



# LOCAL VETERAN HONORED WITH A HUNT

By: Ryan Bergeron

A glass case is filled with badges, pins and medals, and a pair of rubber sandals and a round green helmet, both worn by the Viet Cong, the U.S. enemy during the Vietnam War, hang on the wall to the left of the case, as one walks into a Karlstad home. Randy Krantz, a lifelong Karlstad resident and one of the home's owners, will share not only a smile, but also surely a laugh, if one stays long enough.

A Vietnam veteran, Randy received the opportunity to do something he loves and has done his entire life, hunting, with people sharing a similar experience to him—those wounded in service-- through an organization called Wounded Warriors Guide Service. Hunting in Pierre, South Dakota with his brother Brent on June 13, Randy not only had the chance to hunt something new, prairie dogs, but also make a new and "better" memory related to his service.

Entering the U.S. Army as a draftee in February 1969 at 20 years old, Randy, a 1967 Karlstad High School graduate, served in the First Infantry Division ("Big Red One"), doing four months of training before

beginning his service in the Vietnam War in June 1969. A machine gunner in his unit, the Twenty-Eighth Infantry Division (Black Lions), Randy's Vietnam duty ended suddenly on January 20, 1970, after getting shot in the right side and lower back. The bullets ripped through his right kidney and lung, intestines, liver, and diaphragm.

After spending time at a nearby hospital in Chu Chi, Vietnam, for three weeks, Randy was transported to a Camp Zama, Japan, hospital, staying there also for three weeks. He arrived back in the states, hospitalized in Fort Riley, Kansas, beginning in March 1970. Returning home on leave for 30 days, he went back to Kansas for surgery to reverse his intestinal colostomy. After this surgery went as hoped, he returned to active duty on August 1970, training lieutenants heading for Vietnam.

Randy received an honorable discharge in February 1971, and in honor of his service, received numerous accommodations. Those awards, displayed in his glass case, include: National Defense Service Medal, Sharp



Shooter Badge, Expert rifleman and machinegun, the Vietnam Campaign Medal, Air Medal with a two device, the Bronze Star Medal, the South Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm, the Presidential Unit Citation, the Purple Heart, and the award he's most proud of, his Combat Infantry Badge, his main badge for being in combat.

Despite all this recognition, his years in the service did come with some price, as the physical and psychological effects from his Vietnam service have affected him for many years, even still to a degree today. Physically, he can walk, but does suffer pain from his injuries, taking medications, including oxycodone, a powerful pain medication. According to a document written by his wife of almost 44 years, Karen, nerve damage and scar tissue led to constant pain, preventing him from working since 1993. To this day, he has a bullet lodged in his chest cavity close to his spine. Psychologically over the years, he has suffered nightmares, depression, nervousness about large noises, and the need to isolate himself from big groups.

One would never guess he has suffered and still suffers pain, having a positive personality, and for good reason.

"I'm lucky I am around, put it that way, and I'm lucky I can walk because I got shot through the side and through the back," Krantz said. "It just missed my hip and just missed my spine."

Those closest to him, including his brother Brent, four years old when his brother headed to Vietnam, see this personality constantly and admire it. Brent looks at the everyday pains, from headaches to backaches, that he awakes to sometimes as trivial, seeing the injuries his brother had suffered and knowing the pain he experiences everyday.

"If you see him cutting wood or hunting, you wouldn't know he has an injury," Brent said.

As Karen wrote, reading books Vietnam veterans authored helped Randy face these different problems. They showed him others suffering similar problems and brought back memories locked away in his subconscious, to allow him to store away more positive memories.

Brent wanted to provide Randy with one such positive memory, and to thank and honor him for service. What better way to honor him than through hunting?

"We get done with one hunt, we're getting ready for another one... we've been making food plots for the deer now, getting ready for the deer season already," Randy said.

For Brent, the task of finding Randy a veterans oriented hunt and eventually going on an actual such hunt took over five years. First, he sought out Veterans Outdoors, wanting to do a whitetail deer hunt, possibly in Kansas, to provide Randy with a better memory of the state where he first returned to the U.S. from Vietnam. This option didn't work out, as this organization, Brent and Randy explained, mainly dealt with those veterans having difficulties getting around.

Brent continued to contact the state to help find an opportunity for his brother, and, after some time, he contacted state representative Dan Fabian, providing Brent with the contact to Wounded Warriors Guide Service, offering various different hunts to wounded veterans. Brent reached David Morse, a Wounded Warriors Guide Service representative, and he sent Brent dates of different hunts. These hunts are for wounded veterans, but for all Brent's effort in setting this up for Randy, the organization was going to allow him to go on these hunting trips too. Unfortunately, whenever it looked like both brothers could go on a certain trip, something always came up. Finally, after making some arrangements, they both were able to head to South Dakota for the prairie dog hunt.

Getting permission to hunt prairie dogs on two different ranches in Pierre with their two guides and two other individuals, all veterans, these two hunting enthusiast brothers enjoyed a new and valuable experience. Arriving the day before and waking up bright and early, they shot from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on a hot day, stopping for just a quick snack and to move between ranches.

"We were shooting long range and we were kind of getting the eyes right and getting ready for deer hunting, but (in deer hunting) we don't have to shoot them from almost 300 (to) 400 yards hopefully."

"Not steady like that," Brent added.

Speaking of ranchers, they welcome such hunts. Why? Ranchers view prairie dogs as pests, making holes and mounds in their land, leading to cattle possibly getting hurt. Some ranchers even poison them if the number on their land gets so high. Randy and Brent mentioned how the prairie dog population was



quite high in their hunting area, shooting and killing at least 50 as a group, most likely even more.

“We shot many rounds. We had to stop for awhile to let the guns cool off because they got so hot from shooting,” said Randy, chuckling.

The hunters may have been able to shoot these prairie dogs, but couldn’t touch or pick them up. Prairie dogs in that area carry the bubonic plague.

They may not have been able to touch them, but the memories they made and the generosity they received while on this hunting trip will last forever. The organization runs completely on donations and volunteers. Randy and Brent didn’t even have to pay for food, gas, their one-day varmint licenses, lodging, ammunition, or gear, and didn’t even have to bring their own guns.

These hunts provide veterans more than the chance to hunt down some prey. As both brothers explained, those heading the organization started it partly in response to high suicide rate among veterans.

“For the guides and the people they take out, it’s therapy for all of them. They can talk... or just do stuff that they enjoy doing,” Brent said.

“If anyone wants to give to anything, this would be the one to give to because local people can go on it,” Randy said.

Others seem to think the same too, evident by an instance at a local hardware-grocery store in Pierre. While coming up to purchase some snacks and licenses at the store before heading out for their hunt, someone at the store asked what all the hunters were doing there. When they found out they were part of the Wounded Warriors Guide Service, the donated everything to them, with the exception of the licenses.

Randy is interested in going on future hunts through Wounded Warrior Guide Service, but for now is just



going to focus on the upcoming bear and deer hunting seasons in this area. He mentioned that if they did turkey hunting, he would be very interested.

To assist this organization, one can send donations to: Wounded Warriors Guides Service, 3117 Foxtail Drive, Fargo, ND 58078, or, David Morse, PO Box 375, Fargo, ND 58107. One can also donate and learn more about this organization by visiting its website: <http://www.woundedwarriorsguide.com>. It also is present on various social media

sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr.

Randy was very proud to serve his country, but as he reflected on what it meant to be a veteran, he said something that is real for veterans like him and other military members and emergency personnel.

“Freedom isn’t free. There’s always somebody dying,” Randy said. “Every minute of the day, there’s somebody watching out for you. So, you’re getting protected, from your local I suppose police to the military.”

At least for a little while, he had the chance to associate his service years with positive memories beside people having similar experiences to him. His memories and injuries from Vietnam have lingered with him to a degree, but it has not prevented Randy from living a happy life, evident by the smile on his face and his many laughs, and continuing to do something he enjoys.

“I’m a life member of the Legion, VFW, Disabled American Veterans, NRA, and the Deer Hunters Association,” he said.

The last group mentioned brought another laugh.