

Russell High School (GA) During World War II: A Legacy of Duty, Civic Pride and Service

By William E. Fry

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In war we often think of our fighting soldiers as the first line of defense; however, there is a second line of defense, the home front, which plays a critical role of support for the first line of defense. With millions of young men mobilized for WWII, students necessarily became more active and engaged in this second line of defense. During the war, high school students throughout America played an important part in the war effort at home and took their job seriously.

Russell High School set an impressive legacy and example during World War II. The call to action and overwhelming response of the faculty, staff and students during those years of sacrifice are well documented. While many other Atlanta area schools contributed to the war effort in various ways, Russell High was significant regarding high student participation rates and levels of involvement.

Pre-War Preparedness

About two years before America's official entry into the war, the country began to get on a war footing by initiating preparedness programs. As early as January 1940, Russell High offered aviation classes through the Russell High Co-op program. Ten months later Russell student options included additional evening classes in: 1) Advanced sheet metal work; 2) Airplane motor accessories; and 3) Sheet metal pattern crafting, the last of which was taught by Mr. Clarence Arnston, Russell High shop teacher. By January 21, 1941, a new round of defense program classes involved airplane motor mechanics, accessory maintenance & overhauling, and acetylene welding.

As a proactive measure in March 1940, America began a fingerprinting campaign designed to identify Americans amid increasing foreign espionage. Organized through homerooms and beginning with senior classes, Russell High students were among the first in Georgia to be fingerprinted. Concerning the project, Mr. Paul West, Russell High principal, remarked:

“The student body responded remarkably and I think the school was one hundred per cent. We are more than pleased to have this opportunity to cooperate in the nationwide move to definitely establish the identity of our younger citizens through the years to come.”¹



Press coverage in April 5, 1940 *Russell Wildcat*

In response to growing military threats in Europe, President Roosevelt and Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act (STSA) on September 16, 1940, the first peacetime draft in U.S. history. The STSA initially required the registration of all men between the ages of 21 to 35 for one-year of service with induction made possible by a national lottery.

¹James Barron and Mary Moorelan, “School Assists Authorities in Fingerprinting,” *Russell Wildcat*, April 5, 1940, 3.

On October 16, 1940, millions of young men across America went to public locations to register for selective service. From 7 a. m. to 9 p.m. over 1,000 men registered at Russell High. While students had the day off, Russell faculty members handled the necessary paperwork for the event. Russell ROTC cadets served as ushers and Russell PTA members served meals and refreshments during the long day.

War Years

Russell High developed a school defense outline within a month after America's official entry into the war:²

1. Air Raid Drills
2. Junior Defense Corps
3. Red Cross Activities
4. Sale of Defense Bonds and Stamps
5. First Aid Training
6. Nutrition Classes
7. Home Nursing Classes
8. Americanism

1. Air Raid Drills

Within a month after the Pearl Harbor attack, Russell High initiated the first of many air raid drills. According to an article in the *Russell Wildcat*, the first drill was successful with student air wardens, student firemen, first aid groups, and other students all reaching their pre-assigned destinations. In Principal West's assessment of the drill, he stated:

“I am extremely proud that Russell realizes the seriousness of this undertaking. The first drill was a success to our minds. To make sure, however, we had the air raid warden of East Point, Carlos Hemperley, and fire chief, Max Wiggins, over January 8, and let them witness another drill. They were well pleased and said the school was the first organization in East Point to undertake such drills.”³

² Ed., “School Adopts 8-Point Defense Plan,” *Russell Wildcat*, January 20, 1942, 1.

³ Ed., “Air Raid Drills Held At Regular Intervals For Students' Safety,” *Russell Wildcat*, January 20, 1942, 1.

Occasional citywide blackouts and air raid drills were reminders of the threat of enemy activity during World War II, and various civic groups were organized to administer this part of the Civic Defense program. The Russell Band performed on March 17 at a graduation of Air Raid Wardens, about 244 of who participated in a practice air raid drill held two nights later in East Point. The following week, the Russell Band performed in the Russell Auditorium as the opening group for an East Point Defense Rally, an event featuring information concerning blackouts, civil defense procedures and air raid warnings.⁴

Another class of Civil Defense volunteers, a group including the first all-female Air Raid Wardens in East Point to graduate from Red Cross and Air Raid Warden courses, graduated on October 1, 1942. The Russell Band provided musical entertainment for the graduation ceremony at the East Point City Auditorium.

2. Junior Defense Corps

Russell High served as a repository for the East Point-area metal recycling effort. In the fall of 1942, the *Atlanta Journal/Constitution* initiated these drives and provided cash incentives for pupils bringing in the most scrap metal. At Russell High, Mr. James Breitman, an electricity and drawing teacher who first came to Russell in 1940, supervised a collection area that was established on the Jefferson Avenue side of campus. Within weeks, Russell students and staff collected tons of material, and since this scrap was of value, this area was closely supervised and secured.

⁴ E. N. Martin, ed., "Defense Rally for East Point will be Held at Russell High Auditorium April 2," *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter*, March 27, 1942, 1.



In the days immediately after Pearl Harbor, male faculty members and the entire Russell ROTC Corps of Cadets provided security for Russell High assets, particularly the rifle inventory in the ROTC armory. Working in shifts, volunteers guarded the armory, scrap metal repository and other important areas at

Russell High for 24 hours, seven days a week. For the duration of the war, a newly created Russell High Special Duty Patrol assisted with campus security.

3. Red Cross Activities

The first Russell High Junior Red Cross Chapter was organized in 1936 and became more active as hostilities increased in Europe. For the 1941 holiday season,



Russell's Red Cross Chapter folded over 5,000 Christmas Seals and donated food to the Methodist Home in Atlanta for Thanksgiving. Using Russell room No. 111, the Russell Chapter knitted war related items for donation to Lawson Military Hospital in Chamblee (GA) in time for

Christmas. The next month, Russell's Red Cross assisted in an American Library Association book donation appeal designed to provide books to help entertain and occupy military trainees. Miss Page Morton, school librarian, sponsored the effort at Russell High.

Russell's Red Cross contributions were particularly noteworthy during the height of the war years. In March 26, 1943, a reporter noted:

“Russell High School has a very active Red Cross organization under the leadership of Mrs. P. H. Fitzgerald of the English Department and Elizabeth Holt

as president. The organization has sponsored a great many projects...for the benefit of the present Red Cross drive in East Point.”⁵



A month later, the *Russell Wildcat* revealed that the Red Cross group donated over 100 pairs of knitted slippers to the sick wards of local government hospitals. Additionally, numerous Russell High Red Cross students volunteered time at Crawford Long Hospital.⁶

On February 1, 1943, Russell High initiated a new student organization, the all-female Russell Auxiliary Corps (RAC), which occasionally collaborated with the Red Cross Chapter in Russell High and citywide Red Cross related projects. For example, the Russell RAC debuted as an official Russell High organization and marched with the Russell Band and ROTC contingent as part of a Monday night, March 15, 1943, Red Cross Drive Parade in Atlanta. This 60-member group, under the sponsorship of Miss Morton, wore uniforms of khaki and white, and generally was the only all-female unit present in Red Cross and other parades. Since the Russell High ROTC Corps did not include female students, Russell girls were able to contribute to the war effort as members of this quasi-military group.

During the month of March 1944, the Russell Band was very busy with activities related to American Red Cross drives. On March 8, the band played an evening concert in the Russell High Auditorium as a benefit for an East Point Red Cross Drive. According to the *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter*, several hundred people attended.⁷ The band, along with

⁵ _____, “Russell Has Active Red Cross Organization,” *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter* March 26, 1943, 1.

⁶ Louise Reese, Ed., “Red Cross and Home Ec Classes Making Servicemen Slippers,” *Russell Wildcat*, April 9, 1943, 4.

⁷ _____, “Large Crowd Attends Red Cross Rally at Russell High Wednesday,” *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter*, March 10, 1944, 1.

Russell's RAC unit, also marched in an evening City of Atlanta Red Cross parade on Monday, March 13. The Russell Band, RAC and all ROTC units closed out the month with a Monday, March 27 appearance in the Red Cross Drive Parade in East Point, a celebration that featured numerous civic, civilian defense, and regular military organizations. The parade's motto was, "Give that he may live."

For the March 21, 1944 Red Cross Drive, a local paper reported, "Russell High donation of \$1,000.00 for the East Point Red Cross Drive represented 100% participation of both students and faculty, making Russell the leader among the City High Schools."⁸

Atlanta and the nation successfully completed numerous Red Cross drives during the World War II years. The Red Cross was extremely important to service personnel and their families both during and immediately following the War. By early 1946 the Red Cross was still in critical need of supporting local and worldwide activities for millions of soldiers on active duty and those being discharged from service. A Red Cross campaign began on March 27, 1946 with a downtown Atlanta parade along the usual parade route. The Russell Band, ROTC and RAC participated along with twelve other area high school bands. Paul West, former Russell High principal, was the Co-Chair of the Fulton County Campaign; Roy Drukenmiller, Russell principal and former Russell High band director, was campaign coordinator for East Point.

4. War Bonds and Stamps

War Bond and Defense Stamp drives were critical during the war. According to the National Archives, about 85 million Americans purchased over \$185.7 billion worth

⁸ E. N. Martin, ed., "East Point Raises over \$6,000.00 in Red Cross Drive," *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter*, March 31, 1944, 1.

of securities to help finance the war effort.⁹ With America's entry into the war, many high school students volunteered to help with selling War Bonds and Defense Stamps. In Russell High's first bond drive in January 1942, Principal West led the way by buying the first War Bond, while Ms. Price, the school clerk, bought the first defense stamp and Joyce Smith made the first student purchase of a War Bond. First day receipts amounted to \$436. 80. The two-week total came in at \$1,379.05, with the senior class contributing the highest percentage of that amount.¹⁰ Moving forward, admittance to a number of Russell High events, such as the Friday night January 23, 1942 Barn Dance in the Russell gym, occurred only through the purchase of bonds and stamps.

Russell High homerooms held various war bond drives on a regular basis throughout the war. Mr. E. W. Greene, a faculty member in Russell's Diversified Co-operative Training Program, directed the sale of Bonds and Stamps. His Co-op class raised over \$1,550.00 in bonds and \$135.00 in stamps during a December 7, 1942 Pearl Harbor Day Victory school assembly program.



On February 10, 1943, the Russell High Band marched in a parade staged by the City of Atlanta to kick-off a fund-raising effort to build a new USS Atlanta, a navy cruiser sunk on November 13, 1942, after a little over a year in action. This vessel, sponsored by Margaret Mitchell (author of *Gone With the Wind*) and launched on September 6, 1941, saw action in the Battles of Midway and Eastern Solomons shortly before being heavily damaged beyond salvage and scuttled during the naval Battle of Guadalcanal in November 1942.

⁹ Duke University. "Brief History of World War Two Advertising Campaigns War Loans and Bonds." Accessed September 24, 2020.

¹⁰ Ed., "Seniors Lead in Purchase of Defense Stamps," *Russell Wildcat*, January 20, 1942, 4.

The next day, on February 11, 1943, Russell High School held its own “Cruiser Day” celebration on campus. The festivities began in the morning with the Russell Band and ROTC in a military parade. A replica of the Cruiser Atlanta was on display all day, as were the availability of Bonds and Stamps. A dance was held later that night following the Russell/Decatur basketball game, with admission via purchase of war stamps; local theaters showed newsreels of the day’s activities and events. The final total of Bond and Stamp sales exceeded \$5,000.00.¹¹

On the evening of April 6, 1943 Atlanta’s Municipal Auditorium played host to a Victory Song Rally as part of a joint conference of three organizations: the Southern Division of the National Music Educators Association, the Georgia Music Educators Association, and the Georgia Association of PTAs. Of the over 1,000 students singing from the top floor of the auditorium, 150 were from Russell High. The 3-day conference also featured Russell High student Cyril Johnson leading the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance, along with Russell High student Ruth Webb, who was a featured speaker on raising over \$1.5 million in War Bonds sold in local schools.

Russell High’s War Bond efforts were memorialized in numerous news articles. For example, in a February 1944 issue of *Atlanta’s Suburban Reporter*, a reporter stated, “Russell Teachers and Students raise \$53,548.45 during the Fourth War Loan Drive, exceeding all other high schools in the county.”¹²

As such, by 1945, Russell High and the City of East Point were extremely successful in raising funds and meeting War Loan Drives quotas. This devotion to the

¹¹ E. N. Martin, ed., “Russell High Sells \$5,000.00 Worth of Bonds Last Friday,” *Atlanta’s Suburban Reporter*, February 19, 1943, 1.

¹²E. N. Martin, ed., “Russell High Chalks Up Another Marker for Victory,” *Atlanta’s Suburban Reporter*, February 18, 1944, 1.

war effort earned East Point a namesake liberty ship, with the news being revealed in an early January *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter* article:

“Since Russell and the East Point community performed very well on a series of War Loan Drives, the Navy dedicated a new liberty ship with the name of ‘East Point Victory.’ The honor was awarded the City because of its excellent record in war bond campaigns. Only one other city in Georgia was named in the group of ships to be launched.”¹³

5. **First Aid Training**

When planning for home defense, first aid training is required for times of emergency. Mr. W.B. Pirkle of the Russell faculty held an American Red Cross certification and taught a 20-hour First Aid class in the school auditorium every Monday and Wednesday from 3 to 5 p.m. Those passing the first class then had the option of certifying for an advanced course. Enrollees for the courses generally were faculty members and mothers from the community, with students having the option of joining the campus First Aid Club.

6. **Nutrition Classes**

In addition to Junior Red Cross activities detailed in number 3 above, the Red Cross sponsored a 20-hour nutrition class beginning on January 20, 1941 that met on Tuesdays from 3 to 4 p.m. Faculty members Miss Ruth Colly and Mrs. Sue Glausier Bullard taught the courses. Within a year, Russell High organized a Nutrition Club.

In a speech to the Russell P.T.A. on Tuesday, January 12, 1943, Superintendent Jere A. Wells spoke about the new Russell High Victory Corps Chapter and its benefits to the students regarding nutrition and physical fitness. Ms. Flora Bailey, Russell High Lunchroom manager, encouraged proper nutrition and health by periodically offering

¹³ _____, “Liberty Ship to be Named City of East Point,” *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter*, January 19, 1945, 1.

Russell students 'Victory Lunches,' which contained meat loaf, tomato sauce, mashed potatoes, corn sticks, turnip greens, and milk.

To encourage better health and to screen for membership in the Victory Corps, all students at Russell High and throughout Fulton County were given physical examinations beginning Monday, January 18, 1943. The check-ups consisted of height and weight measurements and blood pressure, X-ray, eye and ear tests.

7. Home Nursing Courses

Home nursing classes were geared toward Russell High mothers, members of the P.T.A., and Russell students who were interested in sick care at home. Miss Armstrong of the Public Nursing Center organized and conducted the instruction, which occurred from 2 to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays. In a school-wide registration for Civilian Defense in East Point held within a month after Pearl Harbor, many girls signed up for home nursing courses.¹⁴

8. Americanism

As one contemplates life in America during World War II, an interpretation emerges of an entire country united in the war effort. Like many schools, communities and civic organizations across America, Russell High and the surrounding community stepped up and did their part to foster patriotism and democracy, which made Russell High and the East Point area a better place to live during a dark and difficult time.

The *Russell Wildcat* editorial staff frequently urged patriotic action in editorials such as the following by Juanita Henderson:

“Unless each individual is willing to do his part for National Defense, our government will have a struggle to win this war. The war effort demands sacrifices, readjustments, and consecration. You must share in all these.

¹⁴ Ed., “Students Register For Civilian Defense,” *Russell Wildcat*, February 3, 1942, 3.

Do your part in buying Defense Bonds and Stamps, giving to the Red Cross and other organizations. We are in this war whether we like it or not, but we can help by facing the fact boldly and being grateful for the protection and privileges enjoyed by us in our country – the United States!

Pledge yourself to help in any and all ways and not to do anything offensive to our country.”¹⁵

Groups associated with Russell High assisted in various ways. In a special patriotic ceremony held at Russell High on Sunday, October 25, 1942, the Alumni Association recognized the Russell men, women and former students serving the country by presenting three flags: a U. S. flag, a State of Georgia flag, and a Service flag.¹⁶ The 8th District of the Georgia PTA Congress discussed the topic, “What the PTA can do to aid in the Nation’s War Program,” during a meeting at Russell High on Tuesday, October 5, 1943.¹⁷

The Russell High Victory Corps Chapter was a popular patriotic group on campus. In 1943 Russell High, along with a large number of high schools in Georgia, established a High School Victory Corps administered statewide by O. C. Aderhold, a then-professor of vocational education and future president of the University of Georgia. According to Aderhold, the purpose of the Victory Corps involved a voluntary effort to mobilize high school students for more effective preparation for participation in wartime service. Specific program activities included physical fitness programs, guidance, wartime citizenship and pre-flight aeronautics in select high schools.

In announcing the Russell High chapter of the Victory Corps, Principal Drukenmiller cited various goals, such as promoting better health, higher scholastic

¹⁵ Juanita Henderson, “What You Can Do For National Defense,” *Russell Wildcat*, January 20, 1942, 2.

¹⁶ Ed., “Russell Salutes Its Men and Women Now Serving The Country,” *Russell Wildcat*, November 11, 1942, 1.

¹⁷ Ed., “P.T.A. District Divisions Plan Meetings This Week,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 3, 1943, 10-C.

standards, and better conduct of students during wartime.¹⁸ Students were also eligible to earn and wear the Victory Corps Insignia. Over time Russell students trained in areas such as Air Raid Warden, Firewatcher (or other civil defense activity), USO volunteer, Red Cross Service, Scale Model Airplane building, Health Service participation, farm aid, or other part-time employment to meet manpower shortages.¹⁹

Regarding off-campus student activities, the Russell Band and ROTC were particularly active and visible representatives of the high school. Like many other high school bands across the Atlanta area, the Russell Band and ROTC made significant and



Russell Band cadets prep for parade inspection

important contributions through numerous parade and other activities designed to help the war effort. During the war years, these two Russell organizations marched in an

average of three to four Red Cross parades

and War Bond drives each year. With the addition of the Russell Girl's RAC in early 1943, the Russell parade contingent was even larger. The Atlanta parade routes generally formed at Peachtree and Baker Streets and proceeded along a route southward on Peachtree/Whitehall Streets to Mitchell Street before concluding at Trinity Avenue.



Russell High's RAC unit

appeared as special guests when the East Point Civilian Defense chapter held a large bond rally at the East Point

Auditorium on Sunday, January 23, 1944. Entertainment headliners included the 14-piece

¹⁸ Louise Reese, ed., "High School Victory Corps Planned at Russell," *Russell Wildcat*, November 25, 1942, 3.

¹⁹ _____. "Victory Corps Program is Introduced to Russell Students," *Russell Wildcat*, January 25, 1943, 1.

orchestra of Charlie Sorrells and his chief vocalist, Miss Jane Schneider. Miss Jane Withers, a young movie star from Atlanta, was in town and volunteered her time to help raise funds for Civilian Defense.

Roy Drukenmiller (1897-1960), Russell High Principal

The story of Russell High School during World War II is largely a reflection of Mr. Roy Drukenmiller, Russell's principal, who served in that role from 1942 to 1949. Simply put, as principal, Mr. Drukenmiller spearheaded, approved, and/or fostered a majority of the Russell High activities as documented in this review.

Except for one year when he was principal of Hapeville High School (1941-42), Mr. Drukenmiller was associated with Russell High either as a chemistry teacher, band director, or principal for over 20 years. Considering the school was 25 years old when he left in 1949, Mr. Drukenmiller was an important part of Russell High for most of its entire history. After his tenure at Russell High, he worked as a Fulton County Schools music supervisor during the 1950s until his death in 1960, at which time he had served a total of 32 years for Fulton schools.

Drukenmiller certainly was remembered for his work in education; however, service in many areas outside his profession was particularly noteworthy. *The Atlanta Constitution* obituary highlighted a number of Drukenmiller's volunteer activities with community and civic groups, including those of the Yaarab Temple Shrine Band (Director Emeritus), Inter-Civitan Club (Past President), and East Point American Legion Post 51 (Past Commander).²⁰ Concerning a pre-war speech at the American Legion, an *Atlanta's Suburban Reporter* writer noted:

²⁰ Clark Howell, ed., "Roy Drukenmiller Dies; School Music Director," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1960, 23.

“At the regular meeting of the East Point American Legion Monday night, a masterful address on Americanism was delivered by Legionnaire Roy Drukenmiller of the Russell High School faculty. Drukenmiller brought a message of duty and loyalty to our government in these days of danger and fifth column activities.”²¹

His commitment to service translated not only to activities within Russell High and with membership in civic organizations, but also as a dedicated volunteer as East Point chairman of numerous recording-breaking East Point Red Cross Drives in the 1940s. Reflecting on the March 14 - 30, 1944 Red Cross Drive, Drukenmiller wrote:

“Let me take this opportunity of expressing to the people of East Point my deepest appreciation for the splendid cooperation received in the recent Red Cross Drive. Although our quota was increased to nearly double that of last year, the people responded with the same loyalty and enthusiasm they have always manifested in similar campaigns before.”²²



Roy Drukenmiller

After the 1947 Red Cross Drive, Drukenmiller expressed his gratitude yet again, stating, “The citizens of East Point again displayed their fine spirit of public service and cooperation by surpassing their quota in the 1947 Red Cross Fund Campaign.”²³

As a person, he was a deeply spiritual, patriotic and musically talented man who presented himself as a dedicated and tireless professional, revered by his students and colleagues alike. Taken as a sum total, Drukenmiller’s dedication and devotion to Russell High and to the East Point community, as reflected

²¹ C. N. Martin, ed., “Roy Drukenmiller Speaks at Meeting of American Legion,” *Atlanta’s Suburban Reporter*, September 20, 1940, 1.

²² _____, “East Point raises over \$6,000.00 in Red Cross Drive; Quota \$5,000.00,” *Atlanta’s Suburban Reporter*, March 31, 1944, 1.

²³ _____, “Red Cross Drive Again Surpasses Quota in East Point,” *Atlanta’s Suburban Reporter*, April 17, 1947, 1.

through the sheer number of his activities - particularly during the war years - was especially impressive.

Russell Teachers and Students off to War



FACULTY MEMBERS WHO SERVED IN WORLD WAR II

Front row, left to right:

GEORGE CARROLL, *Army*
FRED GUFFIN, JR., *Marines*
HOYT GRIFFIN, *Army*
U. J. LOCKLEAR, *Army*

Second row, left to right:

HENRY BILLINGHURST, *Army*
C. V. MADDOX, *Army*
CECIL JACKSON, *Army*
DOUGLAS PURDIE, *Navy*
JAMES BRIETZMAN, *Army*

*Not in picture
BERNARD B. FULLER,

As chronicled in this paper, Russell High's contribution to the war effort was particularly noteworthy. In this regard it is important to note that a significant percentage of Russell's male faculty answered the call to duty during the war and almost all of them returned to teaching positions at the school after the war.

A significant number of former Russell High students served in the war as well. Exact figures are difficult to come by, but the number was undoubtedly in the hundreds. The East Point Historical Society contains a special wall exhibit recognizing East Point boys who gave their lives in service to the country.

Additionally, a large Bronze Plaque, which currently resides at the Fulton County Schools Teaching Museum South/Hapeville and was presented by the Class of 1945, lists those Russell High students who gave the ultimate sacrifice.

In Memoriam

We pay reverent tribute to those from our midst who gave to their country the last full measure of devotion in World War II.

[Presented by Russell High School Class of 1945]

Lt. Frank P. Baker
New Guinea August 20 1943

Capt. Young Ben Barber
Italy August 10 1944

Cpl. William W. Lee
Bataan February 27 1943

Lt. Henry W. Belcher, Jr.
England August 1 1944

G.M. 2/c Jack R. Boatwright, USN
SW Pacific November 13 1942

Lt. Daniel P. Pace, Jr.
Austria April 23 1944

Ph.M. 2/c Daniel B. Rhodes
Okinawa May 12 1943

Pfc Henry A. Sneed, Jr.
England December 10 1943

Pfc Winefield F. Purdy
France December 12 1944

S/Sgt. Gerald M. Simpson
Japan March 28 1943

S/Sgt. Edward W. Simpson
US July 23 1943

Pfc William N. McKee, Jr.
Belgium January 7 1943

Sgt. Horace H. Smith
Bismarck Bay July 26 1944

A M 3/c Royal D. Stokely
Brazil December 9 1943

Pvt. Leslie C. Perry
Italy February 17 1944

Cadet Frank A. Smith, Jr. RCAF
Canada September 19 1941

Sgt. Robert M. Thompson
Belgium January 4 1945

Pfc Louis H. Rigsby
Holland September 23 1944

Pvt. Billy T. Towns
Normandy, June 6 1945

Pvt. Robert D. Waters
Italy May 14 1945

Ass't Engineer Carl J. Wynn
Cape May N.J. June 24 1942

F 1/c Clayton E. Grigsby
Mediterranean October 9 1943

Sgt. Harry O. Brown
Italy May 2 1944

Ens William R. Brock
Saipan January 9 1945

Lt. Raymond Christian, Jr.
Germany April 11 1945

S/Sgt Lawrence H. Brown
Normandy June 16 1944

Capt. Luther L. Carroll
Italy September 19 1944

Pfc James C. Conklin
Sicily July 11 1943



East Point Historical Society special wall exhibit

1942 Russell Graduate Recalls Student Days

Reminiscences of Russell High’s World War II years are memorialized in Ora Jean Gunnin’s article, “1942 Russell Graduate Recalls Student Days,” and serve as a tribute to those students who attended Russell during those years of sacrifice. Mrs. Gunnin, the former Ora Jean Porter (1925-2017), was editor of the *Russell Wildcat* during her junior and senior years (1940-1942). She was married to former East Point City Councilman Olen Gunnin (1923-2016), also a Russell graduate, who was the Russell High Booster Club president when this message to students first appeared in the *Russell Wildcat* in 1960. Her article, reprinted in the *Southside Sun*, is as follows:

“If there was one thing an alumnus of Russell could say to the present day students that could give them an insight into what the future will bring, it would be hard to put the exact words into meaning to let one know just how much you will cherish the days you are now enjoying. When I think back over the years and remember the many memories that make Russell dear to me, I wish I could tell them all.”

“The years preceding World War II were a time of change and uncertainty, just as the time now seems to be in an upheaval of what tomorrow will bring-whether it be a trip to the moon or a world conflict such as we have never seen. But the parallel is the same, students are trying to achieve goals to prepare them for life, yet not knowing just what skills they need. Education is not something handed to one on a silver platter, it is the result of hard work and effort on the part of an individual, not just what one is made to do in the classroom. The memory of many classmates leaving school to join the armed services is still sad, even though they were doing a fine duty. But many who did not finish their education then, have since had to work very hard to obtain a higher education and

many have expressed the thought, “if only I had known then what I know now, how important school was, but we knew it all, or so we thought!”

“When World War II began and American people went through such a trying and unhappy time, education suffered its loss too. But those who tried did obtain the best they could. School spirit was high when I was at Russell and it stood second to none in our estimation. We were always glad to speak highly of Russell. Constructive criticism can be good, but a fellow who says we have no school spirit and does nothing cannot expect miracles. Even today I can remember many long hours spent to make a *Wildcat* possible, or to make a club progress, or to have some student participate in a community activity that would bring credit to Russell.”

Then, as now it was a cooperative effort, the teacher worked with us and we with them. Sports were important and those who participated actively in them, but not to the exclusion of academic work, and those who were not active participants did their share to boost the interest in attendance at sporting events. The alumni of today feel I am sure as I do that what was said of Russell in those years, was being said of us - that we made Russell what it was.”²⁴

Legacy

In 2001, Tom Brokaw wrote his famous book, *The Greatest Generation*. In many ways, Brokaw described many of those at Russell High who grew up and came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War. This was a generation defined by their commitment to duty, civic pride and service. This article is an attempt to pay tribute and gratitude to the students from the greatest generation who gave succeeding generations of Russell students the traditions that we enjoyed during our subsequent time at Russell High.

Dr. William E. Fry, Russell High Band '71, retired as a band and orchestra director in 2011 after 36 years of teaching. Currently, he holds a part-time music position at Point University in West Point, GA and is the artistic director of the Columbus (GA) Community Orchestra.

²⁴ Ora Jean Gunnin, “1942 Russell Grad Recalls Student Days,” reprinted in *Southside Side*, June 1, 1975, 4B.

