

From the UCA Archives LI  
**UCA's Alumni Remembered**

Fourth in a Four-Part Series

By

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In sheer number of deaths, World War II is considered the most deadly conflict in human history. Most published estimates of the total number of people killed (military and civilian combined) range from a low of 50 million to a high of 78 million. According to the Congressional Research Service that provides information to Congress, the United States Armed Forces suffered a total of 291,557 killed in action with another 113,842 deaths occurring due to other causes.

According to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas, 194,645 Arkansans served in the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II, or about 10% of the state's 1940 population. The same source shows that 3,519 Arkansans were killed in action. According to the Faulkner County Veterans Memorial that stands in front of the Faulkner County Courthouse, 120 military personnel from Faulkner County lost their lives in the war.

On a percentage basis, the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) was hit hard by the number of war deaths. From the fall of 1941 through the fall of 1944, UCA averaged 458 students per fall semester. UCA's loss of 46 alumni amounted to approximately 10% of the student body during that time.

After the war was over, UCA officials wanted to find a way to properly remember those who had given their lives for their country. They decided to create a living memorial by planting a live oak tree for each former student that had been killed. The Memorial Trees line Donaghey Avenue, stand in front of Wingo, McCastlain, and Bernard Halls, and also in front of the UCA Student Center.

Initially, only 38 trees were planted because that was the number of alumni UCA officials thought had been killed. Then, a short time later, three more trees were planted when officials believed 41 alumni died in World War II. Later research showed that 46 UCA alumni died while a member of the U.S. Armed Forces during the war.

On February 22, 1946, UCA officials held a memorial service in Ida Waldran Auditorium to honor and cherish the memory of the fallen. The service began at 11 a.m. when the Chair of the UCA Department of Music, Milton Trusler, played an organ prelude, "Andante Cantabile," by Tchaikovsky. A prayer was then offered by B.A. Lewis, Chair of the Department of Education. Elizabeth Tilden, a vocalist, sang "There is No Death" by O'Hara. After the song by Ms. Tilden, C.C. Calhoun, Instructor in Business Education, called the roll of those alumni who died in the war. The roll call was not answered by other students, as is customary at memorial services at some U.S. universities.

As each person's name was called a candle was lit by Paul Cooper, a student who had served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the war. After the roll had been called in its entirety, Jefferson Farris, Chair of the Department of Physical Education, dedicated the living memorial.

The primary speaker for the memorial program was Dr. Hubert L. Minton, Chair of the Department of Geography and Director of Public Relations. In his speech, Dr. Minton stated in part, "Once more the preservation of this nation has been threatened and the necessity of war has been thrust upon it. Once again its strength has been sufficient to avert destruction. The cost, however, has been terrific, far more than that of all other wars combined.

We are met today to acknowledge our debt to those who have given most in this struggle that this nation might continue to live. Over this land many such meetings as this have already been held, many others are being held, or will be held to give recognition to this obligation and to grant to our heroes the highest honor that can come from a profoundly grateful people. It is altogether fitting that such recognition be given. For the very existence of a nation depends upon the morale of its people induced by the attitude and treatment accorded its fighting personnel."

After the memorial service ended, the families of the dead were guests of UCA at a dinner that was held in McCastlain Hall. The main cafeteria for many years was located in McCastlain, formerly known as Commons. The memorial service was well-attended and many of the families of the alumni being honored were present. The Memorial Committee was made up of Dr. Ada Jane Harvey-Chair, Miss Evie Shaw, Miss Marie Schichtl and Mr. C.C. Calhoun.

As time marched on and after the passage of several decades, the purpose of the stately oak trees was forgotten. Institutional memory suffered as faculty and staff retired and students graduated and moved on. Thousands upon thousands of students, faculty, staff and visitors, have walked under the shade of the Memorial Trees without knowing that they represented UCA Alumni who died during World War II.

To further complicate the matter, a plaque or marker in close proximity to the Memorial Trees has never been found and possibly never existed. The UCA Staff Senate reminded the public of the trees during the 1990s at Veterans Day ceremonies. But, the fact remained that unless a permanent marker was installed that addressed the reason for the living memorial, it would again fall into obscurity.

In 2002, not long after Lu Hardin became UCA's eighth president, this author discussed the situation about the Memorial Trees with him and the fact that no marker existed to explain their purpose. President Hardin was sympathetic to the issue and asked me to chair UCA's World War II Memorial Committee, and I agreed to do so.

Several World War II veterans were asked to serve on the committee. Those committee members who served in World War II included Sue Evans, a member of the Women's Army Corps and retired UCA music professor; W.C. "Dub" Ferguson Jr., a B-25 Mitchell bomber pilot and son of Dr. W.C. Ferguson; Chief Master Sergeant (retired) Theodore C. Hood, who served in the Mighty Eighth Air Force, 306<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, 423<sup>rd</sup> Bombardment Squadron also known as the Grim Reaper Squadron. Chief Hood participated in 35 bombardment missions into

enemy occupied Europe as Flight Engineer and Top Turret Gunner aboard a B-17 Flying Fortress, and Al Hiegel, who served as a Radarman, 3<sup>rd</sup> class, aboard the aircraft carrier USS Independence.

Other members of the committee were Judy Corcoran, from the College of Liberal Arts and representative of the UCA Staff Senate; Dr. Turner Harris, Korean War veteran, medical doctor and Distinguished UCA Alumnus; Dr. Harry Readnour, Vietnam War veteran and UCA Professor of History and Jimmy Bryant, UCA Archivist.

After several meetings the committee made the decision to recommend a black monument with gold lettering. The name of the memorial and an explanation of the Memorial Trees is on the south face of the monument and the names of the deceased alumni and an epitaph is on the north face. The committee also decided the monument should carry the name, rank and branch of service of each alumni. One alumnus, Joe Parrott, Jr., is the only person on the monument who died in the service of another country.

Pilot Officer Joe Parrott, Jr., graduated from UCA with a Bachelor of Science in Education, in May 1937. He joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in August 1941, more than four months before Japan's devastating attack on Pearl Harbor. He received his commission as an officer while stationed at Ottawa, Canada and later received fighter pilot training in England. Pilot Officer Parrott was killed in an airplane accident at Sealand, England on May 29, 1942.

After the monument had been designed, ordered and installed, the committee was given the task of organizing a proper dedication ceremony. The committee sought to acquire a speaker still serving in the U.S. Armed Forces or a veteran and succeeded when Nick Bacon, an Arkansan by birth, who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions in the Vietnam War, accepted the invitation to speak. First Sergeant Bacon retired after 21 years in the Army and in 1993 became Director of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Bacon passed away at the age of 64 in July 2010.

The committee also suggested a flyover of a C-130 Hercules. It was the opinion of the committee that the propeller driven C-130 Hercules better represented the type of aircraft that was flown by some of the deceased alumni than a modern-day pure jet aircraft. Even though the C-130 was powered by four turboprop engines instead of four radial piston engines found on the B-17 Flying Fortress and B-24 Liberator used in World War II, it still had four propellers and looked similar. The Arkansas Air National Guard provided the flyover. As a witness to the flyover, I can attest that a C-130 Hercules flying relatively fast at a low-altitude, is a very impressive thing to see, hear and feel.

The UCA World War II Memorial Dedication Ceremony took place at 1 p.m. on October 3, 2003, in front of McAlister Hall where the Memorial is located. The UCA Bear Band, under the direction of Dr. Ricky Brooks, set the mood for the event and played patriotic music. Approximately 15 Airman from the Little Rock Air Force Base participated in the program as did the Little Rock Air Force Base Honor Guard, which was in charge of the presentation of the U.S. Flag and Air Force Flag. Dr. Mark Dance, Senior Pastor of Second Baptist Church of

Conway, gave the invocation. UCA ROTC Cadets stood in formation and later participated in the program when two Cadets unveiled the Memorial to the delight of the crowd.

President Hardin gave the welcoming remarks and introduced Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Nick Bacon. When he introduced Bacon, President Hardin was quoted by the Log Cabin Democrat as saying, “We must never, never, never forget the price paid for our liberty. We in high schools, colleges and universities and institution must do everything we can to honor in monuments and memorials those who have given us our freedoms today.

He (Bacon) is a passionate advocate for veteran’s affairs and a great veteran himself. There are very few Medal of Honor holders living today. His extreme heroism earned him the coveted award.”

When Bacon spoke, he truly expressed a sincere gratitude for the sacrifices made by his fellow veterans, their bravery and what their sacrifice meant to the continuation of freedom in this country. According to the Log Cabin Democrat, Bacon stated, “It is a great thing we do today, dedicating this beautiful memorial in the memory of the brave men and women who fought and died in World War II. The memorial like this shows how important it is to guard our way of life and our freedoms.”

“They did not die in vain and we’re proud of what they mean to America. Let us remember as we reflect on this day that democracy requires consistent vigilance and each time we have had to defend it, we add names to those white stones in our national cemeteries.”

In regard to World War II veterans in general, whom Bacon referred to as the greatest generation, he was quoted by the Log Cabin Democrat as saying, “We can never forget what they did. Many are not with us today but they live on in spirit because we remember what they did. They did not serve to conquer, they did not serve to annex, they did not seek riches or glory. They fought for peace and the right of freedom and liberty and justice for all.”

After Mr. Bacon finished his remarks, President Hardin read all 46 names that were inscribed on the monument. A moment of silence followed the reading of the names and then the C-130 Hercules roared over the assembly. Immediately after the flyover, the program ended with the playing of “Taps” by two members of the UCA Band.

Author’s Note: The sources for this article include The Echo, Log Cabin Democrat, “A History of Arkansas State Teachers College” by Ted Worley, Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Congressional Research Service <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL32492.pdf>, Faulkner County Veterans Memorial, UCA World War II Alumni collection-M06-05, “The Centennial History of the University of Central Arkansas, “World War II Almanac: 1931-1945” by Robert Goralski,