

**A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF CARL ALBERT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Carl Albert is best known for his tenure as the 46<sup>th</sup> Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1971 until 1977. And although he is rightly celebrated for his prowess on the national stage, he is also rightly praised for the many lesser-known contributions to his home state of Oklahoma. It is the intent of this brief research paper to explore one aspect of those contributions pertaining to the role Albert played in the creation and development of both the city of Midwest City and its accompanying military installation Tinker Air Force Base.

## A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF CARL ALBERT



**Figure 1. Carl Albert works at his office in Washington.**

Born 10 May 1908<sup>2</sup> in McAlester, Oklahoma, Carl Albert would rise through the political ranks to become one of the most influential politicians in American history. Facing numerous obstacles, Albert remained steadfast in his commitment to serving the people of his home state and the nation at large. A major chapter of his legacy can be viewed through his pivotal role in the creation and support of the establishment of both Midwest City and Tinker Air Force Base.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Albert, photograph, Date Unknown; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1596272/>; accessed May 3, 2024), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Albert, Carl Bert. Recollections of My Early Life, article, Spring 1974; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc2124196/>; accessed May 4, 2024), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Raised in the rural town of McAlester and its surrounding areas, Albert was rooted in the traditional values of the American heartland. In high school, he would become involved in many activities – including Debate - which would lead to his becoming the Midwest Champion of the National Oratorical Contest. As a result, Albert was given the opportunity to visit Congress and speak before President Coolidge.<sup>3</sup> This would be the spark that motivated his interest in politics.

After graduation, Albert would originally attend the University of Oklahoma before being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to attend the University of Oxford. There, he went on to eventually receive a Bachelor of Arts from St. Peter's college before returning to Oklahoma where he established a law firm in Oklahoma City in 1935.

When hostilities broke out in the Second World War, Albert found himself serving in the Pacific theater where he received numerous commendations. He would remain serving after the war's end in 1946 in the Army Reserve until his retirement as a colonel in 1968.<sup>4</sup> It was his experiences in the military which would influence his becoming a voice for the needs of those serving as well as those supporting its efforts.

Rewinding to 1941, as the war raged on the United States War Department recognized the need for additional facilities to achieve the goals set out for its war agenda. This included the realization of a pressing need for infrastructure development and housing for returning veterans. Seizing the initiative, Albert – along with others – proposed the creation of a planned community to be located on the outskirts of Oklahoma City. He worked tirelessly to acquire federal funding and support for this proposal, giving rise to the naming of the community as “Midwest City”.

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<sup>3</sup> Lindbergh, Charles, text, 1972; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1627758/>; accessed May 4, 2024), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/>; crediting Ardmore Public Library.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Albert, *Little Giant: The Life and Times of Speaker Carl Albert*. (University of Oklahoma Press; 1999. Accessed May 4, 2024).

This support continued throughout his career. Even when disaster struck the area years later involving the crash of a F-100 Super Sabre Jet military aircraft, Albert was also involved in coming up with a solution to prevent further accidents. His devotion to the community and people of the city remained undeterred.



**Figure 2. Aftermath of jet crash in Glendale subdivision of Midwest City.**

Central to this vision was the presence of the nearby Army installation known as Tinker Field – a post that would grow into one of the largest military installations in the United States and currently designated Tinker Air Force Base. It played a crucial role in supporting national defense efforts throughout the war as well as driving economic development in the region. By working tirelessly to continue support for expansion and modernization, both the base and city grew into a thriving hub for civilian residents and military families alike.

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<sup>5</sup> King, Cliff. [Photograph 2012.201.OVZ001.0469], photograph, August 25, 1961; (<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc1698472/>; accessed May 4, 2024), The Gateway to Oklahoma History, <https://gateway.okhistory.org/>; crediting Oklahoma Historical Society.

Regarding Midwest City, Albert wanted to create more than just a residential area; he strove to develop a vibrant, self-sustaining community with access to quality education, healthcare, and recreational facilities. Even after his retirement from the military, he would continue pursuing this vision while serving in Congress from 1947 until 1977, winning election in 1946. His legislative efforts would help establish schools, hospitals, and parks in the city, laying the foundation for its long-term growth and prosperity.

In addition to his support for Midwest City, Albert also became a staunch advocate for the nearby airfield Tinker Air Force Base. Throughout his time in Congress, he fought incessantly to protect funding for the institution and advocated for continued investment of its infrastructure and technology. These efforts not only strengthened the airfield's capabilities but also ensured thousands of workers remained employed and flourished within the surrounding communities.

In conclusion, Carl Albert remains a revered figure to the community of Midwest City and Tinker Air Force Base. His tireless advocacy and visionary leadership laying the groundwork for both communities that continues to inspire current leaders to continue the path of growth and prosperity for the betterment of Oklahoma and the nation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CITATIONS

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