Contributed photo / Paul Howells, who graduated from UW-Stout in December, has created a 3-D digital gallery to honor U.S. military personnel killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of the fallen is his older brother, Army Spc. Alun R. Howells. Paul holds a small-scale version of his bust of Alun, which was made at UW-Stout via a 3-D printer. At left is a print of the bust of Army Sgt. Andrew Tobin of California.

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UW-Stout graduate crafts digital busts of his brother and other fallen military personnel

By UW-Stout News Bureau

MENOMONIE — Paul Howells' final project at UW-Stout was an intensely personal one.

Students pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree must complete a senior project. Howells, who graduated in December, chose to honor and memorialize his brother and others by creating the Fallen Heroes Memorial Gallery, a 3-D digital gallery for the more than 6,300 men and women who have died in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.
At this point the gallery includes four 3-D digital busts of fallen troops; Army Spc. Alun R. Howells, Paul's older brother, is one.

Alun died Aug. 13, 2007, in Baghdad of wounds sustained from direct enemy fire. At 20 years old, he had been in Iraq less than six months and had volunteered for an especially dangerous mission.

"He was always volunteering for things," Paul said of his brother.

Before he was deployed, Alun told his mother that he wasn't afraid of dying but of being forgotten. Paul took this to heart and is motivated to make sure that all of the troops who have sacrificed their lives are remembered.

The other three busts of servicemen are Army Sgt. Andrew R. Tobin, California; Navy Constructionman Mychael A. Flint, New York; and Air Force Senior Airman James A. Hansen, Michigan.

People visiting the digital gallery will see, in addition to the busts, a wall similar to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial of the names of those killed in the conflicts. Paul obtained the names from the Department of Defense Statistical Information Analysis Division.

The gallery includes search and browse functions so visitors can view a specific memorial or look through all of them. Each bust is accompanied by a personal tribute.

Paul's goal was and continues to be to honor and memorialize all the troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan and to remind people that military personnel - men and women - continue to fight and die. These individuals aren't just numbers; they are aunts and uncles, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers and friends, he said.

‘Profound impact'

The Howells family moved to Menomonie in 2004 from Colorado; Paul graduated from Menomonie High School in 2006. Always interested in art and design, Paul chose UW-Stout because the school was close to home, and the art and design program looked strong.

"It has been a good fit; I'm happy with my decision," said Paul, whose concentration was multimedia design.

Alun also had considered attending UW-Stout.
Paul was accepted in the University Honors Program and graduated cum laude. He was entering his sophomore year when Alun was killed.

According to Lopa Basu, director of the honors program, "This experience has had a profound impact in shaping Paul's life as a student and artist."

Not forgotten

During the summer of 2011, Paul made a digital bronze bust of his brother for his honors project, which spurred him to create his digital gallery. Paul was able to replicate the memorial 3-D digital bust of his brother into an actual bust with the help of a 3-D printer housed in a print lab at the university.

Ellery Connell, Paul's professor for his 3-D class, helped tremendously.

"The project would not have been possible without his help," Paul said.

To connect with others who have lost a family member, Paul started a Gold Star Families Facebook page, which has more than 1,000 followers. Gold Star Families have lost a loved one in U.S. military service.

Through the page, designed for people to express their sorrow and grief to those who also have suffered grief and loss, Paul connected with families who volunteered to participate in his digital gallery. They sent him photographs of the deceased family members as well as basic information. Using the pictures, Paul fashioned his 3-D digital busts. He has created four but plans to add more.

Greg Quinn, Dunn County veterans service officer, had not heard of Paul's digital gallery, although he would like to see it.

"That's wonderful that he has done this for his loved one," Quinn said of Paul's work.

With his degree from UW-Stout, Paul isn't sure which direction he will take. He is interested in possibly working in special effects in the film and TV industry.

But no matter the job he takes, Paul will continue to add to his gallery so that his brother and others won't be forgotten.