

commentary

from other pens...

Five-star general finds a home and a garden

London in the early spring of 1942 was grimy and gray, pockmarked with bomb craters and gutted buildings, sandbagged against Luftwaffe attack and ever alert for air raid sirens.

So it was with a certain sense of relief a few weeks later when a car pulled up before the columned portico of an 1820 house on the edge of Leesburg, Va., 35 miles west of Washington. Gen. George Catlett Marshall stepped out to inspect the house his wife, Katherine Tupper Marshall, had bought during his visit to the embattled British capital.

"As we drove along the narrow roller coaster road, the honeysuckle along the fences filled the air with fragrance," Mrs. Marshall recalled in her memoirs.

As the car turned into the drive, the setting sun reflecting off the window panes turned the glass into sheets of fire. The old oaks were black against the sky.

The general took in every detail. His wife awaited the verdict. Finally he spoke. "This is home," he said in a husky voice. "A real home after 41 years of wandering."

Marshall named the house Dodona Manor because the rustle of the wind in its oak trees reminded him of the oracle at Dodona in ancient Greece, where the god Zeus was said to speak to mortals through the sound of the wind in a grove of oaks.

The general was chief of staff of the U.S. Army, engaged in the most perilous and critical undertakings of his times.

Marshall had a long career and it was far from over. He had helped plan military maneuvers for Gen. John Pershing in World War I. By the spring of 1942 he had four stars. By the end of World War II he would be credited for making the Army the greatest fighting force in history. He had been denied a combat command, but by then he was a five-star general.

Marshall made a second entry in the history books in 1947 while serving as President Truman's secretary of state. Invited to deliver the commencement address at Harvard University, he outlined a plan to bring economic stability to Europe, and in the process stop the advance of communism. As it took hold, ending hunger and misery, people on both sides of the Atlantic started calling it "The Marshall Plan."

When the Korean war broke out in 1950, Truman named Marshall secretary of defense, the first career military man to serve in that post.

Marshall's career was capped in 1953 when he won the Nobel Peace Prize, the first time a professional soldier had been so honored.

Accepting, Marshall said the choice did not seem so remarkable to him as it did to others because he knew the price of war: "The cost of human lives is constantly spread before me, written neatly in many ledgers whose columns are gravestones."

More than four decades after the general's death in 1959, Dodona Manor is undergoing a multimillion-dollar restoration. The aim is to open the 16-room house as a museum that will tell the George Marshall story and serve as headquarters for the George C. Marshall International Center.

"It is the simple house of a modest man," says Anne H. Horstmann, the project's executive director. "And at the same time it is the private residence of an extremely public man."

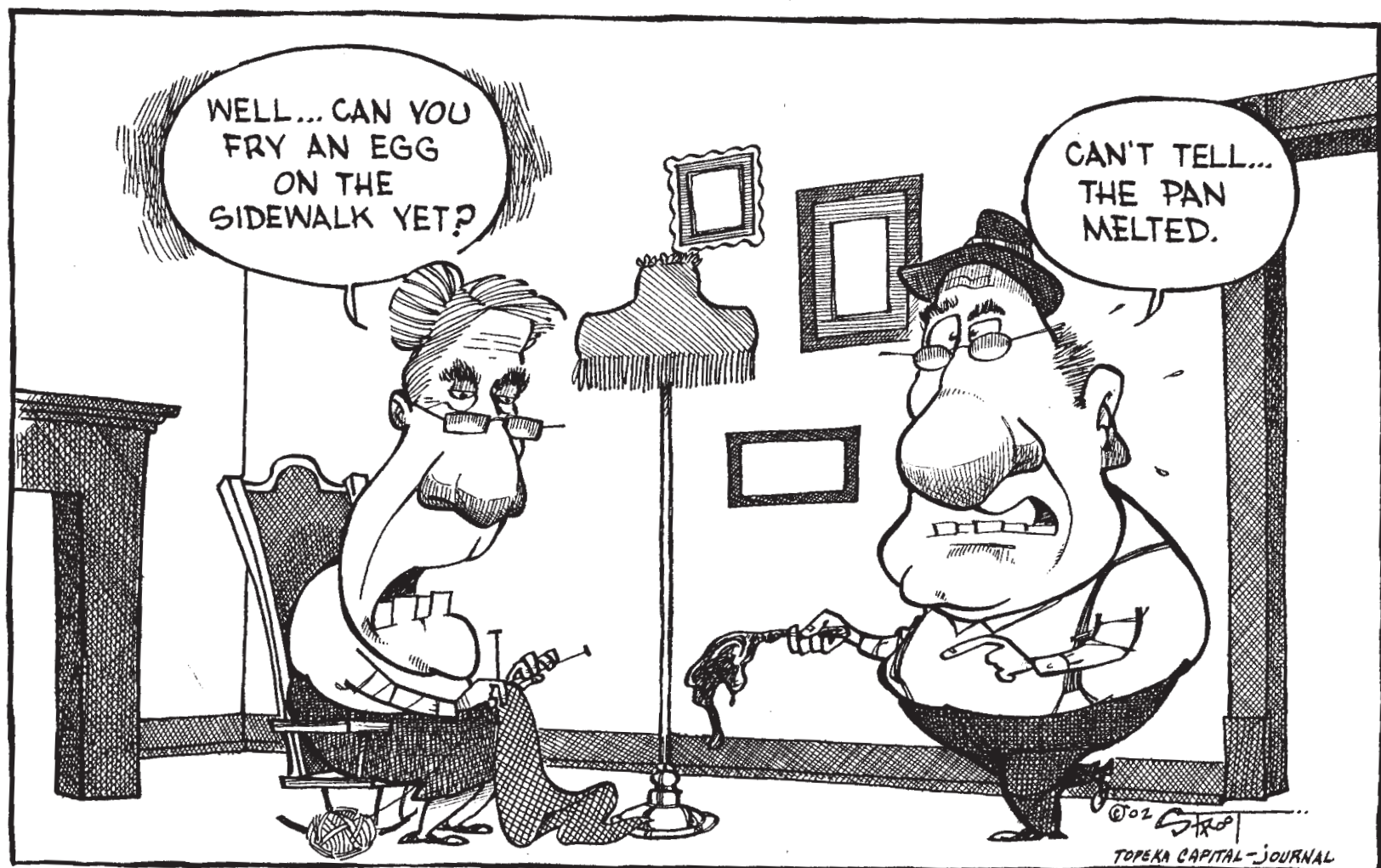
Leesburg is a gateway to the rich farmland lying on the approaches to the Blue Ridge Mountains. Marshall found the town's country quiet a satisfying retreat from ever mounting responsibilities.

Pruning the shrubbery, spading up the garden, building up the compost pile, he could have been mistaken for the hired man, not the commander of a powerful military machine. At the end of 1944 with the war at its most savage, Life magazine photographed him in GI coveralls shoveling garden debris into a compost box.

Marshall was clearly well satisfied with it when he wrote a stepson in the spring of 1945:

"The place at Leesburg looks lovely now, with a riot of blooms, roses, peonies, poppies."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lawrence L. Knutson has reported on Congress and Washington's history for 34 years for The Associated Press.



The spirit of '76 lives today

WASHINGTON — The men who signed the Declaration of Independence risked being hanged for the actions. If there's a worse way to go, I can't think of it.

This country was started by people risking their lives to have a country that heralds freedom, honors the individual more than the government and says you have a God-given right to the "pursuit of happiness."

Last fall we saw that there are still those willing to protect it.

I loved the way those firefighters trudged dutifully up the stairs of the World Trade Center. "This is my job," one of the guys answered as he ran past a woman with the look of sheer wonder in her face. I loved the way the passengers on the fourth plane, after learning what was happening in Washington and New York, went for broke and stormed the cockpit.

The fact that those brave souls rose to the occasion, epitomizing what Ernest Hemingway called "grace under pressure," convinces me that this country is as tough as we were at her start. Well, at least part of it is.

This week, as we celebrate the Fourth of July, there are people in this country who still don't get what it means to be an American. They're obsessed — and I mean crazed — with what happened on Sept. 11.

They buy gas masks, radiation detectors, potassium iodide (to guard against so-called "dirty" bombs). They avoid the subway, shopping malls and build their own personal bomb shelters — just in case. And, most of all, they chatter... constantly about



chris matthews

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their personal fears of what might happen to them.

You know what I think? I think it's downright narcissism: they see it as the first big thing to come along that they can claim a part of. This is the one drum-banging media show where they're going to claim a front-and-center seat.

I hold President Bush and his crowd responsible for all this hand wringing.

We Americans have suffered through much worse. If you don't believe me, then read some history books. We had a 25 percent unemployment rate in the early 1930s. There was no Social Security, no unemployment compensation, nothing. If you lost your job, then you and your family went broke. You then just hopped a freight train and became a hobo.

During World War II, 50 million people were killed. We lost a quarter-million of our best and brightest. In the combined wars of Korea and Vietnam, we lost almost half that number.

So stop talking like we are in World War III, Mr. President. If this is a real war, then it had a beginning and it will have an end. If this is a serious effort to protect this country from a loose band of Islamic terrorists worldwide, then let's call it that.

Let's plant our feet on the ground. Brazilians,

whose team just won the World Cup, went nuts — over a soccer game! But at least they had things in perspective more than some of us. You could see it in their smiles — they know that life is going to go on. They know that there will be more World Cups, just like there will be Friday night high school football this fall, the World Series and Christmas.

This is a country of 260 million people. Bad things have happened and will happen. People die every day, sometimes way too young. While the attacks were horrific, and terrorism must be stamped out, let's put these Fourth of July threat warnings into perspective. Let's stop reading and jabbering about the end of the world. Let's drop the "Apocalypse Now" number.

"Oh, I know that in the midst of this war there is a lot of warlike talk, and I'm as guilty as... I'm guilty. I talk that way," the president admitted this Monday. Right there, that's why we like you, Mr. President, because sometimes, when you look down at those speech cards, I'd like to believe that you're thinking "enough is enough."

This weekend, with the fireworks behind us, let's all remember what the Declaration of Independence is all about. It's about taking risks in order to be free.

Let's be reasonable. Compared to what the signers risked, we're looking at some very good odds. Go and enjoy.

Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and "Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

Westar's financial health leads to people's wallets

Families with high credit card balances or other big debts can struggle to meet household expenses, and financial disaster can loom only one big misfortune away.

Some critics of Westar Energy Inc. say likening the state's largest electric company to a debt-burdened family is a good way to get a handle on Westar's problems — and understand their concerns about its future.

Last week, the Kansas Corporation Commission opened hearings into Westar's finances. So far, those hearings have dealt with arcane accounting and financial issues.

But ordinary Kansans have a stake in the discussions because the issues lead directly into their wallets.

"If you have a utility that is financially unstable and unable to get capital to maintain its operations, then the only source of capital is a rate increase," said Walker Hendrix, consumer counsel for the Citizens' Utility Ratepayers Board. "This is big stuff."

Westar disputes that it is financially troubled. In testimony filed with the KCC, Westar executives said the company continues to provide safe and reliable service.

"And no party has provided any evidence to the contrary," said Richard Dixon, a senior vice president.

Also, KCC spokeswoman Rosemary Foreman said the agency's concern is more about the future.

"We don't want to put fear into the general public that their utility is going to collapse," she said. "It's not."

Yet even company officials appear to understand that Westar's \$3.25 billion debt is too much for the company.

It reported \$6.59 billion in assets in the last quarterly report filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, for the first three months of this year.

Much of the debt is from Westar's unregulated, non-utility operations, particularly its 85 percent ownership in the Protection One monitored security business.

Though Westar says Protection One has a positive cash flow, others like Hendrix see it as a money loser dragging on on Westar.

And Foreman said: "Ratepayers should not be burdened by any negative activities associated with Westar's unregulated entities."

Westar now wants to sell its 45 percent share in ONEOK, a Tulsa, Okla., natural gas company, to raise \$738 million after taxes to pay down debt. Westar wants to sell its ONEOK stock back to



john hanna

• ap news analysis

ONEOK.

Westar officials have tied reduction of the company's debt to its goal of improving the financial rating for its securities, which now trade as junk bonds. They believe such an improvement will come by 2004.

The KCC and Westar critics believe an improvement in the company's securities rating will make it easier for Westar to raise capital.

In November, Standard & Poors Corp., the financial rating agency, said Westar, then doing business as Western Resources Inc., had "an exceptionally frail financial profile."

Critics suggested comparing Westar to a debt-laden family is especially apt. They argue that Westar has trouble borrowing money, just as a family with high credit card balances might have trouble getting a loan.

"It directly relates to the finances of the electric utility," said James Zakoura, an Overland Park attorney who represents large Westar customers. "In a broad sense, it relates to rates."

Westar executives argue that it's inaccurate to suggest that the company can't get access to capital markets. This year, it refinanced \$1.5 billion in debt that was coming due.

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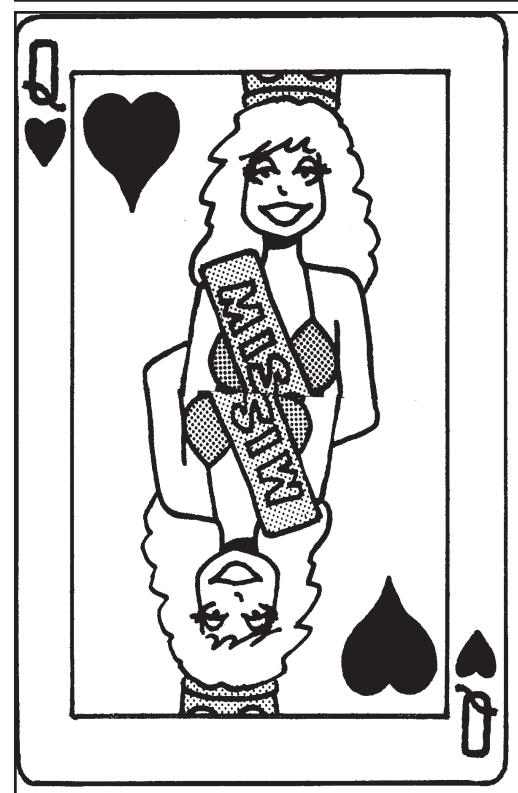
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