



FOOTBALL AT
MILITARY TRAINING CENTERS
DURING WORLD WAR II

BY BENJAMIN HARE '06

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*“But I firmly believe that any man's finest hour, his greatest fulfillment of all he holds dear, is the moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle - victorious.”*¹

~ Vince Lombardi

*"If you are going to win any battle, you have to do one thing. You have to make the mind run the body. Never let the body tell the mind what to do... the body is never tired if the mind is not tired."*²

~ General George S. Patton

Blitzkriegs, bombs, tactics, trenches, formations, battle plans, and precise execution are all strategic aspects of both war and football. Throughout the years the language of the two has been so interwoven that it is often difficult to decipher quotes about either unless one is given the source and the context. It is important to remember that football is not war, it is just a game. But on occasion games can take on a life of their own that transcends sports rivalry and becomes something more memorable and more powerful than just friendly competition. Is it possible that a game can be more

¹ Vince Lombardi, Coaching Quotes Powered by Quote Bank, <<http://www.coachqte.com/lombardi.html>> (Feb. 12, 2006).

² George S. Patton, George S. Patton Quotes, <<http://www.military-quotes.com/Patton.htm>> (Feb. 12, 2006).

than a game? Is it then possible that a game can play multiple roles? Can a game be a distraction and escape for not only young men but a nation? Can it at the same time be an allegory or even training for the real battles that take place? Can a game be another step toward a social change? Can a simple game at a complex time transform ordinary men into legendary heroes?

There is an interesting and rich story hidden away in football history and often overlooked in World War II U.S. social/military history. The story is of football played at U.S. military training academies during the war years (1942-1945). Given the circumstances of the time, football at these academies and training centers was arguably the highest level of competition during the time. Although most of these institutions played a primarily collegiate schedule, they were made up of the best players in the country, including many former college All-Americans and even some professional players (depending on that institution's policy on professional athletes competing in varsity athletics). It is no surprise that

the two football seasons after the war concluded (1945 and 1946 seasons), West Point Military Academy had two consecutive Heisman Trophy winners in Doc Blanchard and Glenn Davis. Blanchard had joined the Army after one year at the University of North Carolina and was appointed to West Point Military Academy in 1944.³ Glenn Davis was recruited by West Point and decided to enroll in 1943 after graduating from high school. During their years together at Army the team went 27-0-1, winning outright National Championships in 1944 and 1945 while splitting the 1946 National Championship with Notre Dame after tying with them during the season.⁴

Beyond the story of the most well known military academies (Army-West Point and Navy-Annapolis) is the story of training centers that may no longer have varsity

³ Dennis Brunson, "Bishopville celebrates 'Mr. Inside': Heisman winner 'Doc' Blanchard honored while visiting hometown," The Doc Blanchard Project, <<http://www.sccotton.org/blanchard.htm>> (Feb. 12, 2006).

⁴"Army rushing legend Glenn Davis, 'Mr. Outside,' dies at 80," SportsLine.com wire reports: Associated Press New Service, March 9th, 2005, <<http://cbs.sportsline.com/collegefootball/story/8273148/1>> (Feb. 12, 2006).

athletics or may no longer exist. One such institution still in existence is the U.S. Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Illinois, yet it no longer carries varsity athletics. Other institutions such as Naval Pre-Flight Training Centers established at the University of Iowa (IPF), the University of North Carolina, the University of Georgia, St. Mary's College in California, and Del Monte California Naval Air Station were commissioned under the Navy V-5 program in 1942 and 1943.⁵ All five of these institutions would be disbanded once victories on both fronts were secured. The V-5 program was based on the idea that athletic competition was essential for the development of a soldier's character and physical training, thus emphasizing varsity and intramural athletics, primarily those that involved bodily contact, with special emphasis on football.⁶

⁵ Donald W. Rominger, Jr., "From Playing Field to Battleground: The United States Navy V-5 Preflight Program in World War II", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (winter, 1985) pg 256, [Amateur Athletic Association Website](http://www.aafla.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH1985/JSH1203/jsh1203d.pdf), <<http://www.aafla.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH1985/JSH1203/jsh1203d.pdf>> (Feb. 12, 2005).

⁶ Ibid.

Two of these schools are especially noteworthy due to their exceptional performance in varsity football. During the 1942 season both of these squads, Great Lakes and Iowa Pre-Flight, (the Bluejackets and Seahawks respectively), had quality seasons. Great Lakes went 8-3-1 playing a primarily Midwest schedule including games against Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois.⁷ The Iowa Pre-Flight team also had a good season going 7-3 while playing a mostly Midwest schedule that included more western teams such as Kansas, Nebraska, and Missouri.⁸ This first year of the war showed that these two teams would be formidable opponents for any team facing them during the years to come.

It was in 1943 that both teams hit their pinnacle. Great Lakes ended that season 10-2 after defeating a previously undefeated Notre Dame team that was ranked number one in

⁷ “Here Comes the Navy: Great Lakes on the Gridiron” Season Preview booklet from 1943, Great Lakes Naval Museum, Great Lakes, IL.

⁸ ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1985), <<http://proquest.umi.com>> (Feb. 12, 2006).

the country by the Associated Press.⁹ Great Lakes also laid claim to the Service Team Title citing the fact that they had beaten Notre Dame and Iowa Pre-Flight had lost to Notre Dame earlier in the year.¹⁰ This was definitely a hard claim for the Seahawks to honor because their only loss of the season was in the Notre Dame game by a score of 14-13.¹¹ Between the two Navy training centers, in a three year span, they compiled a record of 53-12-2, playing against Midwestern colleges as well as other smaller military bases.¹²

⁹ “Station Team Downs Notre Dame, 19-14 Bluejacket Eleven Ends Season in Blaze of Glory; Wins Service Title Claim,” *Great Lakes Bulletin*, Dec. 3rd, 1943, Great Lakes’ Amazing Football Teams, <<http://www.nsgreatlakes.navy.mil/history/1943football.html>> (Feb. 12, 2006).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Soren Sorenson, Sports Ranking, <http://www.phys.utk.edu/sorensen/cfr/cfr/output/1943/CF_1943_Main.html#Content> (Feb. 12, 2006).

¹² Ibid.

Football as training for war:



Fig. 1 Illinois Vs. Great Lakes. 1944.
(Courtesy of Great Lakes Naval Museum.)

Football at these institutions was used for a number of reasons as outlined by the creators of the V-5 program. The use of football and athletics for the purpose of training military men drew a lot of flack from people inside and outside of the military as to whether or not it was the best and most efficient way to prepare men for combat. The opposition to the program was not nearly strong enough to work against those in favor of the program.

The program had backing in very high places such as from the Secretary of Navy Frank Knox. Knox believed strongly in the use of football as a training tool for combat. He was one of the biggest advocates of the program and he

was also in the best position to see that the program continued on during the war years. Knox is quoted in the *Great Lake's Bulletin* as saying, “[t]his is a war where you kill or get killed! And I don’t know anything that better prepares a man for bodily contact, including war, than the kind of training we get on the football field.”¹³ As one can see from these strong words, Knox believed deeply in the advantages of using football as a training technique. He goes on to say that “[there is] a definite relationship between the spirit which makes great football players and the spirit that makes great soldiers or sailors.”¹⁴

When one takes the time to compare football and war it is possible to see that there are some definite similarities between the two that indicate football’s merits as good training for prospective soldiers. Many football coaches will tell you that the three most important fundamentals in football are: blocking, tackling, and running. The first two

¹³ Frank Knox, *Great Lakes Bulletin*, Feb. 11th, 2006, pg. 7, Great Lakes Naval Museum, Great Lakes, IL.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

fundamentals deal specifically with the game's physical nature in which men try to hit each other with great strength and explosiveness with the intent of trying to displace their opponent in an attempt to either advance the ball or stop the other team from advancing the ball. This aspect also deals with the violent nature of the game that often ends with one player inflicting injury on another. Being injured or hurt and playing through these ailments has always been a fairly standard existence for football players. A connection can be made between a player playing through injuries and a soldier continuing to fight even though he has been wounded. Having soldiers that have been trained to deal with pain is a definite advantage for any army. If an army is full of soldiers that quit as soon as they are wounded, that army has a higher likelihood of failure because the rate of men ceasing to fight would be higher than an army that has less soldiers of this nature.

Running contributes to the overall physical fitness of a person. By playing a sport in which running is of the utmost importance, men are trained heavily in the skill and therefore

develop it better than a person that is not involved. The military is known for drilling its personnel until they are in top condition. Cadets participating in athletics only advance their level of physical fitness.

Probably the most important characteristics that a cadet could learn while playing football are keeping a cool head under pressure and learning to work as a cohesive group with a common goal. Staying calm in frantic situations can be the difference between winning and losing in a football game but on the battlefield this could be the difference between living and dying. The advantages of having soldiers that have been in pressure situations prior to war are beneficial to any army because it is more likely that these soldiers will be able to keep their composure. The ability of a soldier or group of soldiers to work together as a team is also quite important for an army. More often than not armed forces missions are performed in small or large groups and the cohesiveness of the unit is always important to its success. Executing individual

assignments with a common goal in mind is important for armies and football players alike.

The idea for using competitive athletic training was not new to World War II. A Preliminary V-5 program was experimented with in World War I under Joseph Raycraft, director of the War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities.¹⁵ Raycraft's short research on the subject indicated many of the sentiments expressed above. It was because of these results the War Department issued this statement "that physical training include 'competitive games as a means to a common end, namely, the development of the greatest possible efficiency and power in offensive combat.'"¹⁶ This program was not continued during the years in between wars but enough people saw merit in the program that it was resurrected at the beginning of World War II.¹⁷

The Navy spent a lot of time defending its program because there were dissenting opinions on the matter of

¹⁵ Rominger, 253.

¹⁶ Ibid, 254.

¹⁷ Ibid, 254.

competitive athletics and their benefits as a training tool.

There were many issues as to whether or not this type of training actually worked and whether or not it was too distracting for the cadets. Therefore the Navy was forced to have extensive policies that covered these issues. In an article by the Secretary of Navy such naysayer's issues were addressed,

...to guard against abuses and overemphasis by: a) allowing participation in athletics only where the command has jurisdiction, b) prohibiting players from receiving money for playing c) prohibiting competition before the public for the benefit of the naval service, d) prohibiting participation of naval personnel in benefit athletic contests, e) prohibiting 'concentration of personnel for the express purpose of building up a team rather than for the purpose of specific naval duties', and f) prohibiting team members from devoting too much time to the sport and too little to their naval duties.¹⁸

Each institution also had their own policies on athletics that addressed more specific issues. These policies were, in many ways, an argument for these programs. In a stated

¹⁸ Lt. T.A. Larson, USNR, History of the U.S. Naval Training Center Great Lakes, IL, In World War II, (Washington, D.C.: Office of Naval History, 1945), provided by the Great Lakes Naval Museum, pg 288.

policy the commander of the Great Lakes Training Center offered his thoughts on the issue,

...1) to sponsor 'varsity' teams to provide entertainment and recreation for recruits and service schools students, to 'attract thousand of fine boys to the naval service', and to benefit the participants, 2) to adhere to the policies of the Secretary of Navy, the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel and the Commandant of the Ninth Naval District, 3) to prevent holdover of athletes 'for unwarranted periods' by permitting men to play for only one season, 4) to avoid overemphasis by using no professional football players and avoiding the use of player with national reputations, 5) to schedule as many home games as possible, and 6) to sponsor a comprehensive program of intramural sports.¹⁹

For the most part these policies were upheld by the pre-flight schools with the exception of the professional player rule. It is no secret that during that time many professional athletes were floating in and out of these academies and logging significant playing time while in attendance.

It can be seen that there was great debate over the issue of using football as a training tool. There were many people for and against the issue but the Navy had enough advocates in

¹⁹ Ibid, 289.

high positions that the programs stayed throughout the war. The proof, of whether or not these policies were advantageous for the U.S. military, is in the pudding. First off the United States was on the winning side of war, giving the program that advantage. Tom Harmon, a graduate of the University of Michigan, cited his football training as the main reason for his surviving two separate instances of being missing in action, once in South America after a crash landing and thirty-two days behind Japanese lines in China after being shot down during World War II. He said, “When you play football it gives you a fighting heart to survive situations I have faced.”²⁰

Football as stepping stone for social change:

Throughout American history there has been a deep seated problem with racism. During the World War II years the Civil war seemed to be ancient history, even though it had occurred only eighty-years earlier. It was during the

²⁰ Harmon did not play football on any of the Naval Training Center teams but did play for the University of Michigan from 1938-1940 and won the Heisman Trophy in 1940. “Tom Harmon Grounded in Hotel Lobby,” *North Central College Chronicle*, College Archives, North Central College Archives, Feb. 2, 1944, pg. 3.

American Civil War and the subsequent reconstruction period that African-Americans gained many legal rights through the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments. Civil rights for African-Americans improved greatly compared to what they had been before the war, yet there were still many fundamental flaws and loopholes that allowed for discrimination, segregation, and infringement on other civil rights. At this point the great civil rights movement of the late 1950's and early 1960's was still over a decade away but that did not mean African-Americans were not winning small civil rights battles all around the country. One such person was Graham E. Martin. In his time as a member of the United States Navy, Martin would win many personal battles against racism and he would also be a part of one major victory. Interestingly enough, football would not only help Martin with this victory over racism but also playing would be a victory in and of itself.

Graham E. Martin was born on January 18th, 1917 in the small town of Tobacco Port, Tennessee.²¹ When he was only eight years old his father passed away and shortly thereafter he and his mother moved to Indianapolis, Indiana.²² It was here that Martin began his work as a scholar, a leader, and an athlete. Martin attended Crispus Attucks High School in Indianapolis (the city's segregated all-black high school), where he was a standout athlete on the football team, the senior class president, and a strictly A's and B's student in the classroom.²³ Upon graduation he enrolled at the University of Indiana where he played football and earned his bachelors degree in 1941.²⁴ After graduation he decided to continue his education at Howard University in Washington, D.C. where he would study history with an emphasis on African-American history.²⁵ After the December 7th attacks on Pearl Harbor, Martin knew that his path would lead him into the armed

²¹ Paul Stillwell ed., The Golden Thirteen: Recollections of the First Black Naval Officers, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993, pg. 5.

²² Ibid, 5.

²³ Ibid, 10.

²⁴ Ibid, 14.

²⁵ Ibid.

forces. He was able to finish his master's degree at Howard before he was drafted into the Army. Martin "considered the army too dirty" and subsequently joined the Navy a day before he was to report to the Army.²⁶

Martin was assigned to the Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Illinois in the fall of 1942. After completing his own training at Great Lakes, he was asked to stay as a company sub-commander and train new recruits.²⁷ It is important to note that this training center was one of the primary training centers for African-American recruits and it was also heavily segregated. The African-American recruits were limited to Camp Robert Smalls, which was named after an African-American that stole a Confederate ship and delivered it to the Union blockade during the Civil War. Segregation was very much a force and a factor in the Navy and at Great Lakes in general. All sports teams were

²⁶ Ibid, 16.

²⁷ Ibid.

segregated by skin color; the only sport not segregated was football and credit for this can be given to Graham E. Martin.

In 1942 during his training at Great Lakes, Martin asked if he could play on the football team but was told “no” on the grounds that he was black.²⁸ The next fall, while he was stationed at Great Lakes, he again tried to join the football team but he was again turned down for the same reason. It was not until after the second game of the season, a tough loss to Purdue, that the coach approached Martin and a few others at Camp Robert Smalls asking if they wanted to try out for the team (Martin believed that this was due to the poor play from the tackle position and the fact that the coach knew that Martin was an experienced tackle).²⁹ Martin and three others from Camp Robert Smalls were allowed to play on the team, but Martin was the only one to work his way to first string and he did it within the first week. The Great Lakes Bluejackets

²⁸ Ibid, 17.

²⁹ Ibid.

would go on to a record of 10-2, which included a season ending victory over previously unbeaten Notre Dame.

Interestingly enough, desegregation on the football field in the college ranks was quite common. Martin himself played at the University of Indiana and there were many other African-Americans that too had played, dating back to the turn of the century. There were still issues of discrimination in college football but it had moved beyond professional football and baseball in this respect. Baseball was strictly segregated and Jackie Robinson would not break this color barrier until 1946. Professional football had let African-Americans freely participate until 1933, when it too banned black players and did not integrate again until 1946.

Graham E. Martin's most important accomplishment was his commission as one of the first black naval officers. In 1944 the Navy decided that it would be a good time to begin to integrate African-Americans into officer positions. This was due in part to the high numbers of African-Americans in the Navy and the fact that they were under-represented in the

officers' ranks. Great Lakes saw about one-third of all African-American recruits, with roughly 7,000 men passing through Camp Robert Smalls in its three years of operation.³⁰ At the beginning of 1944 the Navy chose thirteen African-American men to complete officer training, including Martin. Martin and the other twelve men were commissioned as officers in March of 1946. These thirteen men would be labeled the "Golden Thirteen" and were even written about in the April 24th, 1944 issue of *Life Magazine*, helping to make these men the face of integration in the armed forces.³¹



Photo # NH 93624 The "Golden Thirteen", March 1944

Fig. 2 The "Golden Thirteen." Top Row (Left to Right): John W. Reagan, Jesse W. Arbor, Dalton L. Baugh, and Frank E. Sublett. Middle Row (Left to Right): Graham E. Martin, Charles B. Lear, Phillip G. Barnes, and Reginald E. Goodwin. Bottom Row (Left to Right): James E. Hare, Samuel E. Barnes, George C. Cooper, William S. White, and Dennis D. Nelson. (Courtesy of Great Lakes Naval Museum)

³⁰ Larson, 271-272.

³¹ Stillwell, 281.

In a time full of racism, segregation, and discrimination in many aspects of society, it took men like Graham E. Martin to help move society along one step at a time. Martin's and the rest of the Golden Thirteen's success helped to change Navy policy. In History of the U.S. Naval Training Center Great Lakes, IL, In World War II, author Lt. T.A. Larson wrote, "In the later stages of Negro training at Great Lakes the view that segregation was a mistake generally took hold...The success of integration on a small scale in main-side service schools was perhaps the main factor in explaining the popularity of integration."³² There is little doubt the efforts of Graham E. Martin, in his time at Great Lakes both as a football player and a member of the Golden Thirteen, contributed significantly to this change in thinking.

³² Larson, 277.

Football and the creation of a legendary hero:



Fig. 3 Bill Shatzer posing for a senior picture in full football uniform. North Central College circa 1941. (Courtesy North Central College Archives)

Circumstance is often the most important ingredient in the creation of heroes. For William Warren Shatzer Jr. those circumstances were World War II and playing football for part of the season at the Iowa Pre-Flight Naval Training Center. It was under these circumstances that Bill Shatzer was transformed from a great small college athlete into not only a legend but also a symbol of heroism and citizenship.

Bill Shatzer was born in Lewiston, Pennsylvania where he lived with his mother, father, and siblings. At the age of

eight Mrs. Shatzer and children moved to Mooseheart, Illinois after the death of Mr. Shatzer. While living in Mooseheart, Bill developed his athletic ability throughout his high school career before graduating in 1938. The next fall he enrolled at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois, where his athletic career would truly takeoff. In four years at North Central, Shatzer lettered three times in each of the three sports - football, basketball, and baseball - and twice in track.³³ In football he would be named an all-conference performer three years in a row, (and arguably would have gotten a fourth, had freshmen been allowed to participate in varsity athletics at this time), named team Most Valuable Player his junior and senior seasons, and was also named to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics “Little All-American” team.³⁴

Upon graduating from North Central College in 1942 with a B.A. in General Science, Shatzer was ready to begin his career as a professional football player with the Detroit Lions.

³³ “Bill Shatzer ’42: Hall of Fame,” North Central College Athletic Department, <<http://www.noctrl.edu/x7574.xml>> (Feb. 24, 2006).

³⁴ Ibid.

In fact in his senior yearbook Shatzer had his current residency listed as Detroit, Michigan.³⁵ His plans were greatly interfered with when he was called to active duty in August by the United States Navy. Almost immediately he enrolled at the Iowa Pre-Flight Training Center, which was located on the campus of the University of Iowa.

It was here at Iowa Pre-Flight (IPF) that Shatzer proved himself as one of the best football players in the country. As mentioned before, the IPF team was composed of some of the best players in the country, hence it was no small feat for someone with Shatzer's "small time" experience to earn significant playing time. He broke onto the scene as a reserve half-back for the Seahawks in the 1942 season opener against the University of Kansas. The Seahawks out matched the Jayhawks 61-0 that day, but the even bigger story was Shatzer's performance. He scored two touchdowns running the ball and he connected with a teammate on a pass for a

³⁵ *Spectrum* 1942, College Archives, North Central College Archives, pg. 156.

third.³⁶ This performance would elevate Shatzer to first string halfback for the second game against Northwestern University, whose roster included future Hall of Fame quarterback Otto Graham. Against the Wildcats, Shatzer helped lead the Seahawks to a 20-12 victory by rushing for 106 yards on 13 carries.³⁷ This brought Shatzer's two game total to 236 yards rushing including 3 touchdowns, all while averaging 7.02 yards per carry.³⁸

Surprisingly, after this point, there is not much talk of Shatzer, although he is mentioned in press clippings preceding the Michigan game and he is noted as a probable starter for the Seahawks in the Indiana game.³⁹ This is partially because he was transferred to another base for further training in early

³⁶“Iowa Preflight Veterans Roll Over Kansas In Opener, 61 To 0,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)*, Sep 20, 1942, pg. A1 [ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune \(1849 - 1985\)](http://proquest.umi.com), <<http://proquest.umi.com>> (Feb. 24, 2006).

³⁷ “Bierman Prepares Strategy for Gopher Homecoming Saturday,” *Iowa City Sports Press-Citizen*, Sep. 28, 1942, pg. 7 (Display Merner Fieldhouse, North Central College, Naperville, IL).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Indiana Hopes Seahawks Are Still Off Form; Comeback Day,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1872-1963)*, Oct 31, 1942. p. 20 [ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune \(1849 - 1985\)](http://proquest.umi.com), <<http://proquest.umi.com>> (Feb. 25, 2006).

November.⁴⁰ Even with just playing the first six games, the *North Central College Chronicle* reported on January 13th that Shatzer was selected to the All Navy Pre-Flight Cadet All-American Team.⁴¹

“Bill Shatzer’s troubles have been little ones.”⁴²

Sadly the 1942 class prophecy for Bill Shatzer’s life in 1950 would be far from the truth. On May 16th 1944, Shatzer was reported missing in action and presumed dead while performing his duties as an ensign in his bomber squadron, leaving behind his wife and college sweetheart Sue Truesdell and his soon to be born son William Warren Shatzer III. While in the prime of his life Shatzer made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. But in this sacrifice his spirit would live on in many ways at his Alma Mater.

⁴⁰ *Alumni News/North Central Now*, College Archives, North Central College Archives, November 1942, No. 4, pg. 7.

⁴¹ “Bill Shatzer Makes All-American Honors,” *North Central College Chronicle*, College Archives, North Central College Archives, Jan. 13, 1942, pg. 4.

⁴² “We Prophecy,” *North Central College Chronicle*, College Archives, North Central College Archives, June 1, 1942, pg. 2.

Bill Shatzer's character and persona will presumably live on forever at North Central College, where he is remembered and memorialized not only for his athletic ability but also for his citizenship and his self-sacrifice. Shatzer is remembered in many ways on the campus. In a display case in the College's field house his number twenty-one jersey is forever retired alongside pictures and stories of his days at North Central and Iowa Pre-Flight. The College also honors the most outstanding male athlete of the senior class each year with the Bill Shatzer award. . In 2001 a statue of Shatzer was erected and dedicated in his honor outside of the football stadium. The college football team also has its own ways of honoring Shatzer. Beginning in 2002, after each football season, a player has been awarded the Bill Shatzer Citizenship Award.

The most unique ritual and honor the football team bestows on Shatzer is their pre-game ritual. Before taking the field for home games or boarding the bus for away games the entire football team gathers around the life size bronze statue

of Shatzer, hand in hand, on one knee, with heads bowed to say a short prayer. After the prayer each player taps the statue. This is not only a gesture of honor to Shatzer and those like him that have sacrificed their lives for the greater good of the United States, but also a moment in which young men take the time to reflect on what it means to be a student-athlete, a citizen, and a person of character, integrity, and self-sacrifice.



Figure 4: North Central College Football team at Shatzer statue in Championship Plaza, Homecoming 2003

Character and self-sacrifice were exactly the characteristics that people such as Frank Knox hoped would be instilled in the young naval cadets during their football

playing days at the Pre-Flight Training Centers. It is likely that these traits were inherent in Shatzer's nature but there is little doubt that football did not help to strengthen them. His short time at Iowa Pre-Flight greatly elevated his status as a football player, and "it has been said by some good football people, that, at the time, Bill Shatzer was the best running back in the nation."⁴³ Thus because of these unique circumstances of war Shatzer will forever be remembered as a legendary symbol of athletic ability, citizenship, and selflessness.

Conclusion:

During the war years, football was still in its fledgling stages insofar as being a major American sport was concerned. The game itself would hold the status of America's second favorite sport alongside basketball. It would not be until the modern era of fantasy football, cable television, and non-stop sports coverage that football would ascend to the top of

⁴³ "The Bill Shatzer Story," (Display Merner Fieldhouse, North Central College, Naperville, IL), n.d.

America's favorite sports. But even this ascension did not happen by itself. It would be triggered by a baseball strike, the retirement of Michael Jordan in basketball, and the general mis-management of the National Hockey League. Needless to say football has always held a special place in American society, but at no time was this any truer than during World War II.

It was during this time that football, specifically at military training centers, had an important multifunctional purpose. Many believed that football was critical to war training because the game trained men in aspects that were essential to war. Football also played a role in racial integration at this time. Of all the aspects of military training that were segregated, football was not one of them. Beyond that the lone black football player on that Great Lakes team would become one of the first black naval officers commissioned by the United States Navy. It also had the power to transform ordinary men into symbols of citizenship and manhood, as in the story of Bill Shatzer. What he was

able to accomplish as a member of the Iowa Pre-Flight football team proved his status as one of the premier football players of his time but in his sacrificing of his own life he became a symbol of citizenship.

As can be seen football did have an influence both during and after the war. Even though football's accomplishments and influences are often over shadowed by the war, what did take place is important nonetheless. Whether it had direct or indirect effects on the war, the legacy of the men who participated in this institution lives on through their accomplishments on and off the field.

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