

opportunity to know Michael Dawson. He has been a loyal friend and a sage counselor whom I will truly miss.●

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM F.X.
McCONNELL

● Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a fellow Utahn, William F.X. McConnell of Salt Lake City, a remarkable man with a remarkable story. I am not sure that in this retelling I can do justice to his sacrifices or of those who fought along side of him during World War II's campaign for the Rhine River. But, I think my colleagues would be interested in this history and would like to join me in paying tribute to the bravery of these men.

In December 1944, Bill McConnell arrived in France and was assigned to the 168th Engineer Combat Battalion. Shortly thereafter, Bill McConnell and his battalion fought in the terrible Battle of the Bulge. His battalion paved the way for an allied victory by removing road blocks and tank traps, building bridges under fire, and other perilous assignments. But, these were not the most harrowing experiences to which McConnell was assigned. The worst was yet to come.

McConnell and his battalion were called to cross the Rhine River, an assault as dangerous as it was important. He was told that this would be a simple assault, with plenty of support provided. At 2:00 a.m. on March 26, 1945, he boarded a row boat to cross the Rhine River into Germany. During the crossing, a bank of lights on the German side of the river were suddenly turned on, spotlighting the American soldiers. German tracer bullets fell like deadly rain upon them. The promised support from the American side never came.

While rowing, McConnell was hit in the wrist. Bleeding profusely, he continued to row. Shortly thereafter, several tracer bullets ripped through his thigh and knee. Continuing to row, he was hit a third time by an unidentified object on the side of his face and head. This blow knocked him into the water where he was miraculously saved by an assault boat returning from the German shore. Still without cover, the occupants of the boat were forced to disembark and trudge through an active sewer line in order to escape the German gunfire.

For this act of bravery, Bill McConnell was awarded a well-deserved Purple Heart. In addition, he has been honored with the American Campaign Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Distinguished Unit Citation, European Theater of Operations with four battle stars, and the Belgium Croix de Guerre (War Cross). These medals stand as a symbol of his dedication.

But, Bill McConnell's battle since the war has been to keep this military history alive. While the battle at Remagen and other locations during the war to defeat the Third Reich have been well-chronicled in books and on film,

engagements such as the Rhine crossing are still unknown to many Americans.

Since the war, McConnell has worked tirelessly in support of veterans organizations. Shortly after returning from the war he worked as a national service officer with the Disabled American Veterans. For 25 years, he served in the Veterans Administration Adjudication Division, in positions including senior adjudicator, chairman of the rating board, and adjudication officer.

For more than 40 years, he has been the American Legion member in charge of placing U.S. flags on graves for Memorial Day. He has served as past state commander in Utah of the Disabled American Veterans. He is the founder of the Salt Lake City chapter and national service officer of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, where he volunteers to help veterans with their disability claims. Clearly, he is one who has helped many.

There are thousands of World War II veterans just like Bill McConnell, who fought courageously for freedom. But, William F.X. McConnell is one who happens to live in my home state. He exemplifies the dedication of all American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines—past, present, and future—who have always been on watch to defend our country and its vital interests.

Today, I want to thank Bill McConnell for his service in uniform and for his service to our nation's veterans. This stand as his own monument. I am pleased to call the Senate's attention to his bravery in battle and to his many contributions to veterans.●

MR. LEONARD E. AND MRS.
LOUISE A. PLACHTA DAY

● Mr. ABRAHAM. Mr. President, November 11, 2000 is a very special day on the campus of Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, MI. The day has been proclaimed Mr. Leonard E. and Mrs. Louise A. Plachta Day, in honor of the former President and First Lady of the University. I rise today to recognize this occasion and to pay tribute to the magnificent couple being honored.

The couple arrived in Mt. Pleasant in 1972 when Mr. Plachta took a job as Professor of Accounting. He served as Assistant Dean of CMU's College of Business Administration from 1977 to 1979, when he took over the position of Dean. In January of 1992, he was appointed to serve as President of the University, and he served in this position until his retirement in July of 2000.

Mr. Plachta's 8-year tenure as President stands as one of the most productive stints in the history of the University. His financial restructuring of CMU has allowed it to remain one of the most affordable public universities in the State of Michigan. He initiated a number of programs to give students real-world experience to help prepare them for future employment, including

developing a state-of-the-art Career Services Center and expanding internship opportunities for students.

He drew national attention for the Degree Partners Program, which is a guaranteed four-year degree agreement with students designed to save them money as well as get skilled professionals into the job market quickly. He also initiated one of the first leadership scholar programs in the country, a four-year educational protocol designed to help students develop ethical leadership skills they can apply in their professions.

Mr. Plachta oversaw significant upgrading of classrooms and facilities during his tenure. This included new, highly technological music and science buildings; new and renovated athletic facilities; and a pending Library and Information Services Center that will incorporate technology to link students with academic resources from around the world.

He also oversaw a complete reorganization of CMU's academic programs in order to increase interdepartmental cooperation and draw attention to the University's strengths. This reorganization included a new College of Communication and Fine Arts, a new College of Health Professions, redefined science programs through a new College of Science and Technology, and a revamped College of Business Administration, College of Education and Human Services, and College of Humanities and Social and Behavioral Sciences.

One of the greatest accomplishments of his tenure, though, has been the leadership role CMU has taken in terms of the chartering of public school academies, charter schools. More than 17,000 K-12 students, approximately 50 percent of whom are minorities or at risk children, are enrolled in 59 CMU-licensed schools throughout the State of Michigan, with families on waiting lists at nearly every school. In addition, the national Charter Schools Development and Performance Institute, housed at CMU, had its grand opening earlier this year, on May 1, 2000.

Mrs. Plachta has also greatly contributed to the CMU community. For twelve years, she worked as a member of the clerical staff. She provided superior guidance and caring support to nontraditional students as the nontraditional student services liaison, which is a volunteer position. Her knowledge in this position came honestly, as she earned a master's degree herself as a nontraditional student. And, as First Lady, she has been a much-loved ambassador for CMU and an outstanding member of the Mount Pleasant community, volunteering with numerous organizations and strongly supporting adult literacy programs.

Central Michigan University stands where it does today, poised for success in the 21st Century, in large part due to the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Plachta. They have worked together to bring