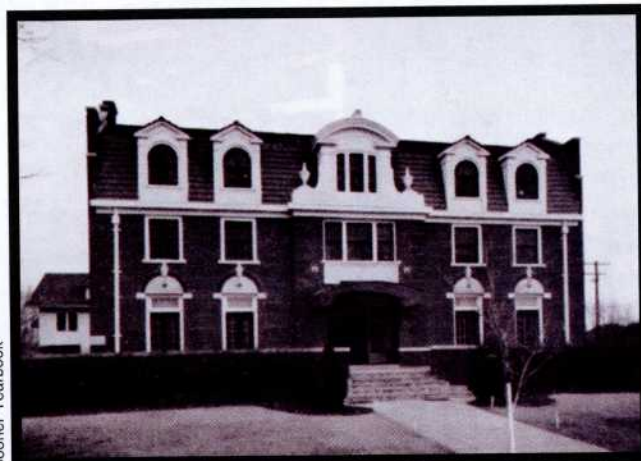


Every town had its story.

A group of young men, who had shared the same playgrounds and attended the same schools, went off to college together, then to WWII—and never returned. The five OU Phi Delts from Enid were not so unusual as they were illustrative of the heart-wrenching cost of freedom.

BROTHERS ★ IN ARMS



Sooner Yearbook

The second Phi Delta Theta fraternity house at the University of Oklahoma was built in 1922 at 111 E. Boyd Street.

BY WILLIAM C. HUDSON

It was a February day in 1945 in Enid. A young girl, Jerry Bass, was busy in her high school study hall when she received the news. Her brother, Bob, had died in action fighting on the German front.

Throughout the war, her father, Henry (always known as “Heinie” to his friends), had edited, produced and mailed a newsletter to more than 100 servicemen and women from Garfield County. Many of them soon would come home to a hero’s welcome. His own son—Jerry’s brother Bob—was one hero who would not be coming back. Bob was a member of Phi Delta Theta social fraternity at the University of Oklahoma. By the end of the war, four other Enid Phi Delts also would have lost their lives in military service. The following is a remembrance drawn from interviews, articles and Henry Bass’ writings about these five remarkable men.

★ BOB BASS

In 1939 Robert Dean Bass graduated from Enid High School where he was a dedicated student and played end on the Plainsmen football team. A friend wrote of Bob, "When he walked into a room, it seemed to light up." Following graduation, Bob enrolled at OU, where he was initiated into Phi Delta Theta fraternity on March 10, 1940.

Bud Everitt, a retired Presbyterian minister, remembers, "I was two years behind Bob Bass, and he was a good friend from Enid. However, he was a member, and I was a pledge, and that was before the days of no hazing. I remember that Gary Munger, Gordon Holland, Jerry Kemp, Jack Corkill and Bob Bass swung a wicked paddle. He was a social creature who always had a lovely lady on his arm. He was a great dancer, always the athlete and a serious-minded student.

"None of us drank in those days; WWII would take care of that. Most of us came from old Enid families whose patriarchs had told us not to bring disrespect upon the family name. D. Bruce Selby, our high school principal, reinforced that, and the community at large doubly reinforced rather strict codes of behavior. Bob Bass was a choice companion in that part of our lives."

1st Lt. Bass became a platoon leader in the 324th combat engineering battalion of the 99th Infantry Division. He survived the Battle of the Bulge but was killed February 7, 1945, leading his men as they destroyed German pillboxes on the Siegfried Line.

On February 25, 1945, Raymond Collins, Bob Bass's jeep driver, wrote Bob's parents a poignant letter of condolence. "He was more than an officer to us," Collins wrote. "He was our friend. He was my officer, and I can honestly say that he personified the high ideals of the uniform he wore so proudly. Unlike many officers, your son at no time ever asked one of his men to do anything he would not do himself. Truly, he was our leader in every sense of the word."

Bob's father compiled his own notes and Bob's letters home in a 300-page book, *Bob's Europe*. The book outlines the trip in which his family followed the route of the 99th Infantry Division through England, Holland, Belgium and Germany, where Bob lost

his life, and to the cemetery where he was interred with 18,000 other Americans. (His body was later returned to Enid.)

In Aubel, Belgium, they were met by Ernst Levoux and his wife, Jenny. The Levoux family recalled the November day in 1944 when Bob Bass and his platoon of engineers arrived. It was rainy and cold as the platoon prepared to bivouac outside. Monsieur Levoux, seeing that Bob was their commanding officer, invited him inside to pass the night. Bob explained that he couldn't accept unless similar accommodations were found for all his men. Levoux knocked on doors up and down the street until every man had a warm, dry bed.

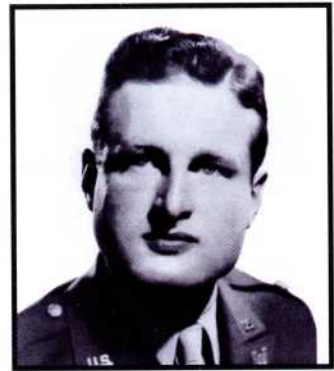
The Basses spent the night of July 2, 1948, in the Levoux home. Bob's parents slept in the same bed he had used three years before.

★ BOB VANCE

Leon R. Vance Jr. attended Enid schools from the first grade through high school. He was an athlete and an honor student. Following graduation, he attended OU and became a Phi Delt. Two years later he received an appointment to West Point as a member of the Class of 1939. A 1999 article in *U.S. News and World Report* called Bob and his West Point cohorts the "Warrior Class" because they were destined to fight in WWII, Korea and Vietnam.

At West Point, Bob (or "Philo," as he was nicknamed after a popular fiction writer of the era who shared his surname) was an active, popular man. Despite a heavy academic load, he managed to work football, basketball, choir and ski club into his schedule. The day after graduation he married his long-time sweetheart, Georgette Drury, in the school's Catholic chapel. Although they understood the uncertainty ahead as war clouds gathered in Europe and Asia, they faced the future with anticipation and courage. They would have five years together.

On June 5, 1944, Lt. Col. Vance was flying as a group commander of a flight of B24 bombers. The mission was to soften up



Robert Dean Bass was a genial, social sort of fellow whose engineering studies at the University of Oklahoma were geared to a peacetime life in line with his upbringing in the small city of Enid, but fate placed him at the head of a group of combat engineers in the drive through Europe into Nazi Germany, where in 1945 he lost his life in an assault on German pillboxes on the Siegfried Line.



Leon R. "Bob" Vance Jr., an honor student and gifted athlete, left OU for a West Point appointment, joining a storied class of young warriors, two of whom—including Vance—would earn the Congressional Medal of Honor. After heroically risking his life to save his men, Vance perished when the hospital plane bringing him home disappeared. Enid's Vance Air Force Base bears his name.



Jack Holland and his older brother, Gordon, both came to OU, both left Enid to serve their country in World War II; only Gordon returned. Jack landed on Omaha Beach, lived through that invasion of Normandy, only to be killed a few months later fighting his way toward Germany.



Alan Neal is remembered to this day by his Enid buddies as an exuberant daredevil whose high school exploits earned him legendary status. To no one's surprise he lived and died as a World War II fighter pilot.

German defenses in France for the invasion of Normandy, due to take place the following day. Enemy anti-aircraft fire hit the plane, killing the pilot, wounding several of the crew and almost severing Vance's right foot. His performance during the next few hours would make history.

Despite his injury, and with three engines lost to the flak, he led his formation over the target and completed the bombing. After applying a tourniquet to his leg with the aid of the radar operator, he took the controls, piloted the rapidly failing plane to the English coast and ordered his crew to bail out to safety on land. He then acted to save one man who couldn't jump due to injuries. With his foot, hanging by tendons, still lodged behind the co-pilot's seat and with a 500-lb. bomb hung up in the bomb bay, Vance managed to ditch the plane in the channel. Once down, the plane began to sink with the colonel pinned in the cockpit. Suddenly an explosion threw him clear of the wreckage. Still searching desperately for the injured crewmember, he was found 50 minutes later by an air-sea rescue craft. Vance's valor made him one of two members of his 700-man West Point freshman class to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

As he lay hospitalized following the amputation of his foot, he received the news that his beloved father, Leon R. Vance Sr., principal of Enid's Longfellow Junior High School and a flight instructor, had died in a plane crash with a student pilot. Then, in an even crueler twist of fate, Vance lost his own life when the hospital plane bringing him home to the United States disappeared. On July 9, 1949, Enid Air Force Base was renamed Vance Air Force Base and dedicated to the memory of Lt. Col. Leon R. Vance Jr.

JACK HOLLAND

The Holland boys seemed fortunate. Amidst the poverty of the Great Depression, their family was close and affluent. But tragedy struck when their father, a marketing director for Champlin Oil, was afflicted with a form of multiple sclerosis. Gordon was already a Phi Delt at OU; his little brother, Jack, was still in high school.

Jack took a job with the newspaper to help with family finances. A childhood bout with scarlet fever had caused heart problems that kept him out of most sports, although he still played golf for Enid High. In September 1941, Jack pledged Phi Delt at OU and discovered that he had outgrown his disability. He turned out to be a gifted addition to practically all of the fraternity's intramural teams. He was initiated March 29, 1942.

Jack joined the Army in January 1943, and following basic training was assigned to the reconnaissance troop of the Second Infantry Division as it prepared for the campaign across France into Germany. Gordon Holland still remembers the last days he and his brother spent together. Jack received a furlough before his outfit shipped out, and Gordon took a few days off from flight training. The two spent several days in Enid—double dating, enjoying mom's home cooking and sleeping in. The boys knew the next year would see heavy fighting for both of them. This was a time for relaxation; the war was hardly mentioned.

The Second Division landed June 7 on Omaha Beach and distinguished itself in fighting its way through the hedgerows of Normandy. It was one of the spearhead divisions in the breakout. Jack's young life ended October 10, 1944, in a burst of German small arms fire. His commanding officer expressed the wish that he could have had a whole troop of men like Jack, saying, "He was top man in everything he did and carried out orders to the word." Jack's brother, Gordon, still misses him.



IN LASTING TRIBUTE



In 1948 Henry Bass, of Enid, and his brother, Harry W. Bass, of Dallas, memorialized their son and nephew at OU by endowing the Robert Dean Bass Scholarships in political science and economics, which have been awarded annually for more than half a century. When the University built Cross Center dormitories for men in 1952, the individual houses were named for several of OU's war dead, among them, Bob Bass and Leon R. "Bob" Vance Jr.

★ ALAN NEAL

Gordon Holland knew well another Phi Delt hero from Enid. Leo Alan Neal Jr., called Alan or "Pinky" by his friends, loved music and was active in the Boys Chorus. Never an interscholastic athlete, he still was always at games cheering his classmates on. One winter night Gordon, who had played first string on the basketball team but was sidelined by an injury, asked Alan for a ride home from the El Reno game. Enid had won, and Alan drove away from the gym a little too exuberantly with the El Reno police soon flashing their lights behind him. A thin and spirited daredevil, Alan took this as a challenge. He accelerated and eventually switched off his lights and turned onto a country lane. He lost the police completely. It was no surprise to Gordon years later when Alan—who loved his car, his motorcycle and speed—became a WWII fighter pilot.

Alan managed to attend OU and pledge Phi Delt before joining the Army Air Force. He served out his tour and eagerly anticipated seeing his wife and meeting his six-month-old son, but died in a plane crash on June 2, 1945. His mother remembered him in a poem:

TO MEET DEATH—FLYING

They flew away in the early morn,
Through mists that rose from the sea;
Flying in search of the unknown thing
With hearts that were light and free.

We never knew how far they flew,
The time nor even the place.
But we know that when they reached
the land,
They met God face to face.

Perhaps someday when shadows creep
About us, and we know
That death is waiting silently
The time when we must go –
We'll wish we had a ship to sail
Over an unknown sea,
That we might go as they have gone
To meet death fearlessly.

To fly on and on past the edge of the world,
Meeting the winds that blow,
And find death there in the great unknown,
With only God to know.

—Helen Parkinson Neal

★ WAYNE TURK

Wayne Turk was initiated into Phi Delta Theta fraternity at OU on March 3, 1935. He joined the Army and trained at Fort Sill in Lawton and in California. He then was sent to Australia where he died in an explosion on September 18, 1942.

His mother received the following letter:

Somewhere in Australia
September 21, 1942

My Dear Mrs. Turk,

It is with a feeling of great sorrow and the deepest of regret that I find myself writing this letter to you and the family in order that I may express and offer the deep sympathy of a boyhood friend of your son.

There is so little that one can offer or do to assuage the sorrow of your great loss, yet I feel it will be of some comfort to you to know that a life-long friend was with Wayne at the last.

Censorship regulations do not permit me to enter into any detail at this time, but after the war I shall write you fully. I can only say this much—that Wayne's passing was as he would have wanted it to be.

As you undoubtedly know, Wayne joined our outfit only a short time ago. His work was outstanding and had gained the attention of his superior officers. It will please you to know that he was in buoyant spirits and quite happy in his new work.

Wayne was given the full honors of a military funeral this morning as his host of newfound friends and myself accorded him the farewell salute due a brave and gallant comrade. It was my great privilege and honor to serve as a pallbearer for your son.

Again may I express my deep regret and sorrow over your very great loss. If there is anything at all that I can do, please call upon me. With deepest sympathy, I remain

Yours sincerely,
Captain Jack E. Morris



Wayne Turk, of Enid's Phil Delt Five, was the farthest from home when he met his fate while serving in the Armed Forces. An explosion ended his life in 1942, shortly after he was sent to Australia, and less is known about the circumstances of his death. Interestingly his buddy at his new posting was an old friend from his hometown, who served as his pallbearer and later wrote to his parents.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE AUTHOR.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: William C. "Bill" Hudson is an ex-Marine captain and Purple Heart recipient, having served in WWII and Korea. Like the subjects of this article, he joined Phi Delta Theta fraternity while at OU and earned a marketing degree in 1951. He ran Hudson's Big Country Store, the family business established in Coalgate in 1900, until its closing in 1991. A self-confessed history junkie, Hudson spends his retirement years researching and writing. He lives in Oklahoma City with his wife, Betty, who attended Oklahoma A&M College, now Oklahoma State. Their four children all attended both OSU and OU.