like. Hence, this first generation sacrificed control over the message in exchange for the access and support they needed to obtain information.⁷

Russell and many of his colleagues next turned their attention to the American Civil War (1861–5). Despite the large number of war correspondents and extensive network of war reporting,⁸ the Civil War was characterized by more censorship than during the Crimean War. The Russell tradition of criticizing logistics and management did find some proponents, but failed to gain the public's interest and Russell's own work was poorly received by military command.⁹ The military's autonomy over both the fighting of war and the content of the journalists' message was now generally accepted by correspondents, leaving only the questions of access and support.

During the First World War, the next major test of media–military relations, the issues of access and support would also swing to privilege the interests of the military. Some journalists, including notably Arthur Moore in 'Amiens Dispatch',¹⁰ challenged censorship, but generally war correspondence had narrowed from Russell's day to become a form of nationalist cheerleading. Perhaps the most remarkable evidence of this can be found in the American coverage of trench warfare. Although journalists gave their lives to report from those very trenches, war correspondents did not succeed in revealing the truth of the Western Front during the war, presenting only the most antiseptic insights.¹¹

Scholars argue that war correspondents grew even more aligned with military interests during the Second World War, giving rise to an era that I term the golden age of American media–military relations. This term is appropriate for three reasons: first, the alignment of interests was generally found agreeable to journalists and military agents alike; second, there was extensive censorship of journalists, but there was also considerable self-censorship; and finally, journalists actively executed propaganda goals of the military (sometimes knowingly, sometimes not). With these three elements in place, military leaders could feel confident that operational security would be maintained, public opinion would be cultivated, and Congressional interference would be minimized,

7 Pointed critiques of strategy and tactics, when it occurred in Russell's writing, were muted by his editors and sent secretly to members of Cabinet (Hudson and Stanier, *War and the Media*, p. 7).

8 J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the War* (Pittsburgh, 1955), p. 60. Andrews places the number of correspondents at over 300 (p. 60), with 50,000 miles of telegraph lines in place (p. 6).

9 Andrews, *The North Reports*, notes, 'from time to time, certain bold spirits criticized the abuses in army administration, abuses such as vandalism, unsanitary camps, shocking neglect of the wounded by incompetent surgeons, waste in the commissariat, clothing Union troops in Confederate gray uniforms, and many others. The unpopularity of such correspondents at army headquarters readily can be understood' (74).

10 Knightley, *The First Casualty*, pp. 90–1; Matthew Farish, 'Modern Witnesses: Foreign Correspondents, Geopolitical Vision, and the First World War', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26.3 (2001), pp. 273–87.

11 Knightley, *The First Casualty*, pp. 80–1.

while any mistakes or unpleasant necessities would be overlooked – certainly a desirable information environment for the military of any democracy.

The willing obedience of the press to toe the line during the Second World War is frequently noted. Wyatt argues that ‘the reporters believed in the cause for which the nation was fighting’.¹² Knightley explains, ‘war correspondents went along with the official scheme for reporting the war because they were convinced that it was in the national interest to do so. They saw no sharp line of demarcation between the role of the press in war-time and that of the government.’¹³ Hammond describes the press as cooperative, while Mander is even more emphatic: ‘This rhetoric of service to one’s country was never really questioned in World War II where it was as familiar as old wallpaper.’¹⁴ In a lavish catalogue for the National Portrait Gallery’s exhibition on the Second World War’s war correspondence, Alan Fern argues that ‘the press was by no means a homogenous cheering section’, but tellingly he goes on to clarify, ‘this is another subject, to be dealt with in another context’.¹⁵

The attitude of obedience extended to acceptance of fairly stringent censorship guidelines,¹⁶ so much so that one scholar notes, ‘they took it upon themselves to police their ranks’.¹⁷ In a study of the reporting of atrocity, Oliver stresses the particular self-censoring surrounding stories of American soldiers committing acts of violence or cruelty: ‘neither U.S. media outlets themselves nor their readers and listeners seemed particularly receptive to stories that disturbed, however faintly, the discursive nexus between war-making and national virtue’.¹⁸ This was true, too, of atrocities committed against American soldiers by enemy forces.¹⁹ Correspondents became so accustomed to censorship that Knightley quotes one at the end of the war asking where he would go now to clear his stories.²⁰ Minor also stresses this habit of mind, attributing the timidity of American journalists in the face of Sen. Joseph McCarthy’s witch-hunts ‘in large part to a hangover from the experience of its wartime relationship with government and men in power’.²¹ Voss notes, ‘generally speaking, journalists and the news-consuming public

12 Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York, 1993), p. 15.

13 Knightley, *The First Casualty*, p. 276.

14 William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962–1968* (Washington, DC, 1988), p. 6; Mary S. Mander, *Pen and Sword: American War Correspondents, 1898–1975* (Urbana, IL, 2010), p. 114.

15 Alan Fern, ‘Foreword’, in Frederick S. Voss, *Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II* (Washington, DC, 1994), p. x.

16 Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, p. 15.

17 James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941* (Baltimore, 1992), p. 6.

18 Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (New York, 2006), p. 14.

19 Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion* (Newbury Park, 1986), p. 143.

20 Knightley, *The First Casualty*, p. 276.

21 Dale Minor, *The Information War* (New York, 1970), p. 7.

alike were sympathetic ... to regulations and mechanisms designed to limit and to a large extent channel the war's news coverage'.²²

Historians of propaganda have stressed the importance of war correspondents in collaborating with the dissemination of the United States' immense quantities of 'white' propaganda, in what has been called 'the greatest propaganda battle in the history of warfare'.²³ Another historian notes, 'It was systematic mobilisation of propaganda and manipulation of public opinion. Although journalists soon realized this, few if any confronted the system.'²⁴ And Charles Lynch, recalling his experiences as a Second World War correspondent, affirms this view:

It's humiliating to look back at what we wrote during the war. It was crap – and I don't exclude the Ernie Pyles or the Alan Moorheads. We were a propaganda arm of our governments. At the start the censors enforced that, but by the end we were our own censors. We were cheerleaders.²⁵

From the perspective of critical readers of the news and of repentant correspondents like Lynch, the state of the American public sphere during the Second World War was perhaps more an Orwellian nightmare than a golden age. Yet the term has value as a heuristic device for clarifying just how ideal the situation was from the military's perspective, and just how remote that era is from our post-Vietnam perspective.

In what follows, I will accept the scholarly consensus that American war correspondents did by and large willingly follow the information policies of the American government. By turning to examine in depth the press work of the Army's top soldier, Gen. George C. Marshall, we will discover the degree and character of the military effort undergirding this arrangement. As it turns out, this golden age required considerable command attention.

Press Work, Pre-Second World War

The term 'press work', borrowed from Glora Goodman,²⁶ is used here to refer to a class of organized, intentional activity that broadly overlaps with what is now termed the 'public information' element of military public affairs. American military public affairs has traditionally been divided between three fields: *public information*, which involves military agents liaising with, managing, and observing the work of the civilian press; *command information* (formerly *troop information*), which concerns the internal audience of soldiers and officers; and *community relations*, which concerns liaising with the local domestic governments and civil society actors that surround military bases.²⁷ In what

22 Voss, *Reporting the War*, p. 19.

23 Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: War Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Nuclear Age* (Glasgow, 1990), p. 188.

24 Greg McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (London, 2002), p. 68.

25 In Knightley, *The First Casualty*, p. 333.

26 Glora Goodman, "'Palestine's Best': The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946–1946", *Israel Studies*, 16.3 (2011), pp. 1–27.

27 *Field Manual 46-1 Public Affairs Operations* (Washington, DC, 1997).

follows, I isolate work undertaken personally by Marshall that would fall under the organizational category of public information.

Why choose this narrow definition? Primarily, this is done to maintain a focus on efforts directed at the press itself rather than at the diffuse political processes that involve the press. A broad definition of press work might encompass any act done by officers or soldiers where there is some purposeful intent to interfere with the processes of reporting on military affairs, which includes news-gathering, reporting, and then transmitting, editing, publishing, and promoting the report. That broader use would cut across multiple organizational divisions within the military, including for example the work of liaising with top American government officials (called *Legislative Liaison* and later *Legislative Affairs*); managing the actual governance of foreign publics (called *Civil Affairs*, a major concern in the North African theatre); as well as public relations, marketing, and advertising. It would also include special branch activities such as Samuel A. Stouffer's research efforts or Frank Capra's films. While Marshall was involved in all of these activities, including them would distract us from the goal of understanding how the press factored as a point of specific command concern.

Our focus then is on Marshall's press work in the narrow sense of his public information work, that is to say, his efforts to manage the civilian American press. I exclude Marshall's involvement with *Stars and Stripes* or *Yank* magazine, for example, since these concerned the primary audience of American soldiers (and so are classified as command information activities). Similarly, I exclude instances such as Marshall's memorandum for Gen. Thomas T. Handy where he recommends expeditiously informing family members of soldiers' injuries through the Adjutant General's Office – a policy which he describes as 'good propaganda'²⁸ but not one involving the civilian press. Incidentally, this narrower approach aligns with both William M. Hammond's pioneering work on public affairs²⁹ and Sarah Maltby's recent work on military media management.³⁰

As the war progressed, the American government's capacities to manage information expanded dramatically. All such activity can be broadly classified as having propagandistic or censoring functions, with the public information activities (or press work) done by American soldiers partaking in both. In this, uniformed press workers were joined by three major civilian staffs. First, the Office of War Information (OWI) executed 'white propaganda', efforts to persuade Americans that were clearly marked as such.³¹ Second, the Office of Strategic Services executed 'black propaganda', attempts to persuade that were not clearly marked as propaganda – in other words, deceptive propaganda and psychological warfare.³² These two offices had little to do with one another.³³ Third, the

28 Marshall to Handy, 29 October 1942, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3: 'The Right Man for the Job', December 7, 1941–May 31, 1943*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Baltimore, 1996), p. 415.

29 Hammond, *Public Affairs* (1988 and 1996 editions); William M. Hammond, 'The Army and Public Affairs: Enduring Principles', *Parameters*, 19 (1989), pp. 57–74.

30 Sarah Maltby, 'The Mediatization of the Military', *Media, War & Conflict*, 5.3 (2012), pp. 255–68; Sarah Maltby, *Military Media Management: Negotiating the 'Front' Line in Mediatized War* (New York, 2012).

31 Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, p. 202.

32 Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, p. 202.

33 John W. Henderson, *The United States Information Agency* (New York, 1969), pp. 31–2.

Office of Censorship executed standard forms of security-oriented censoring, with no publicity function at all. Indeed, the office did not even have a press agent.³⁴

Within this field of propaganda and censorship activities, top military leaders soon recognized the need to engage in their own full-scale propaganda and censorship activities. When Marshall was appointed chief of staff in September 1939, Army public information activities were under the G-2 or Information Division, as they had been since the First World War. This meant in practice that each unit conducted its own, independent form of public relations, with little centralization.³⁵ In July 1940, a Press Relations Bureau, now free from the limiting purview of Army Intelligence, was set up under Major Ward Maris, who was directly responsible to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations. Marshall's biographer notes,

This bureau controlled information for the War Department; information on units outside Washington still came under G-2. ... [Secretary of War Henry L.] Stimson and General Marshall became convinced of the need for supplying more information on Army activities to the nation's newspapers. Secretary Stimson concluded that he must have a War Department Bureau of Public Relations directly under his control.³⁶

On 11 February 1941, Stimson formed the Bureau of Public Relations (BPR) to succeed the Public Relations Branch. He directed Major General Robert C. Richardson, the head of the old branch, to shift over and head the new bureau. This bureau 'was created to implement those things which General Richardson felt were necessary to keep Army PR apace with the expanding forces. ... He remained the director of the Bureau for only six months, however, being given a command assignment.'³⁷ The preference for a command assignment would continue to strip the BPR of talent for the rest of the war.

Major General Alexander Surles replaced Richardson on 8 August 1941 and would become Marshall's primary correspondent and aide in press matters for the rest of the war. Surles enjoyed a good reputation and, though like Richardson would have preferred to leave the office for command assignment, was willing to remain in place. As one historian notes, 'in the words of one Washington editor "he came through with laurels and the affectionate respect of the newspapermen with whom he had to deal"'.³⁸ Under Surles, the BPR worked with both the OWI and the Office of Censorship (but not the Office of Strategic Services). The BPR's Review Board (in charge of censorship) had a tense relationship with the OWI since the OWI 'argued for the release of "everything known to the enemy or that would not give him aid"'³⁹ but 'in general, relations were quite harmonious with Davis [OWI chief], and especially so, as one might well expect, with Bryon Price and the Office of Censorship'.⁴⁰

34 Sidney Alvin Knutson, 'History of the Public Relations Program in the United States Army' (MSc thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1953), p. 186.

35 James R. Mock and Cedric Larson, 'Public Relations of the U.S. Army', *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 5.2 (1941), p. 275.

36 Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory, 1943-1945* (New York, 1973), pp. 127-8.

37 Knutson, *History*, pp. 177-8.

38 Knutson, *History*, p. 179.

39 Hammond, 'The Army and Public Affairs', p. 66.

40 Knutson, *History*, p. 187.

In Surles, Marshall had a thoughtful and dedicated press chief heading a vast press office that worked closely with both the primary propaganda and primary censorship departments of the American government. And notably, Marshall himself was not oblivious to the role of the press in war. During the First World War, when he was Gen. John J. Pershing's aide and they were campaigning through France, Marshall gave one rare intimation of this understanding. In the words of one historian, immediately before a battle at Cantigny, France, and 'foreshadowing a technique made famous in World War II, [Lieutenant Colonel] Marshall then briefed the assembled news correspondents on the plan, in part to commit them to its security'.⁴¹ This ethic would come to define Marshall's relations with the press during the next world war.

Top Soldier and Press Chief

Marshall's tenure as chief of staff began on 1 September 1939, coincidentally the day that Hitler's forces crossed into Poland. He left the post in November, 1945, three months and nine days after the bombing of Nagasaki. Although there are important distinctions between his work as chief of staff before the United States joined the fray on 7 December 1941 and after, I focus here on both parts. Doing so not only gives us a more complete picture of his press work, but it also reflects the simple fact that Marshall's time as chief of staff before the official entry into the war was spent with the full expectation that the country would join the war.

The nomination process itself reveals something of Marshall's initial view of the press. At the time of his appointment, he was the fifth officer in line who met all eligibility criteria. The more senior Gen. Hugh A. Drum was publicly campaigning for the position, and could boast considerable political support. Certainly, Marshall too benefitted from a roster of highly influential supporters, including his former commander Pershing (perhaps the most respected military figure in the country at that time). More importantly, Marshall was an astute political strategist, and had carefully guided his supporters in moderating their support until the last minute, for fear of showing his hand as the clear favourite.⁴² Marshall viewed the press at this time as an obstacle to avoid rather than a resource to exploit, and considered his reputation for not seeking promotion as a major asset.⁴³ In turn, the announcement of his appointment met with little enthusiasm among reporters, who, in his biographer's words, 'knew Marshall only slightly by reputation, if at all'.⁴⁴

Marshall's reluctance to deal directly with journalists would pass, and he soon entered routines of engaging the press and his public affairs staff. But precisely what sorts of press work occupied Marshall's attention during his term as Army Chief of Staff? To answer this, I have drawn from several hundred references to the press in three sources: the

41 Paul Herbert, 'The Battle of Cantigny and the Dawn of the Modern American Army', *On Point: The Journal of Army History*, 13.4 (2008), p. 11.

42 Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General, 1880–1939* (New York, 1963), pp. 326–7.

43 Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, p. 328.

44 Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, p. 330.

Table 1. Types of press activity personally conducted by George C. Marshall, by year.

	Memoranda	Letters	Briefings	Speeches	Misc.	Press Releases	Total
1939	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1940	4	6	1	0	2	2	13
1941	10	8	0	2	2	1	22
1942	8	4	7	0	1	1	20
1943	17	3	4	2	1	0	27
1944	11	7	1	5	1	1	25
1945	1	5	0	0	0	0	6
Total:	51	33	13	10	7	5	119

published volumes of his collected papers;⁴⁵ Forrest C. Pogue’s four-volume biography;⁴⁶ and the original copies of his papers held by the George C. Marshall Foundation in Lexington, Virginia.⁴⁷ From that large collection, I have narrowed down a list of 119 items for which we have confirmation that Marshall was directly involved and for which we have a specific date and action. Marshall’s personal press work emerges from this body of material as constituting four primary types of actions: dictating to his secretary (and, on occasion, hand-writing) letters and memoranda; meeting with journalists in off-the-record briefings; giving speeches; and editing press releases.

Table 1 offers us a broad portrait of Marshall personally working on press-related matters about twice a month during the most intense phases of the war. In terms of the data, it is important to acknowledge that it is possible that individual letters or memos written by Marshall have been lost or that additional briefings and speeches pertaining to the press have not been recorded. However, it seems unlikely that the missing material would dramatically alter our understanding. Marshall, after all, was a creature of well-recorded habits who spent much of every day in this period behind a desk dealing with paperwork (duly archived), or attending high-level public or political events that were

45 The four volumes that cover this time period are: Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 2: ‘We Cannot Delay’, July 1, 1939–December 6, 1941*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Baltimore, 1986); Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 3: ‘The Right Man for the Job’, December 7, 1941–May 31, 1943*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Baltimore, 1991); Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 4: ‘Aggressive and Determined Leadership’, June 1, 1943–December 31, 1944*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Baltimore, 1996); and Marshall, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall, Volume 5: ‘The Finest Soldier’, January 1, 1945–January 7, 1947*, ed. Larry I. Bland (Baltimore, 2003).

46 The four volumes are: Pogue, *Education*; Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope, 1939–42* (New York, 1966); Pogue, *Organizer*; and Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945–1959* (New York, 1987).

47 Although first-hand cross-checking was somewhat redundant, it proved necessary because of an oversight in the third volume of the Marshall Papers, which has left off Surles’s name from the index. Significantly, six of the items listed in the case studies (and referenced below) were found in the archive but not in the collected papers.

assiduously recorded. Throughout the war, Marshall adhered to a strict routine, to 'keep his health and sanity'.⁴⁸ In addition to the recorded items, the routine included a 'quick look' at various newspapers in the morning (his biographer singles out the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Christian Science Monitor*) followed by magazines or books in the evening: 'Of the many magazines to which they subscribed, he preferred the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Readers' Digest*.'⁴⁹ Also not included in my accounting is Marshall's involvement in drafting discussion points for Secretary of War Stimson's Thursday press conferences, although we do know that he was regularly involved in that task.⁵⁰

We also have no record of what generally crossed Marshall's desk from his press relations officers. On this point, perhaps the best we can do is to extrapolate from a memorandum from late in the war sent to Marshall by Col. Luther L. Hill. In this memorandum, Hill describes the routine press services provided by the Bureau of Public Relations to the top combatant commanders, Eisenhower, MacArthur, McNarney, and Wedermeyer. Up to that point (5 May 1945), these generals were given a weekly 'book cable' but they then switched at Eisenhower's request to a daily update with immediate dispatches for urgent matters.⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, the most extensive group (84 of the 119 items) is the memoranda and letters that Marshall himself dictated, since these were systematically collected for the historical record. The preponderance of this material is appropriate given the large portion of his day that such work generally occupied. On the other hand, the briefings category is almost certainly incomplete: these were described by Wyatt as 'regular' and by Bland as 'occasional',⁵² but we have dated reference for only 13. The press release category refers only to official Army public relations releases which Marshall himself dictated or edited by hand, but it is possible that more of these passed his desk and occupied his attention than were retained in the relevant archival folder. As a final point to consider, there is a miscellaneous category of seven items encompassing meetings, discarded drafts, and a dinner event that defied easy classification; one suspects many other exceptional events were glossed over in the record-keeping process.

In sum, then, we know that Marshall was personally involved in at least 119 instances of press work during his time as chief of staff of the Army. We can add to this an unknown number of other off-the-record briefings; a steady stream of material from his press relations bureaus which would have crossed his desk at least weekly; his involvement with Stimson's Thursday press conferences; and his personal daily perusal of several magazines and newspapers. And so, while the total class of 119 actions may seem trivial in the context of Marshall's unceasing labours during these long six years, they rather reflect a

48 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 11.

49 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 12.

50 Pogue, *Organizer*, p. 128.

51 Col. Luther L. Hill to Marshall, memorandum 18 May 1945. Copy seen in Marshall Foundation National Archives Project, Xerox 2103, George C. Marshall Library, Lexington, Virginia. (The archives provide incomplete documentation on the location of the original.)

52 Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers*, p. 15; Bland in Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 4, p. 527.

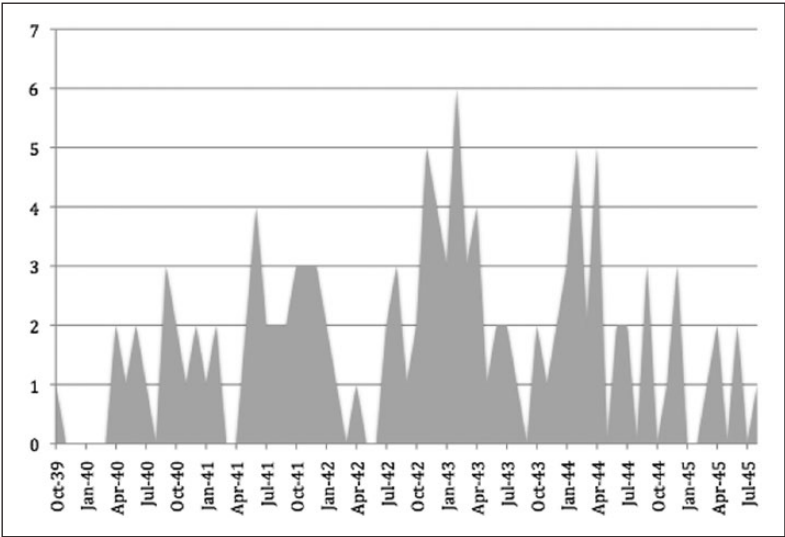


Figure 1. The frequency of Marshall's press work by month and year

fairly consistent effort on the part of Marshall to both act upon press matters that came to his direct attention and to oversee and intervene in press work done by his staff.

In the following graph (Fig. 1), the rate of Marshall's press work can be seen to accumulate around several periods of heightened activity. In what remains of the article, I will detail the separate strands of Marshall's press work in the two most defined peaks: the first centred on October 1941; and the second on January 1943. I collect the press work done in the five-month periods centred on those two dates.

By targeting these loose dates, we are able to focus on a narrower subset of reports in greater detail. The risk is that we exaggerate the amount of Marshall's press work, but this is outweighed by the benefit of better understanding what sorts of actions he would take when press work was occupying his attention.

Case 1: August–December 1941

Between August and December of 1941, Marshall was personally involved in 13 press matters (see Table 2). Categorized by type of media, this included four letters, four memoranda, two meetings, two speeches, and one press release. Categorized by category of propaganda, censorship, or mixed, there were five cases that were strictly propagandistic, four that were strictly concerned with censorship, three which involved both, and one for which we have too little information to determine.

The column that interests us most is the directives that Marshall issued in this press work. These reveal what role commanders like Marshall actually played in managing public information during the war.

In his letter to Gen. Haislip of 18 August 1941, Marshall's directive is quite straightforward: 'I think it is important that a press release be made tomorrow morning on the

question of extension of service ... We must not appear to be taking action because of unfavorable reactions.'⁵³ Marshall's letter gave Haislip the authority to issue a press release but also guided Haislip in what the release was intended to accomplish, namely to convey the false impression that the Army was not concerned with recent reports of discontent among soldiers. This was, in other words, propaganda delivery via the press.

Indeed, Marshall was very concerned with the issue of troop morale. At the heart of the problem was the Selective Service Act, which had drafted large numbers of American men without clear indication of what they were to do, since the country had yet to join the war. A movement had developed around the acronym O.H.I.O., which stood for 'Over the Hill in October' – over the hill referring here to desertion. This issue also occupied Marshall's attention in his letter the next day to Bernard M. Baruch. Baruch was a famed Washington insider, described by Pogue as 'a pipeline to centers of influence'.⁵⁴ In this cordial letter, Marshall simply thanks Baruch for his support, shares his own feelings on the O.H.I.O. movement, and writes that he hopes they get to eat lunch together soon. In one revealing comment, Marshall notes, 'There is no more delicate problem than troop morale, and with such a slender margin of public approval behind us, it is no easy matter to build up the highly trained and seasoned fighting force that we must have available as quickly as possible.' But the letter is also an indication of a more systematic effort on Marshall's part that he would later relate to his biographer. Behind the scenes, and leaving no traces other than these letters, Marshall 'strengthened the Army's Press Relations organization and set it to work telling the positive side of the Army's training program. The Morale Branch was enlarged and more camp shows were organized to entertain men at the various posts.'⁵⁵

On 9 September 1941, Marshall would address his concerns in this matter directly to the president. He notes,

The present morale situation in the troops of the Army, resulting from the debates in Congress, as well as press and radio activities, presents a very difficult problem ... Within the War Department organization we are doing our best to counteract this weakness on the home-front, but as it relates to the civil population, I recommend that this phase of the matter be taken in hand by the Civilian Defense organization ... In my opinion, Mr. President, prompt action is necessary.⁵⁶

Here, then, Marshall's directive to is encourage the president to 'prompt action' in delegating more authority to the Civilian Defense organization in raising troop morale.

Twenty days later, Marshall's attention is taken up by a more mundane matter. Marshall had come across a picture of himself taken by Maurice Constant and requested that the BPR gain the rights to the picture so he can make it his official portrait. Coincidentally, the next month, Marshall had another photograph that he wanted the BPR to distribute. This time, the photo was of 'the first German prisoner captured by the AEF [American

53 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 590.

54 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 27.

55 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 156.

56 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 602.

Table 2. Marshall's press work, 18 August 1941–13 December 1941.

Date	Type	Addressee	Category	Directive
18.8.41	Memo	Gen. Wade H. Haislip	P	Write a press release
19.8.41	Letter	Bernard M. Baruch	P & C	Build morale and counteract reports
6.9.41	Memo	President Roosevelt	P & C	Delegate work
29.9.41	Memo	BPR	P	Distribute photo
13.10.41	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Distribute photo
21.10.41	Letter	Commanders	C	Prepare for bad publicity
25.10.41	Letter	Gen. Ben Lear	C	Stop pot-boiling
11.11.41	Speech	Citizens' Defense Corps	P	Be on guard against enemy propaganda
13.11.41	Press release	American Press	C	End rumour
15.10.41	Meeting	Six correspondents	P & C	Spread propaganda, censor rumour
7.12.41	Speech	Eds of Af-Am Newspapers	Unknown	Unknown
13.12.41	Letter	F. Warren Pershing	P	Enlist in Public Relations Section
21.12.41	Meeting	Robert Sherrod	C	Background

Expeditionary Force]'. Marshall sent the photo to BPR for simple propaganda, but reveals in the note what might today be considered a major scandal at the heart of the picture, although this appears to have been of little moral or strategic concern:

Confidentially, there were few heroics in the procedure, as he wandered into our lines to deliver food, having taken the wrong trench. There the poor fellow, who had been injured in the head, I think, was questioned until he died, because after our G-2, the officer in this picture, was finished with him, all the observers in the rear echelons of an impatient AEF started to work on him.⁵⁷

In October, Marshall wrote to a number of generals who he had heard were to be subject to criticism in the press. His directive was simply to prepare for the bad news. A few days later, Marshall writes to one of those generals, Ben Lear, to discuss the matter in more detail. Marshall elaborates: 'Our problem here is to avoid having columnists, radio men and the press generally involve us, with deliberate intention, in denials or assertions regarding leading, and frequently baseless statements. It is news to them to keep the pot boiling.'⁵⁸ This awareness leads Marshall to reveal that 'General Surles and I have

⁵⁷ Marshall to Surles, memorandum, 13 October 1941, George C. Marshall Foundation Research Library. Box 65: Correspondence, Pentagon Office, 1938–1951, Folder 23.

⁵⁸ Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 651.

discussed at length the proper procedure, and as a result he is endeavoring to arrange at the White House to have the President use this incident as an example of destructive press practices.’⁵⁹

In November, Marshall used NBC radio to broadcast a message directed to the Citizens’ Defense Corps. This was simply a warning to be on guard against enemy propaganda. Two days later, he personally edited a press release denying the rumour that ‘we are preparing troops for a possible expedition to Africa or other critical area outside this hemisphere’.⁶⁰ This was another nod to the O.H.I.O. movement and broad morale problems. A few days later, he held a secret conference with six correspondents (*Time*’s Robert Sherrod; the *Associated Press*’s Edward E. Bomar; the *New York Times*’s Charles W.B. Hurd; the *New York Herald Tribune*’s Bert Andrews; and *Newsweek*’s Ernest K. Lindley). Sherrod recorded, ‘there were some things that he had to tell to key press correspondents in order that their interpretations of current and forthcoming events did not upset key military strategy of the United States’.⁶¹ Marshall revealed that the country was on the brink of war with Japan, and that the American government had a secret source on all Japanese information about the United States – a major strategic asset. A complicated scheme had been hatched by Marshall and he was seeking support from the press. The key issue was that the Japanese believed the United States was preparing only to fortify the Philippines rather than preparing for offensive war. Marshall wanted the press to help in keeping US power in the region secret, so that the ‘Army fanatics’ in Japan did not force the Japanese state into attacking the United States in order to save face. Instead, Marshall wanted to leak the US force information directly to the Japanese ambassador Saburo Kurusu so that he could warn his government against antagonizing the United States. He also warned that the danger period was the first 10 days in December.

Of this remarkable conspiracy, Marshall’s biographer notes, ‘The Chief of Staff had learned that the best way to keep a secret out of the newspapers was to reveal it to the responsible newsmen and then explain why it could not be printed.’⁶² He goes on to note, ‘The briefing was successful in gaining secrecy if not in reporting accurately all of his plans.’⁶³ This is reflected in the fact that on the day of the Pearl Harbor attacks, Marshall was busy meeting with the editors of African American newspapers to help build targeted support in those communities. But perhaps the most remarkable expression of this close relationship is seen in a one-on-one meeting between Marshall and correspondent Robert Sherrod two weeks after the attack. The earlier secret meeting acknowledged the vulnerability of Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s Philippine air force, but in the event, MacArthur spectacularly failed to protect against the bombing attack on 7 December. Marshall told Sherrod, ‘I just don’t know how MacArthur happened to let his planes get caught on the ground.’⁶⁴ This is clear indication of the confidence Marshall had in Sherrod,

59 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 652.

60 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 671.

61 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 672.

62 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 202.

63 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 203.

64 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 234.

who would wait to tell the story in a post-war collection.⁶⁵ But surely on the date, much could have been made in the press over MacArthur's blunder and division at the very highest levels of Army leadership. The relationship between Marshall and Sherrod was such that this story was not reported.

Only a week after Pearl Harbor, Marshall would find himself corresponding directly with Gen. John J. Pershing's son, a stockbroker in New York, who wanted desperately to join the war effort. Marshall's nuanced public relations sensibility is revealed in his response. Marshall felt that commissioning the younger Pershing directly would cause resentment, so he instead advises him to join the Public Relations Section in a civilian capacity, and to then be given a commission later. He alternately suggests Pershing enlist: 'I am certain that the public reaction would be immediate and extremely favorable to such an action on your part.'⁶⁶

This five-month period involved Marshall in an array of both propagandistic and censoring activities. He worked to end rumours (that were true) then circulating in the press. He managed his own media profile. He gave advice to top generals to guard against anticipated criticism and warned the public to guard against German propaganda. And most remarkably, he took a group of leading war correspondents into his confidence in an effort to guide them toward censoring certain information and promoting other information.

Case 2: November 1942–March 1943

Moving forward to the next major peak in Marshall's press work, between November of 1942, and March of 1943, we see his time was taken up by no fewer than 21 events.

By type of media, this included ten memoranda, four letters, three briefings, two drafts, one press release, and one speech. Eleven cases were strictly propagandistic, five were strictly concerned with censorship, one involved both, and for four we have too little information to determine (see Table 3).

Unlike the earlier time period, this five-month interval was marked above all by Marshall's frequent messages to Surles, which make up 12 of the 21 events. Accordingly, it reveals important information about what Surles's BPR actually did. His first memorandum to Surles in this period is a directive to release Army and Navy casualties from the North African theatre. Two days later, Marshall has cause to mention press 'attacks' on the War Department prompted by what the correspondents considered to be too little information coming to them about Eisenhower's campaign in North Africa. This was in fact the result of Eisenhower having major radio communications problems, a serious strategic risk:

We cannot advertise to the world that he is having communication difficulties but you could tell these press men that when the commander is in trouble over communications they certainly cannot expect voluminous press releases. As a matter of fact they know practically as much as we know and we regret that it is not organized as a New York newspaper office.⁶⁷

65 Members of the Overseas Press Club, *I Can Tell It Now*, ed. David Bruner and W. Richard Bruner (New York, 1964).

66 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 19.

67 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 451.

Table 3. Marshall's press work, November 7, 1942–February 13, 1943.

Date	Type	Addressee	Category	Directive
7.11.42	Draft	President Roosevelt	C	Warn the president
15.11.42	Briefing	Reporters	Unknown	Unknown
20.11.42	Letter	Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower	P	Publicize a general
23.11.42	Press release	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Write a press release
25.11.42	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Convince press
1.12.42	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Distribute propaganda
7.12.42	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Convince press
13.12.42	Letter	Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower	P	Convince press
15.12.42	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	C	Discourage press reports
4.1.43	Briefing	Reporters	Unknown	Unknown
7.1.43	Letter	Walter Lippmann	C	Discourage press reports
30.1.43	Briefing	Reporters	Unknown	Unknown
7.2.43	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Misdirection
13.2.43	Speech	American Society of Newspaper editors	C	Court press
21.2.43	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Promote a story
22.2.43	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	C	Discourage press reports
22.2.43	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Promote a unit
24.2.43	Draft	Gen. Alexander Surles	P & C	Promote a story
1.3.43	Letter	Gen. Alexander Surles	P	Court press
15.3.43	Memo	Col. McCarthy	P	Distribute propaganda
20.3.43	Memo	Gen. Alexander Surles	C	Protect a general from criticism

Two more memoranda to Surles would follow in the next few weeks, with the first directing Surles to send a propaganda film to England and France where it will 'stimulate morale and ... produce a healthy effect'.⁶⁸ In the second, Marshall complains to Surles that too much of the press coverage of the North African campaign comes from British sources, which has caused the *New York Times* to complain in print about the British stranglehold on information: 'Whatever the trouble is see if you can't straighten it out because it is unfortunate to be building up anti-British prejudices.'⁶⁹

In a memo in mid-December, Marshall provides Surles with quotations for use in deflecting criticisms that the Army was too large. In February, Marshall strategizes with Surles to distract the press: 'Find out if Navy has any objections to the release of the following [i.e. information about Guadalcanal] ... This release at this time might take some of the heat off the pressure of the question about what is happening in the Solomons.'⁷⁰ On 21

68 Marshall to Surles, memorandum, 1 December 1942, George C. Marshall Foundation Research Library. Box 65: Correspondence, Pentagon Office, 1938–1951, Folder 23.

69 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 3, p. 474.

70 Marshall to Surles, memorandum, 7 February 1943, George C. Marshall Foundation Research Library. Box 65: Correspondence, Pentagon Office, 1938–1951, Folder 24.

February 1943, he sent Surles information that he thought may have 'possible news value'. The next day, he wrote Surles twice. First, he writes of his frustration with the still-growing anti-British sentiment spreading in the American press. Second, he also sends Surles statistics on the continued expansion of the various Army departments.⁷¹ Two days later, he sends Surles several rambling paragraphs musing on the need to intervene in debates over manpower by correcting the tendency to overlook the cost and time associated with training troops properly. Surles notes that he will use the pieces 'in different places, where he could'.⁷² In the two final messages to Surles during this period, Marshall writes to ask him to help finalize details about a meeting with leading newspaper publishers, and later in March writes to ask Surles for his thoughts on adverse comments being made about Gen. Lloyd Fredendall. Fredendall was a deeply problematic commander, but at this point he still had Marshall's faith, and typically Marshall was working hard to shore up Fredendall's reputation.

Throughout this period, then, Marshall kept in steady contact with Surles about a wide range of press matters, involving both strategies to guide press interests and more mundane examples of pushing propaganda or censoring reports. At the beginning of this period, Marshall had considered writing the president about 'the obvious campaign in a large number of newspapers directed against the increase of the Army',⁷³ but decided to send Roosevelt a milder warning instead. Given this circumspect concern, it is likely that Marshall's three press briefings during this period (off the record, as usual) would have been intended to court the press back to supporting the Army's interests more overtly.

The North Africa campaign, partly because of growing tensions with the British in the press, had become a bit of a press paradox. Marshall wanted more positive coverage of the American forces, but was wary of strategic risks associated with too much information being revealed. Marshall admitted as much in an eyes-only, urgent message to Eisenhower on 20 November 1942: 'I am doing my utmost to support you by meetings with the press, with members of Congress, with State Department and with the President.'⁷⁴ During the invasion of West Africa, 'Marshall was strongly bent on making the public aware of American contributions to victory'.⁷⁵ To this end, he informed Eisenhower that 'a wonderful press [has been] kept at its same tone by filling in gaps in communiqué business with details regarding personal items'.⁷⁶ As it happens, there was a bit too much fluff for Marshall's liking, and he would complain to Eisenhower two weeks later that 'There was more about the loss of [Gen. Clark's] pants ... than there was of the serious phase of the war.'⁷⁷

Eisenhower, for his part, blames this on his lack of an experienced public relations officer.⁷⁸ In a letter to Elmer Davis, who was the chief of OWI and as such the country's

71 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 561.

72 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 526.

73 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 13.

74 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 445.

75 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 418.

76 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 418.

77 Pogue, *Ordeal*, p. 483.

78 Marshall, *Papers, Volume 3*, p. 446.

top propagandist, Marshall requested as much support as possible for Eisenhower in managing the press. And indeed Marshall himself jumped into the fray, writing the famed columnist Walter Lippmann personally to tell him, 'we must pause for the moment in our impatient desire to accomplish miracles of readjustments and reforms and put some faith in the judgment and intelligence of Eisenhower [and his staff] ... who are on the ground and who are responsible for the success or failure of our effort in Africa'.⁷⁹

In mid-February, some of the frustration Marshall must have been feeling with these press concerns came to the fore in an informal talk to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. His reflections on that occasion are worth quoting at length:

In my past dealings with members of the press and the radio I have scrupulously avoided what might be called propaganda proposals and have endeavored, through a frank presentation of the situation, so far as permissible, merely to give them the facts, leaving the conclusions to their own judgment. The War Department will always be embarrassed by the insatiable demand of our people for 'hot' news, and with related perils involved in releasing certain information. The situation is inevitable and the safeguard I turn to is to build up a general understanding of the problems by you gentlemen who present carefully considered views in your editorial columns.⁸⁰

Of course, as we have seen, there was much more to Marshall's press management strategy than 'a frank presentation'. Throughout this period, we see instances of Marshall working to shape the reputation of his top generals and to direct the press toward certain stories and away from certain stories. In his mid-March letter to one Col. McCarthy, Marshall reveals his enthusiasm for propaganda as a militarily valuable resource, directing further distribution of *Desert Victory*, a British propaganda film, which the president thought was 'the best thing that has been done about the war on either side'.⁸¹

Discussion

The 34 events discussed in these two cases make up about 29 per cent of the total number of events. The reports are chosen from two five-month periods, or about 14 per cent of Marshall's total tenure as the Army's chief of staff. This is a robust sample of Marshall's total recorded press work and can offer us a number of insights into the way the office of chief of staff (and, indeed, other top military leadership roles) may reach out to shape the work of journalists. Several broad categories of strategic effort can be identified in these cases to help focus future work on this complex topic.

Anticipate

Perhaps the most consistent theme in Marshall's press work is the importance of anticipating rather than reacting to the press. This involves both the anticipation of bad news, as we have seen in his warning to the generals on October 21, 1941, as well as the anticipation of what the press will need to produce stories that the Army wants disseminated, as for

79 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 3, p. 508.

80 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 3, p. 543.

81 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 3, p. 584.

example his tendency to send along to Surles whatever newsworthy material crossed his desk.

Looking outside our cases, we can see many examples of Marshall's emphasis on anticipation. In a worried letter to Roosevelt's aide Lowell Mallett, Marshall requests 'an immediately available background of publicity'⁸² for the Selective Service Act, something which no one else appears to have considered worth doing. Marshall took particular care with the reputation of his generals, and worked hard both to anticipate negative coverage, as in the case of Fredendall, but also to anticipate good public relations opportunities and newsworthy material that would show his generals in their best light. These points converged in an eyes-only memo to Surles on April 4, 1943, concerning Gen. Orlando Ward:

Ward is being relieved from command because he suffered a slight wound and a considerable shock under the pressure of the German attacks.. it seems to me that it would be a good thing to get into one of your press releases, as quickly as possible, the fact that General Ward had been wounded in action, without any comment as to his relief of command. That would develop later, and the previous announcement would serve to protect him against the usual newspaper – columnists – dissertations. What do you think about it? Destroy this memorandum.⁸³

In any event, the memorandum was preserved, and we can see in this directive that Marshall was playing a long game with the press in regards to his generals' reputations. A more mundane example of this is a memorandum for BPR handwritten by Marshall that complains about a 'wretched photo' of Gen. Charles Corlett and supplies a better one.⁸⁴ Verging on micromanagement, this careful pruning reflects the high value Marshall assigned positive coverage of American generals and the importance of anticipating press needs to cultivate such coverage.

Align

A corollary to the strategy of anticipation is the strategy of alignment practised assiduously by Marshall throughout the war. Our first indication of this strategic preference dates back his work meeting with war correspondents outside Cantigny in the First World War. As we have seen in these two cases, Marshall worked to win over the press quite overtly, as in his plea for support to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on 13 February 1943. Looking beyond our cases, Marshall deployed this strategy in perhaps the most famous instance of Army–press tensions during the war, namely Gen. George Patton's slapping incident. Writing 'in the *utmost* confidence'⁸⁵ to the editor of the *Kansas City Star*, Marshall pleads for editorial intervention: 'I feel I must depend on you and your most influential associates to protect us from his business of throwing pop

82 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 303.

83 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 3, p. 632.

84 Marshall to the Bureau of Public Relations, memorandum, 2 February 1944, George C. Marshall Foundation Research Library. Box 65: Correspondence, Pentagon Office, 1938–1951, Folder 26.

85 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 4, p. 391. Emphasis in original.

bottles at the umpire in the hope of influencing his decision, when the thrower of the bottle has not even played sand-lot baseball.⁸⁶

In order to persuade journalists to align their interests with those of the Army, Marshall was conscious that his broad censorship powers needed to be handled judiciously. On 13 April 1943, Marshall wrote Eisenhower about a minor flap over British criticism of an American unit (the 34th Division), which had been traced back to Eisenhower's command. Marshall makes clear that he thinks negative reports of this kind are 'to our national disadvantage' but that 'the problem of censorship is a delicate one and frankness has its eventual reward'.⁸⁷ But if pushed, this strategy of alignment only went so far. As late as 22 November 1944, Marshall considered withdrawing his confidante Robert Sherrod's credentials after Sherrod published a piece that criticized soldiers in comparison with US marines.⁸⁸

Misdirect

That being said, while Marshall's press management sometimes bears the traces of the Carnegie method of persuasion, there are also glimmers of Machiavellian subtlety in certain instances of misdirecting the press. We have seen misdirection in his memo to Surles of 7 February 1943, when information about fighting at Guadalcanal was intended to distract reporters from discussing setbacks in the Solomon Islands.⁸⁹ Before the United States entered the war, this was perhaps a more important principle, since Marshall was tasked with building up a military force without the support of the public. On 15 May 1940, he warned a staff member that 'we must be prepared in the next few days – and immediately in conversations with the press, to off-set the clamor that will be raised by the opponents of the Administration'.⁹⁰

Misdirection in that case referred to reorienting press coverage from one subject to another. This principle was more commonly a second-order strategy, based first on having aligned the press to Army interests, and then persuading key journalists to act as a conduit to misdirect public opinion, with the ultimate goal being to allow continued secrecy of operations. The meeting held shortly before the Pearl Harbor attacks is the most significant instance of that form of misdirection. This two-stage strategy (court the press then use journalists as conduits for propaganda) was difficult to pull off, and at times these attempts fell flat. On 9 September 1944, for example, Marshall was forced to admit to the independently minded MacArthur that he was unable to persuade *Time* to increase its coverage of the Pacific theatre – Marshall blamed this shortcoming on MacArthur's unwillingness to work with his local war correspondents.⁹¹

86 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 4, p. 391.

87 Pogue, *Organizer*, p. 189.

88 Marshall to Surles, memorandum, 22 November 1944, George C. Marshall Foundation Research Library. Box 65: Correspondence, Pentagon Office, 1938–1951, Folder 26.

89 Marshall to the Bureau of Public Relations, memorandum, 7 February 1943, George C. Marshall Foundation Research Library. Box 65: Correspondence, Pentagon Office, 1938–1951, Folder 24.

90 Marshall, *Papers*, Volume 2, p. 213.

91 Pogue, *Organizer*, p. 129.

Conclusions

As chief of staff of the Army for the entirety of the Second World War, George C. Marshall occupies an important and unique role in the history of the US Army's relations with the American people. Marshall relied on a press management staff that was very competently headed by Gen. Alexander Surles, but as we have seen, he was himself very engaged with managing the complex processes linking the Army to the public through the work of journalists. At the least, he conducted 119 separate acts of press work during his tenure as chief of staff. More likely, we should add to that both Stimson's weekly press conferences as well as dozens more unrecorded off-the-record press briefings. This would bring the total to a conservative estimate somewhere closer to 400 acts of press work. And to that active total we must also consider Marshall's passive encounters with the press, including both whatever documents he read from the BPR (which were sent at the very least in weekly books) as well as his daily rituals, which involved reading the news every morning and every evening. These actions and encounters surely informed his conduct of the war.

However, the goal of this article has not been to establish a definite claim about what proportion of Marshall's work as chief of staff was dedicated to the management of the press. Such a claim would need to be suspended within a much richer analysis of the War Department's overarching information management. For example, to truly understand the strategic importance of the press, we must understand clearly how public opinion was made legible to military leaders, a field in which scholars are indeed making headway.⁹² Instead, this article has aimed to provide a foundation for understanding how Marshall endeavoured to manage the press and what sorts of press concerns typically occupied his personal attention. What we have found is a rich diversity of press work resulting in an equally rich diversity of directives. Marshall was ecumenical in his efforts, dedicating time equally to propagandistic actions such as the building up of generals' reputations or the encouragement of coverage of infantrymen or the Pacific theatre, as he was concerned with censoring activities such as writing Walter Lippmann in order to discourage certain reports.

From this diversity we can identify three strategic principles that were often invoked by Marshall in his press work. Most importantly, Marshall worked to *anticipate* the opportunity for positive coverage and the inevitability of negative coverage. Also of clear importance, Marshall worked to *align* the press voluntarily with Army interests. Only rarely did this spill over into a third posture of *intentional misdirection*, but Marshall did not hesitate to do so as the situation required. Notably, this body of material includes no instances of Marshall lying outright to journalists. Before the United States entered the war, Marshall met with the Committee on Military Affairs in the House of Representatives, and there had occasion to state his preferred posture: 'I want to go right straight down the road, to do what is best, and to do it frankly and without evasion.'⁹³ It is tempting to view such assertions as declaratory statecraft, and certainly Marshall's vision

92 E.g. Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago, 2009).

93 Ed. Cray, *General of the Army: George C. Marshall, Soldier and Statesman* (New York, 1990), p. 210.

of the proper place of the press and the public admitted wide latitude to domestic propaganda and censorship. Yet for Marshall, the principle of honest dealings with the press seems to have been genuine, and from that sprang enormous strategic benefits.

But what do we gain from this analysis of Marshall's press work? First, we are forced to recognize that even when the military of a democracy may appear to enjoy the most beneficial arrangements imaginable with its citizenry, the power of a relatively free press to shape the fighting of wars is immense. Marshall and other top American officials had at their disposal vast propaganda and censorship capacities that have since been outlawed. Yet even with those resources, press work was an important component of the top soldier's workload.

Second, this research provides a historical foundation for an emerging subfield focused on the mediatization of more contemporary wars and militaries.⁹⁴ That research tradition has focused on social media, remote media technology, and new cultural norms that reflect the ubiquity of communications technology. But as we have seen, military media management is an older phenomenon and it remains to be determined how much of this institutional memory has been carried from Marshall's days into the era of mediatized wars. Specifically, more work needs to be done in making sense of how this beneficial arrangement collapsed during the Vietnam War and how it was recovered subsequently.

Marshall did not spend most of his time dealing with press matters. Press work took up only a fraction of his attention. However, the importance of the press to the war effort could not be ignored. How much less can it be ignored today? This is a strategic question that top military leaders must address – and indeed they do. Equally, scholars of the democratic state will do well to heed them and to set the role of the public in moderating war and statecraft as a privileged site for research.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Author Biography

Thomas Crosbie is an Assistant Professor of military operations at the Royal Danish Defence College. His research focuses on military politics and its consequences for military operations, education and professionalism.

94 For an early overview of the field, see McQuail, 'On the Mediatization of War'. More recent work includes Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War* (Malden, Mass., 2010); Maltby, 'Mediatization'; and Maltby, *Military Media Management*.