

# BOOK REVIEW: Bob Carroll

## UPON OTHER FIELDS ON OTHER DAYS: College Football's Wartime Casualties

By Jim Koger

Longstreet Press: 1991, 310 pp, 35 b/w photos, hardcover, \$22.95; Forward by Joe Paterno

Reading Jim Koger's *Upon Other Fields on Other Days* is a curious experience – both depressing and exhilarating. The sub-title, *College Football's Wartime Casualties*, doesn't quite tell it all. A lesser book might have concentrated on a few of the better-known college players to lose their lives in this nation's wars, stars such as Nile Kinnick, Al Blozis, or Tom Lombardo. And, while these stories have their own fascination, we've heard them before.

Instead of merely repeating the famous, Koger opts for the comprehensive. His book, which is essentially a chronological list, identifies more than 2,300 college football players who were either killed, reported missing, or taken prisoner, beginning with the Spanish-American War and continuing through two World Wars, Korea, Viet Nam and up to the "peace-keeping" mission in Beirut in 1983. Desert Storm apparently came too late for inclusion if any ex-college footballers were among the fatalities.

Because of the size of the job Koger has set himself, most of the stories he tells are short and to the point. Some ex-players, whose football exploits made them famous or whose stories were remarkable for other factors, receive a couple of paragraphs. Most get only one. Here's a typical 1918 example:

(Sept. 15) Cpl. MARTIN OTTO SCHAHNER, captain of the Eastern Illinois Normal School squad of '16, KIA by machine-gun fire during the St. Mihiel action. The athletic field at Eastern was later named in his honor.

If we have other questions – did he leave a family? what was his hometown? was he popular with his fellow soldiers? what were his dreams? – we'll have to find the answers ourselves; Koger gives us the starting point.

Some of the notices where information is sparse are shorter yet. All we learn about Ens. Paul O. Larsen, Kansas State University ('44), is that he was killed in action in the Pacific sometime in April of 1945. That Koger was able to identify these former players at all is to his credit, and, having entered the basic fact, perhaps someday he'll receive a note with more details from a relative.

Reading page after page of what are essentially death notices is saddening. All these fine young lives cut off prematurely by guns, bombs, and, in a startling number of cases, by illness. What might they have accomplished had they lived? That so many of these young men were superior individuals is obvious from the many of medals they received, a frequency that seems out of proportion to their numbers. Quite a few won the Medal of Honor, this nation's highest award. Surely these were the best and the brightest.

Occasionally while reading one comes across a "happy ending." Someone listed as missing in action (or even killed in action) turns up later alive and well. Michigan great Tom Harmon has two notices in the book because twice he was listed as missing when his airplane was shot down. And twice he walked out of the jungle alive.

Although the vast majority of names here will be unfamiliar to most readers (Who can name all the lettermen at Wesleyan in 1916?), every few pages it seems there's an All-American or ex-pro star. So THAT'S what happened to him, you find yourself saying. For example, I'd known vaguely that Gus Sonnenberg, the star tackle for the Providence Steamroller and later world pro wrestling champion, had died in the service but not in battle sometime during World War II. Now I know specifically that Chief Petty Officer Sonnenberg died of leukemia in the Bethesda Naval Hospital at age 44 on September 12, 1944. Although the book is arranged chronologically, there's an alphabetical index in the back that makes it easy to look up any particular player you might wonder about.

Sometimes Koger's short notes aren't enough. One can't help but wonder if former Clemson college fullback (1920-22) USAF Col. Francis M. Ziegler, who perished at age 40 in an aviation crash near

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Macon, GA, on December 9, 1942, was related to the Francis Ziegler who was an outstanding runner for the Philadelphia Eagles in the years right after World War II. His father perhaps? Maybe Koger knows.

The depression one feels in reading of so many losses is understandable. The source of the exhilaration isn't so easy to pin down. No doubt some of it comes from finding a useful reference tool, but mostly it comes from a sense of pride that one's favorite sport and favorite country can produce so many brave men.

Let us pray that there will never be a need for a second volume.