

University at Albany War Memorial Plaques Rededication Ceremony at Draper Hall (from UAlbany web site)

ALBANY, N.Y. (May 24, 2017) — On a sunny spring morning, veterans of conflicts ranging from World War II to the ongoing war in Afghanistan gathered on the Downtown Campus with a singular purpose: to rededicate three veterans memorial plaques.

The event, hosted by the UAlbany Alumni Association, was held near the new Garden of Remembrance outside of Draper Hall. Joining the veterans were University leaders, staff and faculty, police and a military color guard.



Glenn Phillips, a psychology major who graduated just last week, opened the program by recalling the men and women whose service helped “define the character of our nation.”

“Today, we honor those veterans — our alumni veterans — who fought bravely so that racial equality can be achieved, freedom can be enjoyed and the guiding principles of democracy can be preserved,” he said.

Phillips is a former conflict veteran who was deployed to Afghanistan in 2012. At UAlbany he received the Presidential Medal Award for Veterans as well as the President’s Award for Leadership, and served as president of the UAlbany Veteran Student Association for the past two years.



[N.B. Lee Serravillo welcomed the congregation to UAlbany and Draper Hall.]



Provost James Stellar spoke for the University “family” – the 20,000 faculty, staff and students who together “have the characteristics of a family – we come together and sacrifice for the common good,” he said. “In this country, the veterans are our family.”



Geoffrey Williams, the University's archivist emeritus and a longtime advocate for bringing the memorial plaques out of storage and back to the Downtown Campus, spoke about the Veterans Wall of Honor in the University Library.



Paul Ward, '53 and '54, a professor emeritus and the former director of the University's International Student Program, closed out the program with a history of alum Edward Eldred Potter, who lost his life in World War I. Ward, a World War II veteran, repeated the words inscribed in the National World War II Memorial in Washington to describe the veterans plaques and garden: "Here we mark the price of freedom."

[N. B. The full text of Paul's remarks follows:]

Rededication of the UA Memorial Plaques May 23rd, 2018

I would like to thank the University for determining to re-dedicate these historic Memorial Plaques. It is most appropriate that a Memorial Garden was chosen for the Plaques' site. The Plaque preface notes the site is dedicated to all veterans augmenting the "Role of Honor" at the main library.

The first time I viewed two of these plaques, then located in the foyer of Draper Hall, was 69 years ago while registering as a freshman in mid-September 1949. I remember that I was pleased they honored those who served and died in past conflicts. Just two months before I had completed a three year enlistment in USMC—"Semper Fi".

This year we commemorate the centennial of World War I, "The Great War" - April 1917- November 1918. The WWI plaque shows that 6 of those students and one female faculty member died in service to their country. One of these students who lost his life in that conflict, was Edward Eldred Potter. His name was to be remembered and honored on campus for 100 years!

Edward, the youngest of 4 children, was born in 1891 at Windfall, NY. His early childhood was spent in rural St. Lawrence County. The family being poor led to marital strains on his parents' marriage leading to a separation with his mother and three siblings moving to Plattsburgh, NY, in 1907. There Edward successfully graduated with a major in "Manual Arts" at the Plattsburgh Normal School Campus. With this training he taught industrial arts for a year at Glens Falls, NY. Following this experience in the spring of 1915 he enrolled as a freshman at the newly named NYSCT after attending a semester at Union College. His life goal was to obtain a position in educational administration. At Albany he excelled in his studies and demonstrated an exemplary character.

In order to pay for college expenses and living costs he and another classmate lived in a tent in Washington Park during clement weather. He was an excellent carpenter and made book cases and other furniture for faculty and others. He also worked a night shift at a local newspaper.

In May 1917, Edward enlisted in the army. Sent to the Madison Barracks, Sacketts Harbor, NY, for basic officer training, he chose to join the aviation branch of service then under the Signal Corps. In August he left for Cornell University to undergo pre-flight training. His unit was sent to France in October where they would obtain their flight training. After intensive training he was commissioned a 1st Lt. In May 1918 and was selected to ferry planes from England and other French stations to various airfields needing replacement aircraft.

August 1, 1918, while ferrying an aircraft DH – 4 to Orly Field, Paris, when his engine quit; requiring him to make a forced landing. Seeing civilians on the tarmac he made a sharp turn causing his plane to crash mortally injuring him. He was a month shy of his 27th birthday. He was interred at Suresnes, France along with 1,500 other Americans.

Eleven years later in the spring of 1931, the memory 1st Lt. Potter was to be honored in a unique way. That Spring a number of men students sought to establish a more open social group to enhance friendship. At the time there was only one fraternity on campus. It was a national frat pledging only white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men. Thus there was a definite need for a more open social organization. The group devised a working name of the "Student Union Club".

While seeking authorization from the administration, the then President Brubacher suggested they might consider naming it after Lt. Potter. He stated that "the use of his name as a permanent memorial to Edward's brief life; and his outstanding qualities [would be] a constant challenge to the members of the Club". Thus the Edward Eldred Potter Club came into existence.

The Club was active for 50 years (1931-1981). However with over 900 alums from the Club an Alumni Association was formed to continue the fellowship they enjoyed during their college years. Annual reunions and member group luncheons have been held regularly for the past 37 years to share their past/current activities. In 1996 an Edward Potter Memorial Room at the University Alumni House was dedicated with funds donated by Potter Club Alums. The room contains Edward Potter and Club memorabilia.

As we rededicate these plaques honoring fallen alumni, it comes to mind the words of the late Joseph Persico, '52; eminent historian and Potter Club Alum. Commissioned by the national WWII memorial in Washington, these words were to be engraved on the Memorial in part to justify the 400,000 Americans who lost their lives during that conflict. It seems to me these words could be used for any war memorial, "Here We Mark the Price of Freedom!"

John Paul Ward, '54

