Farewell

TO THE
GREATEST
TIGER OF
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True titans come along perhaps once or twice in a generation. Standing just 5 feet 7 inches tall, Edward “Eddie” Wayne LeBaron, Jr. ’50 was one of his generation’s giants.

Entering College of the Pacific when he was just 16, LeBaron went on to become a professional football player, a courageous war hero, a contented family man, and a successful lawyer and businessman. He died April 1 at the age of 85, having lived an All-American life of legend.

“Dad lived a life of consequence. It touched a lot of individuals in a positive way,” Wayne LeBaron, one of his three sons, told hundreds of guests during an April 14 Celebration of Life ceremony in Faye Spanos Concert Hall. “And beyond the awards and honors he received, it is the scope and the breadth of those personal accomplishments and relationships and the admirable qualities he routinely exhibited that left the deepest impression on me.”

“He was a man of outsized talents” — Wayne LeBaron
LeBaron joined the Marine Corps Reserve when he was 18 while still a student at Pacific. The following year, he led the Tigers to an undefeated season where the team outscored opponents 575–66 and became ranked 10th in the nation. He was also named the most valuable player of the 1949 East-West Shrine Game.

He made his way onto the professional field when he was drafted in the 10th round of the NFL draft by the Washington Redskins. He played two exhibition games for that team.

Then it was at a practice session for the College All-Star Game that the reserves were called up after the outbreak of the Korean War. He played in the game and then was ordered to U.S. Marine Base Quantico in Virginia as a commissioned officer. He arrived too late to practice firing his weapon, making him “possibly the only Marine in history who was sent into combat without undergoing target practice,” he wrote in the Proceedings column.

Arriving in Inchon, South Korea, he was assigned to the 7th Marine Division during a push by forces from the north. He quickly became a platoon leader and then a senior platoon commander, leading patrols deep into enemy territory. He received the Bronze Star medal for heroic actions in fierce combat at Korea’s Heartbreak Ridge, during which he was wounded twice and received the Purple Heart.

LeBaron returned to Quantico in December 1951 to teach tactics, but he left active duty nine months later to return to professional football. Back on the field in Washington, D.C., he was an immediate success on the gridiron and was selected as the 1952 Rookie of the Year. He was also a four-time Pro Bowl selection and the leading NFL passer in 1958.

Along the way he earned the nickname “Little General” for his stature and on-field skills and leadership.

Planning for life after football, he attended George Washington University law school in the late 1950s during the football season...
off-season and passed the California bar exam. But before he could begin a law practice, he joined the fledgling Dallas Cowboys as that team’s first quarterback. (Roger Staubach, Hall of Fame quarterback for the Cowboys, sent a bouquet to the April 14 celebration of LeBaron’s life.) His last season in the NFL came in 1962 after Don Meredith took over as quarterback for the Cowboys. In all, he had played 11 years in the NFL and one year for his former Pacific coach, Siemering, then with the Canadian Football League’s Calgary Stampeders.

LeBaron was then a CBS sports announcer for a time before continuing his career in the NFL in 1977 as the general manager and then later executive vice president and chief operating officer for the Atlanta Falcons. He was named the league’s Executive of the Year in 1980. He also served on the NFL’s Competition Committee.

A NEW DIRECTION

After his NFL years, he had a successful career as an attorney and practiced law in Texas, Nevada and Georgia. His law partner in Las Vegas, Joe Brown, remembered following LeBaron’s athletic career and was delighted when he ended up working with LeBaron.

He recalled LeBaron’s calm demeanor under pressure and called him an excellent lawyer, as well as “sweet, considerate and kind.”

Before retiring in 1997, LeBaron returned to California in 1988 to practice law as a partner at Pillsbury, Madison and Sutro in Sacramento. He had also formed a real estate development company, which still operates an office in Stockton, and worked in various capacities for the Northern California Golf Association.

“One of the lessons current student-athletes can learn from the way Eddie lived life is that you can be both — you can be a scholar and an athlete,” Leland said. “You can study hard and achieve academically, and also be an athlete. Eddie did that.”

A LEGENDARY LIFE

Hundreds of family and friends attended the April 14 Celebration of Life ceremony for LeBaron in Faye Spanos Concert Hall. Former Pacific Chaplain Rev. Dr. Gary Putnam, Pacific Athletic Director Ted Leland, and family and friends spoke of LeBaron’s life and legacy.

A contingent of U.S. Marines at the ceremony included a general. A Marine Honor Guard fired a 21-gun salute outside Faye Spanos Concert Hall and returned inside to present a flag to the family.

“One of the things that I’ve learned over a period of time — and I learned this from Eddie LeBaron more than anyone else — is that you can be a high achiever and be a great person,” said Ted Leland during the ceremony. “You can be a high achiever and never talk down to anyone. You can be a high achiever and meet everyone on their own terms.”

What LeBaron learned at Pacific seemed to stay with him, too. “He talked a lot about his time at Pacific,” Wayne LeBaron said. “A lot of his friends throughout his life were from Pacific.”

The younger LeBaron said he and his siblings often marveled at stories his parents told over the years — many of them dating to his college days — and how they stood the test of time. “Eddie really remains a role model to the Pacific community and the general public,” Leland said. “He was a heck of a guy. … He stayed connected to Pacific all through his life. He was the kind of guy who kept friends throughout his life.”

He is remembered fondly by his wife, Doralee, whom he married in Pacific’s Morris Chapel in 1954; the couple’s three sons, Edward “Wayne” III, Richard and William; five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren; and the many colleagues, friends and alumni who knew and loved him.

2002 - EAST-WEST SHRINE GAME HALL OF FAME
2004 - ROBERT T. MONAGAN AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE-PACIFIC OMEGA PHI ALPHA CHAPTER OF THE DELTA UPSILON FRATERNITY ALUMNI CORPORATION
2004 - BAY AREA SPORTS HALL OF FAME. FIRST CENTRAL VALLEY SPORTS FIGURE TO BE INDUCTED
2006 - PACIFIC ATHLETICS AMOS ALONZO STAGG AWARD OF HONOR
2008 - U.S. MARINE CORPS SPORTS HALL OF FAME
2009 - UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC PRESIDENT’S MEDAL OF ACHIEVEMENT
2002 - MILITARY HONORS - BRONZE STAR FOR HEROIC ACTIONS DURING FIERCE COMBAT AT KOREA’S HEARTBREAK RIDGE; AWARDED PURPLE HEART FOR INJURIES SUFFERED IN BATTLE