



postscript. Reminder of the “Forgotten War”

The casual tourist visiting Norman campus landmarks might miss the full significance of a small slab of granite at the foot of the Parrington Oval flag pole. The odd shape of the monument is less familiar today than it was 60 years ago when its outline often accompanied reports of the so-called “police action” claiming American lives on the Korean peninsula.

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950. When it ended some 37 months later, its veterans began emulating in smaller numbers those of World War II by trickling into the University of Oklahoma on the GI Bill. Many of them, mostly young men, otherwise would never have had the opportunity to go to college.

It took a while for these veterans of a conflict no one wanted to assimilate into the student body and its many organizations. Eventually, however, the Organized Veterans of Oklahoma University was formed to represent Korean War vets on campus. It was, member John Meek recalls, primarily a social group with no particular agenda. They were receiving good treatment, nothing special—yet they did have two issues with the OU administration.

First, the vets demanded installment payment of tuition and fees. Second, the OVOU wanted permission to place a Korean War memorial on campus. President George L. Cross quickly agreed to both requests.

The monument was especially important to these men, who set about raising funds for its installation. They felt a great need to commemorate those who did not return from Korea as they had—the 37,000 who fought and died there, averaging 1,000 for every month of the bloody conflict—and the 8,000 who simply disappeared and are still missing nearly six decades later.

Present for the dedication of the memorial were U.S. Senator Robert S. Kerr, a World War I veteran, and Brigadier General Hal Muldrow of Norman, commanding officer of Oklahoma’s National Guard, the 45th Division, which had

served with distinction in Korea.

In May 1955, the OVOU evolved into the Thomas E. Reynolds Post 303 of the American Legion. A photo of its members appeared in the 1956 *Sooner* yearbook. Its goals were “to work for veterans’ interests on and off the campus and to engage in service projects for the school and community.” The officers were Bill McGinnis, commander; John Meek, vice commander; Jay Dee Chase, post adjutant; and Lawrence Vache, post chaplain.



U.S. Senator Robert S. Kerr, right, and Brigadier General Hal Muldrow attend the 1954 dedication of the Korean War monument.

Gradually the Korean vets moved on by graduation or to other pursuits, and the post was deactivated in 1959. (A predecessor American Legion Post consisting of World War II veterans had existed from 1945 to 1950 with offices in Oklahoma Memorial Union, and even earlier, a post for WWI vets from 1919 to 1937.)

In 1956, OU’s Interfraternity Council dedicated a small group of memorial oaks “as silent tribute” to students “who made the supreme sacrifice in WWII and Korea.” Then-editor of *The Oklahoma Daily* George Gravley, who later served in Korea, recalls covering the unveiling of the commemorative plaque attached to a large stone marker that still stands just outside the Union’s east door.

The Union itself “honors the memory of the students, faculty and staff of the University of Oklahoma who gave their lives in the service of their coun-

try as members of the armed services of the United States.” Bronze plaques throughout the building attest to their valor in WWI, WWII, Korea and Vietnam—and a small one to the ROTC cadets killed in a 1953 plane crash.

A block or so away stands the Gaylord Family Oklahoma Memorial Stadium, built at the same time as the Union and originally named to honor Sooners who died in WWI. Outside the northwest corner of the structure is an elaborate monument bearing the names of OU students, faculty and staff lost in U.S. armed conflicts.

In one of the Parrington Oval’s several redesigns, the 1954 Korean War marker was moved to a place on the east side that some considered a “lesser place of honor.” However, lest this tribute to Oklahoma heroes of the “forgotten war” become as overlooked as the conflict it commemorates, the granite silhouette subsequently was relocated to stand beneath the flag its honorees died to defend. —CJB