

# We Are Marshall

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*We Are Marshall* is a 2006 motion picture directed by McG about the aftermath of the 1970 plane crash that killed most of the Marshall University Thundering Herd football team, the rebuilding of the program, and the healing that the community undergoes. It stars Matthew McConaughey as head coach Jack Lengyel, Matthew Fox as assistant coach William "Red" Dawson, David Strathairn as University President Donald Dedmon and Robert Patrick as ill-fated Marshall head coach Rick Tolley. Georgia governor George "Sonny" Perdue has a cameo role as an East Carolina University football coach.<sup>[1]</sup> The movie is rated PG. The movie was scored by Christophe Beck and written by Jamie Linden.<sup>[2]</sup>

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## Plot

On the evening of November 14, 1970, Southern Airways Flight 932, a McDonnell Douglas DC-9 which Marshall University chartered to transport the Thundering Herd football team to Greenville, North Carolina and back to Huntington, West Virginia, clipped trees on a ridge just one mile short of the runway at Tri-State Airport in Ceredo, West Virginia and crashed into a gully. The team was returning from their game against the East Carolina University Pirates — a 17-14 loss. There were no survivors. In all, seventy-five people lost their lives. The dead included the thirty-seven players, Tolley and five members of his coaching staff, Charles E. Kautz, Marshall's athletics director, team trainer Jim Schroer and his assistant, Donald Tackett, twenty-two boosters, and five crew members.

In the wake of the tragedy, and having just been kicked out of the Mid-American Conference the previous year for over 140 NCAA violations, President Donald Dedmon leans towards indefinitely suspending the football

### *We Are Marshall*



**From the ashes we rose**

<b>Directed by</b>	McG (Joseph McGinty Nichol)
<b>Produced by</b>	McG Basil Iwanyk
<b>Starring</b>	Matthew McConaughey Matthew Fox Anthony Mackie Kate Mara Ian McShane David Strathairn Kimberly Williams-Paisley Robert Patrick Brian Geraghty January Jones
<b>Distributed by</b>	Warner Bros.
<b>Release date(s)</b>	December 22, 2006
<b>Running time</b>	124 minutes
<b>Language</b>	English
	<b>IMDb profile</b> ( <a href="http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758794/">http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758794/</a> )

program, but he is ultimately persuaded to reconsider by the pleas of the Marshall students and Huntington residents, and especially the few football players who didn't make the flight. Dedmon hires a young new head coach Jack Lengyel, who, with the help of Red Dawson, manages to rebuild the team in a relatively short time. They are aided by the NCAA's waiver of a rule prohibiting freshmen from playing varsity sports (a rule which would be permanently abolished in 1972). The new team is composed mostly of the returning players and athletes from other Marshall sports programs. The "Young Thundering Herd" wins just two games during the 1971 season; their first post-crash victory is a heart-stopping 15-13 home win against Xavier University in the first home game of the season. In reality, the play was a 13-yard screen pass from quarterback Reggie Oliver to freshman fullback Terry Gardner. When Gardner caught the ball, there was no time left on the clock. The extra point was unnecessary. In the film, the pass is longer.

## Awards

*We Are Marshall* received the *Truly Moving Picture Award*

(<http://www.trulymovingpictures.org/movie-view.aspx?id=297>) in 2006, designating it as a film that can “move you to laughter, to tears, to make a difference.”

## Filming

Filming of *We Are Marshall* commenced on April 3, 2006 in Huntington, West Virginia, and was completed in Atlanta, Georgia. The premiere for the film was held at the Keith Albee on December 12, 2006 in Huntington; other special screenings were held at Pullman Square. The movie was released nationwide on December 22, 2006.

Several aspects of the film were changed for dramatic purposes

(<http://www.cornnation.com/storyonly/2007/10/24/224350/14>) , although the gist of the story was retained.

## DVD Release

*We Are Marshall* was released on DVD, HD-DVD and Blu-Ray in the United States on September 18, 2007.

## Lawsuit

Deborah Novak and John Witek, who produced the 2000 documentary *Marshall University: Ashes to Glory* have filed a \$40 million lawsuit in federal court in California accusing Warner Bros. and others associated with the *We Are Marshall* film of fraud, copyright infringement and breach of contract. <sup>[3]</sup> Novak, who directed *Marshall University: Ashes to Glory*, is a Huntington native and Marshall alumna.

## Trivia

- The name of the movie is based on a cheer performed by students and players at the university, which is also featured prominently in the movie. There is some argument about when the cheer actually began, but it is generally dated after the time period of the movie (post 1971).
- In the movie, newspaper headlines are from the combined Sunday newspaper of Huntington WV, the *Herald-Advertiser*. In the scene where Coach Dawson views the Nov. 15, 1970 newspaper, he sees a picture of himself as presumed dead. In reality, it was graduate assistant coach Gale Parker, who is not shown in the movie, who switched plane seats with assistant coach Deke Brackett. Parker in turn returned with Dawson to Huntington (Dawson and Brackett had made the recruiting trip to Virginia together). And the actual Nov. 15, 1970 edition of the Huntington newspaper carried Brackett's photo and listed him as presumed aboard the plane, which was in fact the case. The weekday afternoon *Advertiser* ceased publication in 1979 and the seven-day paper is now the *The Herald-Dispatch*. In one scene the paper is referred to as the *Herald* by a secretary.
- In the movie, the name "Wooster" is always mispronounced.
- In the movie, Herndon Stadium in Atlanta was used as the football home stadium of Marshall. From 1927 to 1990, Marshall played its football games at Fairfield Stadium, which has since been torn down. The East Carolina game was filmed at James Hallford (formerly DeKalb Memorial) Stadium in the northeast Atlanta suburb of Clarkston. And the Morehead State game was filmed at Tara Stadium in Jonesboro, a south Atlanta suburb and fictional home of "Gone With The Wind" book and movie.
- Coaching legend Bobby Bowden of Florida State University was the head coach at West Virginia University at the time, Bowden asked NCAA permission to wear Marshall jerseys and play Marshall's final game of the 1970 season against Ohio, but was denied. In memory of the victims of the crash, Mountaineers players put green crosses and the initials "MU" on their helmets. Bowden allowed Lengyel and his assistants access to game film and playbooks to acquaint themselves with the veer offense, a variation of the option offense which aids teams with weak offensive lines after Lengyel discovers that the team is unable to run the Power I formation he favored. Lengyel credits Bowden with helping the Young Thundering Herd recover. Bowden reportedly became emotional while viewing the movie, and has said that he was the original candidate for the Rick Tolley coaching job. <sup>[4]</sup>
- In the movie Bowden refers to a willingness to help Marshall since the Herd and WVU will not play each other "that season". In reality the two teams, although both in the NCAA University Division (now NCAA Division I, subdivided for football only into Division I FBS and FCS) at the time, did not play each other at all. Their 1997 game was the first football matchup between the two schools in eighty years.
- In the end credits of the movie, clips are shown of some of the more prominent players in Marshall history, such as New York Jets quarterback Chad Pennington, New England Patriots receiver Randy Moss, and Atlanta Falcons quarterback Byron Leftwich.
- The real Red Dawson can be seen in the movie as the coach of Morehead State.
- 1971 quarterback Dave Walsh can be seen in the movie as an assistant for Xavier.
- The 1970 Clint Eastwood movie *Kelly's Heroes* is shown as the headliner at the movie theater, just before the plane crash. That film, originally from MGM, is now owned by the distributor of *We Are Marshall*, Warner Bros. - through Turner Entertainment.
- In an episode of *How I Met Your Mother*, Marshall was standing in front of a mirror repeatedly saying, "You are Marshall! You are Marshall!" Each time louder and with more excitement until it sounded like the cheer in the movie.
- The real Jack Lengyel had a cameo appearance in the movie. Another notable cameo was by Keith Morehouse, the current sports director for WSAZ-TV in Huntington and play-by-play announcer for Marshall broadcasts. He followed in the footsteps of his father Gene Morehouse, who was Marshall's



The memorial at Spring Hill Cemetery in Huntington, West Virginia to the victims of the Southern Airways Flight 932 crash was the site of one of the film's pivotal scenes.

play-by-play announcer when he was killed in the crash. Keith's future wife was left orphaned by the crash.

- In the movie, the kicker that made the field goal before halftime of the Xavier game was played by former University of Georgia kicker Billy Bennett, who is also the all-time leading scorer in the SEC.
- *Survivor: Palau* and *Survivor: Guatemala* castaway Bobby Jon Drinkard plays #4 in the film.
- In the movie, a radio announcer calls Marshall's opponent the "Xavier Pirates." In real life, the school's mascot was, and still is, the Xavier Musketeers.
- The game against Xavier actually ended on a last second play, although it wasn't the one shown in the film. Some argue, including the head coach at that time, Jack Lengyel, that the true life play used in 1971 was more dramatic. In that play, a screen pass back to the left after quarterback Reggie Oliver had drawn most of the defenders to the right on a rollout, fullback Terry Gardner caught the pass 13 yards short of the goal line and with no time left in the game ran the ball into the end zone, aided by a block from junior tackle Jack Crabtree, a member of the 1970 team not on the plane because of an injury. It was Marshall's first home game and win since the crash of the plane in 1970 killed the team and coaches. Because of its win over Xavier, which discontinued college football after the 1974 season, Marshall actually finished 1971 with a better record (2-8) than the Musketeers (1-9).

## References

- ↑ http://www.gov.state.ga.us/press/2006/press1182.shtml
- ↑ Jamie Linden (http://www.imdb.com/name/nm1956691/)
- ↑ Deborah Novak et al v. Warner Bros Pictures LLC et al - 2:2007cv04000 - Justia Federal District Court Filings and Dockets (http://dockets.justia.com/docket/court-cacdce/case\_no-2:2007cv04000/case\_id-390831/)
- ↑ http://jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/121906/spf\_6895455.shtml

## External links

- *We Are Marshall* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0758794/) at the Internet Movie Database
- Official web-site for 'We Are Marshall' (http://wearemarshall-themovie.warnerbros.com/)
- Check-Six.com - Information about the 1970 crash with crew and passenger list (http://www.check-six.com/Crash\_Sites/MarshallU-Main.htm)
- 'We Are Marshall' (http://www.myspace.com/wearemarshallfilm) at MySpace
- 'We Are Marshall' (http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=wearemarshall.htm) at Box Office Mojo
- Apple.com 'We Are Marshall' featurette (http://www.apple.com/trailers/wb/wearemarshall/featurette/)
- We Are Marshall at Marshall University (http://www.marshall.edu/movie/)
- 'We Are Marshall' Reviews (http://www.metacritic.com/film/titles/wearemarshall) at Metacritic
- 'We Are Marshall' Theatrical Trailer (http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1809267427/trailer/)
- Review of the Book 'The Marshall Story' - Tells the story of Marshall Football (http://www.cornnation.com/storyonly/2007/8/1/0528/17051)

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