

OPINION



Lisa's Lines

by Lisa Ingebrand

Recently, I worked up the nerve to ask a friend about his military service.

I've known him for almost 17 years.

He's a veteran, but I've never seen him participate in the local programs, ceremonies or parades, and I've always wondered why.

At first, when I asked him to tell me his story, he slyly changed the subject.

Then, he turned me down.

Then, he didn't answer my phone calls.

And, then, one day... He agreed.

The story he shared with me—and I'm about to share with you—is unlike any veteran story I've written during my almost 20 years with this newspaper. So, I'm going to preface this with the same words my friend Barry Raatz of Waterville used to begin telling his story: "This isn't a 'good' story."

Bad days have been outnumbering Barry's good days, lately, and there's no telling what kind of day it will be until he wakes up.

If he's a little dizzy, but can maneuver through his residence without falling and can eat a little something, he calls it a good day. The bad days, he won't talk about.

He's a 73-year-old Vietnam veteran with prostate cancer. He's been fighting the cancer for eight years, taking handfuls of pills daily and suffering the painful effects of radiation that have degraded his bones, causing lower spine degeneration.

When asked if his cancer is linked to his years in the military, he shrugged. "I have no idea," he said.

Barry doesn't talk much about his military service, and when asked why he doesn't participate in the local events and ceremonies for veterans, he shook his head.

"My story isn't a 'good' story," he offered as an explanation. "I was trained and sent to Cambodia, where we (the U.S. military) weren't supposed to be, and did things we 'didn't do.'"

According to Barry, he enlisted in the Air Force when he was 20 years old—not because he wanted to, but because a judge ordered him to—following a run-in with the law that occurred one night after he had a beer with a friend in Heidelberg.

"I had a fast car back then, and my buddy yelled to me from across the road, 'Smoke the tires.' So, I did," he explained.

That action allegedly attracted the attention of a police officer on the outskirts of Montgomery. Instead of pulling over, Barry hit the gas pedal.

"I don't know why I tried to evade him. I was young with a fast car," stated Barry, who admits to leading law enforcement on a chase through the county's back roads. At one point, as Barry tells it, his vehicle launched over a hill and crashed into a parked car. But, he kept driving, ultimately parking his vehicle at a friend's home in Waterville and walking home to Waseca.

"I walked a lot of miles that night and woke up in a neighbor's barn," he said. "When I got home, they put me in the hospital... Someone had put something in my beer."

Barry landed in court.

"The judge called me a 'menace to society,' and I had to enlist," Barry stated.

Ultimately, Barry chose to enlist in the Air Force because his dad, a WWII veteran, who

had served in the Army and bore deep scars from his time in Sicily and North Africa, didn't want him in the Army.

Barry went through basic training in Texas, after leaving behind his position as an electrical wireman at McQuay's in Faribault. "I was already a certified electrician at that time," he noted.

From there, as Barry explained, he was sent to different bases for more training and eventually earned the rank of Master Chemist. "I hated chemistry even in high school," he stated with a smirk.

Barry was assigned to work on the country's Titan missile systems in Little Rock, Arkansas. "We had 18 silos in the ground back then. They had nuclear missiles on them," he explained. "They're all destroyed now."

But, after long weeks spent on the base, SSgt. E-5 Raatz and a few of his buddies grew bored of their regular routines and began volunteering for any mission that would get them off the base.

"One friend of mine, he was an electrician, he volunteered for Vietnam, but he was told no," he shared. "Can you believe that?"

Then, one night, it all changed.

According to Barry, he and his comrades were told to shed themselves of all identification—no name tags, dog tags or billfolds—and report to an airplane hanger. When the plane came, they were told to board it.

"We didn't know where we were going or what we were supposed to do when we got there," he said. "Have you heard of Operation Prime BEEF? Well, if you haven't,



Raatz

look it up... And, only half of the stuff they publish is true."

Barry soon found himself in a strange country, which he and his comrades eventually figured out to be Cambodia, a country that shares a border with Vietnam.

North Vietnamese troops



BARRY RAATZ
Barry W. Raatz, son of Mr. and Mrs. Carl W. Raatz, R. 4, Waseca, has been promoted to airman first class in the U.S. Air Force.

An old newspaper clipping Barry's sister has held on to over the years.

were moving supplies and arms through the northern part of the country, and the goal of the mission Barry was part of was to slow or stop this transport.

"Basically, I was the chemist," he stated, his voice growing quiet. "There were all these little villages along the supply trails, and most of 'em had wells."

According to Barry, his unit strategically attacked the villages' drinking sources.

Mortar fire soon turned on the U.S. troops, and Barry was hit with shrapnel.

"I got a mortar in me, but because I was where I wasn't supposed to be—according to the government that put me there—there was no Purple Heart for me," he stated.

Barry recalls a man pulling out most of the shrapnel from his body soon after he was injured, but one piece of metal remained in his left thumb for many years, until it worked itself to the surface enough to where he was able to cut it out himself.

When asked how long he was in Cambodia, Barry shrugged and answered: "Oh, I don't know... You loose track of time in a place like that, sleeping when you can, eating when you can... And, then, you get out of there."

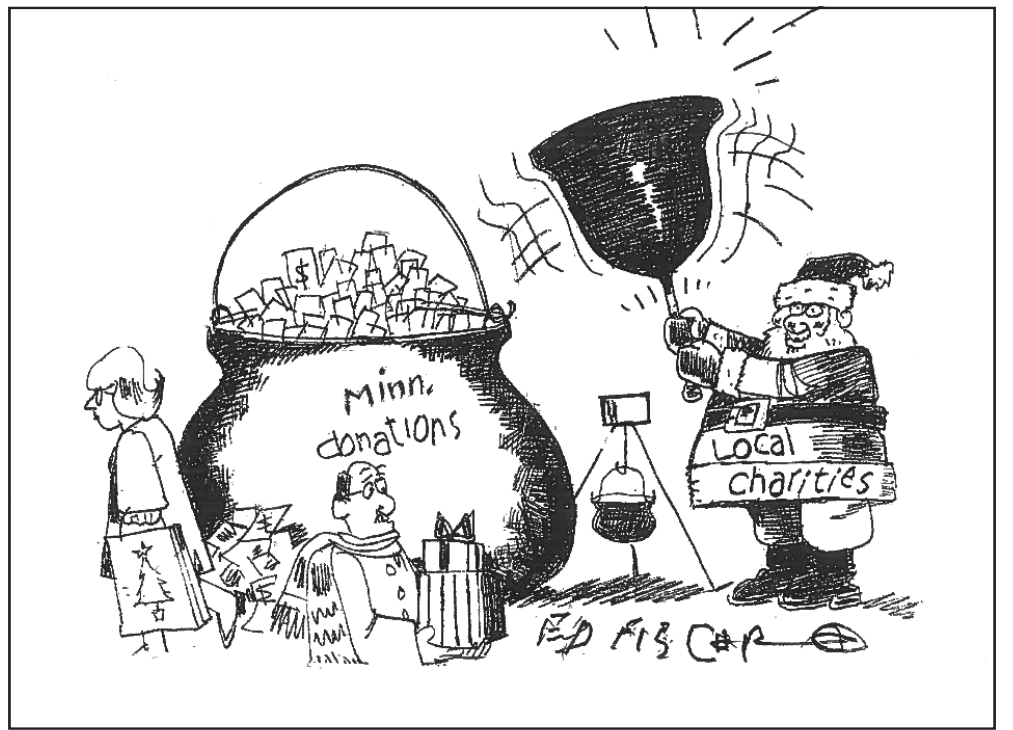
According to Barry, because his time in Cambodia was considered "temporary duty" it does not appear on his record. "It's as if I never left," he stated with a shake of his head.

Barry returned to the States and his position on the base in Arkansas and fulfilled his time in the military. He was honorably discharged in May 1972.

"I had a good life after that," he said. "People in town were good to me when I got back. It wasn't anything like what was happening in California. No one ever spit on me or nothing like that... I was just told to forget what I know."

He worked as a mechanic at an automotive shop his brother built just outside of Waseca and later became the owner of the business, Automotive Performance. "I did a lot of hotrod stuff, and I was really good at it," he commented with a smile. "People from all over would bring

Lisa's to 6



Those Were The Days

100 Years Ago
December 2, 1921

A carload of lumber was received by H. Hahn, which will be used in the construction of his new buildings at the lake.

Quite a number of sheep were lost by farmers east of Elysian during the summer, and it has been suspected that wolves or other wild animals were responsible for killing them. In one night, Leslie Stangler lost nine sheep. On the Yerhot farm another night 30 sheep were reported killed and later one was slain on J.F. Hebl's place and it had been dragged to the bank of Lake Lily.

Oscar Williams is selling a kitchen range and a hard coal stove used only a few months.

75 Years Ago
December 4, 1946

Jack Brown and his crew of men and road building equipment moved into this territory and are now doing some grading on Highway 13 southeast of town in Waseca County.

Mr. Ed Harrington bought out his partner, Mr. Len Goldman, in the Waterville Cleaners.

Frank D. Blair, state game and fish director warned fishermen that they must secure a seal for each net in their possession, except for minnow, landing, and dip nets.

50 Years Ago
December 2, 1971

Rev. Vernon Hunt, pastor of the Faith Lutheran Church in Janesville and North Waseca Lutheran Church, has accepted a call to the First Lutheran Church at Circle, Montana.

Sandy Peach, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Peach and Jim Pemble, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Pemble, were honored at a bridal shower at the Elysian Community Hall. The couple will be married Dec. 18.

Melvin Kuball of Morristown arrived

home having completed his active Army duty and a tour of duty in Germany.

Seniors on the Buccaneer wrestling team were Mike Bengtson, Bob David, Tim Thielbar, Harold Jewison, and Jim Lundin.

25 Years Ago
December 5, 1996

Bettina Rennie, AFS International exchange student from South Australia, is staying with host family Don and Joyce Kaplan of Elysian.

The City of Waterville is in the process of updating their water metering system. This includes installing a new meter in the home and implementing a new system for reading water usage.

The ownership of the Pizza Palace in Waterville changed hands. Mike Shonka sold the business to Dale and Phyllis Arndt. After two successful years in Waterville, the Pizza Palace has relocated to Elysian.

Mike Boyd, Sr. rolled the high game (237) and high series (544) in the National Bowling League.

10 Years Ago
December 1, 2011

Jen (Frodl) Jacobson was inducted into the University of Wisconsin-River Falls Hall of Fame for volleyball

Jeff Amundson and Grant Pope were both named to the 2011 Minnesota Associated Press All State High School Football Team. Amundson was named 2nd Team Defense and Pope Honorable Mention Defense. Pope was also named Academic All State.

Educators Joyce Mace and Keith Zicafoose were named the WEM Teachers of the Year (2011-2012).

John Milbrath was elected 1st Vice Commander of the Le Sueur County Legion and Auxiliary Board.



These three young ladies are members of the sixth grade clarinet trio who entertained their mothers at the Band Mothers meeting. Pictured (left to right): Karen Engquist, daughter of Director and Mrs. Tom Engquist, Diane Meskan, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Larry Meskan, and Tracy Holling, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Holling. (Taken from the Dec. 9, 1971 - Lake Region LIFE)

THE BOOK CORNER

"Dinosaur Dance" by Sandra Boynton—Picture Book

"Dinosaur Opposites" by Paul and Henrietta Strickland—Picture Book

"Dinosaur ABC" by Simon Mugford—Picture Book Non-Fiction

"The One and Only Ivan" by Katherine Applegate—Junior Fiction

"Anne of Green Gables" by L. M. Montgomery—Junior Fiction

"Wonder" by R. J. Palacio—Junior Fiction

"Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library" by Chris Grabenstein—Junior Fiction

"A Wrinkle in Time" by Madeleine L'Engle—Junior Fiction

These items and many more are available through the Traverse des Sioux Library System at tds-mt.iii.com and can be picked up at the Elysian Area Library.

"I figure when you come to a crossroads, you have a choice: right turn, left turn, straight ahead. Or you can just pull over to the side of the road and call it quits. But if you've got a good stretch of road up ahead and someone fun to travel it with, why stay stuck in the galdern ditch?"

~ Chris Grabenstein

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