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The Ghosts Of Bear Down Gym



The University of Arizona Wildcat's battle cry of Bear Down And Fight song (hear it here) comes from the Thursday October 18, 1926 final dying words of a 22 year old wildly popular charismatic student leader, and multi talented athlete who often trained in what was then the newly built Men's Gymnasium as the Bear Down Gym was originally named.

In 1925 John 'Button' Byrd Salmon was the President of the Student Body, the Varsity Football Team Starting Quarterback, and the Team Captain. John was also a three-year star catcher for the University of Arizona Baseball Team with obvious major league potential.

Nicknamed 'Button' by his family for his small height and frame (he stood 5'8", weighing 145 pounds) and his unbelievably impish good looks, John was extremely popular with his teammates, his coach, his fellow students, the people of Tucson, all the schools girls, and

many local young girls in the then small
dusty town of Tucson, Arizona.

In 1925, the year just before his untimely
death, John 'Button' Byrd Salmon completely
amazed a stadium crowd of over 30,000
University of Southern California (USC) Trojan
fans as well as his University of Arizona
supporters watching up in the stands at the
game against USC in 1925 Los Angeles with his
almost superhuman powerful punts, literally
flying over the top of opponents, and his
totally fearless defensive plays. He was one
very talented athlete without fear who was a
'hard as a rock kid' with wild curly reddish
hair and freckles that inspired his teammates
to bestow the apt nickname on Button of 'The
Leaping Tuna.'



1925 John 'Button' Byrd Salmon

John 'Button' Salmon was also an exceptionally talented baseball catcher with clearly recognizable major league talents. In the spring of 1925 his 'clutch two base hit' drove in the winning run against the University of Southern California USC in a very heated intense baseball game.

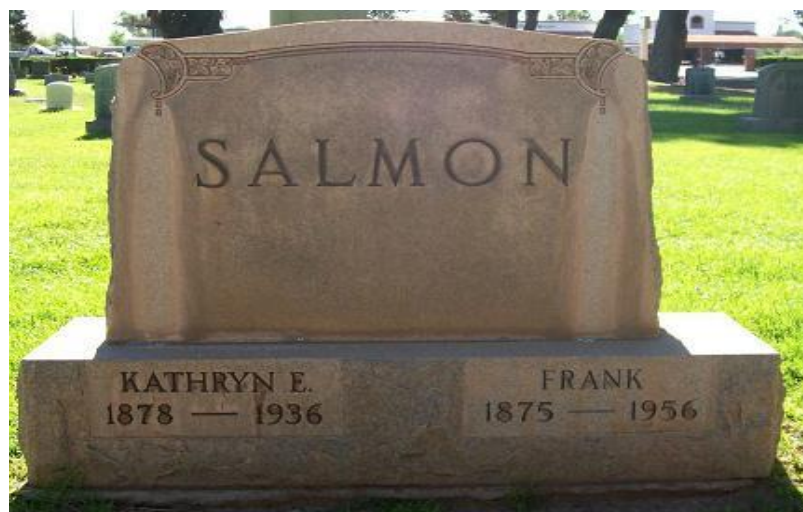
John 'Button' Byrd Salmon was elected as the Student Body President just four days after that amazing baseball game later referring to his 'hit' as 'my 200 vote double.'

John's father, Frank Salmon was born in 1875 and raised in Texas. Frank, was an educated smart tough no nonsense but always very

supportive family man who worked hard in upper management for the Phelps Dodge Copper Corporation in Bisbee Arizona during the 1917 Miners Strike when the miners were rounded up at gunpoint, loaded into railroad cattle box cars, taken to an isolated area in New Mexico with no food or water, and left there during what was called "The Bisbee Deportation of 1917".

Button's mother Kathryn E. (Simpson) Salmon was a gentle yet tough fine lady and very loving mother born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1878.

In time, both "Buttons" parents were buried in Tucson near their son who they had always proudly loved so very much.



Their son, John 'Button' Byrd Salmon was born in Christoval Texas on October 22, 1903 and grew up with his parents in the tough early 1900's copper mining town of Bisbee, Arizona.

'Button's' older brother Riney B. Salmon was also very athletic, and mentored-supported his young brother John 'Button' Byrd Salmon in both baseball and football at Bisbee's Warren Ballpark where the Young 'Button' Salmon regularly played baseball with the likes of numerous members of the Chicago White Socks, and many other pro ball players of the time who spent time there in the off season. 'Button's' brother Riney B. Salmon later became the President of the Arizona-Texas Baseball League from 1948 to 1950.

The very day after the University of Arizona's 1926 season's big opening football game at Phoenix, in the early morning John 'Button' Byrd Salmon was driving at a very high rate of speed returning back from

Phoenix in his Ford Model T (see article) (see video) with a football team and fraternity brother along with a young girl when he missed a treacherous curve and hit the dirt berm hump along the side of the road near Picacho Peak, Arizona.

John's car overturned violently numerous times, crashing far down into a deep ravine pinning young John to the desert floor underneath the battered twisted cars metal wreckage for hours until any help could arrive. The other two passengers in the car were both ejected out into the desert from the car where they miraculously sustained some deep lacerations, cuts and bruises, but neither were seriously injured.

However, the young talented John 'Button' Byrd Salmon was not as fortunate suffering a severe severed spinal cord injury leaving him paralyzed from his neck down. Dr. Victor Melsor, a very well respected and extremely talented Tucson surgeon, performed an intensive eight (8) hour surgery on 'Button' at

the Southern Methodist Hospital in Tucson
using all the medical technology and
techniques that were available there in 1926.

But sadly, John's spinal injury was far too
severe and far beyond the medical science and
its capabilities of the later 1920's time
period.

John 'Button' Byrd Salmon died 14 days later
on October 18, 1926, at the Southern Methodist
Hospital in Tucson, Arizona.



**Southern Methodist Hospital Tucson, Arizona
October 1926**

On that day, October 18, 1926 John 'Button' Byrd Salmon spoke one final message to his coach 'Pop' and ultimately to all of his football and baseball teammates, to his University of Arizona classmates, and those students who would follow in perpetuity.

John 'Button' Salmon's coach 'Pop' Mc Kale, who had been visiting 'Button' Salmon every single day for 13 days at the hospital, was talking to 'Button' when the injured young man suddenly whispered 'Pop' come closer.....

"Tell them...Tell The Team To... *'Bear Down'*

The nurse in attendance at his bedside, Mrs. Rebecca Farnsdale then noted into the official hospital medical record that John 'Button' Salmon breathed in one last breath, then died peacefully at precisely 10:32 am on October 18, 1926.

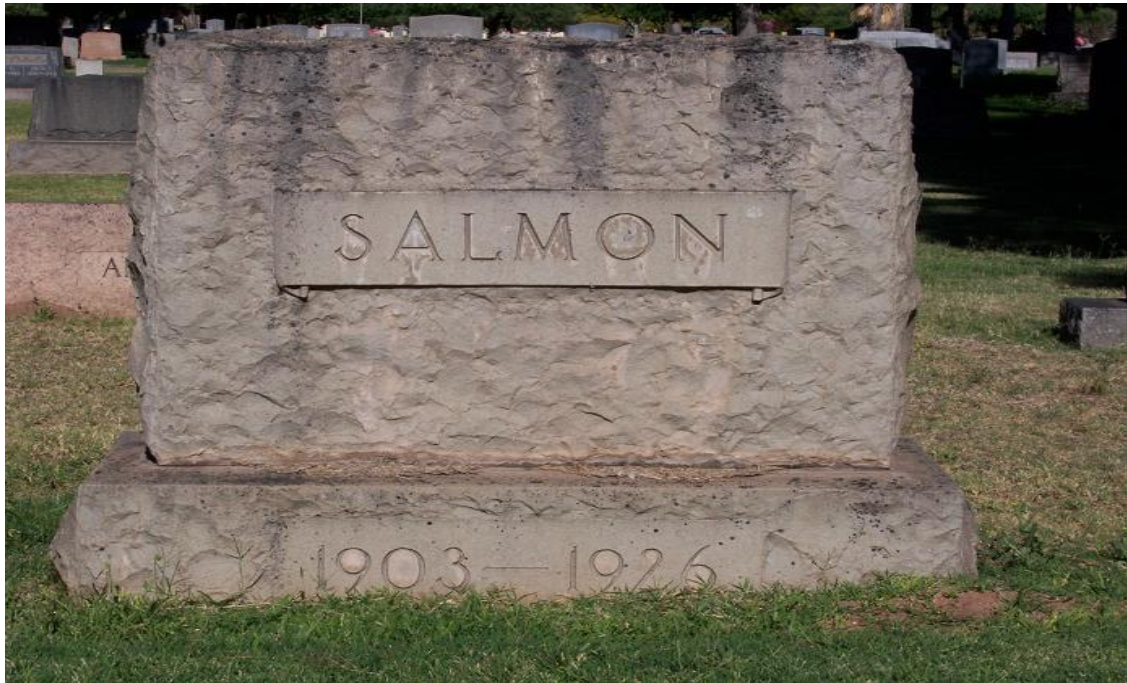


The John 'Button' Salmon Funeral Procession In October 1926

On the day of the John 'Button' Byrd Salmon funeral all classes at the University of Arizona and all work and all schools throughout the city of Tucson were cancelled for the day. Employers and employees all over the city left their jobs to attend John 'Button' Byrd Salmon's funeral service which was held on the University of Arizona's campus inside the auditorium with crowds

pouring outside completely surrounding the building hoping to listen to the service through the auditoriums open windows.

Afterwards, the procession to the cemetery was over three (3) miles long as a line of Ford Model T's, Ford Model A's, Chevrolets, Packard's, Cadillacs, Chryslers, Franklins, Buicks, Pontiacs, Dodges, Oldsmobile's, Hupmobiles, Harley Davidson and Indian motorcycles, citizens on horseback, citizens in horse drawn wagons and coaches, every single taxi in town that was running, police and fire departments vehicles, city officials, those walking and on bicycles, and various other cars and trucks of the era slowly made their way from the University of Arizona through downtown Tucson and up the dirt Oracle Road heading north out of town to the city's main cemetery.



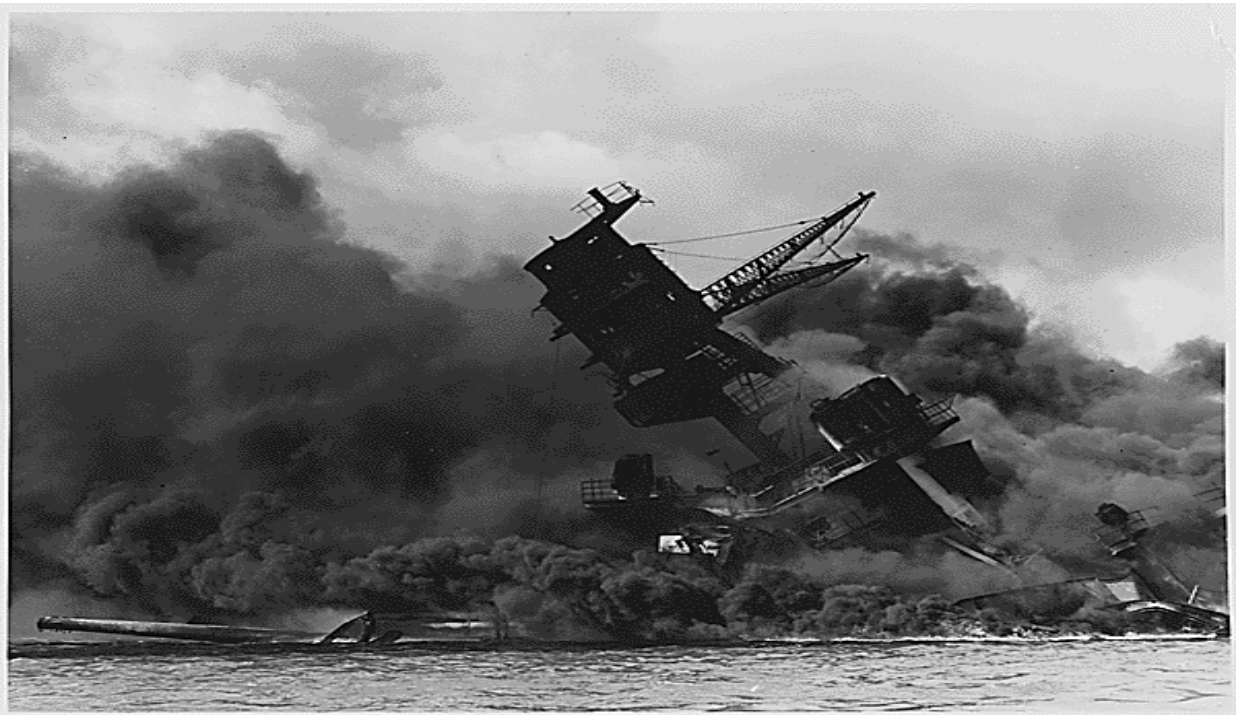
Recounted later by 'Coach Pop', on the night of October 18, 1926 after the University of Arizona Coach 'Pop' returned from the hospital, Pop was working at [his] office desk inside Bear Down Gym around 10:00PM that night. Pop revealed only later that "*the ghost of John 'Button' Byrd Salmon wearing his full football jersey had appeared*" to him "*at the doorway to the office and began walking toward*" the exhausted coach.

The apparition then uttered only two words,
"Bear Down."

Since 1926, other University of Arizona employees, janitor's, volunteers, and students in the gym both during the day and especially late at night have reported over the years their encountering the apparition of a short young man in a well-used 1920's era University of Arizona football jersey moving throughout various areas of the gym, basement, and its offices.

Constructed in 1926 to replace Herring Hall, originally named after Colonel Herring, which was the university's original gymnasium, Bear Down Gym was built as a two story brick structure noted for its curved roof, large semicircular terra cotta entrance and deeply recessed entry with copper-clad window frames. The building was topped with a slightly projecting cornice that includes terra cotta detailing. The structures unique exposed bow-truss roofing system as a highly notable architectural interior feature.

Originally, the main level of the gym provided basketball courts and room for gymnastics, while the lower level contained locker rooms, offices, and space for the Department of Military Science and Tactics. The building at that time seated about 6,000 spectators and was used for sports, school dances, and the annual student registration activities.



The Battleship [USS Arizona](#) - December 7th, 1941 7:48am Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Then Suddenly after December 7, 1941 with the outbreak of World War II looming ominously in the background, Bear Down Gym (and many other facilities at the University of Arizona) were taken over by the United States Military War Department as a barracks for 500 young students at a time as they went through their "Expedited Naval Indoctrination School," just before being shipped off to the war in the Pacific Ocean.

Many of those 'green' future sailors and officers who lived and trained at Bear Down Gym together 24 hours a day seven days a week gave their lives in the war effort in the Pacific and never returned to complete their later adult lives.

It is said and at times it has been documented that the ghosts of those students haunting past still frequent Bear Down Gym looking to start again where they left off in 1941 to 1944 when they were just out of high school and very young University of Arizona students.



**Bear Down Gym - During World War 2
January 16, 1942**

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