

Request for Veterans Appreciation Day

Williams - Amherst Homecoming Football Game 2009

A few months ago I received in the mail my latest copy of the Williams College alumni class notes magazine. As a past service-member, I was surprised to learn of just how many veterans we were losing from our alumni roles each year. In just this one quarter we lost forty-eight alumnus who had, in some way, served their country during their lifetimes.

Every year that I've been nearby, I've gone to pay my respects to Ephraim Williams in the area that has been known for a thousand years as The Great Carry, here near my home in upstate New York. The only land bridge on an otherwise thousand mile water route from the St. Lawrence Bay, down Lake Champlain, Lake George, and south down the Hudson to New York City; it's geographic importance signaled that many would fight, and indeed die - securing it's safety. This area, which I knew well in my youth, was painted boldly on my young psyche while reading The Leather Stocking tales, and later on by the military history of my area. Upon being accepted into Williams in the spring of 1980, I headed up to the old monument I knew existed on the side of the road between Glens Falls and Lake George village. It was literally, just a rock on the side of a hill near the road. Surrounded by steel railings and stone posts, with years worth of weeds and saplings spilling over the side, it had long ago been forgotten by most. I had gone there that day to thank a man who had died in the service of his young country, and who had had the foresight to continue to serve the greater good, even in his death. So every year on the eighth of September, if I'm not out flying somewhere around the globe, I head up to that rock on the hill. Today there is a nice parking area, and a few years ago some Williams alums beautified the area out of honor and respect for old Eph. I play my native flute and my penny whistle for a while and give thanks to a man of service. I wish to do something similar this November for all those men and women service-members.

I therefor, along with another service-member, Paul Rieckhoff, a recent Amherst graduate and now the executive director of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America organization, have a humble request. We are asking for a simple gathering of Veterans at mid field prior to the Williams - Amherst game this November. The game will be played some days after Veterans day this year, and we would like to get the word out to Veterans from both colleges, through our alumni offices and associated college websites that we wish to honor their service to their country; in a simple, yet direct way. We on our side of the field, Amherst on their side - walking toward the middle of the field as the brothers and sisters in arms that we are, standing together at mid-field for the playing of our National Anthem. No comments or diatribe, just a walk to the middle of the field to exchange greetings and to remember those who have served and given their last full measure. Maybe we might find a way to be led from each sideline by the oldest known veterans of each alumni group.

We can try, and work a fly over of F-16's from the Burlington ANG unit or possibly the F-15 unit down at Barnes ANG base, if the colleges agree it would be appropriate to do so. I would hope that we might be able to have an area set up for a tailgate, prior to the game, with a banner above for the Vets to find their way to us. A small table with information on Paul's wonderful organization to hand out information to alums and students alike on the great work he is doing to remind a nation that we are not in one, but two present conflicts - and that those conflicts have a cost, and we as a nation, have an obligation to those returning from those conflicts to not forget their service. We all should do all we can to make sure these fine young men and women have the help of a grateful nation greeting them upon their return.

From the very beginning, as two of the nations oldest and most established places of higher learning, we have always been linked to the ideal of service above self. For Williams, our benefactor's first gift of a bit over \$11,000 helped to eventually create both of these beacons of progressive thought in the mountains and valleys of the Commonwealth. Both colleges have always been tied together in force of spirit and competition and this November we hope we can gather for just a few minutes to remember the sacrifices of so many, who are also linked through their service to the nation. We think many in the stands; alumni, students and family will be surprised by the numbers within our ranks who have served our nation in uniform, and hopefully, for just a moment, be humbled by that unified sacrifice. While this fall our teams gather, once again, on the fields of friendly strife as they have done for one hundred and twenty-four years; our hope is - that this year, we take the time to honor those who have walked fields less friendly, in the past - and indeed - today around the globe, and simply say - Thank You.

Sincerely,

Sean M. Crotty, Williams Class of 1984

Paul Rieckhoff, Amherst Class of 1998