

The Soldier and the Sculptor – Two Notable Harborites

Part I - Highly decorated Major General Eldon Bargewell rooted deep in Hoquiam

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For The Daily World, May 11, 2023

*Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series titled *The Soldier and the Sculptor*. Part II will be published in Saturday's *The Daily World*. Author Tom Quigg is a fourth-generation Harborite, the author/creator of *The Harbor — A Culture of Success* (online at www.cultureofsuccess.com), and a Port of Grays Harbor Commissioner.*

Traveling through West Hoquiam along Emerson Avenue you'll notice a new plaza in a triangle park at Maple and N Streets. The plaza is the site of a memorial statue planned to honor a legendary military hero and member of Delta Force, Major General Eldon Bargewell. Eldon was raised and educated in Hoquiam, in the neighborhood where the bronze statue will be located. To honor the significance of the memorial, the City of Hoquiam recently named the park as *Major General Eldon A Bargewell Delta Park*, and the plaza walkways resemble the Delta Forces emblem.

The planning for the memorial came about after Eldon met an untimely accidental death in April 2019. Jay Fry, retired principal of Hoquiam Middle School, a high school teammate of Eldon and later a neighbor of his parents, had gotten to know him on his occasional visits home. In late 2019 Jay conceived the idea of a memorial to honor his friend Major General Bargewell, and began by reaching out to David Mitchell, a former classmate of Eldon, and discussed a plan. The next step was to combine forces with another group seeking recognition for the General. Under Jay's leadership a committee was formed that worked on design, Bargewell family approval, city approval, contracts, and sculptor engagement. How this project progressed is a story in itself, and is best understood by visiting the website, www.eldonbargewell.org.

An interesting side story is how the entire project is a collaboration of Harborites. The larger than life-sized bronze statue is being created by Rip Caswell, one of the most accomplished bronze sculptors in America, who was raised and educated in Montesano. The conceptual design for the memorial plaza was created by David Mitchell, a Hoquiam High School classmate of Eldon. The construction is by Quigg Bros. Inc., a multigenerational construction firm with deep roots in Hoquiam. The website for the project is www.eldonbargewell.org, which was created by the Byron sisters, Kathleen and Jacqueline, also of Hoquiam. Most importantly, private fundraising is nearly complete for the estimated \$330,000 budget, with donations from all over Grays Harbor, and the nation.

So, save the date for the dedication scheduled for Armed Forces Day, May 20, 2023.

Meanwhile, the story of *The Soldier and the Sculptor* will be told in two parts. Part 1 will be on Major General Eldon Bargewell, *the Soldier*, and Part 2 on Rip Caswell, *the Sculptor*. We hope you enjoy it.

The Soldier and the Sculptor – Major General Eldon Bargewell, the Soldier.

In the center of the plaza constructed in the triangle park on Emerson Avenue, between Maple and N Streets in Hoquiam, a larger than life size bronze statue will be installed to honor Hoquiam military hero, Major General Eldon Bargewell

Eldon Bargewell was raised and educated in Hoquiam. It's fitting that during his youth the family lived on N Street, just two and one half blocks from the site of the bronze statue, which will commemorate his military career.

After graduation from Hoquiam High School in the Class of 1965, Eldon attended Grays Harbor College to play football for the Grays Harbor College *Chokers*, under nationally recognized Coach Jack Elway. His first season was cut short because of a knee injury. In 1967 he enlisted in the US Army, and volunteered for Special Forces training (Green Beret) in 1968. As a Staff Sergeant of MACV SOG, an elite Special Forces group, he served two tours in Viet Nam. During that time, he received the nation's second highest award for valor (one step below the Medal of Honor) – the Distinguished Service Cross. In 1970 SSgt Bargewell was selected for Ranger training, and received the Glen M Hall Award as the Enlisted Honor Graduate.

In 1973 he was offered a field appointment to become a commissioned officer. He instead opted to enter Officer Candidate School, where he finished as the Class 3-73 Leadership Honor Graduate. He was subsequently inducted into the Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame in 1997.

In 1981, then Captain Bargewell applied for assignment to 1st Special Forces Detachment (Airborne) at Ft. Benning, Georgia, better known as Delta Force. Some estimates place the number of soldiers applying for Delta Force at 1,700 per year. Out of that number, less than thirty will make it through, and of those thirty, another eighteen will drop out before completing their course. In a 2008 Eldon sent me an email updating his career highlights. A few of his comments included that after becoming an officer he "...commanded elements of Delta Force from Captain to Colonel over a 15 year period, finishing as overall Commander for Delta Force in 1998. As a Battalion Commander in Delta (sic) I led my unit on a rescue mission at H-hour (Webster: the hour set for launching a specific tactical operation) during Operation Just Cause in Panama to rescue US citizen, Kurt Muse, who had been detained for 5 months in Modello Prison by Panamanian Defense Force General Noriega." Noriega had threatened to kill prisoner Kurt Muse if the US tried to rescue him, so the rescue had to occur before the Operation Just Cause began. As you might expect, the mission was successful and Kurt Muse was safely brought home. According to Business Insider writer Stavros Atlamazoglou, "The operation was one of Delta Force's first successful hostage rescues, and firmly established it as the US military's top hostage-rescue outfit."



To LTC Eldon Bargewell
With best wishes,

Cap Bush

Major General Eldon Bargewell is pictured with President George H.W. Bush during a debriefing of Operation Acid Gambit.

Eldon also served a great deal of time during Operation Desert Storm in Iraq, where he led multiple strike missions behind enemy lines against Iraqi missile sites and logistical command systems.

As a Brigadier General, for two years he commanded all Special Forces in Europe and Africa, which included the Special Operations Forces of the Army Green Berets, Navy Seals, and the Air Force Commanders. While the leader of Special Operations in Europe he was “the commander of a Joint Task Force during the air war in Kosovo and Serbia. At that time he led two separate missions inside Serbia via helicopter to rescue F-16 pilots shot down by Serbian Air Defence missiles.”

As a final note in the email he added “As Major General, I commanded the NATO Response Force consisting of 15,000 soldiers from five European nations and the US. My final job was Director of Strategic Operation in Baghdad. During this time, I was tasked to lead the investigation of the US Marine unit fiasco in Haditha, Iraq.”

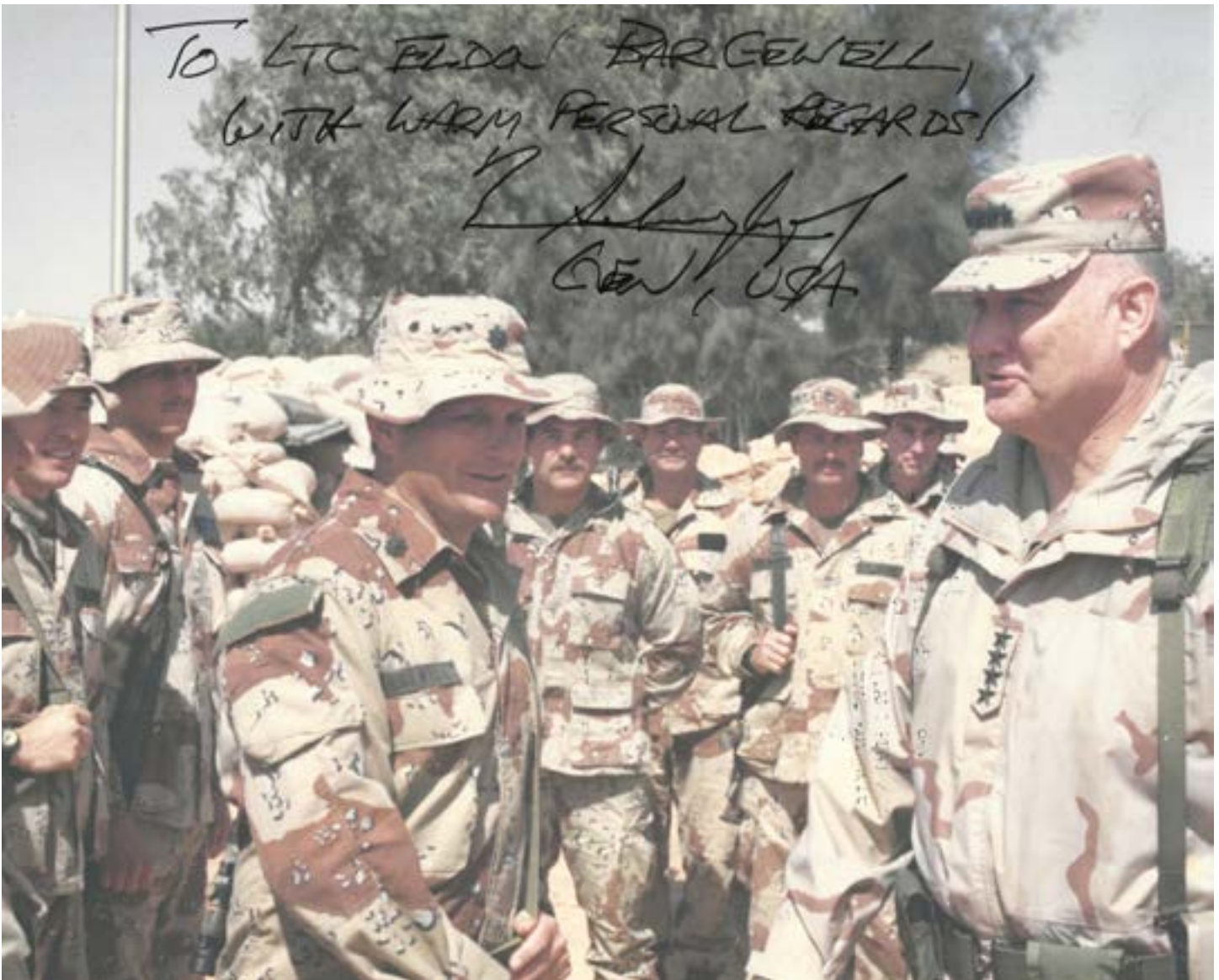


In 2005 in Iraq, Major General Eldon Bargewell is flanked by his two sons.

In a June 6, 2006 *Washington Post* article on General Bargewell’s appointment to lead the Haditha Inquiry, writer Ann Scott Tyson reported, “The two-star Army General leading the main inquiry into the killings of 24 civilians in the Iraqi town of Haditha is a decorated Delta Force operative known among his peers for integrity and uncanny judgement in combat. The 59-year old General is seen as unlikely to bend to pressure...He has unimpeachable integrity said Major General Geoffrey Lambert, a special force officer who has known Bargewell for decades. He (Bargewell) has no constituency that could influence findings. Bargewell is his own man.”

Eldon retired on January 1, 2007, and at the time he was the most highly decorated active duty member of all American military services. During Vietnam alone, he received the US Army Distinguished Service Cross, a Bronze star for Valor, the Army Commendation Medal for Valor, and 4 Purple Hearts. In addition, there were several service medals from the US military, as well as NATO allied countries. Upon retirement he received the US Army’s highest medal for service,

the Distinguished Service Medal. (Note: this is separate from the previously awarded Distinguished Service Cross, which is combat related.) In addition, that same year Major General Bargewell was awarded the Colonel Aaron Bank Award (The Green Beret Award).



MG Eldon Bargewell as a Lt. Colonel with General Norman Schwarzkopf during Operation Desert Storm

After retirement Major General Bargewell was given The Colonel Arthur B "Bull" Simons Award in 2010, U.S. Special Operations Command's highest honor to the person who exemplifies the esprit, values, and skills of the special operations warrior. More on the Bull Simons award can be seen on the www.eldonbargewell.org website. To date only 14 awards have been given.

In 2011, he was inducted into the Ranger Hall of Fame, which may be awarded to "the most extraordinary Rangers." And in 2012 was selected as a Distinguished Member of the Special Forces Regiment.

Eldon is well known for his successful rescue missions, and his unquestioned integrity. He was also a humble man, and credited much of his success to his upbringing on the Harbor. The Daily World did a story on March 13, 2006, prior to his official retirement of January 1, 2007. In that story Eldon made the following observation, "Hoquiam and Aberdeen may not be the center of the universe for business and entertainment, but it is a place where you can rise to success if you have the motivation."

Sadly, on April 29, 2019 Eldon met a tragic death when his riding lawnmower toppled over an embankment at his home in Eufaula, AL.

After Eldon's death, Stavros Atlamazoglou wrote story titled "3 legendary leaders who made America's Special Forces Units into the elite forces they are today" – November 12, 2020, *Insider* (www.businessinsider.com). "Many storied leaders have helped shape and refine the US military's special-operations forces." Three are among the most decorated and accomplished, and their ideas and actions have had a lasting impact on the units they led. "An unconventional visionary: Col. Charles "Chargin' Charlie" Beckwith, One hell of a soldier: Maj. Gen. Eldon Bargewell, and The networker: Gen. Stanley McChrystal."

As a testimony to Eldon, several notable people connected to Major General Bargewell plan to attend the dedication of the memorial. Among them is a very grateful Kurt Muse, who was rescued by the General from one of Noriega's prisons in Panama. Another is retired General Peter Schoomaker, 35th US Army Chief of Staff under President George H W Bush. Jay Fry will tell you he's received an overwhelming number of notes and phone calls from Eldon's military contemporaries, with stories and accounts of their admiration for Major General Bargewell, and what he stood for. Many of them plan to attend the dedication.

A final thought is from Colonel Mike Russell, the Major General's Deputy Commander from 1999-2000 in a YouTube video on the General's receipt of The Bull Simons Award, "You hear hero on the news everyday...but true hero, true warrior...that's General Bargewell. He ought to be the picture in the dictionary."

So, if you want to partake in a special event honoring an incredible Harborite, mark this in your calendar. The dedication of the statue will be at noon May 20, 2023, appropriately known as Armed Forced Day. And as Eldon would insist, all Grays Harbor military veterans will be appropriately honored.

Tuesday, May 16, in *The Daily World* read Part 2 of this series: which will tell the story of Rip Caswell, *the Sculptor*, who is also a notable Harborite.