

Delta Park Dedication 20 May 2023

Before I share a few remarks, I would like to say Happy Armed Forces Day. To my fellow veterans, thank you for honorably serving our nation in peacetime and war. To those currently serving, thank you for your willingness to sacrifice. And to those about to join our ranks, thank you for stepping forward to defend our Constitution and way of life. We need you right now more than ever!

Thank you to the Delta Park organizing committee, especially Mike Vining and Jason Fry, for asking me to say a few words about my friend and fellow Army Ranger MG Eldon Bargewell.

Congratulations to Rip Caswell for the beautiful sculpture, Robert Droll for the design and layout of this magnificent park, and Dan Christiansen for the stonework. And of

course, to the town of Hoquiam for honoring a hometown hero in such a memorable and lasting manner.

To Marian and the Bargewell family, I just know Eldon's spirit is with us today and he is truly humbled and somewhat embarrassed by all this attention!

A little background about when my relationship with Eldon started.

In 1973, General Creighton Abrams, the 26th Chief of Staff of the Army, made an historic decision to form two modern Ranger battalions. The 1st Battalion was formed in October 1973 at Hunter Army Airfield near Savannah, Georgia, and the 2d Battalion followed in October 1974 up the highway at Fort Lewis, Washington. Out of thousands of highly qualified infantry lieutenants, Eldon was the only Officer Candidate School commissioned, Vietnam Veteran, lieutenant selected by LTC Bo Baker, our first battalion commander, to be a platoon leader in Bravo Company. I was deeply honored to be Eldon's company commander in its first year. And what a year it was as we progressed from individual, to squad, to platoon, to company level training to the ultimate certification of the battalion for worldwide deployment in December 1975.

Key to our success in that first year was the development of high standards built on a foundation of trust that led to a winning Ranger spirit and incredible teamwork. Eldon was instrumental in helping me imbue those high standards and realism in our Bravo Company training because of his vast combat experience.

Even though I was also a Vietnam combat veteran and commanding a company for the second time, I was a far more effective leader because Eldon was at my side.

Folks, Eldon was what we refer to today as a quiet professional. His humble, authentic nature was a model for others. But most of all, Eldon is a true American hero. If you look it up in Webster's dictionary, the definition of a hero is:

A person of distinguished courage or ability who is admired for his brave deeds and noble qualities.

We have all read about Eldon's brave deeds in combat.

Just walk and read in this beautiful park about his indomitable courage. His personal courage has inspired generations of soldiers for over 50 years.

But I want to spend a few minutes talking about the second part of the description of a hero and that's Eldon's noble qualities.

From the very first week I spent with Eldon, two attributes came to the forefront: his humility and his absolute competence. Let me bring to life these attributes with some testimonials provided primarily by his peers and subordinates, young men who we affectionately call , "pre-gortex Rangers" who first served with Eldon in Bravo Company 2d Rangers in 1974-1976. Some are present here today:

The first attribute was his constant focus on tending to the needs of others.

I think fellow Bravo Ranger platoon leader, Colonel Retired Marshall Reed said it well. I quote:

Since we were both platoon leaders in Company B, we

technically were peers. The word "Peer" appears in quotation marks to highlight the fact that there's no planet upon which I could be Eldon's "peer." The gulf between our respective life experience and soldier expertise was simply too great. Yet, despite this cavernous difference, he treated me as a peer, not as I was a rank amateur. Eldon's focus was always improving individual Ranger and unit effectiveness. He recognized that an important part of his role in 2-75 was as a role model for the other lieutenants, his "peers", as well as his subordinates. He did this without ego. In a quiet, positive, and supportive way he helped us grow as Rangers and leaders, making us and Company B far more effective.

Former Bravo Company peer and later Commander of the 75th Ranger Regiment, Major General Jim Jackson stated:

Eldon was the true example of the “Quiet Professional”. He lived by the standards he expected all to follow, and he did so without fanfare or need for recognition. Given his past service and the decorations he received, he was very unassuming and never talked about his past or his accomplishments. His approach to leadership was straightforward and real...he expected success and did everything within his power to make it happen. As a fellow ‘young officer’ being around him was both interesting and informative.... all you had to do was watch and listen. Eldon personified the old EF Hutton ad...when Eldon spoke all should listen.

Another Bravo peer and former 75th Ranger Regimental Commander Brigadier General Bill Leszczynski had this to say about Eldon's humility:

Eldon was a very friendly person when he could have been a quite arrogant and condescending based on his many accomplishments since he enlisted in the Army, and specifically during his combat tours in Viet Nam. We all knew what he did to earn the Distinguished Service Cross. However, I never heard him say a single time anything like "This is what I did in Vietnam."

And from my friend Lieutenant General Jamie Jarrard,
a former Delta commander:

By the time I came along, I asked him to come and provide a talk about PTSD to our unit members – and he was perfect. He obviously had plenty of credibility with all of the lore about his actions in Vietnam, but his transparency and authentic personal stories about the need to get help by even the toughest warriors – had the entire audience captivated. And it was the exact message we needed to hear. It was another side of Gen Bargewell that few, if any, of us had ever seen.

I will always remember that night – and my opportunity to walk alongside a true hero – forever.

Another attribute that reflected his humility was Eldon's ability to let team members to do their job without interference:

From Sergeant Tom Gould who served under Eldon in Bravo Company and later in Delta:

He always allowed me to do my job and to be an NCO. I think it was the fact that he didn't interfere with subordinates doing their jobs. He would tell you what needed to be done, point out things that he wanted done a certain way, then allow his subordinates to do their jobs and would assist them if they asked or saw a major problem arising.

Eldon always sought to show appreciation for his soldiers.

Here's what Ranger Kim Maxin, who was a young sergeant in his platoon, had to say about Eldon's care for others:

He led by example and from the front. His expectations for himself and for the soldiers around him were exceptionally high. He was a genuine leader and person. He never pretended to be anything but himself. Quiet, thoughtful, knowledgeable, and truly cared for his soldiers.

And on Eldon's humility, a quote from Eldon's First Sergeant Bill Block:

Eldon attended my induction ceremony into the Airborne Ranger Training Brigade Hall of Fame and sat in the middle of the audience. When it was my time to talk, I publicly thanked Eldon for attending. He was the senior officer in attendance and the audience and staff were

looking around for him. No one knew he was there and that was Eldon.

I could go on and on about Eldon's humility but want to close with my observation of him as a newly minted lieutenant. I found Eldon to be extremely respectful of the chain of command, open to my feedback so he could grow as an officer, and passionately curious.

From the start of our time in Bravo company, Eldon did not want to be the focus of attention among his peer lieutenants who were all ROTC and West Point grads. But when we progressed to platoon level training, it was evident to me that the other platoon leaders needed to hear from Eldon about his past week's lessons learned to learn and grow. I knew he didn't like for me to call on him to share but at one particular training meeting he did not share openly when I called on him. I kept him afterwards for a quick counseling session where I told him I needed his help because our training was accelerating, and I needed him to share more openly with his non-combat veteran peers. After that, he became my primary assistant in helping others

Allow me to finish with a few comments about Eldon's competence. My definition of competence has four elements: knowledge which comes from experience and schooling; skill which is the application of that knowledge; and two non-quantifiable elements: discipline and a positive attitude. In short, Eldon excelled in every one of those elements of competence. Here are a few testimonials from peers and subordinates along the way:

Here's what Major General Ken Bowra, a fellow team leader in MACV-SOG in Vietnam and former Bravo 2d Ranger Battalion company commander and SOF peer of Eldon's for many years had to say about his competence:

Eldon was the epitome of professionalism. He set the example for not only his subordinates but also for peers and those above him in rank. He took time to mentor others. He was a true combat leader.

A former junior enlisted soldier in his platoon and now a retired Colonel, Bob Williams said this about Eldon's competence:

Eldon was unassuming, quiet, and professional. He was not loud, boisterous, or domineering. He always seemed focused, with purpose and intent. He set an example of excellence and challenged you to that excellence.

"Excellence" was the standard. He was not a man of giant stature, but his leadership style had a giant impact. As a subordinate and young Ranger, I felt both inspired and challenged to be worthy and accepted.

And from Col Lee Van Arsdale who happened to be a company commander in my arctic light infantry battalion in Alaska and a successor to Eldon in Delta squadron command. I quote:

His values were all based on a foundation of integrity, the same as all good Soldiers. On this foundation he believed in leading from the front, communicating clearly, providing the expected example, and holding everyone, starting with himself, to an exacting standard.

In addition to the above, Eldon was always committed to mission success, and had the ability to focus on that success while never forgetting that it was the people he led who made it happen. Eldon was a winner, and Soldiers all want to be part of a winning team.

I would like to end the testimonials with one contributed by fellow Ranger and Delta NCO, Fred Kleibacker. I think it best captures the true essence of Eldon:

He exemplified confidence and leadership. No matter how fearful we may have been, he never showed fear. It was the consistent demonstration of his understated personal courage, without drama or fanfare, that was real inspiration. He always led from the front. We knew he would never commit us to something purposely foolhardy, even if ordered to do so. Our belief was always certain - no matter the situation, in training or combat, his combat experience, tactical knowledge, personal courage, integrity and loyalty to us and the mission would be the reason we would prevail. He would not fail us, even if we failed him.

In conclusion, Eldon Bargewell defined for so many along the way that if you want to live a life of true significance, you need to be truly passionate about your calling in life; be true to your personal values that form the nucleus of your character; and be consistent in your behaviors that support your core values.

Thanks again for permitting me to share a few words about an authentic, genuine American hero, Eldon Bargewell, my friend and fellow Army Ranger, and a son of Hoquiam, Washington.

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