Dear Fellow Alpha Dels,

Welcome to this year's fall issue of Xaiphe, a dual tribute to our 175th anniversary and to the Brothers who support our fraternity. Your support is making a huge difference!

It is a great pleasure to report that our 175th year was one of significant progress in revitalizing and achieving the goals of our fraternity. We chartered three new chapters at outstanding universities—Duke, Northeastern, and Penn State—the most in one year since 1836. Our 27 chapters and affiliates initiated 450 new members, a level not seen since the early '90s, and have projected near-record recruitment for the coming year.

Formal leadership and recruitment training was provided by Brother Steve Ehrfurth, MINN '06, our Chapter Service Consultant, to leaders of every chapter, and each chapter was evaluated and coached on 15 important “criteria for success.” Prospective members are responding positively to our emphasis on our literary, moral, social and intellectual traditions, and to improved training. My sincere hope is that you will find these articles interesting, informative, and inspirational.

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### The Value of Giving:

You may have read the April 2007 Wall Street Journal article about Brother Edgar Lanpher, Brunonian (Brown) '19, a truly inspiring story about an Alpha Delt who was president of Brown University from 1936 to 1945. When he died in 1961, he left 300 shares of National Lead Company stock to fund scholarships for needy members of Alpha Delta Phi. His bequeath has helped 42 students. On page two, Bro. Don French, MI '53, describes how you can leave your own legacy by making a tax-deductible donation of stock or cash to the Samuel Eells Literary and Educational Foundation (SELEF) that will benefit future generations of Alpha Dels.

### 175th ΑΔΦ Anniversary:

Enjoy the photographs from the celebration of the 175th anniversary of our founding at Hamilton College. The Alpha Delta Phi Award, the highest award bestowed by the fraternity, was awarded to Brother Bob McKelvey, MID (Wesleyan) '59, former President of both the Fraternity and the Society and current Secretary of the American Rhodes Scholars Association, by Fraternity and Foundation past-president Brother Bob Price, K '58.

In addition, the Samuel Eells Award was presented posthumously to Brother Jeremy Glick, R '92, in recognition of the gallant and heroic leadership he displayed in foiling the 9-11 terrorists’ attempt to turn hijacked United Flight 93 into a weapon of mass destruction and who sacrificed his life in that effort.

**Alpha Delta Phi’s literary tradition continues:** New books published by Alpha Dels since the last newsletter include: *Enigma in Many Keys: The Life and Letters of a WWII Intelligence Officer* by Brother Robert Button, D '36, and *Robert's Ridge* by Brother Malcolm MacPherson, Phi Kappa (Trinity) '65, a true account of a group of Navy SEALS who were ambushed on a mountain in Afghanistan and rescued by an Army Ranger Rapid Response Team. Included in this issue is a tribute to one of Alpha Delt’s most prolific modern authors, Brother Robert Ludlum, MID '51. Ludlum authored the books on which the Bourne movies were based, among many others. We are also pleased to announce the winners of the 2007 Annual ΑΔΦ Literary Competition and the Seward Scholarships.

**Emphasis on academic excellence:** Academically, ΑΔΦ ranks in the top 10 of the 70 national fraternities, and we continue to stress the importance of academics and monitor every chapter’s GPA. The Robert McKelvey Award for Academic Excellence was awarded to Brother Don French, MI '53, on page two.

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*Xaiphe*: The Newsletter of The Alpha Delta Phi

*175th Anniversary, Brothers Who Are Making A Difference*
SELEF Recruiting New Literary Competition Chairperson

The Samuel Eells Literary and Educational Foundation’s current Literary Competition chairperson, Brother Quincy McDonald, VA ’96, is retiring from this position. During his five-year tenure in the position, Brother McDonald spearheaded a rejuvenation of the program, which saw participation rates increase significantly. “I have had the pleasure of meeting many new friends in a variety of chapters, and have been impressed with the talent that both the Fraternity and Society have in their respective memberships,” said Brother McDonald about his involvement in the program. Now, SELEF is looking for a motivated and interested person to maintain the momentum that he created.

The Chairperson of the Literary Program serves the interests of both the Fraternity and the Society and aims to support and strengthen the literary element in all of our chapters. Fundamentally, this involves the stewardship of the Literary Competition and its top prize, the Daniel Pearl Award. As part of the position’s duties, the Literary Chairperson must actively promote the competition, as well as work with the Awards Chairperson in order to ensure that the entries are judged fairly and on schedule. The Chairperson is not required to attend SELEF or other meetings but is welcome to attend if interested.

In addition to these duties, the Literary Chairperson is an active resource to the Fraternity, Society, and Foundation as efforts to increase literary participation at the chapter level are implemented. Sometimes this means being an advisor, sometimes this means being “one of the troops.” Overall, the Literary Chairperson, in consultation with the Foundation, looks for opportunities to build our Literary Tradition. There is a lot of room for creativity and a need to set personal priorities throughout the year.

Please help us by recruiting volunteers for this important position or by volunteering yourself. The Foundation would like to have a new chairperson in place by the beginning of the spring semester (when most of the Literary Competition activity takes place). Brother McDonald has offered to help the new chairperson get started in the position. If you know of an alumnus brother who would be willing and able to take on this role, please forward the brother’s name to the Foundation President, Brother Raymond Thorman, UN ’76, by e-mail to Raymond.Thorman@GenSight.com.

Planned Giving: Deadline Nears For Special IRA Rollover

Question: Why is there urgency in using the advantages of this gifting opportunity?

Answer: The provision in the law expires on December 31, 2007.

I f you’ve ever wished for a way to make a major contribution to Alpha Delta Phi’s educational mission while gaining an exceptional tax advantage, your opportunity may have arrived—but for a very limited time only.

This one time opportunity may permit you to make a substantial gift to the Samuel Eells Literary and Educational Foundation (SELEF), a 501(c)(3) charity and, at the same time, further the cause and traditions of Alpha Delta Phi. There are separate funds in SELEF for the benefit of the Chapters. The Pension Protection Act of 2006 gives a time-limited window to roll over up to $100,000 from your individual retirement account (IRA) directly to a qualifying charity without the requirement of including the money transferred as taxable income. In order to use this gifting strategy, you must be age 70.5 or older. Such a distribution in 2007 qualifies as part or all of your Required Minimum Distribution for this year. The funds must be sent from your IRA directly to the charity, and this transfer must be completed by December 31, 2007.

The gift amount is not limited to the 50-percent adjusted gross income rule. Although you will not receive a charitable deduction, you will not be taxed on the contribution to the charity as would be the case with a usual Required Minimum Distribution. This is an option for you to consider regardless of whether or not you itemize deductions on your tax return. We recommend that you consult with your own legal and financial advisors for professional advice on this and all gift planning matters.

This article is one of a regular series appearing in Xaipe giving helpful information on the advantages to Brothers offered through planned giving to the Fraternity.

If you have any questions about this gifting opportunity or if you would like to receive more information, on a confidential basis, of how other planned giving opportunities might be of help to you and to Alpha Delta Phi, please call or write to the committee at Alpha Delta Phi Headquarters:

Planned Giving Committee
6126 Lincoln Avenue
Morton Grove, Illinois 60053
Phone: 847-965-1832; Fax: 847-965-1871

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SELEF Recruiting New Literary Competition Chairperson

The Alpha Delta Phi International

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Website: http://www.alphadeltaphi.org

Minimum Distribution. This is an option for you to consider regardless of whether or not you itemize deductions on your tax return. We recommend that you consult with your own legal and financial advisors for professional advice on this and all gift planning matters.

This article is one of a regular series appearing in Xaipe giving helpful information on the advantages to Brothers offered through planned giving to the Fraternity.

If you have any questions about this gifting opportunity or if you would like to receive more information, on a confidential basis, of how other planned giving opportunities might be of help to you and to Alpha Delta Phi, please call or write to the committee at Alpha Delta Phi Headquarters:

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Kenneth E. Growney, COR ’82

Douglass Diefenbach, MI ’80
John F. Furriss, K ’97
Edward J. Malysiak, ILL ’74
Honoring Bob Price, K ’58

Robert S. Price was initiated into the Kenyon Chapter’s class of 1958 with his two closest friends, Judge Howard H. Harrison Jr., who was later his best man at his wedding in 1965, and Edwin Cole Daly, later headmaster at Menlo School, Menlo Park, California. As an undergraduate, he was well known for his photographic memory, particularly with respect to Alpha Delta Phi trivia.

He picked up a good bit of this information from Carl R. Ganter, K 1899, who had been his predecessor as keeper of ADPhi legends. Chip Harrison gave Bob his Kenyon nickname of “Diamond Jim.” As an undergraduate, he served in the capacity of social chairman for two years, providing excellent parties stocked with “Diamond Dip” (a glutinous mess then served at ADPhi parties to satisfy the demand that we offer something other than booze). In return, the chapter agreed to overlook the occasional disappearance of a bottle of Scotch, to which he is partial. He also distinguished himself by cracking a safe in the DK E Lodge, after having been “initiated” quickly to satisfy protocol.

Bob was back for Commencement-Reunion weekend in 1964, when Albert (Bonzo) Eastman, K ’54, decided that he had been president of the East Wing Association long enough and picked Bob as president. He served for two years, until David D. Taft, K ’60, agreed to serve, with Bob dropping back to secretary, which he has been since 1966.

In 1969, he was Kenyon’s alumnus delegate to the convention that rewrote the Alpha Delta Phi Constitution. As a graduate of the Yale Law School, they thought he would be a good chairman of the drafting committee, and they gave him, as co-chairman, an undergraduate at Wesleyan who could spell—making a perfect team. Bob so impressed the Board of Governors of the Fraternity with his good humor and capacity for Scotch that they asked him to stand for election to the Board in 1972. On condition that he would not be elected, he agreed to have his name entered and did not attend the 1972 Convention at Ann Arbor. In his absence, he was double-crossed and elected. By 1975, the President-elect found himself unable to take the job, and, there being no qualified candidates, Brother Price found himself as President of Alpha Delta Phi, serving for three years. He was elected Honorary Chairman in 1979 and, shortly thereafter, took the reins as President of the Alpha Delta Phi Foundation. Bob Price retired as President in April 2007.

While President of the Foundation, Bob was deeply involved in the rechartering of the Yale Chapter. DKE invited ADPhi back to Yale, the invitation coming from the President of the Rampant Lion (the DKE Foundation), who was aware of Bob’s DKE connection and Kenyon’s indebtedness to Yale for its charter. When Kenyon College decided in 1990 to take away half of the Fraternity’s space in East Wing, it was Bob who remembered Carl Ganter telling him that ADPhi had signed an agreement with Kenyon giving ADelt first rights to all of East Wing.

With the help of Kenyon Historian Thomas Greenslate Sr., Bob was able to reconstruct the entire background of the 1906 agreement, including the renewal negotiations that occurred in 1949-50 after the Old Kenyon fire. The actual agreement had been rescued when C. Raymond Grebey Jr., K ’49, removed it from the smoke-filled Bull’s Eye Room and Jack Furness Jr., K ’52, kept it in his files. When President Jordan declined to honor the agreement, the East Wing Association and the Kenyon Chapter sued, with substantial help from James Squires, K ’50, to enforce it. Kenyon moved for summary judgment in its favor on the basis of some 300 pages of arguments and cases, which—after reviewing the documentation—the judge flatly rejected.

Thereafter, Bob (with the help of Herbert Van Arsdale, K ’60, a number of ADPhi trustees, and the new President, Rob Oden), was able to settle the case on terms almost identical to those previously rejected by President Jordan. Under the settlement, Alpha Delta Phi relinquished its right to East Wing under the agreement in return for the college’s agreeing to erect and maintain a new Lodge around the existing Lodge. A fund drive was successful, and the construction has also been completed. The new Lodge assures the long-term viability of our Chapter.

Robert Price, K ’58

While President of the Fraternity, he was responsible for the rechartering of Johns Hopkins and Bowdoin Chapters and the chartering of Lambda Phi Chapter (with the help of Thomas M. Neely, K ’74).

[A variation of this article first appeared in The Kenyon.]

ADΦ Celebrates 175th Anniversary, Brothers Who Are Making A Difference

(continued from page one)

in 2006-2007 was awarded to the Northeastern and Brandeis Affiliates, both with GPAs of 3.2. We announced at the 175th Convention that the fraternity would award a grant of $10,000 to any undergraduate brother who was named a Rhodes Scholar.

The Alpha Delt Story, a documentary: Alpha Delta Phi has an historic 175 year-old story to tell and we are producing a DVD documentary on the fraternity, from our founding to the present, to tell this story. It is our hope that this DVD tribute will help each chapter with recruiting and fund raising.

To finance this effort, however, we need additional support from alumni. All alumni who donate a tax-deductible gift of $100 or more will receive a complimentary copy of the DVD when it’s completed.

Alpha Delta Phi—a lifelong commitment: Our continued success is the result of the support of many committed alumni. Together we’ve made significant strides in re-energizing our fraternity and have helped to perpetuate the Alpha Delt environment that allows young men to learn and practice leadership skills and self-governance.

Your Board of Governors thanks all of you who contribute to ADΦ so that we can continue to build bridges so that others can follow. You’ve helped us more than double annual donations over the last three years, helping to provide the increasing resources needed to achieve our goals. We hope you will help us continue this positive momentum.

Please remember, all of your donations to SELEF are used for educational and literary purposes and are fully tax deductible.

XAIPE!

Fraternally yours,

Jon Vick, HAM ’64
President,
The Alpha Delta Phi International

Jon Vick, HAM ’64
Bro. Don French, MI ’53, receives the Andrew Onderdonk Award for Alumni Excellence on behalf of the Miami Realty Association from Bro. Ken Growney, COR ’82.

Brothers gather around the gravesite of our Founder, Samuel Eells.

Bro. Mark Richardson, HAM ’81, presents Bro. William Waldron, HAM ’58, with Board of Governors Award.

Brothers and guests during the Memorial Service in the Hamilton College Chapel.

Bro. Steve Ehrfurth, MINN ’06, right, presenting Bro. Brady Gordon, BC ’09, with the E.O. Blackman Award for Chapter Excellence which is given to the best chapter of the year.

Brothers Danny Martin, ILL ’10, Tom Livingston, ILL ’90, and Cole Fisher, ILL ’08, outside the Hamilton College Chapel.

Brothers Alex Lord, K ’08, Chris Mehrman, NIT ’07, Joe Gheradi, NIT ’08, and Ted McDonald, NIT ’07, await the Erie Canal cruise.

Bro. Ron Zaykowski, R ’93, presenting the Samuel Eells Award to Liz Glick-Best, the widow of Bro. Jeremy Glick, R ’92.

Bro. Jay Flynn, MASS ’85, receives the Board of Governors Award from Bro. Ed Donahue, JH ’68.

Bro. Don French, MI ’53, receives the Andrew Onderdonk Award for Alumni Excellence on behalf of the Miami Realty Association from Bro. Ken Growney, COR ’82.
Remembering Mark E. Larson, WIS ’75, MINN ’01

To many of us, he was both a close friend and the true definition of a brother. Brother Mark E. Larson was initiated in February 1972 into the Wisconsin Chapter of The Alpha Delta Phi and graduated with a molecular biology degree from UW in 1975. At Wisconsin, Mark held many elected positions within the chapter, such as House Manager and Homecoming Chairman. After graduation, he became a volunteer EMT and firefighter for the city of Madison. He also became a researcher at the University of Wisconsin in the department of ophthalmology and visual sciences, where he researched the effect of diabetes on the human eye.

Later, Mark became the executive director of the Lions Eye Bank of Wisconsin in Madison, one of the largest eye transplant clinics in the state of Wisconsin. His knowledge of the medical field allowed him to become one of the most respected individuals in his field at the time. At one point, he consolidated the Milwaukee Eye Bank into the Madison Eye Bank to form one state-wide clinic.

He was a member of many professional societies, including the Eye Bank Association of America’s Board of Directors, the Pan-American Association of Eye Banks, and the UW Organ Procurement Organization Board of Directors.

Mark began his career with The Alpha Delta Phi in 1986 when he became the Midwestern Regional Director. Brother Larson joined the Board of Governors in 1987, and a year later, at the 156th Convention in Washington, D.C., he became the 73rd President of the Alpha Delta Phi International. After his presidency ended in 1991, he moved on to become Vice President, Secretary, and eventually Treasurer in 1999-2001 when service on the Board ended because of term limits. His dedication to the Fraternity also brought him all the way to Miami to see the Three Tenors perform. Mark also had a love and appreciation for fine dining and good food. He frequently made trips to some of the top restaurants in the area and often visited Charlie Trotter’s in Chicago, which has been voted one of the top 10 restaurants in the world. His taste for delicacies brought him around the world, tasting various styles of cooking and flavors.

Brother Larson always remained close to his own chapter but he was also helpful across the border in Minnesota. His devotion to the Midwest region helped the Minnesota Chapter during the many recolonization efforts in the 1990s. His personal involvement helped the Chapter stay afloat during those dark times. His dedication to the Midwest region almost led to an Alpha Delta Chapter at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, but unfortunately, it never materialized into a solid effort. The shining moment came at the conclusion of the Annual Founder’s Day celebration in 2001 when Brother Larson donated his personal Brothers-in-Arms statue to the Minnesota Chapter to replace the original statue, which had been stolen in the 1970s. In recognition of his gracious gift, the brothers of the Minnesota Chapter initiated him as a member, which kept him involved with the operations of the Chapter and the Alumni Society until his last days.

For those who knew Mark, he was one of the most well-rounded brothers many of us have had the privilege to meet. His sense of humor and never-ending jokes made him a fun and loveable person to visit and to be around. Brother Larson also had an unselfish quality that allowed him to place others above himself. He always did anything to help a brother. He was mentor to some and a good friend to others. Brother Larson passed away unexpectedly at his Madison, Wisconsin, home in August 2007 at the age of 54. He is survived by his mother and three sisters. His passing leaves a large hole in many hearts and an even larger hole in the history of The Alpha Delta Phi. May his name be forever on our lips and may we all be united in that final chapter meeting.

Steve Erfurth, MINN ’06

The Larson Scholarship

The Samuel Eells Literary and Educational Foundation would like to announce the creation of the Mark E. Larson Scholarship Fund.

In memory of his dedication and deep passion for The Alpha Delta Phi, an annual scholarship in Mark’s name will be made to two brothers, one each from the Wisconsin and Minnesota Chapters, based on grade point average and service to their respective chapters. If you are interested in making a donation to this scholarship fund, please send a check to:

Samuel Eells Literary and Educational Foundation
6126 Lincoln Ave.
Morton Grove, IL 60053

Please make a designation on your check that this money is for the Larson Scholarship.
Honoring The Sacrifice Of Colby J. Umbrell, JH ’03

JOHNS HOPKINS GRADUATE
IS KILLED IN IRAQ

FORMER FOOTBALL PLAYER DIES
IN ROADSIDE BOMBING

In the months before graduating from the Johns Hopkins University, Colby J. Umbrell’s athletic pursuits began to turn from football. Sometimes alone, sometimes with a family friend, he ran mile after mile through the city’s streets, training for marathons, a career in the military—and for the distinct possibility of going to Iraq. He ran three marathons, two before earning a Hopkins degree in political science in 2004. He became an Army officer. And he began his first tour to Iraq six months ago.

On Thursday, the Army first lieutenant was killed by a roadside bomb in Musayyib, Iraq, about 40 miles south of Baghdad. He was 26.

Lieutenant Umbrell is the second Hopkins graduate known to have died in Iraq within a month, according to school officials. Army Capt. Jonathan Grassbaugh, a 2003 graduate, was killed while on patrol April 7. Hopkins President William R. Brody notified faculty and students of Umbrell’s death in an e-mail on Friday.

“The bonds that we forge with one another when we become members of this university community are not broken—indeed, they are strengthened—by graduation,” Dr. Brody said in the statement. “It is those strong bonds that pull at our hearts today as we think of Colby and Jonathan.” Lieutenant Umbrell, who was raised in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, about 45 miles north of Philadelphia, played three years as a reserve defensive lineman for the Hopkins football team. His last year was as a junior in 2002, when the Blue Jays won a share of their first Centennial Conference title, the first of four straight for Hopkins.

Hopkins football coach Jim Margraff described Lieutenant Umbrell as a “high-energy guy” who was impeded from playing a more prominent role on the team because of high school injuries.

“He talked about going into the military,” Mr. Margraff said. “It’s one of the things that he aspired to do. He was hard-working, focused, detail-oriented, honest and someone you can trust with anything.”

Lieutenant Umbrell developed an interest in the military in 1998 while attending a football camp at West Point, said his father, Mark Umbrell. He had considered attending the military academy, but he settled on Hopkins, which provided the big-city atmosphere he craved and was close to Washington. His family visited him a few times a year in Baltimore, hitting the usual tourist destinations such as the Inner Harbor and Fell’s Point. After leaving the football team, Lieutenant Umbrell, who was about 6 feet tall, worked to lose 50 pounds to get into military shape. He ran his first marathon in Chicago in 2003. While finishing up his college career overseas in Italy, he ran his second in Florence.

Lieutenant Umbrell joined the Army shortly after leaving Hopkins and became a Ranger and a paratrooper. His father said he wanted to become a lawyer and work for the military’s Judge Advocate General’s Corps. Lieutenant Umbrell was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, out of Fort Richardson, Alaska.

“He knew he was going when he signed up,” Mark Umbrell said. “He said all along that that was something he wanted to do. He felt it was part of something really important. It was important to establish democracy. He knew it wasn’t going to be something that happened in a few years. He knew that, and he paid the price. He knew and we knew that could have happened. It’s the only thing that keeps us from going crazy.”

By Phillip McGowan
Reprinted with permission from The Baltimore Sun
At its 175th ΑΔΦ Convention, held at Hamilton College, the Board of Governors announced that the Samuel Eells Award had been granted to Bro. Michael Castle, HAM ’61. Bro. Castle has distinguished himself throughout Delaware and the United States with exceptional public service as Governor of Delaware for two terms and United States Congressman for Delaware for a record eight terms.

The Samuel Eells Award was established in 1939 to serve as a public embrace of distinguished public service, outstanding service to education, meritorious literary or other artistic achievement and eminence in the business or professional world. We send our congratulations to Bro. Castle.

Jon Vick, HAM ’64, President
The Alpha Delta Phi
Bro. Michael Castle, HAM ’61
being presented the Samuel Eells Award by Bro. Philip Ballard, COR ’00, in Washington.

Congressman Mike Castle, HAM ’61, Receives Samuel Eells Award

The Alpha Delta Phi Story On DVD

Who are we as Alpha Deltas? What is it that binds us together? How can we continue to build a legacy that will thrive for another 175 years? These are some of the questions we hope to answer as a part of The Alpha Delta Phi Story DVD. Film production has already started on this interactive DVD that will focus on our history and legacy as well as our hopes for the future.

On August 4-5, 2007, an all-Alpha Delt film and production crew was able to capture over 20 interviews from brothers across the United States and Canada at our 175th International Convention held at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York. We are continuing to gather interviews, historical photos, and to create a DVD document that will serve as a permanent statement of our rich history.

All of our chapters will be able to put this DVD to good use—to help with fundraising and to help gather support from alumni. This DVD will also be used as a recruitment tool to help to promote the ideals of Alpha Delta Phi to potential members going through the rush process. Once production is completed, The Alpha Delta Phi Story will have its world premiere at our 176th convention in Berkeley, California, in August 2008.

To move forward with this project, your assistance and active participation are needed. We can all recognize the importance of painting a full picture of Alpha Delta Phi from across as many of our chapters as possible. This requires participation by many brothers. Any donation you can make to help this production be the best it can be will be welcome. We aim to raise $12,000 to ensure that the project will be completed. All donors will receive recognition on the finished DVD.

The levels for donors include:

- An “Executive Producer” for a donation of $2,500 or more
- An “Associate Producer” for a donation of $1,000 - $2,499
- A listed “Producer” for a donation of $500 - $1,000
- A “Very Special Thanks” for a donation of $100 to $499

Please help us preserve and promote The Alpha Delta Phi. Use the enclosed gift card to make a donation and note “DVD” on the card. Donations to SELEF are tax deductible.

– David Green, ADEL ’94

DVD Producer
Andy Fiedler, ADEL ’03

Request For Book Reviews

Please forward a copy of the reviews of books by Alpha Delt authors to Terrie Eastmade at: ΑΑΔΑΦΦΦ Headquarters, 6126 Lincoln Avenue, Morton Grove, IL 60053.

Send e-mail to office@alphadeltaphi.org

Save the Date!

A Midwest Alpha Delta Phi Holiday Luncheon will take place on December 20, 2007, at noon, at the Mid Day Club, 21 S. Clark, Chicago, Illinois.

RSVP to Terrie Eastmade at TheADPhi@aol.com.
Prolific thriller writer whose conspiratorial plots of unimaginable evil defined the airport novel

The thriller writer Robert Ludlum, an Alpha Delt from Wesleyan University class of ‘51, was one of a handful of authors who invented and came to define airport fiction. He enjoyed a 30-year writing career in which, according to his publisher, he sold more than 210 million copies of his 21 novels.

Put crudely, Ludlum was the fictional arm of the globalization of American culture. Before him, its popular fiction had been rooted in established genres—westerns, crime fiction, historical romance, sub-James Bond spy thrillers. Like Arthur Hailey and Tom Clancy, Ludlum blasted aside such boundaries, mirroring, as he did so, the rise of the modern Hollywood blockbuster. And yet he did not write his first novel, The Scarlatti Inheritance (1971), until he was in his 40s.

Ludlum was born in New York, and grew up in Short Hills, New Jersey. He left home as a teenager in 1941 and, getting a part in a touring play, tried to make it as an actor. His parents soon rescued him from Broadway, after which he spent two years with the U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific in the aftermath of the second world war. He then attended Wesleyan University, in Connecticut, where he met his actress wife, Mary Ryducha. [Ludlum was an Alpha Delt at Wesleyan.]

Together they went into the theater, where Ludlum spent the next two decades working as an actor, with minor roles on television and on Broadway, and then as a producer, running what was allegedly America’s first shopping-mall theater, the Playhouse, in Paramus, New Jersey. In 1960, he produced The Owl And The Pussycat, using a then unknown actor named Alan Alda.

Having a famously deep voice, Ludlum also made some money doing voice-overs on the side; he once claimed that uttering the words “Plunge works fast,” in a toilet cleaner commercial, put one of his sons through college. When the theater business began to pall, he quit to write his first novel.

The key ingredients were there from the start—a grand conspiracy, and forces of unimaginable evil that only one individual could thwart. The Scarlatti Inheritance was a preposterous, yet compelling, yarn revolving around the notion that, back in the 1920s, a worldwide cabal of high-ranking Nazi sympathizers made a plan to ensure world domination.

The book was an immediate success, and Ludlum followed it up with a book a year through the 1970s, each one with the same signature-title construction. The Osterman Weekend (1972) was filmed (unmemorably) by Sam Peckinpah. The Bourne Identity (1980), perhaps the pick of the bunch, has just been filmed, with Matt Damon in the lead. One after another, the titles continued to sell more than 20 million each, Ludlum’s readers apparently happy enough despite the fact that his formula was becoming ever more transparent and repetitive.

Today, it has become the critical norm to rubbish Ludlum and his ilk as purveyors of semi-literate, right wing tosh. This is unfair on several counts. For a start, no one survives long in popular fiction without having the ability to keep the pages turning. Secondly, Ludlum was not the right winger people tend to take mass-market thriller writers to be—the gung-ho Clancy is actually the exception to the rule. Indeed, Ludlum frequently cited living through the red-baiting McCarthy years as a key influence on his plots, which often revolved around neo-Nazi conspiracies and rarely evoked the “red menace.”

Not that Ludlum should be read as a serious political commentator in the way that one might approach Eric Ambler or John Le Carré. He himself would probably have disparaged any such claims, being much given to remarks like, “I don’t believe that my first name is Leo, or that my last name is Tolstoy. I’m a storyteller.” And that’s right. His great talent was as a storyteller.

Another keystone of Ludlum’s popularity was painstaking research. He explained that he spent about three months on research, and about 15 months writing his books. Thanks to that, his thrillers always had the air of being written by a man in the know, an important quality in popular fiction aimed at the male reader—and Ludlum is very much a writer of boys’ books—who likes a hefty amount of factual information.

It is as if reading a novel would be an unforgivable indulgence if the reader did not learn something concrete from it: how to evade an infra-red security system, or the precise specification of the latest terrorist weapon. It is a trend that reached its logical conclusion in the work of Ludlum’s successor, Clancy, whose books offer enough technical information for the reader to construct his own nuclear submarine.

As Ludlum’s prodigious pace slowed a little, following a triple bypass in the mid-1990s, he launched a series, Robert Ludlum’s Covert-One, in which his fictional ideas were fleshed out with the help of a co-writer, Gayle Lynds.

However, hardcore fans were relieved to see him go solo again with his latest book, The Prometheus Deception (2000). It is typical Ludlum: a hero who realises that nothing is what it seems, a global conspiracy and endless double-crosses. This time, the menace is not neo-Nazism but the computerized surveillance culture.

Alpha Delt brothers will be glad to know that this will not be Ludlum’s final work. At the time of his death, his publishers were quick to announce that he had been working on several books, which they were going to continue to publish.

By John Williams

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