



# TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

“Tribute to Service” is an initiative by the editorial and columnist team at the Northern Sentry to honor veterans we’ve encountered or connected with during our journalism careers. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many local merchants who supported us, as well as to those who graciously shared their stories.

By nature, those who have served this great country often don’t speak about their time defending our freedom. They live quietly among us—as neighbors, friends, or perhaps someone you see at a Scout meeting or PTA event. It is with great pride that we present “Tribute to Service,” recognizing that these are only a few of the countless inspiring stories we could tell.

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TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

# A Legacy of Service and Community at Minot AFB

AMY ALLENDER

Bruce Christianson's personality fills a room. A conversation with him is bound to be full of intriguing anecdotes, laughter, and the energy of a man decades his junior. But while he is powerful in presence, Christianson remains humble and unassuming about his significant impact on Minot and Minot Air Force Base (MAFB).

"We're not looking for publicity or pats on the back," Christianson said in an interview last week. But recognition is overdue for him. Christianson, the honorary commander of the 5th Operations Group, has embodied a legacy of service and commitment to base-community relations in Minot for 50 years. The strong bond between Minot and MAFB—and the base's continued operation—is largely due to the work of Christianson and the teams he's been part of.

His journey began in 1974, when he joined the Minot Area Chamber of Commerce's Military Affairs Committee, driven by a vision of creating a better place for Air Force personnel and their families. This engagement sparked a lifetime commitment to fostering a sense of unity between Minot-MAFB. Over the years, his efforts have spanned everything from promoting MAFB as a strategic asset to the nation to organizing community events, making him an invaluable bridge between the base and city.

His role on the Military Affairs Committee laid the foundation for even bigger undertakings. In 1990, when the Department of Defense announced three rounds of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC), Christianson became a founding member of Task Force 96 (TF 96), a group formed to defend MAFB during national reviews of military resources. "We were there to make the case for Minot Air Force Base and to show why it should exist," he said.

TF 96 worked tirelessly, advocating for MAFB and showcasing its value to both national defense and Minot. Their success in passing BRAC reviews in 1991, 1993, and 1995 led to the establishment of Task Force 21 (TF 21) in 1999. This group focuses specifically on supporting personnel and missions into the twenty-first

century. Christianson has been a steadfast member of TF 21, helping to spearhead initiatives that ensure MAFB remains a vital part of Minot's identity.

Through TF 21, Christianson and other team members host events like the annual Wild Game Feed, golf tournaments, and cookie drives, all aimed at making service members feel welcome and appreciated. These activities go beyond gestures—they are part of the culture Christianson has helped build, one where Minot is truly a place military families can call home.

"We're just out telling the Minot story," Christianson said proudly. He explains that TF 21's work stands on three "legs": supporting active-duty personnel, enhancing quality of life for civilians, and working with congressional delegation in Washington. "It's warm and friendly to do business here—not as cold as everyone thinks it is," he said. His passion for Minot and its people shines in every project TF 21 undertakes.

Today, Christianson is looking toward the future as TF 21 focuses on supporting the Sentinel missile program, upgrades to the B-52, and the introduction of the Grey Wolf helicopter. Each of these projects represents a commitment to MAFB's enduring mission, one that Christianson believes is essential not only for Minot but for the country.

Christianson's dedication isn't just about big projects

or government funding; it's about the impact on the people stationed at MAFB. For him, it's always been about "quality of place." He's committed to ensuring that military members and their families in Minot feel valued, respected, and supported. "Quality of place—that's what we're after. Quality," he emphasizes. This focus on quality has been recognized by Minot's winning of the Barksdale Trophy twice since its inception in 2017—a prestigious honor awarded to the community that provides the most exceptional support to a base in the Air Force Global Strike Command.

Reflecting on his own history, Christianson fondly recalls growing up in nearby Granville, where he would hear fighter jets overhead. Those early experiences gave him a deep respect for the military, which only grew stronger over time. He's seen Minot change and grow, and he's been part of that growth every step of the way.

After 50 years, Christianson's legacy is clear: he's helped turn Minot into an essential part of the nation's defense and is a testament to the power of community. Minot is grateful for his passion and commitment to cultivating unity between the city, surrounding area, and MAFB. His work has placed Minot on a trajectory that will carry it into the future, building a tradition of quality and community support that will endure.



Bruce Christianson at a Civic Leader visit during Global Thunder 25 on Oct. 24, 2024 on Minot Air Force Base.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO | MINOT AFB PA

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# Turret Gunner Recalls 'Black Thursday' October 14, 1943

ROD WILSON, NORTHERN SENTRY



*Art Linrud, Velva ND, was one of the World War II veterans who remembered Black Thursday, October 14, 1943, the day of the bombing mission to Schweinfurt, Germany. He was engineer and top turret gunner on B-17 Flying Fortress No. 42-3436. It was one of the relatively few planes without a nickname painted on its nose in the "Can Do" 305th Bomb Group in the 1st Air Division of the 8th Army Air Force in England. Linrud was forced to bail out of his burning plane. He became a prisoner of war. His account of Mission 115 follows.*

were seen climbing for altitude and readying for the attack.

From my position in the upper gun turret, it was difficult to get an accurate count. It was a matter of picking out one, lining it up in the gun sight, squeezing off bursts from two 50-caliber machineguns until the enemy plane swept past, then swinging the turret to pick up another attacking wave, picking out a plane, firing and following it though.

Unless a plane blew up in the gun sight view or smoked badly, a gunner never really knew if the plane was damaged or shot down. There wasn't time to watch.

An enemy plane caught in the gunner's sight was greeted with a hailstorm of bullets and streamers of red tracers as it came within range.

The action continued unabated as the attackers dove in at high speed, cannon and guns flashing along the wings. An occasional plane dove through our formation, barely missing the bombers.

On several previous missions, enemy pilots attacked cautiously and skillfully, using every tactic to the best of their ability and advantage. Today was different. It was a fierce air battle, a last encounter for many an airman on both sides.

As the formation moved deeper into enemy country, damage to several bombers became evident. Occasionally a plane, damaged and unable to keep up, would fall behind, then turn and head back, hoping to make it back to base or ditch in the English Channel, with crew members picked up by air-sea rescue.

Going home alone with a damaged plane usually meant further attacks from enemy fighters until either the fighters were shot down or driven off or the damaged bomber abandoned with crew members bailing out.

Smoke poured from an engine on a plane behind and to our right. It pulled away from the formation and was heading down in a dive, on fire and out of control.

Whenever I turned the turret to fire at an enemy plane I could

see the action was everywhere, no part of the formation escaped the attack.

Suddenly, our plane shook violently from the impact and explosion of a cannon shell or rocket as it smashed into the rear part of our No. 2 engine, ripping a hole in the leading edge of the wing and leaving the engine a smoking mass of ruin. It was not more than 15 feet from my turret and from our pilot.

Fortunately, our pilot, Lt. Dennis McDarby, was uninjured, and quickly brought the plane under control. But, with the damage, we were unable to keep our place in formation and dropped down and started to fall back.

McDarby called on the intercom, checking on crew members-everyone was OK-and reporting that with the plane damaged as it was there was no way we make it to target with the bomb load. He said he was going to dump the bombs and go down in an attempt to fight our way back to a cloud cover at lower altitude. That way perhaps we could escape the fighters which continued to press the attack now that our plane was damaged and without the protection of the formation.

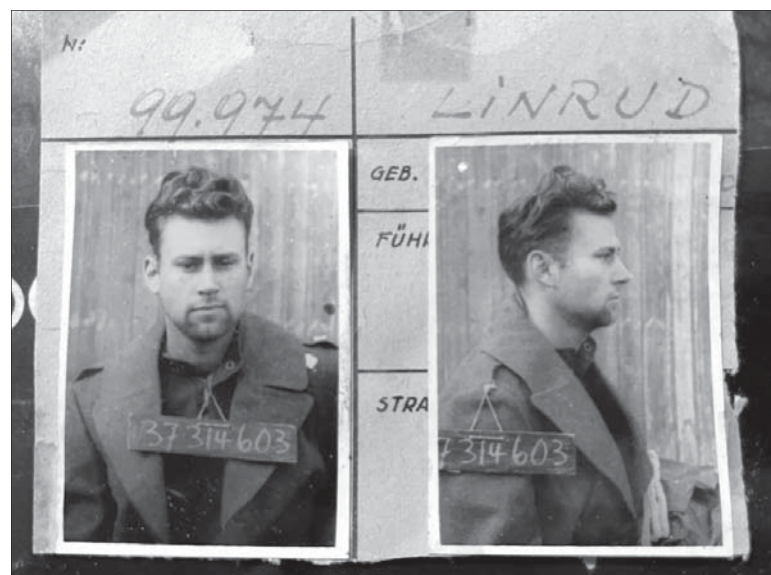
Smoke continued to pour out of the No. 2 engine area as we turned and dove down. Machinegun bullets hitting the fuselage sounded like hailstones hitting a tin roof.

Where smoked had been pouring back, flames appeared and, fanned by the wind, quickly spread to the fuel supply. Soon a huge ball of fire trailed back past the tail section of the plane.

Co-pilot 2nd Lt. Donald Breeden motioned me up front where pillow McDarby said, "Go down and remove the escape hatch cover. We'll never get this fire out now."

I picked up my parachute pack, snapped it in place, climbed down, grabbed the emergency hatch release and gave the door a kick with my foot. It disappeared as if by magic. A hole cut out into the sky appeared.

I was climbing back up into the cabin when I felt a hand on my head. I looked up to hear pilot



Art Linrud POW Photos from Stalag 17B.

McDarby say, "Bail out. I've already given the order. The wing is going to break off soon. We're coming too."

Backing down again, I hung my feet out the door and sat on the edge. Glancing into the nose section, I saw navigator 2nd Lt.

William Martin and bombardier 2nd Lt. Harvey Manley getting ready to follow me out. With a quick departing wave, I gripped the "D" ring and tumbled into space.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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# Is Veterans Day Important to Those Still Serving?

ERIN BEENE, NORTHERN SENTRY

Veterans Day is a day set aside as a time to thank and pay tribute to those Americans who have served in the United States Armed Forces. Veterans Day (not to be confused with Armed Forces Day which is usually in May) is always on November 11th. It is there to commemorate the small percentage of patriots who have put themselves in the hands of the country in order to protect and defend the US against all enemies, both foreign and domestic.

Previous members of the Armed Forces tend to use the day to reflect on their pride, patriotism and experiences in the service. From the numerous social media posts from previous Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, Marines, and Guardians everywhere, it is evident that most are proud of the time they served despite the difficulty of situations they were placed in while serving. These members share their stories and photos, reminiscing about hard days served and the friendships formed. While not all veterans' memories are positive—some are painful or even life-altering—the shared experiences while serving with others has a camaraderie-building effect. “Trauma bonding” is a term often thrown around as a way to describe the sense of what military members sometimes feel about their time

and the people they served with. It can be explained as although times were hard, or even downright sucked, getting through challenges alongside others created a special bond between mil members that is unmatched in the civilian world.

Even if the time served in the military wasn't glorious all of the time, Veterans Day tends to bring out the nostalgia of the time where they were part of something bigger than themselves. The pride unfolds as civilians all over the country take extra time to thank them for their service and companies offer special freebies or meals to those who have served. It is a special day of remembrance for those who are no longer serving.

But what about those who are still serving? Those still in the thick of the scary moments or even the never-ending government bureaucracy that plagues most military members during the time served. Do they feel the sense of pride and camaraderie about their military service the same way those who are now out?

It is impossible to get a perspective from every single serviceman or servicewoman, so it is likely that feelings are mixed; however, it seems that AD members, while often included in Veterans Day festivities, tend

to project the pride outward to family members and those who served before them instead of on themselves.

For many AD members, November 11th usually results in an down day from work and an opportunity to receive some free meals, but it may not yet mean much else for themselves personally. However, as their Air Force journey eventually come to a close, it is possible that their thoughts and feelings about Veterans Day and what it means will likely change. Like so many things, when looking back on the time served it is usually easier to see it for the sacrifice it was rather than when in the thick of it.

That's why Active Duty members are included in Veterans Day discounts and thank-yous. Even those who have never faced combat or battle or war, the sacrifice of being willing to do so is what Veterans Day is all about.

Thank-you to all the Veterans, those who currently serve and those that will serve in the future. It is because of you and your family's sacrifices that allows Americans to live as we do each day.

You are willing to risk it all for our way of life, and that's what Veterans Day means.



A U.S. Airman assigned to the 5th Bomb Wing reunites with family after returning from Bomber Task Force (BTF) 24-3 at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota, June 26, 2024. BTF missions demonstrate the credibility U.S. our forces to address a global security environment that is more diverse and uncertain than at any other time in recent history.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO | AIRMAN 1ST CLASS LUIS GOMEZ

## 'Black Thursday'



CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Onrushing cold air alerted me to give a firm pull on the “D” ring. There was a sudden slap in the face from the chest parachute pack as it passed upward and then a jolt as the chute filled with air.

Being suspended in the quietness of the air was a contrast to the clatter and vibration of machineguns, tension of battle and steady roar of engines. How quickly it had changed!

The roar of a German plane passing overhead, too close for comfort, quickly brought me back to reality. Several chutes were visible in the sky.

My eyes caught sight of our plane, below and to one side, falling out of control. The burning wing had broken off.

As the ground moved up to meet me, what before were small dots were now civilians and German soldiers moving about to intercept landing airmen. I came down in a small field, landing on my feet but falling to the ground from the impact.

Not more than a few minutes later, after freeing myself of the parachute and getting to my feet, I heard a statement that was to be heard often for the next 18 months.

Spoken by a German soldier with a pistol pointed at me and interpreted by a civilian, it was: “For you the war is over. You are now a German prisoner of war.”

I had landed at the edge of a small town on the

border of southern Holland and Germany, landing among soldiers stationed there. The officer in charge quickly had me searched for sidearms. It was hard for him to believe I had none.

We made our way to a small group of people gathered in a circle about 100 yards off. I immediately recognized Sgt. Dominic Lepore, the tail gunner from our plane, sitting on the ground, his hands covering his head. A 20 mm shell had exploded above and behind him in the plane, sending many small pieces of metal through the flying cap and into the back and top of his head.

A bicycle was brought and we sat him on it. With the bike pushed by two civilians, we mad our way into the town and were taken to a building that appeared to be the town hall. In a few minutes, a civilian doctor came and attended to the wounds in Lepore's head.

There was a lot of commotion-people and soldiers coming in and out, loud and excited talk in a language we didn't understand.

Soon more Americans were brought into the hall. Among them were Sgt. Ben Roberts, the ball turret gunner, Sgt. Hosea Crawford, the radio operator, and McDarby. McDarby was limping badly from an injury to his ankle and foot.

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# Now Their Air Force, Not Mine

ERIN BEENE, NORTHERN SENTRY

Life after military retirement presents itself in many ways. Some feel the relief of pressure released, others feel sadness of a part of themselves suddenly missing. For Chief Master Sergeant (Ret.) Ernest “Kacky” Crider, it is a little bit of both that hit at different times.

Kacky had a long military career both in the Air Force and the Navy, serving over 20 years with a 6 year break in between. “I separated from the Navy because I did not feel cared for and felt like I was a number. I did not realize how good I had it until I joined the civilian workforce and struggled. I didn’t find the same level of camaraderie, family, standards, accountability. I enjoyed my time in the AF so much more because I had a different level of context than ever before.”

He left service for good after his intimate Air Force retirement ceremony on April 26, 2024, after serving 3 years at Minot AFB as the 91st Missile Wing Command Chief. Kacky planned to stay in Minot after retirement and hopes to move back someday, but family circumstances led him to move back to Ohio for the time being. He used the summer immediately following retirement staying busy on various projects like rebuilding a house and taking several fishing trips to both Alaska and Canada. But now that the novelty of not working has worn off, Kacky admits that life after the military is a bit harder than he originally thought. “I was confident I made the transition seamlessly. However, having run out of projects, I recognize the void that exists. I was/am determined to unplug. I did my time and hope I made a positive impact. I cannot dwell on the current state of the Air Force as it exists now or in the future.”

Looking back on his Active Duty time with nostalgia, Kacky tried to explain what it was like. He said, “The first word [to describe it] is blur. It went by so fast. The second word is family. I miss the people. Family is the greatest gift the military gave me. It gave me a multitude of friends and family all over the globe.”

A pivotal time in Kacky’s career was when he was a Flight Engineer with the 6th Air

Refueling Squadron out of Travis AFB where he experienced some difficult working conditions. “I had a MSgt Superintendent who was an iron-fisted kind of guy. Everyone either hated him, was afraid of him, or both. He promoted me to a position ahead of a bunch of people. After a few months, it was clear he put me in that position because he thought he could control me and dictate how I ran the shop. He simply wanted to run it through me.” After he endured another horrible day on the job he responded to an email advertising a position at Wing Protocol. He interviewed and got the job and moved positions by the next week. “I went from living an extremely sheltered life thinking the Air Force revolved around my KC-10 to quickly realizing how much Air Force was going on around me that I had no idea about.”

After this job change, Kacky was able to be introduced to several of his professional mentors: CMSgt Eric Jaren, who was the Air Force Material Command Command Chief at the time, and CMSgt Sandra Johnson. He explained that these two mentors helped him learn about the Air Force and changed the way he approached the job. “So to say that disagreement with my boss changed the trajectory of my career is an understatement.” He never went back to being an active flyer again after this experience.

When discussing his thoughts about the importance of Veterans Day and how he views it differently now that he is retired, Kacky explained, “I am not sure setting a day aside is enough for everything this country’s veterans have done. For most of my career, I have lived in areas with great military support from the community. Minot, ND, is at the top of that list. But I remember weeks of protests at the gates of Kirtland early in my career and a time when I could not wear my uniform off base. The support we receive from the 99+ % is very important.”

As Kacky continues to navigate the life of a civilian, he knows time will continue to evolve, but one thing he knows for sure: “I spent the majority of my life serving this great country. It is a part of who I am. I hope I had a positive impact on enough people to move this mighty machine forward in the best direction. I will slowly transition further and further from the service. At the moment, I have decided to continue mentoring Airmen and being a resource. But I do so knowing it is now their Air Force and not mine. I try not to miss an opportunity to thank a member for their service.”

Ernest Crider “Kacky” is one of the thousands of veterans who have served valiantly in the United State Military. Thank-you for your service!



Col Menuey and Chief Crider “Kacky” participating in Shoot, Move, Communicate drills with the 891 SFS in 2021



KC-10 deployment in Southeast Asia (2004-2005).

TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

# Hiedi Miller: A Grateful Veteran with a Servant's Heart

MARTINA KRANZ, NORTHERN SENTRY

U.S. Army Staff Sergeant (SSG) Hiedi Miller served her country and continues to help people in her community. Miller grew up in Glenburn, ND. Her father, Brian Folstad, served in the Army Reserve, in the Navy in Vietnam, and in the civil service on Minot AFB. In the fall of 1992, Miller took the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) in high school, and then a recruiter began to call her house. Miller explained that her father was so excited that the recruiter was calling, so she decided to speak with him. Once Miller took that phone call, it changed her life. She said it was a bit of her father's excitement, her curiosity about a new job, and the money for college that prompted her decision to enlist in January 1993. Her choice that day shaped her life and helped her "take a lot of cool steps along the way that she wouldn't have went otherwise."

When Miller was 17, she joined the U.S. Army Reserve, completing basic training between her junior and senior year of high school. Then, completed her Advanced Individual Training (AIT) for combat medic after she graduated from high school. She served in the 4226th U.S. Army Hospital located at the U.S. Army Reserve Center in Minot until 2006. It was

decided that the 4226th would deactivate, so Miller moved to the National Guard. She said that the military helped her to achieve her goals by exposing her to different cultures, helping her to learn about the medical field, and most of all, meeting some of the greatest people and developing irreplaceable, lifelong friendships.

What surprised Miller the most about serving in the military was "how it gets in your blood, like you just got to stay. It feels really good to serve your community and serve people." Miller also explained that besides the good feelings, it's the awesome individuals that a soldier comes to know—people with whom a soldier shares the same values, and becoming like a whole, extended, second family. From other soldiers, Miller learned what it meant to be a good leader and what and what not to do to become that good leader—to lead by example and make a difference in a soldier's life.

Miller's advice to new recruits is to push themselves, and to do things they thought they would never do. She explained that at first, it might be scary but do it because no one knows the extent of their abilities until they try a new job or step into a higher position. Utilize all the

opportunities that you're offered and take that assignment that's out there to see the world.

The military really did help Miller reach her educational goals too. While still in the U.S. Army, Miller earned a master's degree in social work and manages her own counseling clinic in Minot. Miller said she was attracted to the field of social work because around the age of 21, she needed counseling herself, and she appreciated how the counselor helped her with different perspectives and how to reframe how to look at situations. She thought it would be awesome to do that kind of work. Miller worked many years with different organizations, including the Veterans' Administration (VA), and finally, to achieve a better work, home, and family life, she opened her own office. It has allowed her to help people in a better, more meaningful way.

Since December of 2022, Miller has achieved her dream of helping more people in the Minot community. Because she is a veteran and recognizes all that veterans do and have done for their country, she calls her service Healing Freedom Counseling because mental health struggles can prevent a person from feeling free. Miller states, "Freedom is so, so important, and I wish



SSG (Ret.) Hiedi Miller stands next to her "ride" on a flu shot mission when the ND Army Reserve National Guard deployed small teams throughout the state in October to accomplish all flu vaccinations by November 1. She flew from Bismarck to Williston. North Dakota owned the plane, and ND Governor and Adjunct General of the ND National Guard used the plane to get around quickly.

for everyone to have that, but with mental health struggles, sometimes those get in the way of feeling free, so by healing those, you can reach that freedom and

be your best self." Miller retired from the U.S. Army as a Staff Sergeant (SSG, E-6) in April 2013 with 20 years of service.



The front door of Healing Freedom Counseling PLLC, which is solely owned and operated by Hiedi Miller, Staff Sergeant, (Ret.), U.S. Army Reserve National Guard.



Hiedi Miller, Staff Sergeant, U.S. Army, Ret. and her counseling service in Minot.

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# Keeping the American Legion Front and Center...

MARVIN BAKER

It's been a long time since Gary Knudtson put on an Army uniform, but the warrior ethos (put the mission first) has never faded from his mind.

Knudtson, of Donnybrook, is 89 and served in the Army Reserves 311th General Hospital from 1959-1965 that had units in Minot, Bismarck, Grand Forks and Fargo.

A 1953 Minot High School graduate, Knudtson was trained at Fort Sam Houston as a hospital medic.

He spent five summers doing annual training that included Fitzsimmons Hospital in Denver, Fort Carson, Colo., back to Fort Sam Houston, then to Fort McCoy, Wis., which at the time was called Camp McCoy, and finally his last annual training was held at Fort Riley, Kan.

He has a vivid memory of the Berlin Crisis in 1961 and how the 311th was put on alert in case a bad situation went to worse. 1961 is the year the Berlin Wall was built.

Another incident includes a woman he met at Fitzsimmons who had hepatitis whom he cared for while on active duty.

By the time Knudtson got to Fort Riley, he was a specialist 5 and was able to pull a few strings to get a ride on what he called a "little bubble" helicopter like the ones used in Korea.

He would have re-enlisted, but life got in the way.

"I'd have re-upped, but I got married that spring," Knudtson said. "I was 20 years old when I went in and some Carpio guys joined at the same time."

His first paycheck was \$78 a month and when he got out in 1965, he was up to \$80 a month.

Knudtson is now an active member of American Legion Post 195 in Donnybrook. There were a lot of years since his honorable discharge until he joined the American Legion.

"I joined the American Legion in 2005," he said. "I wasn't considered a full veteran because I wasn't in during a war or conflict."

That all changed after the Twin Towers in New York were attacked on Sept. 11, 2001.

"So when I got a letter that I was a full vet, I joined," Knudtson added. "I've always been in Post 195."

Officially known as the Clarence McCormack American Legion Post 195, Knudtson wants people to take away from this article that an American Legion post in Donnybrook, population 52, remains active.

"We've got to let people know we still exist and we are doing good things," he said. "Military funerals are our first priority; there are Boys

and Girls State, American Legion baseball and many other entities we work with."

Now the vice commander, Knudtson served as commander of Post 195 from 2016-2021. During one Memorial Day message, he recalls giving a presentation about the post's namesake, Clarence McCormack, much of what he gleaned from the Donnybrook Courier newspaper.

The current commander is Dean Poppinga. Wyatt Goettle is the treasurer, Greg Jacobson the adjutant, Russell Bott the chaplain and Dave Miller is sergeant at arms. Danny Michel has been the longest serving commander of Post 195. Michel served in that position for 13 years.

"We have a fair amount of members," Knudtson said. "We just need more active members."

Even though the Donnybrook post is numbered 195 of 210 American Legion posts in North Dakota, Knudtson explained that following the inaugural meeting of the American Legion in France in March 1919, charters were quickly granted in the United States.

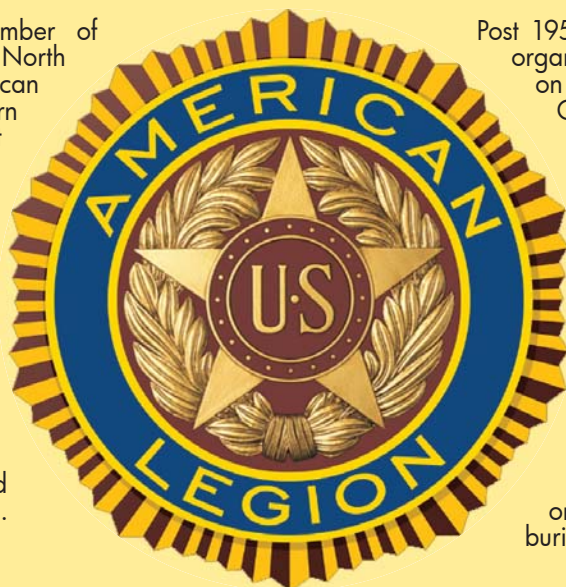
"Hundreds of posts joined in the first six months," he said. "We joined in the fall of 1919."



American Legion Post 195 Vice Commander Gary Knudtson looks through the Post 195 roster in his home.

The American Legion was founded as a patriotic, mutual help, wartime veterans organization. It is a community service organization with 12,000 members belonging to 210 posts across North Dakota.

Post 195 is a member of the Department of North Dakota American Legion's Western Region, Sixth District and is located 35 miles northwest of Minot. Additional posts in District 6 listed on the American Legion's roster include Minot Air Force Base, Post 304 and Minot, Post 26. Tolley, Velva, Granville, Kenmare, Makoti and Mohall are also listed.



Post 195 received its national organization charter on Aug. 2, 1920. Christie Barke was elected temporary chairman and the name Clarence McCormack was agreed upon for the name of the post. McCormack joined the North Dakota National Guard in Minot on July 14, 1917. He served overseas until he was killed in action on July 20, 1918. He is buried in France.

## VETERANS DAY

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TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

# Lives That Touch Soldiers, Pilots & POW's

ROD WILSON, NORTHERN SENTRY

Two lifetime friends, connected through their time at a German POW camp, are joined once again after their lives have ended through a series of events related to a book about WWII heroes in Benson County, North Dakota.

Art Linrud and Merlin McCloud would visit about once a year. Art was a turret gunner on a B-17 that was shot down on October 14th, 1943, Black Thursday. Merlin was a tail gunner on a B-17 that was shot down by a German fighter on November 10, 1943 near Bologna, Italy.

Linrud and McCloud would end up in the same German POW camp, Stalag 17B near Krems, Austria for 18 months. After being freed from Stalag 17B, the two were picked up by the 3rd Army near Strasburg, Bavaria.

Art Linrud returned to his hometown of Velva, North Dakota, where he farmed just south of Velva. Merlin McCloud was from Maddock, North Dakota. Mr. McCloud, as I would know him, lived just 2 houses away from my Mom & Dad. Merlin was a rural mail carrier.

**AUTHORS MARLAN & NANCY HVINDEN**

During my time at the University of North Dakota I would get re-acquainted with longtime friend Marlan Hvinden and his wife Nancy Hvinden. Marlan was originally from Maddock, but he was 12 years older than me. He worked for the local newspaper, The Standard,



Marlan & Nancy Hvinden

in the days of typesetting and typewriters.

His decision to seek a journalism degree at UND, 12 years into his career, would make him one of those older than average students.

Nancy was not a journalism major, "we met in Norwegian class" she says. After graduation from UND, the Hvindens would move to Garrison, ND where Marlan was the editor of the McClean County Independent, a weekly newspaper printed in Garrison. Later he would leave the Independent and start the Dakota Country magazine, finally ending up as the McLean County Auditor at the Courthouse in Washburn, until he retired.

After retiring there was a renewed interest in continuing their work. Marlan would finish his book Justice Was Swift, Tales of the Old West. It was a book of stories of the law and the lawless in western North Dakota from 1867 to 1910.

The Hvindens then turned their attention, and their efforts to publishing a book about WWII veterans in Benson County. Of particular focus was Merle Gilbertson, a young man from Flora, North Dakota, who enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps. He would fly a P-51 Mustang during WWII. Merle Gilbertson would gain fame for his distinctly recognizable Sad Sack color scheme. Major Merle Gilbertson would eventually lose his life in a jet plane accident after WWII. His F-38 would suffer a flame-out, and the pilot ejection seat would fail. Merle Gilbertson

was laid to rest in October of 1950. There were full military honors, and a flight of P-51's overflying North Viking Church in Maddock.

For those of us with a passion to hear and record the stories of our veterans, there is the challenge of listening closely to the hundreds of true-life experiences that war creates. My introduction to Art Linrud was through my wife, Sue (Linrud) Wilson. Sue's father Lawrence and Sue's Uncle Art were both WWII veterans. It would certainly be accurate to say that most veterans keep those stories close to the vest, until they feel the time is right to share. "They all pretty much lived by the 75 year rule" according to Nancy Hvinden. That rule meant that all military information is classified for 75 years. In 2019 that rule was repealed. Many veterans were more open with their war experiences. Many still chose not to talk about the war.

It was a hunting trip with Art Linrud that brought to light some of the information. I knew that he and Merlin McCloud were friends from the war a POW's together at Stalag 17B. Like Merlin, Art would stop short of a complete explanation of the horrible conditions they endured.

One afternoon Art put the truck in park, and gazing across the North Dakota landscape he would explain to me the long march to the American lines after being released from Stalag 17B. How they chose to go many miles more to reach the American lines to the west, rather than to the Russian lines to the east. How those who were healthy were able to carry those who were ill and could not walk. And of course there were those who did not make it to freedom. Still, most were carried, even though deceased, to the American lines rather than be buried along the way.

And then there was an afternoon in Art's basement where he had professionally organized his war experience. On the wall were names of fellow crew members, and those from other B-17's. Some were marked "because they died on the mission." Others were not accounted for. A simple "X" across the plane meant it was shot down during the mission. It was surreal, because to say that many planes were lost is one thing, to see them represented on a chart was yet another. I was honored to share in Art Linrud's story that afternoon. It didn't seem



Art Linrud  
World War II veteran

right that I was a journalist that day. If I were wearing that hat I would have taken notes and recorded the event with photos. Instead, I was a friend who Art Linrud chose to share his story with.

As I look at Marlan and Nancy Hvinden's book, I imagine the daunting task they had. "We made many trips to Maddock and Benson County" Nancy shared "there were just untold hours spent interviewing and listening" adds Marlan. There are 460 pages of stories and photos, and as Nancy said, "there could have been a lot more." There were stories that weren't shared, maybe because the memories were too painful, maybe because they were forgotten. But of more importance are the stories and memories that are recorded and retained for future generations.

**CONNECTIONS NEVER LOST**

I know a lot of the names in The Heroes Next Door book. No one took my hand and walked with me to Merlin's front door and said, "let me introduce you to a real hero." It's not what Merlin wanted or expected. In Merlin's story, his granddaughter is the recorder. Merlin's story now only lives on in the pages of Marlan and Nancy's

book, but in the memory of Tamara Lea Schwartz, hopefully passed on to the next generation.

The time we have with these WWII veterans is almost over. But thanks to the Marlan and Nancy Hvindens of the world, the stories of these true American heroes will be passed on.

**SGT. MERLIN MC CLOUD PARACHUTES FROM B-17, WAS CAPTURED, FORCED TO ENDURE ONE YEAR IN NOTORIOUS NAZI STALAG 17-B**

*Reprinted with permission of Marlan and Nancy Hvinden.*

A rural Maddock, North Dakota farmer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Loren McCloud had special interest in the war news because two of their sons, Harley, 23, and Merlin 21, were fighting in the North African/Middle Eastern Theatre. Harley had enlisted in the Army in April 1941 and became an infantryman, while Merlin went a different route, enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Corps June 13, 1942, and found himself a crew member on a B-17 Flying Fortress, manning the tail gun on the four motor bomber.



Sgt. Merlin McCloud  
(Photo Courtesy of McCloud Family)

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## TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

Mr. and Mrs. McCloud were notified in mid-June 1943 son Harley had died after being wounded April 8, 1943. An intense battle in the desert of Tunisia made it impossible to get medical aid for soldiers. Harley McCloud died in the dark as the jeep carrying him to an aid station stalled in deep sand. McCloud's commanding officer, an aide and two other soldiers battled for hours to get the jeep moving but in the interim Harley died peacefully.

McCloud's parents hoped that 1944 would get off to a good start, New Year's they received a message that their son was reported missing but alive, although he was a prisoner of the Germans.

Several weeks later McCloud was reported a German prisoner of war. The message came from the Red Cross and was welcomed news indeed. It brought them other information through rather roundabout channels but none the less authentic. His ship was shot down by a German fighter on November 10, 1943. Three of the ten-man crew members managed to escape by parachute while the other seven killed in the crash or from enemy machine gun fire from the

fighter which attacked them.

It took 42 years and a High School 10th grade class writing project by Sgt. McCloud's granddaughter Tamara Lea Schwartz to get some facts of McCloud's POW days. Prior to her interview for the writing project, she had never talked about the war with her grandfather. She had previously been told how her grandfather had left for overseas on February 8, 1943. Just six days later he and crewmates on the B-17 they were ferrying to England had engine trouble and the plane was crash landed near a small island off French West Africa. The following italicized story is the first-hand account of what Tamara was told to her by her grandfather. "After the bomber crashed the crew made their way to a beach on French Guinea and into the jungle where he was spotted by search planes and picked up on an emergency landing strip and sent to French West Africa. He spent a week in the hospital with malaria and then sent to Algeria late in April 1943.

"It was there he learned his older brother had been killed in action in North Africa. His first bombing raid was May 10, 1943," Tamara said, "He was on his 50th mission the day his plane was shot down. (Nov. 10, 1943)

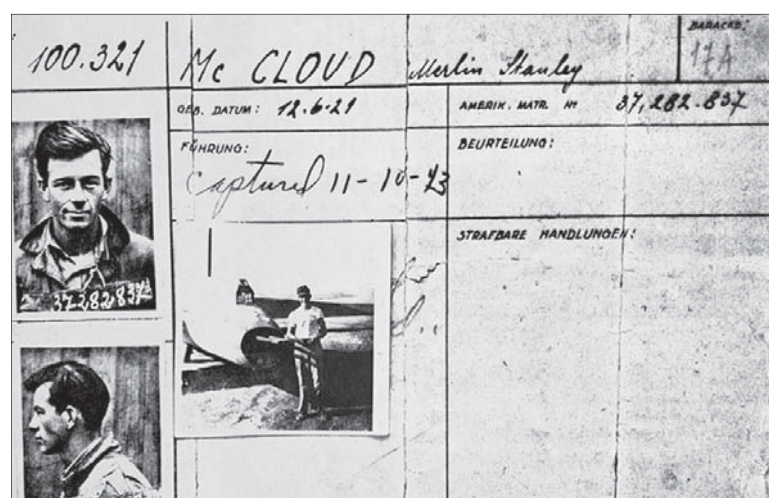
near Bologna, Italy. He and the pilot parachuted from the doomed plane, but the remaining seven crewmembers died in the crash. Bomber and fighter crews completing 50 missions were rotated back home for a furlough. He came so close," his granddaughter remarked.

He said, "It got worse, we dropped into a German airfield, and I was knocked out, when I came too, all I could see were leather boots and six pistols aimed at my head."

McCloud was put on a train to Frankfort, Germany where he was interrogated before being sent to Stalag 17B, Krems, Austria.

Tamara Schwartz noted that it was six months before his parents knew he was a POW. His first letter arrived at his parent's home June 1944.

"The conditions at Stalag 17B were very bad, my bed was straw pad with one blanket. There were close to 4,500 men and there was a lot of illnesses and no doctors to treat them. When I first got there, I spent the first two weeks in solitary confinement. I ate turnip soup with worms and sawdust bread. We got very little fresh food, only what came from the Red Cross." (McCloud spent 363 days imprisoned but would only say "Terrible" and only prisoners can ever know how bad



Merlin McCloud POW Camp Identification Paper, (Courtesy of McCloud Family)

things were, he told Tamara.

"On May 8, 1945, the American 3rd Army picked me and others up in the woods near Strasburg, Bavaria. I was transported to LeHavre, France, where I was given a physical, food, clothing and then interrogated by our people." Sgt. McCloud told his granddaughter.

She closed her interview with this observation: "On his birthday, June 12th, 1945, he returned to the states for a 60-day rest leave. He felt that

people were very cold toward him, my grandfather had a very bad time telling me all this. Afterwards he rarely talked of the war until he joined a POW Organization in 1983. He says no one will ever know the things that they went through and the way they were treated (by their captors). There will always the nightmares (for us)." Tamara Lea Schwartz - Granddaughter of a Hero, Sgt. Merlin McCloud.

## A Sense of Duty - A Sense of Pride

KIM FUNDINGSLAND

It was a sense of duty. That's how one Minot veteran described his commitment to military service.

Andy Maragos, 80, son of a Greek immigrant, credits his father with instilling in him a strong work ethic and sense of pride in the United States.

"My father came to Minot about 1915 with the railroad as a Gandy Dancer. He laid railroad track," said Maragos. "Dad came through Ellis Island. To speed citizenship, he enlisted in the Army and went to France in WWI."

After returning from WWI, Maragos' father owned and operated several businesses in early day Minot, including farm to market stores in the city. Andy Maragos, one of nine children, remembers working for his father.

"We grew up stocking shelves, dusting, carrying out groceries. Dad gave us responsibilities. We always had something to do. It was a great life," said Maragos. "Dad wanted us to be smart and responsible. I was very blessed in that regard."

Following his graduation from Minot High School, Maragos enrolled at the University of North Dakota and its ROTC program, a natural step for a young man considering a career in the military. Upon graduation from UND he

was commissioned into the Army in 1960. A weak eye precluded him from combat branches of the military.

"I was relegated to the medical service corps and basic at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. That's where I entered the Army," said Maragos. "I went to medical school and became a supply officer."

The year was 1968 and the Viet Nam war was ramping up. Maragos was assigned to the 5th mechanized infantry division at Fort Carson, Colorado in preparation for overseas duty. He was soon on his way to the war zone in Viet Nam, assigned to the 11th armored cavalry regiment.

"Tanks," remarked Maragos. "My first commander was George Patton III. He was a colonel then and well-liked by his troops. We were the Black Horse, a well-known unit in the Army - well-known."

Maragos had what he described as "quite an interesting job", that being to advise the commanding officer as to medical supplies. A surgical hospital was set up at a base camp in the theater of war, for the purpose of providing definitive medical care for the surrounding combat area.

"I was the supply officer for the 11th Cav as well as being the supply officer for the entire regiment," recalled Maragos. "Everything I did

was a sense of duty."

That duty included being creative at times for the betterment of others in uniform, such as when he sought an upgrade to x-ray equipment. Maragos was able to secure a full body x-ray machine but had no table necessary for its use.

"I decided to confiscate a table at the depot," said Maragos with a slight grin. "I opted for rarely used mission authority. I found out where the tables were stored and brought a 6'5" Pennsylvania miner with me. He was about 260 pounds of muscle. We took a table back and were able to properly x-ray wounded soldiers."

Though not serving in a direct combat role, Maragos' time in Viet Nam wasn't without some very anxious moments. The Viet Cong, or "Charlie", were anywhere and everywhere, especially at night.

"They were always probing. You had to be really vigilant at night. They were remarkably stealthy and remarkably good at penetration, getting through the wire. If they got in, they created havoc," said Maragos.

An often-used tactic of the Viet Cong was to lob rocket fire onto U.S. bases wherever they might be. Maragos had some firsthand experience during an assignment



Andy Maragos

near the Cambodian border. A day prior to his arrival a rocket struck the outside corner of his billet, putting a 6-7-foot hole in the ground.

"I foolishly walked down into that hole to inspect the corner of the building. I know others were upset at having to follow me. When we were all down in that hole, guess what?" said Maragos. "A rocket came in right on top of the building. Because we were all below ground none of us even got shrapnel."

Looking back on his service, Maragos says he enjoyed his tour of duty and would do it again "in a heartbeat." He cites working with people from throughout the United States that he otherwise never would have met as a benefit to his

service. But, said Maragos, there's much more reward to serving your country.

"It gives you a sense of pride to be part of something bigger than yourself. That you weren't an embarrassment to anybody. That you improved situations and did good things. To me, that's very important for self-appreciation," said Maragos.

His dedication to his job and fellow soldiers led to Maragos rising to the rank of Captain. He was discharged from the Army in 1970, joining the ranks of thousands of veterans who live and work among us today, enriching countless communities across the U.S. To all - thank you for your service.

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## TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

# Me? I Didn't Do Anything Special

## George Franklin's Military Career Spans Two Wars

ROD WILSON, NORTHERN SENTRY

A young George Franklin started his military career in September of 1944 at Fort Snelling. Across the Atlantic Ocean Allied troops had reached Paris, and in the Pacific U.S. troops had landed in the Philippines.

From Fort Snelling George was shipped to Texas for training. His next stop was Fort Mead, Maryland "and soon after that I went across the Atlantic on the Queen Mary landing in Scotland and going from there to South Hampton, England by train overnight" and according to George the journey would continue in France as American troops were transported in boxcars referred to as forty and eights, "they were French Army box cars, and they could carry 40 men or eight horses."

These American troops would end up near Luxembourg where they joined the 76th Division. "I was in the 417th regiment. We went clear across Germany over to what would end up being the Russian zone. The Army wanted us to know just what the Nazis were like, so some of us were taken by truck to the Buchenwald concentration camp" as George remembers. The soldiers toured the camp and were able to see first-hand the terrible conditions. "There were gallows and a small gas chamber and a crematorium right there. The gas chamber was small. I guess they could probably kill about 30-40 people at a time. The Army just really wanted us to know what went on. The camp was established in the early 30's and it originally housed political dissidents. "They kept thousands in that camp. I was young and easily impressed, and I can remember the gallows where they could hang about 5 people at one time. It was an extremely cruel place to be" as George now recalls.

From there the next leg of the trip would take George back into Bavaria. Where his regiment ended up would eventually be a Russian occupation zone, where they would act as an occupation Army until the younger soldiers, George included, were to be sent to the far east where WWII was still going on. "We were sent back to France to a replacement depot near the French city of Faso. There were rumors that the group would then be sent through the Suez canal to China/Burma...but the war ended when we were there. I was

then sent to Le Havre where I spent about a year. Again, we were part of the occupation force processing men who were going home. When it was my turn to go home I was amused because on one side of the pier we were loading up troops that we going to the United States, and on the other side of the pier were German prisoners coming back from the United States. We went home to the U.S. on a ship called the Westerly Victory, and I ended up in a camp in New Jersey, and then I was sent to Fort Sheridan, Illinois where I was discharged."



76th Infantry Division Class A Patch WWII

But that was not the end of George Franklin's service to his country. "For personal reasons I enlisted again in 1949 and went to signal school in New Jersey. I was sent to Korea, and I spent a good year and a half there. I came home and was discharged" says George "and I spent a year with the Great Northern Railroad." When business at the Great Northern slowed down, George was laid off, but he soon found employment with a telephone company where he stayed for 44 years.

Relating back on his war time experience, George spent time as an occupation force in Germany to make sure there were no problems. "But in general, there wasn't any problems with the German population. They were as happy to have the war over as we were."

For a young man who only had turned 18 just 26 days before he enlisted in the Army, to a service man in his mid-20's when he was discharged in 1951, George's military career, although not continuous, would span over 7 years, but more impressive is that he would have experienced 2 wars,

WWII and Korea.

As we sit and talk, George will talk about his time in the service. "You know that the camps around La Havre were named after cigarettes. At first I was in camp Lucky Strike and then I was transferred to camp Phillip Morris. They had to have a name of some sort."

It would only be 3 years between George's out processing from WWII to his enlistment for the Korean War. His duty in Korea as a member of the signal corps was the experience he would rely on to find his position with Northwestern Bell, a phone company that had service to many towns in North Dakota.

Pusan would be George's first stop in Korea in 1950. Soon George would be shipped north to a position just outside of Seoul. "We had a radio station in a location that was an old Japanese radio station. But soon, the Chinese Army came down and we were back in Pusan again" says George.

The Army called up reservists at the start of then the Korean Conflict. It was not unusual to see men who had spent time in WWII "and there were a lot of officers who had been in WWII and were restored to officer's rank to serve in Korea."

George Franklin, now 98 years old, is one of the few veterans of WWII left. George's father was a WWI veteran, and his brother was a gunner in a tank stationed in the Pacific. He was part of the second Philippines invasion.

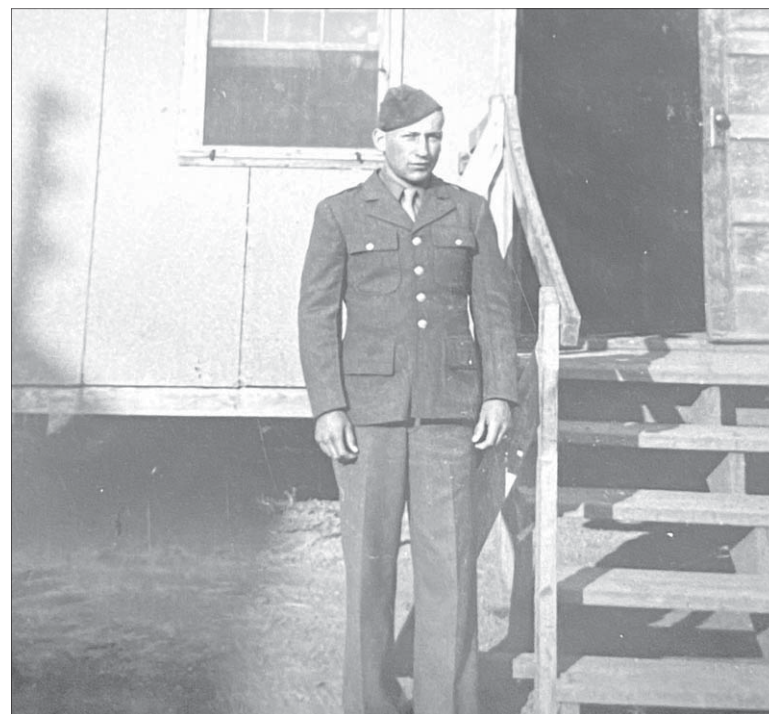
Still hanging in his closet are his 2 uniforms, and he jokes about being much smaller back when he enlisted in 1944. On a table in a separate room are his military photos. He is slowly working through the photo albums, re-organizing them.

He is always eager to share the photos and stories from his military years, and is quick to say, "I really didn't do much."

We often forget that these men and women; sons, daughters, husbands, wives & even grandfathers and grandsons, did answer the call. Even though WWII would end during their military tenure in Europe, they would step up again in just 3 short years and answer the call to Korea. Not with a grudge, and not with a complaint. But with a desire to serve their country. Yes, George Franklin, you did a lot.



George Franklin Proudly Displays His Korean War Uniform



George Franklin just after enlisting in the U.S. Army in 1944.



The French Government gave every state 40 &amp; 8 Boxcars after the war. This one is located on the State Capital Grounds in Bismarck.



# VETERANS DAY

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TRIBUTE TO SERVICE

# Yes Sir!...She's From Around Here

ROD WILSON, NORTHERN SENTRY

*One of our most popular articles this past summer was about DeAnn Fylling, a Minot native who is a member of the 188th Army Band, or the North Dakota Army National Guard. Although dated from this summer, we thought the story would be a nice addition to our Tribute to Service Insert. We hope you enjoy the article about a young woman who has persevered through some trying times. Her battle with breast cancer while maintaining her family life and managing an active career has been an inspiration.*

Well, just as North Dakotan is our braggadocios behavior about who is "From Around Here." I have taken that platform several times to tell folks about best kept secrets. My son(s) call me a professional networker because I seem to know, or know about, almost everyone. In that light, I met up with someone who I think you should all meet. Folks, this week's article is about DeAnn (Hickel) Fylling, a member of the 188th Army Band, and I am mighty proud to say, "she's from around here!"

For a couple of months I was able to tell folks about the 188th Military Band appearing at Oak Park on a Sunday night, July 21st. As one of the emcees for the Minot City band, I could proudly and boldly declare that a young lady from Minot, DeAnn Fylling, was one of the leaders of the 188th Army Band, that being the position of 1st Sergeant. Of course there are an additional 44 talented musicians in the 188th, but DeAnn is from around here, right?

Growing up just a couple of blocks from our home in northwest Minot, DeAnn's mom, Shelli, and my wife, Sue worked together for a few years. From that relationship I met DeAnn's father, Brian. I am going to fast forward a bit and explain that the Wilsons were all boys. We knew DeAnn well, but her path through high school would take her to Bishop Ryan. Our boys went to Minot High. You might say we kind of went separate ways, the Wilsons and the Hickels.

After graduating in 2001 from high school, DeAnn would begin her music education at Jamestown College, "now the University of Jamestown" according to DeAnn. Next? "Well, I taught in Milnor for about 5 years, and then in 2009 my husband and I moved to Bismarck, and we were expecting a baby that fall". At that time Fylling was already in the Army National Guard, a career that has spanned over 23 years "and of those 23 year I have been in the (Army National Guard) band for 16 of those."

After spending about a year at

home with their first child, DeAnn went back to work full time for the National Guard in a military funeral honors position, which she really enjoyed, but baby #2 would soon be on her way, and "I wanted to spend time at home with my kids, so I've been doing the Army Band part time and staying at home part time ever since then" says Fylling.

In the Army National Guard band, Fylling plays saxophone, guitar and does vocals. "We play all different kind of saxophones depending on the need" says Fylling "right now I've been doing a lot of baritone (saxophone)."

The 188th is a typical guard unit, in that they drill one weekend per month "and we have an additional 2 weeks that we spread out over the year. We are doing 10 days now. We are here after doing Medora for 3 days. We'll be here at the North Dakota State Fair for 3 days, we did the Minot Arts in the Parks show and at the end of the week we'll go to Mohall and Bottineau."

For 5 days every fall the band does tours of local schools "yeah, it's really neat. It's called Music in our Schools tour. So, for 5 days we on tour. We're based in one place, and we try to hit 6 or 7 schools over the course of a week with all of the different ensembles performing at different schools. We try to get the students involved in our outreach stuff" according to Fylling. After a quick calculation DeAnn comes up with "in my years we've probably hit well over 100 schools for sure, showing them what we do and getting them involved."

The 188th is a deployable unit "but we haven't been needed overseas at this point" says Fylling "the Army band has done a lot of state side activations. When the DAPL protests were going on we were activated down there for just over a month, and in the 2009 & 2011 floods, which of course very much affected Minot."

And then we started talking about home. "I feel there are more familiar faces in Minot than anywhere else. I've been out of Minot for over 20 plus years. It's fun to get home and catch up with everyone else in Minot" DeAnn shares with a smile.

Like old friends who catch up, there is always so much to talk about. DeAnn's father, Brian passed away unexpectedly a few years back, and today's concert would be a little hard because Brian came to all of her concerts and sat in the front row. And then there's the battle that the Fylling family is fighting, DeAnn's breast cancer. I shared with her how much energy she had on stage at the Oak Park concert. "Sometimes you

just have to kind of make it work" DeAnn shared. The day I talked with her, a Monday, was her first Monday without a chemotherapy treatment. Except for the obvious loss of hair, you would never know. She still keeps up with her band appearances, her 3 kids and of course a household. Hopefully the next time we talk, we can talk in past tense about her cancer. It will be a battle she has won.

And then there came a voice from stage..." Sound check". So well-orchestrated, everyone took their place. Today was not going to be a picnic in the park for the 188th jazz band and saxophone quartet; oh, did I mention that DeAnn and the saxophone quartet just returned from a good will tour in Africa? Now let's get back to the area where the band would perform. It was a very hot, muggy day. But the show must go on, and so it did. DeAnn grabbed her baritone sax, took her seat and was ready to play. Her mom, Shelli, sat next to me, concerned of course for her daughter because of the hot sun.

I learned from a very dedicated journalism teacher back in college that you never end a good story, on a bad note. The concert was absolutely great! Several good notes!

I hope that those who read this story understand the admiration and respect that this journalist has for DeAnn Fylling and the entire 188th Army Band. I also hope all of my readers understand that DeAnn and every member of the band loves what they do. It's more than just a one weekend a month job.

Finally, if you don't know DeAnn, I highly encourage you to attend one of the 188th Army Band concerts in the future. Take a couple of minutes after the concert to greet all of the members of the 188th Army Band; but especially DeAnn Fylling, because you know...yes sir, she's from around here.

### THE NEXT 50 METERS

DeAnn Fylling was starting her Monday morning after a week-long guard duty where the 188th Army Band(s) travelled the state performing in schools. "The troops did awesome. In my new position I am more of a people manager than a performer, so my supervisor and I were pretty busy last week."

And then there is "Super Cooper". DeAnn returned from guard duty to welcome a new puppy to the Fylling home. Our other dog is getting a bit older, so we think it's time" share DeAnn.

And then the next 50 meters. DeAnn will start 5 weeks of radiation therapy on November



Emily, Olivia, DeAnn, Eliza and Eli Fylling.

4th. "Every day for 5 weeks" according to DeAnn "and I also just recently started chemotherapy with a maintenance chemo drug. I get 1 infusion every 3 weeks until June."

A surgical procedure revealed that 5% of the breast tissue had living cancer cells. "They are almost sure that they removed all of the cancer, but they want to be pro-active" she says.

For a Mom and a career professional, it's a double edged sword. First it's the time commitment for the treatments "Fighting breast cancer is a time commitment these days" DeAnn says with a laugh. But then there are the lingering side effects, the most prevalent of which is fatigue. But it comes with the territory, and now DeAnn has to once again rely on family, friends, her church family and of course the 188th Army Band family.

When she found out that she was going to need more radiation & chemo? "At first it was a big disappointment. But it didn't take long to realize that I have to take it one day at a time. We have a saying in the Army; What's your next 50 meter target? You have to hit that first, and then move on" adds DeAnn.

So, when June finally comes, and she hears the words cancer free? "I can hardly wait to move on with my life...but of course we still have to take one day at a time."

There are so many lessons learned in life when you deal with adversity. "My husband is (Eli) is a Rock Star! He just picks up the things that I can't handle" says DeAnn. With 3 girls ages 15, 11 & 7, one can imagine that the Fylling home is pretty busy.

And then there is the lesson about receiving help from those around. "It's hard to ask for and receive help" she says "but we are so grateful. Whether it's helping out with meals, or laundry or a lot of other things, people are there" DeAnn adds "and I truly have learned to be grateful for what is right in front of me. Too many people, especially adults, tend to concentrate on next year, or even the next 5 years."

The breast cancer battle for DeAnn Fylling started with her diagnosis on February 16th, 2023. A month later, on March 18th, 2023, her treatments started.

Once again, we can all learn from DeAnn Fylling, and all of those who battle cancer. Their focus is and has to be The Next 50 Meters.

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