

# Deo, familiae, patriae et Harvardiae - the Emersons

Harvard graduates have a long proud history of service as warriors in the US military. All gave some and some gave all!.

At Memorial Square in the center of Concord Massachusetts, the Vietnam Memorial lists the names of 5 local men **Killed in Action** in Vietnam (3 Marines & 1 soldier who had enlisted) plus a Marine officer. Since I worked in Concord at the time, I was curious about these 5 Concord warriors and viewed their background details on the virtual online Vietnam Wall Memorial online. The Marine officer was Captain William “Bing” Emerson USMC. From the archives of the Concord Library, I later discovered that “Bing’s” funeral was held at Memorial Church (in the Harvard Yard) & was from Harvard where he played lacrosse and lived in Dunster House. “Bing” became a Marine a helicopter pilot and was awarded the Silver Star for valor before he was heroically **Killed in Action** while rescuing Marines from a hot “*Landing Zone*” in South Vietnam. On the adjacent World War II Memorial (in Concord), William Forbes Emerson (“Bing’s” uncle) was also a pilot who was killed on deployment during that conflict. Bing’s 4<sup>th</sup> grandfather died from disease while serving on deployment in the Colonial Army during the Revolutionary War. Another Emerson Harvard graduate (i.e. Stephen) was **Killed in Action** during the Civil War as a private in a Union infantry regiment. A 3<sup>rd</sup> William Emerson (Bing’s cousin) who was also **Killed in Action** as an Army 2<sup>nd</sup> LT during World War I when his plane was shot down in France. “Bing’s” father (David) was also a Harvard grad (HC-38) who survived deployments in North Africa and Europe during World War II in as a highly decorated fighter pilot in the Army Air Corps. After his release from active duty, David Emerson became an investment banker and continued to serve in the active USAF Reserve from which he retired as a colonel.

In Concord on a nearby World War I memorial erected in 1921, the below succinct poem is inscribed which was written in 1863 by “Bing” Emerson’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Grandfather for the funeral service in Boston of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw (HC-1860) of the 2<sup>nd</sup> MA & 54<sup>th</sup> MA (Infantry Regiment). As the commanding officer of 54<sup>th</sup>, Colonel Shaw was **Killed in Action** while leading his “*Negro/ black*” enlisted troops in a frontal assault of the Confederate Fort Wagner in SC. This somber poem captures the essence of sacrifice service and military service of many Harvard as well as all other warriors which certainly applied to the poet’s direct ancestors & descendants. The Harvard patriots highlighted below were not career military soldiers but answered the call of their country and went into harm’s way during in a serious time of national crisis.

*“So nigh is grandeur to our dust  
So near to God is man  
When duty whispers low, thou must.  
The youth replies I can”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (Harvard College class of 1821)

## Harvard College - class of 1761

**Chaplain William Emerson** Massachusetts Militia (Colonel Reed’s Concord Regiment) **[Died on active duty - disease]**



Reverend Emerson was born in Concord (MA) in 1740 and lived in “*The Old Manse*” at Concord. After college, he became a minister in his hometown and served as the chaplain to the Provincial Congress when it met at Concord in October 1774. After the start of hostilities, Bill left his wife and 7-year-old child in June 1776 to join the Continental Army as a chaplain. Unfortunately in October 1776, he died of camp fever while campaigning in upstate New York. His only son, William, also graduated from Harvard and became a famous preacher in Boston with 8 children among whom was the famous American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (HC-1841).

Chaplain Emerson’s 3<sup>rd</sup> grandson David Emerson (HC-1938) who was an Army Air Corps fighter pilot in World War II whose brother Bill was an aviator in the same conflict and was killed in action (**KIA**). Chaplain Emerson’s 4<sup>th</sup> grandson, William Emerson (HC-1964), was a Marine helicopter pilot who was **KIA** in Vietnam.

# Deo, familiae, patriae et Harvardiae - the Emersons (cont.)

## Harvard College - class of 1861

**Private Stephen Goodhue Emerson** - 1<sup>st</sup> Massachusetts Regiment (Infantry)

**[Killed in Action]**

Private Emerson was born in Chester (NH) in 1838. He attended Chester Academy and then Phillips Andover prior to matriculating at Harvard College. His father was teacher for many years before going into business in Boston but later ran into financial difficulties. As a college junior, Stephen became much more religious and spent a lot of time teaching & assisting at a church in Chelsea (MA). After graduating from Harvard, he entered the Andover Theological Seminary in September 1861 with the intent of becoming a minister. 9 months later with the Civil War raging, Stephen surprisingly mentioned to fellow seminarians that he had enlisted in the 1<sup>st</sup> MA in July 1862. After a month of basic training in Cambridge (MA), he reached his regiment in Virginia. He initially had 3 months of picket duty and building roads before participating in several battles, and numerous battles, Under the command of General Hooker in May of 1863, Private Emerson was listed as "*missing in action*" in the **Battle of Chancellorsville** (VA). His family hoped that he had been captured by the Confederates but later learned that he was not on a released rolls of prisoners of war. One of Steve's friends actually journeyed to Virginia to try and recover his body but he was not permitted to reach the battlefield. Almost a year later, a regimental mate who was a recently patrolled POW reported that he and Steve were caught behind enemy lines during a retreat and completely surrounded by Confederates. As they were retreating, he saw Private Emerson hit by a "*minié*" ball which passed through his head and he fell without a word.

Private Emerson participated in the following combat engagements: **Mottawoman Creek** (MD), **Siege of Yorktown** (VA), **Williamsburg** (VA), **Fair Oaks/ Seven Pines** (VA), **Oak Grove** (VA), **Savage Station** (VA), **White Oak Swamp** (VA), **Fredericksburg** (VA), **Malvern** (VA), **Harrison's Landing** (VA), **Bristoe Station** (aka **Kettle Run**, VA), **Catlett's Station** (VA), **2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Bull Run** (VA), **Fort Lyon** (VA), **Munson's Hill** (VA), **"The Mud March"** (VA), **Falmouth** (VA), **Rappahannock Bridge** (VA) and finally **Chancellorsville** (VA).

## Harvard College - class of 1916

**2<sup>nd</sup> LT William K. Emerson** US Army (12<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron) **Croix de Guerre & Purple Heart**

**[Killed in Action]**



Bill was born in New York City in 1894 and prepared for Harvard at the Middlesex School. At Harvard, he was on the football team and crew as well a member of the Hasty Pudding Institute of 1770 & the Spee Club. In the summer of his junior year, he served with the American Field Service on the front lines in France driving ambulances in combat for the Allied forces.

In January 1916, he returned to Harvard and graduated with his class. He returned to France in January 1917 and reenlisted in the American Field Service where he received the Croix de Guerre for conspicuous bravery while evacuating wounded under fire near Monastir, France. At the end of the 1917, he was in Serbia and then returned to France where he was successful in getting commissioned as a 2<sup>nd</sup> LT in the US Army Field Artillery. After training and serving in the 15<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery, Bill transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> Aero Squadron as an artillery observer. On his first flight near Toulon (France), LT Emerson was shot down and died as a result.

## Deo, familiae, patriae et Harvardiae - the Emersons (cont.)

### Harvard College - class of 1922

Seaman Rubert Emerson US Navy

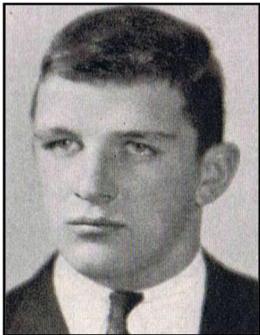
Rubert was born in Rye (NY) in 1899. He enlisted into the US Navy during world War I and served from 1917 to 1918. After receiving his AB from Harvard, Rubert received a PhD in 1927 from the London School of Economics. He then joined the faculty of Harvard University where he was a professor of political science who specialized in Asia and Africa nationalism until his retirement in 1970. He died in 1979.

### Harvard College - class of 1937

Colonel David Emerson US Air Force Reserve (2<sup>nd</sup> fighter squadron, 52<sup>nd</sup> fighter group)



Bronze Star



David (the great-grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson [H-1821]) was born and raised in Concord MA. He graduated from the Belmont Hill School prior to entering Harvard. After college, he joined the Civil Air Patrol and worked for Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in Connecticut. After Pearl Harbor, he was commissioned into the US Army Air Corps and later received his wings as a fighter pilot. He flew P-51 fighters in numerous combat actions both in North Africa and Europe from D Day until the German surrender. After the war, David went into investment banking and continued in the active Air Force Reserve until his military retirement in 1971. He also on served many civic boards before his death in Concord in 1998. His oldest son, Bing [H-1964], was Killed in Action in Vietnam.

### Harvard College - class of 1964



Captain William Emerson US Marine Corps (HMM-265, MAG-36, III MAF Silver Star & Purple Heart [Killed in Action]



William (*Bing*) Emerson was born in Concord (MA) in 1941. At Harvard, Bing was a resident of Dunster House and a government major. He was a member of varsity lacrosse and freshman football teams as well as the Delphic Club. After college, Bing graduated from Marine Corps OCS & later The Basic School at Quantico (VA). Bing then earned his “*Wings of Gold*” as a Naval aviator at the Naval Flight School at Pensacola (FL). After helicopter training, he went to Vietnam in February 1968 and was Killed in Action when his CH 46 helicopter was hit by hostile fire on 20 November 1968 in Quan Nam Province in the I Corps section of northern South Vietnam. Three CH 46 helo troop carriers, including Bing’s, were lost that day while transporting Marines of 3/5 into a hot LZ during the Mead River Operation in an area SE of Da Nang.

His mission was to transport infantry to support Marines who were greatly outnumbered by the North Vietnam Army. The CH 46’s were exposed to heavy ground fire & hit with an RPG and small arms fire while going about 50 MPH about 50 feet off the deck. As a result, Bing was Killed in Action and his body was recovered and repatriated for burial with full military honors at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord (MA). By the way, Bing’s great-great grandfather was the noted poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (H-1821).

Captain Emerson’s Silver Star citation: “*The President takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Captain William Emerson, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Pilot with Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron (HMM) 265, Marine Aircraft Group (MAG) 36, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of 4 November 1968, Captain Emerson launched as Section Leader of a flight of 2 CH-46 transport helicopters assigned the emergency extraction of a USMC recon team that had captured an enemy soldier and was being pursued by a large North Vietnamese Army force southwest of Da Nang.*”

## Deo, familiae, patriae et Harvardiae - the Emersons (cont.)

**Captain Emerson's Silver Star citation (continued):** *Arriving over the designated area, he was requested to attempt a hoist extraction of the prisoner, and as he entered the zone and commenced a hover, his aircraft came under a heavy volume of hostile automatic weapons fire, forcing him to abort the extraction attempt. After refueling and rearming at An Hoa, Capt. Emerson returned to the hazardous area and, observing a potential landing zone, guided the ground unit to the designated position while calmly providing the patrol with words of encouragement. When the Marines arrived at the site, they informed Captain Emerson that the zone was unsuitable for landing. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, he unhesitatingly elected to attempt the extraction and, skillfully maneuvering his aircraft in an evasive approach to avoid detection by the enemy, fearlessly entered the area and hovered with the loading ramp resting on an abandoned hostile bunker. As the patrol embarked, the aircraft came under intense enemy automatic weapons fire supporting an assault by a large North Vietnamese Army force. Disregarding his own safety, Captain Emerson steadfastly maintained his dangerously exposed position while directing armed helicopters in attacking the advancing enemy, forcing them to withdraw. When the hostile force delivered anti-tank rocket fire at his aircraft, he ignored the rounds impacting nearby and calmly waited until all the team members were on board, and then rapidly departed the hazardous area. By his courage, superior aeronautical ability & unwavering devotion to duty, Captain. Emerson inspired all who observed him and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.*



Paul E. Mawn

Captain US Navy (Ret.)

Board of Directors - Harvard Veterans Alumni Organization

Chairman Emeritus - Advocates for Harvard ROTC

President Emeritus - Concord Consulting Group LLC

**Sources:** Harvard Alumni Magazine and various Harvard reunion reports plus information from various veterans and their families. e. Harvard undergraduates in particular as well as others should be aware and appreciate that many Harvard alumni before them paid a price in time, blood and restricted earnings for our national security and liberty. Such military veterans at one point of their life wrote a blank check made payable to the USA for an amount up to and including their own life. Hopefully the highlighting the military service of Harvard veterans will reinforce an awareness that “***Freedom is not free***”.