PRESS STATEMENT:

MALCOLM ERASER:

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VISIT TO VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE

When I was in Charlottesville Governor Battle drove my wife and myself across to Lexington to witness the dedication of a Research Library that would remain as a memorial to General George Marshall.

General Marshall is rightly regarded in the United States as one of their greatest heroes. He was not only a thoroughly successful military commander but he was also a great man of peace. As a soldier he did a great deal to lay the framework for victory during the last war, and as a soldier turned statesman he contributed almost more than any other man to the rebuilding of Europe after the war. He propounded and won support for what came to be called "The Marshall Plan". This was the blueprint that enabled the war-torn countries of Europe to rebuild their industries and their way of life. The philosophy underlying this plan was that all the countries should be taught, if possible, to forget the war, to build again for peace and mutual harmony and friendship with each other. The Plan involved enormous sums of American finance - enormous gifts from the United States so that it could be successful. It was accepted in this country, and it was accepted by the countries of Europe.

The Research Library dedicated to his name was established at the Virginian Military Institute at Lexington because General Marshall had been a cadet at this Institute. This particular day was regarded as one of the greatest in the days of the Institute, President Johnson was present, as was the past President - General Eisenhower. General Omar Bradley - who commanded the largest land army ever to be put together by any country - also spoke. President Truman, rather ex-President Truman, had been scheduled to take part in the ceremony, but a short illness had prevented this. Mrs. Marshall was there. She must have been a proud woman listening to what everyone had to say about her husband. Governor Harriman, Dean Rusk and a former United States Secretary of State - Dean Acheson, were also present.

We were lucky enough to be seated in the second row because we were present as guests of Governor Battle. I had formerly met Governor Battle in Australia when he visited his son, who is the United States Ambassador to Australia. It was a rare thing for so many famous people to be gathered together in one place at one time, and we were both privileged to be present on this occasion.

After the ceremony we were asked to go to the house of General Shell - the Superintendent who is in charge of the Virginia Military Institute. There, again through Governor Battle, we were lucky enough to meet many of the people who had taken part in the program and in the dedication ceremony, including President Johnson, Mrs. Marshall and Governor Harriman.

At the lunch which followed I sat next to General Ridgway of Korean war fame and, at the same table there was General Sheldon who had been in Australia, I think in the years from 1943 to 1945, in the closing stages of the Pacific war.

Many people had travelled hundreds of miles to be present at the Virginia Military Institute on this particular day. It was a wonderful tribute to a great American - General Marshall.
On quite a different topic people may be interested to learn of the Virginian drink laws. These were quite unexpected and would surprise most Australians, especially Victorians.

While the United States is quite clearly the home of free enterprise and private initiative, in Virginia it is only possible to buy alcohol from State run stores and these stores only supply a limited kind of alcohol. At the same time it is illegal to bring into Virginia alcohol from other States but, of course, because the State stores only have limited supplies and limited kinds of alcohol I would imagine most Virginians don't keep this law very strictly. In addition to this, it is illegal to buy any kind of mixed drink in any public hotel or bar although it is possible to buy beer or wine. As a result, people who are staying at a hotel take their own bottle or whisky or gin with them, and they hand it to the bartender if they wish to drink in the public bar, and he puts their name on it. However, it is much more common I think for people to take their drinks up to their own rooms because all the hotels seem to be very well equipped to provide ice, glasses and soda water or tonic water in the hotel rooms.

On the surface these laws appear to be completely incomprehensible to a stranger. They don't reduce anyone's consumption of alcohol. They hardly really make alcohol harder to get because the Virginians know all about their own laws and so apparently take the necessary precautions. These laws are, however, a hangover from the past. Virginia had prohibition before the rest of the United States and when prohibition was dropped in the United States as a whole it was left to the individual States to decide what kind of drink laws they wanted. While Virginia, along with the rest of the Union, recognised the failure of the prohibition laws the people opposing the free sale of alcohol still have some influence in the State and, therefore, a compromise was reached which has resulted in the present position. I don't think anyone has tried to change the laws for a very long period and there is no suggestion that anyone has any wish to try and change the laws at the present time.

The real anomaly in all this seems to me to be in the freest of all free enterprise countries in the world in this particular State alcohol has to be bought from a State run store.
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