

Eating Life

Marshall Doran, his brother, his wives, his castles, his hotels
and living life fully-booked

by Paul Marshall Fenn

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Introduction

Two brothers and a war

I had no conception of what a truly eccentric human being was until I met my uncle, Marshall Doran.*

It was the summer of 1969 when finally I did. Our family had flown from Canada to the UK to visit him, his wife, Joyce, and son, Paul. I was nine, and my dad, seven years younger than his brother, had by then told me hundreds stories about Marshall, most of which put him in the storybook realm: Merchant Navy officer, survivor of a U-boat torpedo attack, head of a smuggling ring, collector of medieval arms and armaments, hotelier, owner of one island and two castles, one of which he'd built with his own hands and those of a cast of accomplices, the other to eventually become his second hotel.

My father, Victor Marshall Fenn, was no slouch in the adventure department himself. He had signed on with the Royal Air Force at 16, having watched the Battle of Britain from his family's apartment rooftop in London. 'How could I not be a fighter pilot after seeing that?' His RAF career saw him, after several failed admissions due to less-than-scintillating mathematical skills, sent to Canada to earn his wings, then into the European fray, flying Spitfires, Mustangs and Hurricanes, among others. After Hitler's defeat, he was sent to Southeast Asia to

* Marshall Thomas Doran was born Jack Marshall Fenn. His brother / my father, Victor Marshall Fenn, always called him Jack, as did we. Marshall's name change would come later.

strafe and harass the post-war rebels and bandits still active there.

Based in Kuala Lumpur, with 136 Squadron, he flew ops against the jungle-entrenched Malayan Communist Party cadres and the pirates of Ko Tarutao, Thailand (then Siam), at the top end of the Malacca Strait's shipping lanes.

Arriving in New York City, he caught up with his brother. While New York seemed the obvious choice for a young man of his station, the letter of recommendation he carried with him had a Toronto business address on it. That was where he went to pursue a successful career as the namesake of Toronto advertising and PR firm Marshall Fenn Ltd. It still thrives, though now under different owners.

I would've been around ten when I finally met Marshall. It was decades ago, and not being much of a note-taker at the time, I have only what my age-depleted memory can regurgitate. At six-foot-two, he was a bear of a man, deep of voice, barrel of chest, workhorse strong and always dressed for his work – namely, the moving, cutting, setting and finishing of stones and timbers. He wore tattered trousers, boots and a leather vest tied at the waist with a length of cord, belt or a necktie if for a formal occasion. He had an inviting face and a commanding baritone that boomed and rolled like the sea that had shaped him. He spoke in a poetic, almost theatrical manner, using curious and archaic words and phrases that to my young imagination sounded like something out of a 1930s pirate movie.

What I quickly understood was that Marshall Doran's crowded life

was driven by a ceaseless need to build – castles and hotels chiefly. His vision was tied to the extraordinary inventory of unusual building materials and collectibles he had in his possession, and that vision evolved as he acquired more, which he did, ceaselessly.

He managed to ingeniously combine his three consuming passions into a life's work. Collecting old arms, armour, art, furniture fossils, scrimshaw, chests, safes, with an emphasis on the medieval, the rugged, the unrefined and the dark – this was his prime fixation.

Second was finding, then acquiring, ancient bits of buildings and chunks of medieval infrastructure – granite wharf bollards, 800-year old walk-in fireplaces, stone doorways, lintels, beams, elaborate walls and ceilings, immense floor slabs, a range of architectural features and details, some carved into nightmarish faces dating prior to the Black Death and other assorted historical tidbits. He sought out unusual timbers, many containing the essences of fallen empires – beams, spars, ribs and other pieces, some coaxed from the carcasses of wrecked galleons and freighters found off the Irish coastline. If it could be pulled from the sea, charmed away from a demolition crew or dug out of a ruin, Marshall was interested.

His third passion was incorporating his collected artifacts into one of three projects: The castle in which he and his family would eventually reside at Flicquet on the northeast coast of Jersey; the Hotel Revere, also in Jersey; and the 10-year-long Belleek Castle hotel renovation, in Ballina on Ireland's west coast.

Marshall was anomalous in as many ways as there are birds in

the sky. He always fought for a bargain, but was not cheap or greedy. He charmed and beguiled all who met him, but preferred to toil alone or with one of the many craftsmen who assisted him over the years. He liked boats and fast cars, but would as often as not leave them to rot into oblivion once he'd spent a few weeks with them. He loved a party, but did not drink excessively. Though brave, he came across as something of a softy, but in fact was expert at deploying his two strong-willed wives, first Joyce and later Jacqui, to execute any schemes expected to meet resistance from others. He liked to laugh and had an easy time of making others laugh. He was an outsized character who lived dozens of lives inside of one. But unlike many, he didn't live off his stories. He lived in them.

His projects sometimes took decades to conclude, if *conclude* even applies. The expression 'a poem is never finished, only abandoned' comes to mind. His works were all akin to epic sonnets that were never quite deemed complete, lest a stone block or vaulted ceiling or ancient doorway be slotted in somewhere. A joke circulated among Marshall's staff that when Nelson Mandela was finally released from prison, his first question was, 'Has Marshall Doran finished Belleek Castle yet?'

I'm not the only one who thinks Marshall's life was worthy of a book. Since I work as a writer, it seemed natural enough to Marshall's son, my cousin Paul, to haul my carcass across the Atlantic, mollify me with liquids red, white and gold, and sit me down to write out the story of Marshall Doran.

I'm exceedingly glad he did, and hope you are as well.

Paul Marshall Fenn

October 2015

Belleek Castle

Ballina, County Mayo

Ireland

Chapter 1

Out of the depression and into the sea

On the evening of 8 November 1942, Marshall Thomas Doran was on duty as Second Officer on the Panamanian-registered cargo steamer *SS Plaudit*, at that moment in the Indian Ocean, some 200 nautical miles south of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. En route from Calcutta, via Karachi, to New York, the ship left port carrying 1,075 tons of rubber, 1,000 tons of manganese, 5,000 tons of jute and gunnies, 400 tons of tea, and 400 live rhesus monkeys.

The monkeys, destined for use in medical research in the US, were kept in caged outdoors on deck, exposed to the elements. As the monkeys died, a frequent occurrence, they were thrown overboard, into the jaws of a school of sharks that had taken to following the ship, due to the regular feedings they received. As an animal-lover all his life, this callous treatment of the monkeys deeply distressed Marshall. Their condition, as well as his own, was soon to distress him a great deal more.

In a 1942 letter to his parents Marshall describes what happened that night:

We took the torpedo right to the engine room. The lights immediately went out and the ship heeled over hard to one side with the impact. Nobody spent much time looking for personal possessions.

But I went back for my torch and knife – you remember that big knife that a Canadian soldier gave me? I was lucky, found them both immediately and they proved to be life savers. I could not find my lifejacket, although I suspected it would not be of much help in the furious seas that night. My chief concern was to launch the lifeboats and get them away from the ship – although to myself I wondered if a lifeboat would be of much use either.

I made my way up to the boat deck port side and fell down a hole created by the torpedo explosion. I managed to keep hold and I believe if I'd let go, I'd have dropped right into the engine room and it would have been curtains. I climbed out the hole and took a look at a lifeboat. I could not see much of it, because of the darkness and because most of it had been destroyed. I made a hasty examination of the other boat on the same side. It was hanging from just one davit and useless to us. That torpedo did a swell job.

I had a sick feeling in my stomach. There was debris everywhere, but fortunately the two starboard lifeboats seemed to be all there. We launched them in spite of conditions and the fact that the ship had headway still on her. Ten guys were in the water and we got them, all except one young fellow – he did not have a light on his lifejacket. The others did. While we were trying to get these boys, the sub started shelling and threw about 15 or 20 hot 'numbers' at the ship. We feared the sharks had taken the young fellow.

We were a couple of hundred feet away from her then, and it was an unpleasant feeling. Finally, they hit the magazine with a shell, or another torpedo, and she blew up and sank into the depths.

He was born on 25 July 1916 in London, at the height of the Great War, in which his father, Harry, was serving. He was raised in the city and also for a time in Bournemouth, where Harry's employer had posted him, before setting out on the series of adventures that never really ceased until he did.

According to the earliest recollections of anyone who knew Marshall, he was an eccentric, an outlier, a man uninterested in the popular distractions of the moment. He cared not for schooling, authority, the class system nor the prospect of a safe, conventional life. Shimmering with physical energy, a strong swimmer and boxer from an early age, he earned championship medals in both sports throughout his teens. He claimed one of his swimming times was faster than Johnny (Tarzan) Weissmuller's.

He also started collecting things, old and unusual things, such that his bedroom and other areas of the house grew into a museum. News of his collection, particularly the fossils, found its way into the *London Daily Mirror*, and at age 13 or 14, his photograph appeared in the newspaper accompanying a story on his collection. Readers inspired by his curiosity sent him their own collections – mounted insects, butterflies, botanical specimens and so on. He responded by expanding his museum to take up more of the family home. His

parents, apparently partial to his curious and acquisitive nature, gave him room to grow.

By the time he was 16, he had the looks, height, physique and self-possession needed to serve the demands of the extraordinary trajectory he'd begun to forge.

He then discovered females, choosing a gypsy dancer from a travelling circus as his first proper crush. To be with her, Marshall, being an all-in sort of individual, signed on with the circus, initially as a trapeze artist. With no experience in that line, he endured sufficient crash landings that he retired from the trade, instead opening a shooting gallery at the fair.

As a quick study on survival in Depression-era England, Marshall lacked no understanding of importance of money, and busied himself developing techniques – many of them well within the bounds of the law – to separate people from theirs.

He went 'on the knock,' banging on doors, presenting himself as a buyer and seller of silver and gold. He'd learned about hallmarks and how to accurately acid-test jewelry, cutlery and so on to calculate their precious metals percentages. He would do so on the spot, name his price and close the deal. Lacking no charm, he met with little resistance. He worked the neighbourhoods, house-to-house, chatting up housewives ready to buy and sell family treasures or, one imagines, unlock their secret desires. Often he'd buy something from one house, march next door and sell it for twice what he'd just paid. He developed an eye for assessing things of current and future value, which paved the

way to his becoming an astute collector of the old and the very old all his life.

Not one to shrink from pursuits risky or unfamiliar, when Marshall returned home from his stint in the circus he decamped to Liverpool and snuck onto a cargo liner bound for America. He was discovered just before the ship departed and chucked back onto the wharf. But such a setback only made him more determined in his pursuit of a life at sea.

It was the early 1930s when he signed on with the British Merchant Navy. He began at the bottom, as a stoker shoveling coal into ships' furnaces, among the least pleasant jobs of the time. He toiled and sweated his way out of the furnaces to the upper decks, eventually becoming a Second Officer. With money finding its way into his pocket and an enthusiasm to experience everything he could, he set about living his motto: Eat life before it eats you.

A taste of the bitterer end of that occurred in port at Havana one evening, as Marshall squired a local señorita on a date. Jumping him from behind, the muggers knocked him out cold and decoupled him from the three months' wages he'd just been paid, and for good measure, his clothes. No doubt she was getting her share, having long fled the scene by the time he awoke. One can imagine the commentary from his shipmates as he marched up the gangplank devoid of a single stitch. Knowing Marshall, he probably came back with something like, 'Well, good job we're in the tropics... rather less shrinkage to contend with.'

Being some eight years older, Marshall spent very little time with Victor, his sole sibling. He was seldom home long enough to do much more than say hello, drop off recently acquired treasures and ship off again. Regardless, young Victor stood in awe. His big brother lived life extra-large, was vacuuming up the world a port at a time, and drawing decent coin in the process. And for a young man, Marshall held his station with dignity, sagacity and humour, all coloured with a roguish aspect that could talk the rust off an anchor. Decades later, Victor would remark that his brother 'was closer to a father image, as well as a hero, to me.'

In return for all that adoration, Marshall studiously ignored his younger brother. Victor was wise enough to know that, as a boy, he had little to offer his brother by way of interesting conversation. So, beyond asking Marshall for more stories, he tended to keep quiet – a characteristic that would come to inform the motto by which he would live his life: Never complain. Never explain.

Two very different characters cut from one cloth. But of what genetic material was that cloth fashioned?

There was a persistent rumour that their mother, Gladys (nee Russell) was an illegitimate daughter of the logician and philosopher Bertrand Russell by way of a tryst with a housekeeper. The dates of their respective births and deaths align sufficiently to make this

technically possible. However, when questioned on the likelihood of the rumour being fact, my father gave it no credence. Then again, he was a stridently honest man, humble to an almost pathological degree, so the notion of casting himself as the progeny of someone of the eminence of Bertrand Russell, while appealing to a literature aficionado such as he, was out of the question, not least without extremely convincing evidence. And of that there was nil.

More recently, Marshall's son has raised the possibility of Gladys being the illegitimate daughter of one Lord Russell or even a Rothschild. Though by which of several possible lords or scions bearing either of those appellations she might've been co-created, we have not been able to ascertain.

Further complications concern Victor and Marshall's father, Harry, or Grumpy, as we grandchildren called him. Born Harold Fenn, he took to calling himself Harry Marshall. One reason for the name change, floated down through the generations, was that Gladys' family owned a company that produced a then-popular household glue called Marshall's Giant Cement. When Harry married Gladys, her family offered him a seat on the company's board of directors and he felt obliged to change his last name to Marshall.

Except, would anyone do that?

When you put all the myths and rumours together, the sum total seems to amount to a tall heap of nothing. From Victor's standpoint, Gladys' maiden name was definitely not Marshall, and had it been so, how could she simultaneously have been Bertrand's female bastard

daughter and have his last name? My father, a great vault of stories about everyone in his family, never once mentioned Marshall's Giant Cement or Harry changing his name to Marshall. And the Rothschild connection seems to have just been thrown into the family soup somewhere along the line – like a handful of chilies – simply to liven things up (more on the Rothschild connection later).

Mind you, these tales are pretty much all the Fenn/Marshall/Doran dynasty ever had to work with when it came to injecting notions of glory into our lineage. The truth – likely that we're descended from the most common of commoners – appears destined to remain safely shrouded in histories long ago lost.

With Marshall always at sea, Victor grew into an omnivorous reader. Ancient history, natural history, biology, physics, astronomy, philosophy, high and low literature, music, humour – anything he could stuff into his all-absorbing mind. Born curious, his formal schooling nevertheless ended at age 14, when, finding it all a waste of time, he dropped out.

Meanwhile, with the Second World War imminent, Britain desperately geared up militarily, while trying to read between Hitler's lines. Victor would soon bear witness to the furious burning skies and streets of London, eventually unleashing some flames of his own.

Chapter 2

The making of a fighter pilot

Victor's first mission as a young man was to get into the Royal Air Force, earn his wings and strap himself into a Spitfire as soon as possible. Though he was underage, no one in the pilot-starved RAF paid much attention. But, as previously alluded, he'd hit a speed bump when it came to the mathematics testing for pilot eligibility. At this he failed twice, going back to the books for weeks on end, studying a subject for which he had not the slightest natural aptitude. He was also dyslexic (as were Marshall and the two generations that followed, and counting). Reading was a monumental exercise in frustration. Each sentence had to be gone over several times, and snapping out of daydreams, he'd discover he'd gone pages without a word sinking in. Slogging through it though, he ultimately let persistence get the better of him and emerged victorious.

By August 1943, he was a year into his RAF flight training. He'd been through the theoreticals, was then sent to Desford, England to train in Tiger Moth biplanes, before commencing his Canadian training at De Winton and Medicine Hat, both in Alberta, and at Bagotville, Quebec. Soon he was piloting modern fighters, Harvards and Hurricanes mostly, and in the countdown toward active duty.

He proved an excellent pilot. Too good, in fact, for his intended

goal. A combination of excellent day and night vision, unusually fast reflexes and navigational mastery saw him marked as prime bomber pilot material. The RAF tended to stream its best new pilots into bombers. But this was not how Victor saw himself best serving the war effort, or his own interests. As he put it, 'Bomber pilots don't do aerobatics, 500-mile-an-hour divebombing runs, dogfights or much else that I watched from my rooftop during the Battle of Britain.' Not to mention that RAF Bomber Command crews suffered a 44% casualty rate, much greater than any other airmen. So, when sent for suitability testing, Victor intentionally dialed back his piloting skills just enough to not make bomber pilot, but still demonstrate sufficient aptitude to be handed a Mustang or Spitfire.

It worked. Sent to join 122 (Bombay) Squadron in Ellon, Normandy, in August 1944, his first mission was a sector reconnaissance in a P-51 Mustang Mark III (known as the P51B / C in America). His regular duties were dive-bombing Nazi trucks, trains and barges, and undertaking armed recces, sweeps, patrols and bomber escorts. He fell utterly in love with the P-51. The Mark III was an extraordinary work of aeronautical engineering. Its Packard V-1650 Merlin supercharged V-12 engine developed a hairpiece-dislodging 1,500 horsepower. Its large fuel capacity and air-slicing design gave it long range and amazing performance, even at high altitude. The sound of its engine was poetry to many pilots; Whispering Grass was the name he gave to one particularly smooth-running Mustang.

Victor experienced no difficulty taking to the fighter pilot's lifestyle.

Wake up at dawn, fly a mission or three, blow various German things to smithereens, debrief back at base, then to the pub to relive the day's glories with your mates while singing filthy songs, followed by the epic stumble back to base. Wake and repeat, month upon month.

His logbook places him amidst some interesting and notable events.

On 19 February 1945, piloting a Mustang Mk. III, number MTM with 122 Squadron, he undertook an 'Escort to VIP' specifically 'Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden returning from the Crimea Conference.'

On the 21st, the 'Squadron pranged 7 trains,' while the following day the squadron crossed the channel to accompany as 'W/Cdr Tait pranged viaduct with 12,000lb eggs.'

On 18 April, still with the 122, he joined an 'escort to 1,000 bombers on Heligoland U-boat pens.'

Victor would put in a year of combat duty over Europe before that piece of the war was won and he was sent to India from Rednal. His logbook carries an entry showing him leaving Poona and flying to Bhopal, where he spent three weeks acclimatising to the heat, learning how to eat chili-infused curries and to use the thunder box, as local toilets were known by intestinally distressed pilots. Then, by way of Madras, Calcutta, Chittagong, Meiktila, Rangoon and Penang, in December 1945, he landed at his new home base at Kuala Lumpur.

The Japanese had fought on for three more months after V-E Day. Naturally, almost the moment they'd surrendered, the European colonial powers began preparations to move back in and reestablish

their domain over the lands and peoples the Japanese Army had 'freed' under the auspices of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. (One senses the men behind the Japanese Empire did not envision a sense of irony developing in the region anytime soon.) And given the power vacuum inside of which millions of East Asians found themselves, various independence-minded rebel groups began to take arms, money and support offered them by yet another set of foreigners promising them a new unending paradise, this one called Communism.

By September 1945, as Churchill attempted to re-integrate Malaya under British India, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) began a campaign of anti-British activities through its military arm, the Malayan National Liberation Army. The group of jungle-based mostly ethnic-Chinese rebels had, back in 1941, been trained and rebranded as the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army by the Brits. They were at that time considered an additional tool to slow the march of Japan. The Brits had even paid them for their efforts after the war. But within a few years of the Japanese surrender, the MCP would turn on the Brits, attacking plantations, towns, trucks and so on. This would evolve into the guerilla war dubbed the Malayan Emergency by the colonial authorities.

Victor joined Squadron 136 in Kuala Lumpur, a portion of whose mandate was to crush the MCP. The 136 was by then a Spitfire squadron, and Victor would pilot various Mark VIIIs over the next few months.

A footnote to the MCP story: In 1989, while on a five-year Asia-Pacific backpacking tour, I was hitchhiking in Malaysia. I can't recall precisely where, but as I stood on the roadside, a large convoy of Malaysian Army jeeps pulled over and ground to a halt in front of me.

An older uniformed gentleman of significant rank invited me inside. As we drove, I mentioned that my father had been with the RAF in Kuala Lumpur, post-Japanese occupation and done recces in search of MCP camps in the Malaysian jungles. He laughed loudly, looked at me in disbelief, and said, 'We're still chasing those bastards around these jungles!' In fact, his unit's sole brief was literally 'destroy the MCP'. He'd been at it for years, he said, with not a lot of success. It was my turn to laugh.

'Well, I'll be sure to inform my father of that,' I said. 'It might make him feel a bit better about his own MCP failures. He never saw a trace of them.'

Months later, I read in Singapore's *Straits Times* newspaper that long-time MCP leader Chin Peng had brokered an agreement for the group to lay down arms and cease all political activities in exchange for a full amnesty. The cadres were hitting their 70s and 80s, the original reasons for rebellion irrelevant or forgotten. So the last shreds of the Malay Emergency were stitched up and laid to rest, with Chin Peng living out his golden years in the deeply non-Communist enclave of Bangkok, Thailand.

Chapter 3

Torpedoed

Long before the war would get underway, Marshall had taken note of the American Merchant Marine, finding its British equivalent sorely lacking. The reasons – better pay, far more opportunities to make cash on the side and all-round superior conditions – were compelling enough to make any patriotic obligations, might they exist, seem trifling. The USA, unlike England, was not being bankrupted by WWII, meaning there was money enough for creature comforts and even certain excesses on the American ships.

There was just one problem: Marshall was an Englishman. American citizenship was essential to being an American Merchant Mariner. So in 1939, Jack Marshall Fenn became Marshall Thomas Doran. The tale told within the family is that he met an American named Thomas Doran in a pub and simply purchased the man's passport or seaman's identification. Security features in ID being what they were at the time, this was no great challenge to pull off. It seems he liked the middle name 'Marshall' and so repurposed it into his new first name (I have to agree; could there be a better first name than Marshall?). One wonders what the American sailors made of this new character in their midst, him being a Brit, a very young officer, and yet very well traveled and spilling over with scarcely believable stories. I'm guessing they got a kick out of him.

Once he'd made the big switch he wasted little time in tapping the perks. As an officer, he could take along significant amounts of cargo on his ship, the *SS America*, free of charge. He took full advantage of this to bring English antiques to the USA, where a strong market devoured everything he could supply. This put Marshall in an ideal position to use his ever-sharpening gift for doing on-the-fly valuations to strike great deals on old heirlooms and furniture back home, and turn them into quick cash abroad.

Meanwhile, the war. All Allied naval and merchant ships, including his, were now considered fair game by Axis forces. Among the many risky passages in which Marshall participated were the dreaded Russian convoys, aka the Murmansk Run, up in the Arctic Ocean. Winston Churchill called it 'the worst journey in the world.' It was the only shipping route that enabled the Allies to supply Russia with the necessary war materiel to hold back Nazi Germany. Access from the Pacific side was fully blocked by the Japanese, and the one other viable route from the West to Russia terminated at ports in the Persian Gulf, but the rail lines and roads that ran from the Gulf to the interior of Russia were too long and limited in capacity to channel the enormous quantities of munitions and food needed. All other potential supply routes were under tight German control.

Immense convoys of Allied navy and merchant ships made the Murmansk Run. Their crews brooked colossal hazards as they steamed through the Arctic Ocean in winter. Wind, waves, raging snowstorms and ice formation the sheer mass of which could capsize boats – they

all amounted to only half the threat. German U-boats patrolled the deep cold seas like hungry sharks. The seafloor would come to be littered with the bodies of thousands of men, ships and aircraft.

Marshall's Murmansk experiences included his ship being bombed and machine-gunned. Beyond these bare facts, very few details survive.

However, he did keep a record of his most harrowing sea experience, as this passage, continued from his 1942 letter home, attests. His ship, the *SS Plaudit*, has been torpedoed and sunk following its magazine exploding:

Then the fun started. From that point on, we had 25 fellows and the skipper in our boat (the other lifeboat had around 23). Few of us had enough clothes on. It was cold as hell and we were taking seas in the lifeboat by the ton. Then we remembered the bung. In lowering, we could not find the bung plug and had shoved a handkerchief in the hole, but the boat still ended up half full of water, meaning it leaked and would need to be carefully watched.

We struggled to keep the boats head on to the sea. Every time we turned broadside, seas poured in. We were bailing furiously and managed to put out a sea anchor, which helped to keep her head-on.

The trouble was it was so dark we couldn't see which way the sea was coming, or if we were beam-on to it or not. Now and then, a star would show itself for a moment and we could take a bearing on it. By using the oars, we could keep the bow into the seas. This would give us a chance to get some water out of the boat – a very slow

process compared with the rate it came in when broadside.

Things looked pretty hopeless that night for us. All through it, we rowed and baled water like hell, and we did not capsize. My confidence in those wooden lifeboats began to grow. When dawn broke, we were pretty near exhausted, but still afloat. The seas were just as high but at least we could see them, and because we knew their direction, could keep head into them. We got most of the water out of the boat, except for about a foot. Saw plenty of wreckage around and a few hatch covers from our ship, or perhaps another one.

While constantly trying to find a dry spot to sit, we were more concerned about a smoke than something to eat. Nobody mentioned food or drink. That conversation was put off as long as possible, in case we had a long trip in front of us, which did seem likely.

The sun came up and stayed out for a little while, and though it was not very warm, it helped psychologically. We figured we were around 200 miles from land, to the north of us. The wind was coming from the south. It was a hell of a cold wind but a Godsend, because it was taking us towards the coast of Africa. We could see the horizon only for brief moments. The seas looked like mountains from our position. I believe we made good progress that day. At 5 o'clock, we had two malted milk tablets apiece and a small tin of concentrated food. It was not much, and we wolfed it down. I guess most of us were praying that the night to come was not going to be a repetition of the previous one.

Just before the sunset, the seas appeared to be getting lighter and we hoped fervently that they would remain calm for the night. We

smoked another cigarette apiece and tried to feel confident about our future. The stars came out. It got colder, but we were not shipping much water. We only had to bale about every half an hour. My teeth started to chatter. I couldn't stop them. Most of the other boys were also getting frozen up. I found it was warmer to keep bunched up with the others.

It was hard to read our compass at night. We navigated using the Southern Cross (a star formation you can see only in the southern latitudes) directly east of us and so knew we were making a northerly direction. We figured if we could hold our course and the wind did not change, we could make land in four to five days, maybe sooner. One thing had us worried: How much the current was causing us to drift. We just had to rely on guesswork.

One or two of the fellows were in more favourable positions to fall asleep in spite of everything, but most did not get one wink the whole time in the boat. I was hungry like the devil in the night, but strangely not very thirsty, which seemed the general consensus.

The night seemed like a century. We kept looking at the sky for signs of bad weather but the fair wind was holding. I dug out a spare piece of canvas and wrapped it around my stomach, which helped keep out the cold a bit. But I fancied I'd already been touched by pneumonia. One of the boys cut two holes in a canvas sailbag, slipped it over his head and made a warm suit.

We were making progress, though all the time we had wind. Just before daylight, someone thought he heard an aeroplane. And he was right. It came over very close and we all flashed our lights.

He had seen us. Salvation was imminent, and none too soon.

In the end, three crewmen lost their lives on the first night, out of a total of 50 – though some accounts say there had only been 46 men aboard. The survivors spent two days and nights in two lifeboats, swamped by powerful Roaring Forties waves. They were rescued on day two by the *Africana*, a South African Seaward Defence Force minesweeping trawler, and taken ashore at Cape Town.

The facts surrounding the sinking of the *Plaudit* are all well documented by historians. Marshall, as we shall see later on, would add his own twist to the ending.

The Internet functions like a great minesweeper, except the mines often turn out to be treasures. One of these is the tale behind *U-181*, the sub that torpedoed the *Plaudit*.

U-181 was a Type IXD2 U-boat in service to Nazi Germany's navy, the Kriegsmarine. Laid down 15 March 1941 at the DeSchiMAG AG Weser yard in Bremen, it was launched 30 December 1941 and commissioned 9 May 1942, under the command of Kapitänleutnant Wolfgang Lüth (1913-1945). It would turn out to be an extremely lethal vessel, whose skipper's short life ended in an irony-laced tragedy.

Captain Lüth enjoyed a superb career, ending it as the second

most successful U-boat ace of World War II. Starting war patrols as a captain at 26 years of age, he sunk 46 merchant ships as well as the French submarine *Doris* during his 15 patrols, worth a total displacement of 230,781 gross register tons (GRT). The *Plaudit* sinking was his second aboard *U-181*. After 15 patrols – 13 on other subs and two lengthy ones on *U-181* – he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords, and Diamonds (Ritterkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes mit Eichenlaub, Schwertern und Brillanten). He was one of only two U-boat commanders to be so honored during World War II.

Following Germany's surrender, *U-181* was taken over by Japanese Captain Marujama on 6 May 1945, while anchored in Japanese-occupied Singapore. A prior agreement between Germany and Japan stated that if one nation was defeated in the war, but the other was able to continue fighting, the former would render all of its war material to the latter. Thus Japan re-commissioned *U-181* as *I-501* on 15 July 1945. After the American A-bombings forced Japan to surrender, *I-501* was turned over to Allied forces in Singapore around a month later.

Her last day afloat was 16 February 1946. Germany's second most lethal submarine of WW II was sunk in the Strait of Malacca by the British frigates *HMS Loch Glendhu* and *HMS Loch Lomond*.

As for Capt Lüth, his final military role was as commander of the Mürwik Naval Academy, in Flensburg. The story goes that after British Forces began their occupation of Flensburg in early May of 1945,

nothing initially changed in the Academy's daily routine. Returning on the night of 13/14 May, in a state of extreme drunkenness, Lüth did not respond to the sentry who asked him for the password, 'Tannenberg.' Whether Lüth refused to answer or the guard didn't hear him is unknown. What is known is that Lüth was then shot in the head and killed, in peacetime, by the guard, 18-year-old Seaman Mathias Gottlob, a fellow German.

Lüth was given the Third Reich's final state funeral, the only U-boat commander to be so commemorated. He left behind a wife and two children.

Chapter 4

Well seasoned

By March 1943, Marshall had based himself in New York City. He'd also become co-proprietor of Doran and Woodward, a shop at 773 Lexington Avenue offering 'Antique Silver, Old Sheffield Plate and Objects D'Art' which he personally imported from the UK. At some stage he became involved with, went into partnership with or employed a woman named Priscilla. Based on his correspondence home, it's fairly certain that she managed the shop, and almost certainly certain that it all finished in tears. And not likely Marshall's. If there was a romantic aspect to it, his mixing of business with pleasure might've served as a lesson to him that in future it would be wise to marry the help before letting it near the till.

Through it all, he took note of a gap in the UK market for a certain commodity that could easily be had in the USA. With opportunities to conduct legit trade hindered by duties and red tape, wouldn't it be easier, he wondered, not to mention more interesting, to bring whatever the hell he wanted into Blighty by any means afforded by his position as a senior officer aboard a spacious cargo ship?

Plans were floated, agreements forged, tools acquired and dinghies, large mailbags and waterproof floating lamps purchased. Marshall soon found himself at the helm of a substantial smuggling ring bringing in one of England's most sought-after products: Indeed, he'd

become the nation's foremost supplier of illicit, untaxed, premium USA-quality ladies' nylon stockings.

His scheme was simple and ingenious. Buying the contraband in New York, he'd pack it into the mailbags, which he'd stash in the ship. A double-hulled vessel, it had large steel inspection plates on the inner hull, each fastened in place with a number of large bolts. Other than being periodically opened for corrosion checks, the plates were left painted over and untouched. Marshall would unbolt the ones in hard-to-reach areas of the ship, hide his mailbags in the void space, then re-attach them.

Once the ship arrived into port at Southampton, customs officials would come aboard and conduct their usual search. But removing even just one of the inspection plates was an arduous, time-consuming process – precisely why your typical customs man couldn't be bothered. And they were concerned only with inbound ships, not departing vessels. So after they'd all cleared off, Marshall would open up the plates and retrieve his booty. But only once his ship had finished in port and set off back toward New York again did the merchandise drop occur.

This took place in the dark hours at a pre-arranged offshore location near Hailing Island. Once the signal had been given to his men ashore, they headed out in motorised dinghies, snatching up the mailbags, each one with a waterproof lamp attached to aid in locating them. At the time, nylon stockings were in short supply, and thus in endless demand by London's glamour-starved women. Marshall's

trusted men ashore sold the nylons at fabulous markups on the black market.

Marshall's importation efforts proved a lucrative and relatively low-risk means to supplement his regular income, and he socked away the spoils for years. By 1952, after 15 years in the Merchant Navy and in his mid-thirties, he'd amassed enough to leave the sea behind him and think about taking up a more genteel life ashore.

At the time of *U-181*'s scuttling, some five nautical miles off Tanjung Balai, Sumatra in the Malacca Strait, just a couple of hundred miles to the east, Victor had entered the closing stages of his career as an RAF officer and fighter pilot.

He was thrilled to be serving with Squadron 136, the short-lived, but highest scoring squadron in South East Asia command. And to his surprise, Victor loved everything about Southeast Asia – the people, food, climate, geography and, most of all, the unusual missions he flew as a 23-year-old pilot in the Spitfire Mark VIII, the state-of-the-art fighter of the moment. He undertook many 'sector recces', in which he'd be sent to make visual assessments of this or that forest or island or rice paddy.

Peninsular Malaya's inland hinterlands contained immense carpets of primary forest running over hills, valleys and karst cordilleras

topped with dagger-sharp pinnacles. The forests were populated with dangerous creatures – tigers, pythons, cobras, elephants, rhinos and also Malayan Communist Party members, his primary target. The absurdity of these recces, he would recount in later years, was twofold: There was never much of anything to see down below, due to the mostly unbroken forest canopy, and should he suffer mechanical difficulties or be shot down, there was nowhere to land an aircraft. Nonetheless, he carried in his belt a *kukri*, or Nepalese curved knife, in case he should find himself alone on the ground, admitting he ‘hadn’t had the slightest bit of bloody training in jungle survival or hand-to-hand combat, not to mention bailing out and parachuting into jungle.’

The best-remembered mission during his three months with Squadron 136, from late 1945 to mid-March 1946, was to be his last.

He’d been briefed about the island of Ko Tarutao in the Andaman Sea, just north of the Thai-Malaya border. It was entirely virgin forest but for two small coastal villages from which pirates had been conducting frequent raids on passing merchant ships. The island had a dark history. Tarutao is a Thai corruption of the original Malay name, Pulau Tertua, meaning ‘old, mysterious and primitive island.’ Before the war, the Thai government had used it as their Devil’s Island, a place to keep its most notorious convicts. Between 1938 and 1948, more than 3,000 Thai criminals and political prisoners were held here.

During their occupation of Thailand, the Japanese cut off all support to Tarutao from the mainland, leaving the guards and prisoners to fend for themselves. Seeing no other option, they banded together in

raiding parties, attacking merchant ships sailing through the busy Malacca Strait near the island. An American plantation owner who'd lost his fortune to the war was said to mastermind the raids. Aably assisting him were two British non-commissioned officers, themselves on the run for murder. The gang had robbed and sunk some 130 ships, their trademark being to kill everyone aboard. After the Japanese had been defeated and exited Thailand, the Thai government had still not taken action against the pirates of Tarutao. So it was left to the Brits.

Victor's solo mission was to fly his Spitfire up the Malayan coastline, then approach each of the two pirate villages at ground-zero altitude, under full throttle. As he reached each village, he was to climb hard, execute a sharp turn, then have a look down and try to tally up the number of inhabitants fleeing for their lives. Pilots were seldom permitted to fly at ground-zero, which is not quite as low it sounds; he'd have been at around 50 feet in altitude and 400mph in airspeed as he approached the village. A mission such as this registered at about 10/10 on the satisfaction scale for a fighter pilot.

He was not to open fire – this was after all Thai territory, and Thailand was an ally. He was only to scare the bejesus out of the village and do the headcount, such that senior command might get a sense of what they were dealing with on Tarutao. He did as ordered, then went around and took a second, then a third go, at the first village, having a wonderful old time. The pirates panic-scattered in all directions, while he managed to do a rudimentary headcount.

It was around then that he remembered he was supposed to do

the same thing to second village on the other side of the island. He'd been enjoying himself a little too much. And he was now too low on fuel to attempt it and still make it back to base. Thus he aborted the second half of the mission.

On returning, he informed his superiors of the situation, asking to return straightaway so he could finish the job. Permission was not only denied, but he was to discover that this was his last mission with Squadron 136. He was sent to Singapore for R&R, awaiting new orders.

Those orders, when they came three weeks later, were to jump on the next flight to Batavia (now Jakarta), the Dutch Indies capital, to join an RAF squadron already there. At the time, the Brits were 'babysitting' the place until the Dutch military could sufficiently regroup and regain control of their colony.

This was far from a plum placement. Chaos reigned across the entire archipelago, with independence forces gaining steam and causing much deadly havoc. Rebels opened fire on any aircraft that attempted to land or take off at Batavia. Many were shot down. Caucasian survivors were often chopped to pieces with *parang* (a type of machete). Moreover, Batavia was infamous as a malodorous, swampy hell-hole, rife with deadly diseases and desperate, starving locals rendered thus by the deprivations of three years of exceptionally brutal Japanese treatment. Worse still, the rumour was that there were very few missions for fighter pilots, due to the nature of the British presence there – more sitting around giving pints of your blood to the

clouds of malarial mosquitoes than anything else.

In a last-moment twist of fate, Victor avoided the dreaded Batavia posting, instead wrangling himself a trip home to England. His war had suddenly ended, and not just with a whimper but with his one and only incomplete mission as his final act. This rankled him deeply then, and would continue to do so for the rest of his life – in spite of a much later attempt to rectify the half-done deed.

Returning home, Victor was met with London lying in ruins, along with the British economy. His parents, Harry and Gladys, had survived and Harry had been fortunate enough to keep his job throughout the war as the circulation manager at a Beaverbrook-owned newspaper. So they were okay. But for Victor, the idea of staying with the RAF during peacetime was quickly rendered untenable. Pilots were kept busy with regular practice. But with nothing left to actually bomb, strafe or escort, Victor believed he might be the first fighter pilot to die of boredom.

He'd done his pilot training in Canada and had really liked the place. Besides, it was finding its economic feet in the new world order dominated by its southern neighbour, the United States. Canada was calling, and Victor was ready to answer.

Chapter 5

To work

Marshall had so far survived torpedoing, bombing, machine-gunning, deep-freezing, over a hundred Atlantic crossings, a larcenous Cuban demimondaine and a grasping New Yorker named Priscilla. How tough could peacetime life be? It was 1952 and though he wished to start enjoying the fruits of his sacrifices for king, country and self, the scale of the Priscilla disaster had imposed unexpected limitations. His net worth was now one Buick convertible, two Invicta sports cars, an antiques collection and £500 cash.

The first question was where to start whatever he'd be doing next. London was out of the question. Besides, English Customs & Excise were getting curious about matters of some, shall we say, import. So where does a chastened New Yorker go when he needs to downsize his dreams? Across the water to Jersey, of course. Old Jersey, that is.

A ten-by-six-mile block of Channel Islands granite, the Bailiwick of Jersey is an independent territory with a mix of English and French culture some 15 miles off France's Normandy coast. Marshall took his cars, his antiques and his cash to St Helier, its capital and only city, dropping the money as the deposit on a mortgage for a run-down guesthouse.

Jersey was not yet the posh tax & tourism hideaway it is today.

The Nazis had occupied it for five years, and prior to that it was a place of fishing, boatbuilding, woolens manufacturing and agriculture. But its location, decent climate and all-round charm enabled the island to reinvent itself as a postwar holiday destination.

Intending to cash in on all that, Marshall wasted little time converting the flea-bitten guesthouse into the Hotel Revere. His business instincts were already well honed by New York. He knew to be careful to make it just upscale enough to attract the necessary coin to remain afloat, but not too expensive to scare off the middle-class tourists Jersey was pulling. The Revere's location was prime, in the heart of St Helier's retail area, and a few minutes' stroll from the beach.

No doubt being single had been rewarding, notwithstanding the Priscilla rout. But were he to make a go of this hotel he couldn't do so alone. The seasoned bachelor soon met his match in the form of one Joyce (maiden name here). An attractive and confident woman who was unafraid to speak her mind – or be a full-blown horror show when necessary – she also had the entrepreneur's touch. She immediately took over hotel management, clearing the way for Marshall to do what he was best at: collecting and building, then integrating all he'd collected into everything he built.

His operating principle was 'replace ordinary with extraordinary.' Walls, floors, ceilings, windows, doors, doorframes, fireplaces – any architectural feature or detail, whether interior or exterior, they were all subject to replacement without notice. He did all the thinking and the hard labour himself, along with one other hired builder – wearing out a

dozen or so accomplices through the years. In a short time Marshall assumed the mantles of master architect, interior designer, stonemason and timber crafter – possessing formal accreditation in none.

Having amassed a too great quantity of unusual antiques to house in the hotel alone, Marshall decided he should have a castle. Europe's post-war economy meant many fine properties with castles and fortresses were on the market. Marshall placed an offer on an old fort at Rozel in Jersey. The deal closed and he prepared to move in, only to be told a short time later that there was no deal; someone had outbid him after the fact.

Stuff it, thought he, I'll build me own bleedin' fortress.

He commenced work on Flicquet Castle in the mid-1950s, on the bones of a property he'd acquired. It sat just above the jagged shoreline of Flicquet with a sweeping eastward view of the sea toward France. As was the Jersey custom, he built with granite blocks. Plenty were liberated from demolished ancient buildings, thanks to the rush of modernity gnawing at Jersey's architectural legacy. He'd stroll into demolition sites, asking the workmen what he could take. The answer was usually whatever he could cart off. He grabbed many a viable, no-cost or low-cost building block this way.

Marshall worked from no drawings other than those he kept in his head. Neither the building code, nor architectural trends, nor standard modes of engineering, planning or zoning applied to him. He built according to a mental sketch that grew more sophisticated as his building materials inventory and purchasing power expanded.

He made mistakes. Like using the wrong mortar to point the granite walls. They later leaked terribly, as did the flat roofs. Furthermore, Flicquet could not be connected to Jersey's water mains, and there was no groundwater to tap, so Marshall added a rainwater collection system that proved insufficient. None of this troubled him. It made complete sense to live this way; he'd need only apply the old water conservation disciplines from his sailing days. Joyce, one guesses, might've thought differently. Flicquet Castle, though gradually becoming a superb work of architecture, would remain chronically damp, short of water, and never quite finished.

And it had rats, which Marshall cared for.

A few people who knew Marshall from his early Jersey days still remained vertical as of the research phase of this work. We have the benefit of their memories to add extra piquancy here. Some stories concerned Marshall's abiding, if disturbing, love for all animals.

Longtime friend and chartered accountant Peter Michel recalls:

I used to be Marshall's accountant, and one day I drive out to Flicquet to see him on a business matter. I knock on the kitchen door, the one right off the road. No answer. So I open the door, walk into the kitchen and I'm confronted by a huge rat. I mean it frightened the life out of me completely. I close the kitchen door, walk through to the lovely lounge they have with the big fireplace, and find Marshall.

'Ah, Peter,' he says with that terrific voice of his, 'here you are!'

I tell him, 'Marshall, before we start, you've got a problem in that kitchen.'

'What?'

'There is the biggest rat I've ever seen.'

'Ah, it's come for its milk.'

He goes and gets a saucer, fills the saucer with milk and puts it down for the rat. The rat drinks the milk. It's absolutely true. I saw it with my own eyes.

Another time, I was having lunch with him and Joyce upstairs above the hotel pool. I even remember it was a lovely sea bass. And there was this bloody wasp buzzing around, flying into our food. It just wouldn't leave us alone. In the end, I rolled up something and I swatted it. I'd killed it. Marshall just sat there, looking at me, and said, 'Now make one! How dare you kill something when you couldn't make one!'

I couldn't argue that point. He was absolutely right. So I wasn't allowed to do that again.

Marshall was always known as a generous man. Peter Michel tells a story of that characteristic resulting in some repercussions:

I won't name names here, but Marshall had a chef who'd worked at the Revere for a few years, and he decided to reward him his good service by giving him some shares in the company. The chef immediately left! Quit his job, saying, 'Lovely! I'm rich for

life now.’ This is mid-August, high season. And the hotel’s chef has just walked out.

Marshall fought to get those shares back year after year – he paid horrendous amounts in lawyers’ fees, and got nowhere. It was backwards and forwards. He told me about it one day. I said, ‘Do you happen to know who his accountant is?’ And I knew him – somebody I’d taught, actually. So I phoned him up and said, ‘Look, I’ve just spoken to Marshall about your client, Mr. X, and what we’re going to do is actually wind up the company, because it doesn’t own the freehold, doesn’t own anything. It’s a trading company. So we’re going to shut it down and well, there are a few debts, so you’re going to need to get in touch with your client to tell him how much he needs to pay in so we can do this.

And he said, ‘I can see where this is going... are you really going to do that?’

I said, ‘Yeah, I am, but it’s going to be a real nuisance, because we’re going to have to open up a new company, we’re going to have to transfer suppliers, et cetera. So why don’t I talk to Marshall and say, ‘Well, if he gives you a thousand pounds, it all goes away, shares come back and everything reverts back to normal.’

I mean the legal fees had been tens of thousands so far. So this accountant spoke to his client, got back to me and said, ‘Yeah, you’ve got us. Okay, we’ll accept a thousand pounds. Just send your agreement to me and we’ll go through with it.’

I was thrilled. This had been going on eons. This man owns twenty-five percent of the company or something, and I've got the whole lot back for a thousand quid! So I come over to the hotel, absolutely full of the joys of spring, can't wait to tell Marshall. I walk in and Joyce and he are having lunch in the royal booth, near the lobster tank. Marshall sees me and says, 'Peter! Sit down. Have a glass of wine.'

I say, 'Marshall, all your legal problems with the shares and everything else... all gone away. If you can make out a cheque to this accounting firm for a thousand pounds, job done.'

'Hmm, much too much,' he says, and carries on having his lunch.

'But Marshall,' I said 'this has been fifteen years of hard work. It's cost you tens of thousands of —'

'Doesn't matter,' he interrupts. 'Much too much.' And he wouldn't pay it. In the end he says, 'Offer him five hundred.'

So I went back, offered the five hundred and the man took it. Marshall finally won. The guy knew he had nowhere to go.

As the hotel began to take shape, people began to remark on Marshall's singular approach to design. Everything he added, whether it was a carved wooden wall, a stone floor or an arched doorway, tended to be old, large, well made and not going anywhere. It was as though he wandered through life looking at all things encountered, sizing them up as possible missing puzzle pieces for the hotel or for Flicque. When

he saw a fit, he'd set to acquiring it, often at no cost or, when paying, seldom at market value. His cunning appraiser's eye saw to that.

In 1954, two years after marrying Joyce, a son, Paul, their only child, was born.

Chapter 6

Hello, Canada

Choosing to exit the UK after leaving the RAF and deciding on Canada, Victor stopped en route at New York to visit his brother. From a letter to Marshall written in 1997:

About the time you receive this letter will mark the 50th anniversary of my arrival in la Guardia en route to Canada: 23 April 1947. You met me there, remember? We roamed around for a couple of days – as we had in 1943 – and then I boarded a train for Toronto. I suspect there may have been a sigh of relief in my wake. (I had thought of staying in the US, if they would let me, and I guess you were wondering – in fear and trembling – where the hell would I stay, if not at your place.)

New York was definitely not my scene. It was kind of brutal, especially to those who had no money. There were so many ex-GIs looking for work that my prospects were decidedly dim. At least I had fond memories of Canada, although I had not been to Toronto during my RAF training, and knew not a soul. But I did have a letter of introduction to the general manager of a magazine subscription agency in Toronto, arranged by Harry's old friend Bill Garnham. It worked and I got a job, just like that. Good timing, too, since I only had 40 or 50 bucks to my name. Within a couple

of months I was back in New York – on an expense account, representing the company. Heady stuff for a 23-year-old. It must have been on that occasion that you were kind enough to arrange a meeting with a girl named Justine. As I remember, it worked out quite well. Thanks.

After 50 years, I can't help wondering if I did the right thing. Looking at Britain now, it's a toss-up. But at the time, and for about 30 years after, it was no contest. Canada – and North America – were incomparably better. Every time I visited the UK during those years, I kissed the ground (figuratively) when I returned to Canada. Paul Doran asked me once why I had left. I answered as best I could, including the fact that you were ensconced in New York at the time. But clearly he thought I must have been misguided. Nobody could understand unless they had been there to experience a country that had been reduced to ruins, physically, psychologically and economically.

Victor's early years in Toronto were a little subdued, compared to prancing Nazi trains and terrifying Malayan jungle bandits. It was an earnest, safe, polite city of WASPs, subject to long winters and not much fun to be had. Still, he was grateful to be let in and applied himself with all his energy. Initially, he bounced between jobs, including working as a copywriter for a bank. He loved the notion that he, a dyslexic school dropout, earned his living as a writer. But he didn't love working for others, and so one day pulled the plug on his job and

opened his own shop, offering copywriting, advertising, and later, public relations services. The business got off to a promising start, allowing Victor a great, long sigh of relief – probably his first as an adult. It's easy to imagine him feeling like the master of his new domain, with his own shop, clients and a stable income. But I know his upbringing carried his share of turmoil.

He admitted to me several times that he'd lived his entire life in fear, and that fear had always been his sole motivator. Fear of what? I finally asked him, when I was in my mid-teens. Fear of being destitute while growing up in the Great Depression. Fear of being bombed in his sleep during the Battle of Britain. Fear of being shot down as a fighter pilot over enemy lines. Fear of living under the Third Reich. Fear of failing as a businessman. Fear of being a lousy husband and father. Fear of being insufficiently financially prepared for retirement. Fear of being abandoned as an old man in a hospital ward, dying alone and helpless. Name your negative outcome, he'd make room for it on his list. In my state of righteous teenage ignorance I privately thought my father was a wimp, but chose flattery instead, saying something like, 'But you survived the bombings in London and then you were a fighter pilot. How could anything scare you after that?'

He looked at me with his intelligent, sad, blue eyes and laughed. 'You cannot possibly imagine life when I was the age you are now. Europe was in the second of two apocalyptic world wars with just over two decades separating them. The Depression... well let's just say it was the opposite of the way you rotten kids live now. You have

everything. We had barely enough of anything, and only that because my father was able to keep a job through it all. And while the Depression dragged on with no end in sight, try to imagine the compounding horror of watching a madman like Adolph Hitler rise up and declare he's taking over the Western world by force – and then the Japanese claiming the entire East for themselves. It was the ultimate nightmare made real for hundreds of millions of people. And Britain was, initially, in no position to defend itself, yet if someone didn't stop the Nazis we were going to be their slaves. We had to pull together. There was no more 'I'm alright, Jack', no more minding your own. This was everyone's business and it was slammed in our faces and pinned there like a side of rotten beef. No one got to sit it out. And once the Americans, Canadians and others realised that this was the end of decency and civilization unless they joined in too, well, we were able to destroy the Nazis... only to see the Soviets, our close ally only a few years before, build nuclear weapons and become a threat of an altogether more terrifying order. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, I couldn't sleep for days on end. So yes, if you're wondering how someone like me could possibly be ruled by fear, perhaps that explains it.' After hearing that, you can bet I praised myself for not calling him a wimp to his face.

One night in the early 1950s, Victor was introduced to the woman who would become my mother, Kay Walden. It happened in a bar, instigated by mutual friends. At the time, she was engaged to a Toronto artist of some note. My father – most uncharacteristically for the perfect

gentleman he otherwise always was – placed himself in the middle, convincing her to dump the starving artist and be his girl. Kay was a knockout with a quick-draw sense of humour who'd left her hometown of Ottawa, which was about 3,000% duller than Toronto, for that very reason. She saw something there, bought in and they were married in short order.

Kay began working as Victor's secretary, and the business went well, until it didn't. For reasons too old for anyone to remember, Marshall Fenn Limited suffered an unsettling downturn that lasted until the birth of Kay and Victor's first child in 1959. That was me. And I take all the credit for rescuing the business by instilling even more fear and worry in my father just by being born.

As Victor became better heeled, he realised he missed the piloting life and now had the means to do something about it. In 1960, he joined the Brant-Norfolk Aero Club, flying both gliders and the tow-planes that hauled them up. It was not nearly as adrenaline-steeped as fighters in wartime, but a poorly handled glider could readily kill its pilot, so there was a bit of fun to it. He was talented enough to enter regional competitions, and in one event managed to soar from a 1,000ft release over Brantford, Ontario to Elmira, New York, for a distance of around 200nm as the crow flies.

In 1962, a second and final child, Elizabeth Anne Walden Fenn, was born to Kay and Victor. She no doubt added more bulk to the Victor Fenn Catalogue of Fears, for it seems to have propelled him well

on his way. For as long as he owned it, his company's fortunes would never wane again.

Chapter 7

Castling up

Marshall's collections had once again outgrown the real estate necessary to adequately house and display them. It had become clear: He needed a second castle.

His knack for good timing remained in top form. The UK and Europe were still a mess. Lords, barons, townships and counties, unable to afford the upkeep, continued putting their castles up for sale. In researching Marshall's papers, a classified ad clipped out of the *Irish Independent* was discovered. It offered for sale a six-bedroom castle with 35 acres of land for a pittance. It's not known if he made a bid for that particular property, but the curious mind wonders: How must it have felt to be among a minority of people in mid-1950s UK with money? Marshall, a compassionate soul by nature, must surely have felt for those who'd been devastated by WWII. But how might he best contribute? Was shopping for castles a responsible act in the aftermath a world war? If you were Marshall Doran, it was. Consider the novelty of his vision: To not only conserve and protect his investments, but also make them into living museums and invite the public to not only view history, but to inhabit it. Where else in the world at this time were hoteliers buying architecturally significant, but distressed, buildings, renovating them with the utmost in imagination and good taste, then

filling them up with ancient treasures as part of the décor? And in so doing, gainfully employing large numbers of locals?

In the end, he didn't get the castle in the newspaper advertisement. He did quite a bit better.

Picture a large Neo-Gothic mansion in grey cut-stone, rising from the edge of a forested hillside. On the left side are the stables, encircling a large courtyard, while on the right some 50 acres of meadow and forestland spread down to the banks of the River Moy. The place has fallen into disrepair to the extent that its owner, the Mayo County Council, is ready to remove the roof – the customary Irish way to exclude a property from various federal tax levies. But, as testament to their builder, the structures are in surprisingly good shape, the meticulously laid stone showing little signs of disrepair. The still-intact roof would enable Marshall to save much of the original interior.

But it wasn't just the building he'd preserve.

The family that had commissioned Belleek Manor was of a most unusual breed: The benevolent baronetcy. A baronet being a member of the lowest hereditary titled British order, the title signifies the status of a commoner, while permitting the use of the honorific 'Sir'. The Knox-Gore Baronetcy, of Belleek Manor in the County of Mayo, would be a short-lived if respected one. The title was created in 1868 for Francis

Knox-Gore, then Lord Lieutenant of Sligo, but died along with the second baronet in 1890. What remains of the Knox-Gore legacy is the kindness displayed by the family to the people of Mayo. Not only did they employ a great many locals and treat them well, during the Irish Potato Famine, the Knox-Gores were known as deeply compassionate landlords. So much so that even during the worst excesses of 'The Troubles' in the 1920s, when the wealthy were prime targets, Belleek Manor and its occupants were left unharmed.

Sir Francis commissioned master architect John Benjamin Keane to create a masterpiece. Keane was an esteemed builder of manor houses, castles, churches and courthouses. It was while building a trio of castles in Northern Ireland that he made time to put up Belleek Manor. Completed in 1831, it cost around £10,000 to construct, with its grey cut stone ferried from the nearby quarry in Moyne. The manor house, built atop the remnants of an ancient friary, contained thirty-eight rooms, with eight bedrooms, three bathrooms, various reception rooms and servants' quarters.

One stroll around the property and it's not hard to see why Sir Francis loved his estate dearly – enough to ensure he'd be buried in its demesne on his death in 1873. Upon his gravesite today stands a monument commissioned by Charles James Knox-Gore who inherited the estate. Charles himself died in 1890 leaving it to his sister, Matilda. Charles followed tradition and also had himself buried in the estate grounds near the river, along with his beloved hound, Phizzie. Modest headstones mark both their graves.

Matilda eventually married one Major General William Boyd Saunders of Torquay, who took the unusual step of tacking his wife's surname onto his to ensure its continuance through future generations. The 1911 census shows Matilda, aged 77, in residence at Belleek with her daughters, her son, his wife and an army of servants. The estate employed over seventy people who tended to the kitchen garden, sawmill, estate lands and a sizeable kennel of hunting dogs. It passed through descendents of the Saunders Knox-Gore family until the outbreak of war.

Belleek was, according to Wikipedia, the site of the first settlement in Ballina, dating from around 1375, when an Augustinian friary was built there. As well:

The Belleek estate originally occupied lands from the Moy River to the Killala Road. This included part of the 'Old French Road' which General Humbert marched on from Killala (during the disastrous French invasion of Ireland in the Rebellion of 1798) and beside part of which in the Killala Road-Belleek area was Belleek's reservoir – presumably destroyed in the construction of Coca-Cola's Ballina Beverages factory; the 'Old French Road' is now closed off at that point.

Belleek Manor's prospects began a long slide toward oblivion after the Knox-Gores sold it in 1940. Dire and compelling circumstances had forced their hand. The family's sole heir was killed

while serving in the RAF in 1939. And the family believed the Nazis were planning to invade England via Ireland and, as members of aristocracy, they would have much to lose, quite likely their lives. As well, the Knox-Gores had been forced to give up a large portion of the acreage due to the Irish Republican government's acquisition policy of returning land to tenant farmers. This had reduced their income, and with it, their ability to keep up the estate.

In September 1942, the contents of Belleek Manor were auctioned off, leaving its commodious reception rooms bare. The property was bought by Isaac Beckett, who intended to convert it into an equestrian stud farm. Some three years later, however, having only restored the manor, he died of a sudden heart attack while on a 'shopping' trip to Dublin – yes, the city's young ladies were more energetic than he'd expected. His son had no interest in maintaining the farm, so in the 1950s, the manor was purchased by Mayo County Council for use as a sanatorium. The interior of the castle was whitewashed, with the reception rooms now used to house female tuberculosis patients. A few years later, with antibiotics bringing TB under better control, the manor was no longer needed. Finally, it had a brief run as a military barracks before falling into disuse.

In 1961, as Mayo County Council ruminated over whether to remove the roof or sell the estate off to the highest bidder, along came Marshall Doran. He handed over £3,000 and Belleek Manor was his. It was the deal of a lifetime, the one that changed everything for him, for his family and, to an extent, for Ballina.

With the Revere Hotel now fully up and running in Jersey, Joyce and Marshall could begin the renovations at Belleek necessary to transform it into their second hotel. Marshall aimed to stick to his 'replace ordinary with extraordinary' ethos, but this time employing some unprecedented twists. He would undertake of what could be formally categorised as 'woodworks' in quantity, but the nature of the work as well as the timber used was as unconventionally sourced as his devoutly rebellious imagination permitted.

By now a seasoned antiques collector and ardent student of history, Marshall was aware of the presence of old Spanish wrecks off the coast of Mayo. The Spanish Armada in Ireland, as the event is known to historians, ranks as one of the great wartime nautical disasters in Europe.

In September 1588, a large contingent of the 130-strong fleet sent by King Philip II to invade England was smashed into ruin along the Irish coast. Having suffered defeat at the Battle of Gravelines, France, the Armada, attempting to return to Spain the long way – via the North Atlantic, westward around Scotland's northern coast – was driven off-course by violent storms and straight into Ireland's west coast. Some 24 Armada ships wrecked along the rocky, wave-battered coastline,

stretching over 300 miles from Antrim in the north to Kerry in the south. A number of the survivors spared from the Atlantic's frigid grip made it to shore, only to be slaughtered by the Irish. The remainder escaped to Scotland, with a few getting home to Spain. It's estimated that around 5,000 Armada crewmen died in the wrecks or at the hands of the Irish.

One galleon sank off Tyrawley (now County Mayo). Some historians believe that a second ship wrecked near Kid Island, though no records remain of it. A ship called *El Gran Grin* came to grief at the mouth of Clew Bay, also in Mayo.

Best known of all the Armada's survivors was Captain Francisco de Cuellar. At the time a prisoner aboard the Armada ship *La Lavia*, he'd been removed from command, and had scarcely avoided execution for not following orders after the Gravelines debacle. A vicious storm took less than an hour to break up *La Lavia* and two other ships, *La Juliana* and *La Santa Maria de Visón*. Sea conditions in Streedagh Strand, Sligo, where those wrecks occurred, are dangerous even during fair weather; de Cuellar's description in a long letter he wrote about the experience serves as somber testimony to the fact:

Many were drowning within the ships; others, casting themselves into the water, sank to the bottom without returning to the surface; others on rafts and barrels, and gentlemen on pieces of timber, others cried aloud in the ships, calling upon God; captains threw their chains and crown-pieces into the sea; the waves swept others away, washing them out of the ships.

While I was regarding this solemn scene, I did not know what to do, nor what means to adopt, as I did not know how to swim, and the waves and storm were very great; and, on the other hand, the land and the shore were full of enemies, who went about jumping and dancing with delight at our misfortunes; and when any one of our people reached the beach, two hundred savages and other enemies fell upon him and stripped him of what he had on until he was left in his naked skin.

Over centuries of storms, tides and currents, certain of these wrecks began to show up on shorelines and in shallower waters. Attitudes at the time were focused more on building the future than preserving the past. Thus when Armada ships' timbers began to reveal themselves, Marshall saw an opportunity he couldn't resist.

In the end, only a select few knee pieces from the Sligo wrecks found their way into the hotel's Armada Bar. The main problem being their advanced state of decay and a tendency for that decay to accelerate once removed from the sea. For the still-viable timbers, Marshall discovered through trial and error that a most unlikely, and appropriately Irish mixture consisting of milk, cow dung and Guinness halted the rot and preserved the wood. This recipe seems to have stood the test of time, as there have been no timber-related injuries reported in the Armada Bar to date.

Much of the other wood incorporated into Belleek Castle came into Marshall's possession through a complex and coincidental series of

historical twists. To trace how all this came to pass, we turn to his son, Paul Doran, who lives at and co-manages Belleek Castle with his partner Maya Nikolaeva:

One day I received a phone call from a woman identifying herself as Linda Mitchell. It went something like this:

Linda (rapid clip, strong Irish brogue): I've the bell o' the sign.

Me: Sorry?

Linda: I've the bell o' the sign!

Me: You have a bell and a sign? I'm happy for you, but I've no idea what you're talking about?

Linda: The boat! I've the ship's bell from the boat called the Sine. I've someone who wants to buy it, but I don't like him. I think it should be with you.

Me: Bring it on up.

Later she shows up with the bell and some historical documents and I tell her it's very kind of her to donate it to the Castle.

Linda: Oh, that's not what I had in mind... I thought that you might like to buy it from me.

Paul: I see... so how much do you want?

After some back and forth, a sum of five hundred euros was agreed and the historical papers were given to me.

Why did Linda Mitchell have the bell of *Sine*, (which now hangs in the Armada Bar)? Well, back in the day, Miss Mitchell was having an affair with Isaac Beckett's son, Frank. This was one and the same Isaac Beckett who'd purchased Belleek in 1940. As for the *Sine*, she was a 140-foot, 500-ton, three-masted barque from Marsdal, Sweden. She carried a cargo of timber from South America bound for the local timber yard, Beckett's of Ballina. While anchored in shallow waters off Ross, she was driven by a powerful northerly gale onto Killala Bank, off Bartra Island, where her cables parted, setting her adrift. A party of locals and policemen rescued the eight men aboard. This was no middling feat. The rescuers first launched a 14-foot boat they'd found ashore. It leaked so badly they fashioned makeshift bungs, in classic Irish tradition, from turf sods. When they reached Bartra, they waded out with lanterns, managing to float a life-buoy to the ship. The crew was then hauled to safety by rope. The cargo of timber washed ashore and Beckett bought the wreck and its cargo – £900 for the boat and £2,000 for the timber.

As previously noted, after his father died, Frank Isaac wasn't interested in a life at Belleek Manor, and sold it off. However, along with the estate, he'd also inherited the *Sine* and its timber cargo, which still sat on the beach in the 1960s. Linda, who eventually married someone else, nevertheless received Frank's estate when he died.

Some two decades later, around 1964, Paul, then aged 10, went to see the *Sine* wreck with Marshall. At the same time, a local, Todd Ryan, sold the cottage next door to him to Marshall, who would give it

to Paul and his then-bride as a wedding gift in 1976. Thus Marshall bought the house, the boat and the timber... and that's how the lumber now propping up much of the Armada Bar – and various other bits and pieces of the hotel – was got.

Chapter 8

Reimagining Belleek

The Armada Bar would be among the first rooms Marshall completed at Belleek – he being a man of enlightened priorities. His knack for acknowledging period features within a space while adding flashes and dashes of antiquity is on full display here. It stands as one of the more atmospheric pubs anywhere, wearing its history comfortably, thanks to a seamless blending of treated Galleon timbers and the salvaged wood of the *Sine*.

Belleek's front reception hall maintained its cream limestone floors, already buffed to a shine and nicely worn down from 200 years of foot traffic. The front doors and ceiling are also original, both striking examples of the design and workmanship of early 19th century Ireland. Off the reception area Marshall built the exceedingly cozy Library Restaurant, with its charcoal grill fireplace built into one wall. All its tables and cabinetry were hand-hewn by him, with paneled walls and a diagonally minstrel gallery installed above.

He added a second barroom, the Tween Decks, beyond the restaurant, modeling it on a Spanish galleon's captain's quarters. The vaulted carved ceiling and woodwork top off a mix of roughhewn bar-tops and dining tables, with delicately finished small-paned windows set obliquely, looking over the Baronial Great Hall banquet room below.

Sea chests, lanterns and other bits from his years of raiding the auctions are placed throughout.

An adjoining room looks out over the original stone balustrade at what was once the cellar-level squash court. Marshall roofed that in, incorporated it into the building and then transformed it into a large, stone and hardwood-floored banquet room with vaulted wood-panel and plaster ceilings. At its far end sits a fully functioning 12th century stone fireplace tall enough to walk into – Marshall acquired it at a demolition site in Jersey for the princely sum of one quid, happily signing a promissory note stating it would never leave the island. In front of it rests a very old rotisserie, ingeniously powered by a flywheel on top and a set of weighted balls hanging on chains below. Once set off, the contraption automatically rotates a large lamb or pig at a constant speed, like some medieval perpetual motion barbecue.

A third bar, opened when the banquet room is in use, has four massive old stone wharf bollards stacked in pairs and deployed as columns to support the ceiling. Set to one side is a seven-foot-tall carved stone horseshoe that once served as a blacksmith's shop entrance. In the bar's foreground hangs an iron chandelier, lit by candles.

The entire wall opposite the fireplace has been decorated with a superb set of carved wood panels Marshall picked up in Europe depicting all the peoples of the New World. It dates from the 15th century and fits the wall as if made for it.

Off the banquet room are a series of cellar rooms, which housed the Marshall Doran Collection until 2016, when it was moved to the newly renovated stables. This collection encompasses all the treasures amassed by the man over his lifetime – armour, weapons, fossils, and much else – at least those not used at the Revere Hotel, Flicquet Castle or upstairs in Belleek Castle. It's said to be the largest privately owned armour collection in Europe. Looking at it is probably the most insightful view one could have into the many curiosities that ruled Marshall Doran.

Amidst all of his building, Marshall had not forgotten his parents. After the war, Harry and Gladys had remained in London, with Harry continuing his work with Lord Beaverbrook's newspaper empire. Marshall must have made them an offer they couldn't refuse, because in the late 1950s, having purchased Rockmount Farm, a fine property above Bouley Bay in Jersey, Marshall moved them in to it.

And the nearby Martello tower (some say it was a neighbouring barn) became home to a 600lb lion he'd come into possession of named Simba, as well as a full-grown Burmese python. Both were incinerated when a kerosene lamp he'd set on stool to help keep them warm was knocked over, burning the structure to the ground.

Harry was at retirement age by then, and one has difficulty imagining he and Gladys refusing to leave London, which was still only

beginning an agonizingly slow recovery from the war. Harry had aged well, and our family's memories of him endured for decades. He was bonhomie personified, a touch impish, always firing off one-liners and great stories, a social creature who spoke with his pipe lodged in one side of his mouth. Being such a man, it's probable he requested Marshall give him something to keep him occupied while in Jersey. To that, Marshall opened an Italian fashion boutique and a strawberry farm there. There's also a faint memory of him running a hire car outfit there called Panoramic Cars.

Gladys, on the other hand, would sadly not be granted a great many enjoyable years in Jersey; she was soon to begin an eight-year-long battle with cancer that finally bested her in 1969, shortly after our first family visit. I recall a bed-bound, but extremely sweet, highly intelligent, witty and strong-willed woman not given to complaining. We grandkids were later informed that she'd hung on just long enough to see us before she died, a few months after our visit.

Victor remained most anxious over not being able to stay as near to his parents as he might've during their latter years. But it was neither easy, affordable nor an overly pleasant undertaking to cross the Atlantic before the mid-1960's, when the jet age instantly changed all that. So it had been letters and phone calls. He never threw anything out if it was written on paper; hundreds of letters between him and Marshall (as well as everyone else on the UK side of the family) survive to this day. And from reading them it's clear the two brothers nursed long-running

disagreements – mostly respectful in tone, if linguistically puissant – over Marshall’s treatment of Harry after Gladys’ death.

When his father became a widower, Marshall sold Rockmount Farm and moved Harry into a room at the Revere. This upset Victor to no end, his chief assertion being that Harry was receiving neither sufficient care nor respect, given Marshall’s significant financial footing. Victor had sent money to Harry from the moment he began earning it in Toronto, and in increasing amounts over the years as his means permitted. His belief – that Marshall was willfully shortchanging their father by keeping him in that room – and Marshall’s assertion to the contrary, tore something open between them that would take decades to heal. It got downright Shakespearean between them. Victor was, by then, extremely well read and a writer by profession. Marshall, also well read, was older, more experienced, infinitely better traveled, extremely eloquent, a study in composure, and had a fabulous cursive style you just don’t see anymore. And so the fraternal battle raged.

When Harry eventually took up with a new lady friend, Dorothy Scott, Marshall apparently did not approve – a view not entirely impossible to understand in a son. Harry introduced our family to Dorothy on a subsequent visit, and she was declared a delight by us all. From our standpoint, they seemed precisely what each other needed at the time. But Victor held the conviction that Joyce was not fond of Harry – or Dorothy, for that matter – and was influencing Marshall to skimp on his financial and filial obligations.

After Harry died in his mid-eighties, in 1978, there was little left to fight over between the brothers, and a peace treaty took hold. It would see them out.

In 1970, its near decade-long renovations completed, Belleek Castle opened for business. As an old manor house-cum-hotel it was ahead of its time. Yes, there were, and would be, other castle-hotels. But none with the esthetic outlook and personal stamp of the likes of Marshall.