

GEORGE C. MARSHALL CLASS OF 1966

by **ELAM HERTZLER**

September 21, 2016



Greetings to each member of the George C. Marshall Class of 1966, your spouses, friends, and former staff and faculty present.

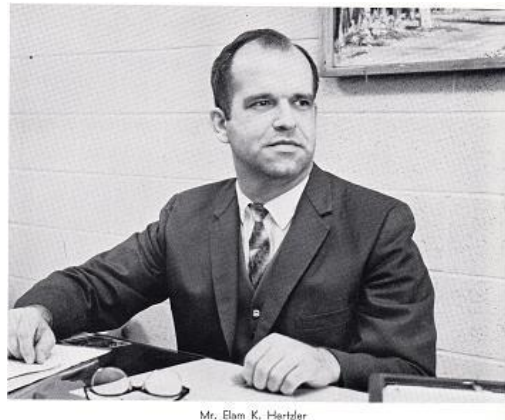
By now you have probably read part one of my comments posted on the well-planned and executed webpage for this reunion. Since I can't be with you this time, I am happy to add my congratulations and two cents with some history

that you may not know.

I began as Principal of George C. Marshall on April 1, 1962 with the expectation that GCM (still under construction) would open in September of that year. As you know it did open, although with a double shift at McLean High.

Double shifting was double shifting and we were all very glad when we could move to our own brand new building. It was a cold and blustery day as you probably remember. The Army Band was there to cheer us on for a good flag-raising and as a prelude to entering the building.

Soon after I finished writing this piece, I received an email from Richard May that brought tears to my eyes. Hear it in Richard's words:



Mr. Elam K. Hertzler

"Elam,

Way back in 1962 when you gathered everyone by the flagpoles on

a cold December morning to dedicate the school, your words had an impact that has lasted to this very day (as evidenced in the way the reunion was phrased). You told us we were not Marshall High School! I'm sure those words got the attention of everyone. You proceeded to tell us that we were George C. Marshall High School, that we should not consider ourselves like the run of the mill high school named for a person. We were named for a man who was a cut above the rest, soldier, General of the Army, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State. That he was the first soldier to wear FIVE stars and one of only five Generals of the Army (a number that shall never change as the rank has been eliminated) was an impressive achievement.

To this day, I refer to my alma mater as George C. Marshall High School. (If I am feeling especially erudite, I will include his middle name, Catlett). I do not like to hear my school referred to simply as Marshall High School and I have corrected many people who have misspoken, including a few at GCM itself.

So, in October, when we lift a glass to the class of 1966 of George C. Marshall High School, you will be a part of that toast."

Thank you, thank you, Richard, I hope everybody heard it the way you did.

Not too long after we were in the new building I decided I wanted a photo from the air and found it was possible to get a one-passenger helicopter ride at a reasonable price and so paid for it out of my pocket. The pictures should be somewhere in the school files.

Attempting to develop George C. Marshall High School in ways that would honor its namesake occupied much of my thought. I approached General Marshall's historian for help. He indicated that naming a large high school for the general was a first. Chuck and Linda Rieger had passed along the fact (from a current GCM staff member) that GCM is the only school in the United States named for the General. The historian, whose name I can't recall, told me that Mrs. Marshall was still alive and very interested in this high school. It was the only project named for the general that really grabbed her interest. If Joe Hills is able to be at the reunion ask him for that historian's name, because I'm sure he'll remember.

I called Mrs. Marshall and made an appointment to meet her at her home in Leesburg. I asked my Assistant Principal for Administration, T. Paige Johnson, to join me for that visit. It was a delight to meet her. She talked

with great ease about the royalty she met as the wife of a diplomat. It was an enjoyable and rewarding visit.

After the conversation, Mrs. Marshall wanted to drink a toast to the school. I hesitated, but could see no point in refusing her offer. Her daughter had left on some errands after we arrived, so Mrs. Marshall went to find some sherry for the occasion. I should mention she had very poor eyesight. I had great difficulty drinking the sherry and asked Mr. Johnson on the way home what he thought she had served. It turned out, we decided, that it was cooking sherry and, wow, what a salty drink it was.

It was such an honor to get to know her. One of the stories she shared was that in the few days that Gen. Marshall had time to come home for dinner they often took a canoe ride for a picnic so that he could be out in nature as the setting for clear thinking and dinner with his wife.

It was also very heartwarming to hear Mrs. Marshall take such an interest and show enthusiasm for GCM. She suggested she would like me to have the folding handheld world map that the general carried with him at all times for any inspirations he may have in the conduct of World War II.

Gen. Marshall's historian felt that the map was much too valuable to be in a high school and offered instead a bust of the general. It is the only copy of the original bust which the artist traveled with around the world. The original bust is at Virginia Military Institute in the Shenandoah Valley. Chuck and Linda told me it rests in the new main showcase at GCM where I had placed it. My wife Lois and I were invited to attend the installation of the original bust at VMI - a who's who list to be sure.

I then asked Mrs. Marshall if she might be interested in being the first graduate from George C. Marshall High School and she jumped at the chance. You may remember she marched in to the first graduation on my arm and sat with me on stage. What an honor for GCM to have her show such interest.

I did not want GCM to be just Marshall High and be confused with John Marshall high school in Richmond. I insisted and personally used the full name George C. Marshall for my entire tenure there. I felt the name was enough by itself and did not have to be followed by high school each time.

For the actual organization of the school, the time was short, very short. I asked the feeder high schools (McLean, Herndon, James Madison and Falls Church) for four or five students who were thoughtful and able to

represent their peers. We talked about our hopes and dreams for GCM including looking at Gen. George C. Marshall's life, resume and other things that could be helpful as we built a framework from which to work.

At the same time, Clint DeBusk (Assistant Principal for Instruction) and I began preliminary interviews with applicant teachers and reviewed the many requests for transfers from teachers already teaching in the county. Decisions had to be made quickly so the schools from which they came had time to make their plans for the coming school year. We interviewed as many as necessary for each position until we thought we had the best available faculty.

I had much to learn in selecting teachers. But learn I did. There was nothing in my graduate studies concerning opening new schools, assembling and developing a good faculty, or a master schedule, etc. Nothing prepared me to select a staff of 120 teachers including department chairs and compatible team members. Clinton DeBusk, in my opinion, Mr. Instruction of Fairfax County, was a tremendous person who helped evaluate the prospective faculty. Requests from teachers already employed in Fairfax wanting to transfer to GCM were the most difficult to choose. Fellow principals were not necessarily forthcoming in their evaluations of those teachers wanting to transfer.

In spite of this, some of our best and most productive faculty members were transfers who added very much to the program. In my opinion we had a really fine faculty. At our first meeting as a whole I was able to introduce each teacher by name and teaching responsibilities without notes. It was a pleasure to have them on staff. During my time at GCM it was necessary to ask for only one resignation and I received it quickly.

Ah yes - my after midnight experience. One Saturday in early April 1962, Lois and I were out for the evening when our kids received a telephone call from a gentleman visiting in the area who was interested in teaching at GCM. They told him to feel free to call back later that evening and that they knew I would be glad to speak with him. Smart kids! We got back about 11:00 and I had already undressed when the phone rang. It was the call. The gentleman was adjudicating music competitions at the University of Maryland, lived in Boston, and was interested in being the band director at GCM. A friend of mine, Joe Adgate, Music Supervisor in Alexandria and former band director at McLean High, told him about GCM. He would gladly wait until Sunday morning to see me before returning home to Boston. Long story short, I met him at the Greyhound Bus station in DC after midnight and we talked for several hours. I told him that if his

credentials came through in good order I would hire him. It was an after midnight trip to DC that really paid big dividends. George Horan was coming to GCM – a teacher par excellence.

One more faculty story and then I'll quit. Lois and I went to Williamsburg to attend a performance at William and Mary in which John Reese was performing on stage. We met and talked with him after the event and ultimately hired him to come to teach at George C. Marshall. Clint DeBusk was the impetus for that trip. A great venture completed.

To expand a bit more on organization, it was my experience that the graduate schools of education with whom I worked and was acquainted were not prepared to talk about the rapid student population growth experienced in Fairfax County that started in the 50s. School budgeting, general supervision and the like dominated that curriculum. More than once I had to fly by the seat of my pants so to speak, which made those early-morning times of reflection so meaningful and helpful.

Starting in the late 50s, Fairfax County built an average of 5 elementary schools, 1 intermediate school, and 1 high school each year. Unprecedented growth. When I moved to Fairfax in 1957 there were only 5 high schools. In 1971 there were 18 with more to come.

Back to the student planning group. The school colors came from those early conversations as well as Statesmen. The idea of Statesmen came from General Marshall's role as U. S. Secretary of State. He was certainly a statesman, scholar and excellent planner among many other things.

Extracurricular activities were also discussed as part of the necessary planning for a new high school. I was looking for innovative ideas, but the planning committee wanted the traditional clubs that other high schools had, such as French Club and Future Teachers of America. I challenged them with the notion that there is room to be unique and be the first as well as the best. It worked.

Among other things, those conversations made it possible to order athletic and band uniforms for use our first year. I was so determined to tie school traditions into the life of George C. Marshall that I gave athletic director Herb Yost a hard time. He was trying to find exciting nicknames and colors for athletic teams. In desperation, I think he suggested Carolina blue instead of navy blue and the steering committee gladly accepted (subsequently renaming it Columbia blue). He had the shade of blue he could work with and we had what we all wanted.

School spirit often comes in part through a good athletic program. I wanted good school spirit but I wanted also to be careful that the tail did not wag the dog, so to speak.

Do you remember our first home football game? Ask Roger Cole. I'm sure he remembers with great detail the undefeated season and the numerous long runs up to 100 yards each.

As the school year progressed, I got involved in meetings with fellow principals of Fairfax County. I was surprised and shocked to see that conversation about athletics flowed much more easily and longer than those about instruction.

Here are 2 other memories from my days at GCM:

I was on my way to a meeting in western Pennsylvania when I heard on the radio about President Kennedy's assassination. I pulled off the road quickly to call GCM and found that everything was being handled very well. No cell phones then.

And the second story... A senior prank just days before graduation of the first class in 1964 turned out to be a dirty trick. I was with the senior class officers at Arlington National cemetery to arrange for placing flowers on General Marshall's grave as part of our first graduation. A senior or group of seniors called an undertaker saying that I had died and he should go to my home to pick up the body. The undertaker was cautious and called my wife to see if I was okay. She wanted to know right away if I was okay so she called the school and I was nowhere to be found because of the trip I was on. Paige Johnson went over to my home immediately to be with Lois until I returned. As I drove into the school parking lot I was greeted and told to go home immediately. Needless to say my wife was very happy to see me.

Over the years I learned that experience doesn't always tell me what to do. It simply advises me what not to do. Has that been your experience? There are many right ways to do something and when possible take your pick.

In order for this to be a stand alone document, I think it necessary to repeat a bit of what motivated me to gladly work those sixty or seventy hour weeks.

I wanted to be a surrogate father so to speak. I wanted to help each of you

individually and collectively to grow into mature adults that would make the world a better place for all people while enjoying every minute of whatever you would choose to do with your life. I wanted to create an academic atmosphere that would make learning a doable challenge for you by making best selections possible in staff and faculty. I wanted to be kind and friendly in my treatment of you but also to be fair, firm, consistent, approachable, and open to making changes to the program as needed. I wanted to leave no stone unturned in doing so.

My inspiration and best ideas (intuition) took place about three or four am after a good night's rest and my mind was clear to think and plan.

In closing, I offer a rhetorical question: As you read these value statements of the last several paragraphs, were you able to recognize them as a teenager at George C. Marshall and/or can you now look back and make sense of what was going on at that time?

My best wishes to you and to the faculty members you've been able to find. As you move into your retirement years be content with who you are, be happy and contribute your best to all you do. Have a great life.

P.S. Write or call if you would like. No question is unfair if you don't already know the answer. (loel@comcast.net or 941-321-2778)