

MONTEVALLO Main Street Memories

SERGEANT ROBERT FARRINGTON BRIDGE

by Clay Nordan
Vice-president, Montevallo Historical Society
(montevallo1817@gmail.com)

Depending on your perspective, it could be said that Main Street either begins or ends at the bridge that spans Shoal Creek just down the bluff from Montevallo City Hall. Photographic evidence exists that shows that a bridge of one sort or another has made life easier and drier here for human and animal travelers since the 1850's.

The bridge that handles a considerable amount of north- and south-bound motorized traffic today was completed and put into service in the mid-1930's.

In 1996, Staff Sgt. Robert L. Farrington Jr., of Brierfield, five miles south of Montevallo, was among the dead when an Air Force plane crashed near Dubrovnik, Croatia.

In the aftermath of Farrington's death, a number of concerned local citizens (led by Dr. Mike Mahan) and supported by city and county officials, sought to honor his service and memory by naming the bridge over Shoal Creek at the foot of Main Street the Sgt. Robert L. Farrington, Jr., Memorial Bridge. Thanks to the efforts of these individuals and groups, state approval for the request was soon to come.

The Farrington Bridge, as it was now known, closed for about a year in 2004 for a significant upgrade and expansion and was reopened to regular traffic in April of 2005. At that time a celebration that included a parade was put on by the city and a new sign, declaring its namesake, was installed.



After several years of effort to locate a photograph of Sgt. Farrington in his Air Force uniform, a Montevallo Main Street Veterans Banner was printed and installed in time for Veterans Day 2022. Appropriately, Farrington's banner was positioned at the foot of Main Street just below City Hall near the bridge over Shoal Creek that bears his name.

At the time of his death, Sgt. Farrington was stationed at Ramstein Air Base, Germany and was assigned to the 76th Airlift Squadron of the 86th Airlift Wing, U.S. Air Force.

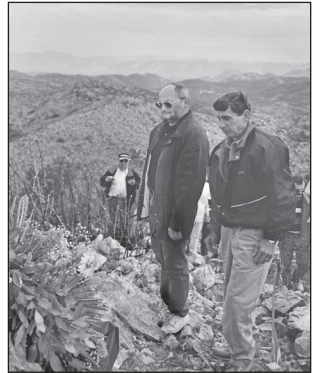
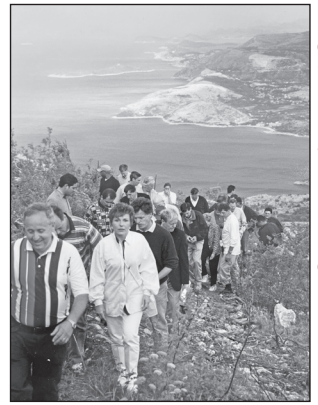
The 76th operated more than a dozen executive transport aircraft for distinguished visitor travel and Sgt. Farrington was in charge of coordinating in-flight amenities for dignitaries flying all over the world. He was in his 13th year of service in the Air Force.

A total of 35 passengers and crew perished in the crash. Among them was Ron Brown, Secretary of Commerce in President Bill Clinton's cabinet.

In August of 1996, Sgt. Farrington's father, Robert L. Farrington, Sr., received a letter from Michael Kantor, who President Clinton appointed to succeed Ron Brown as Secretary of Commerce. Secretary Kantor had recently completed the mission to Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina begun by Secretary Brown. While there, Secretary Kantor and his traveling party climbed the mountain where the Air Force transport went down. They laid a wreath at the crash site and held a brief memorial service there in their memory.

In the letter to Mr. Farrington, Secretary Kantor quoted President Clinton, saying "They were a glowing testimonial to the power of individuals to improve their own lives and elevate the lives of others and make a better future for others". Secretary Kantor concluded by saying, "We climbed that mountain not just with the President's words in mind but with your wishes and cares in our hearts. Please be assured that the work that Robert, Secretary Brown, and the others began will be remembered through the ongoing pursuit of peace and healing and progress."

The body of Staff Sergeant Robert L. Farrington, Jr., was recovered from the site by the Air Force and sent home for burial. He rests in the family plot in the Montevallo City Cemetery.



(Top) A delegation from the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, makes its way up a Croatian mountainside to the crash site of a U.S. Air Force transport plane in 1996. (Bottom) Mickey Kantor (right), who replaced Ron Brown as Secretary of Commerce following his death in the crash is joined by Croatian Prime Minister Zlatko Matesa in placing a memorial wreath on the site where the plane went down.

Photographs courtesy of Kevin Farrington.

Montevallo
Historical Society

Opening the Portals of Our Heritage



540 Shelby Street
Montevallo, AL 35115

WWW.HISTORICMONTEVALLO.ORG

MONTEVALLO MAIN STREET MEMORIES is adapted from the series, THROWBACK THURSDAY, a Montevallo Historical Society and Montevallo Main Street partnership started in 2018. Each installment revisits commercial and residential life on Main Street and in the downtown area in the early to mid-twentieth century. The series remains available online and may be viewed at www.historicmontevallo.org under "Local History".