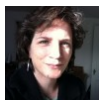




Korean War vets bond over stories, bocce

By [Elizabeth G. Howard](#) on January 10, 2014 in [Stratford Features](#) · 0 Comments

About author



Elizabeth G. Howard

Elizabeth Howard is a Stratford-based journalist, blogger and poet. She writes on the arts, education, music, the environment, green lifestyle, American culture, travel and food. You can find her online at [elizabethhoward.net](#)



Stratford residents and fellow Korean War veterans Bob Batka and Nate Barsky at the monument park on Academy Hill on Dec. 27. The two served in the same harbor off Korea during the war but did not meet each other until 2012 when they started sharing stories of their experiences.

Two local war veterans who served in the same harbor at the same time during the Korean War had never met until 2012, when there was an occasion to exchange war stories.

Having made that connection, they are now practically inseparable.

A year and half ago, Navy veteran Nate Barsky of Stratford started compiling a list of other area Korean War vets to interview for a book he wants to write. Fellow Marine veteran and Stratfordite Bob Batka saw a newspaper article about Barsky and decided to submit his autobiographical statement.

"When I read [his bio]," Barsky said, "I recognized his ship because there were a lot of ships at once in that area. It reminded me of what went on in [Wonsan] Harbor" — one of the largest naval blockades in U.S. history. And we were both in that area at the same time. And here we both lived in Stratford. I have been in Stratford for a total of 40 years, and I didn't know Bob before that. I never joined the Baldwin Center before that. Because of him, I became active there."

Batka is the president of the Men's Club at the Baldwin Center, and Barsky is

REAL ESTATE OFFICES

AND USE OUR MARKET REACH TO DO THAT ON: Hersam Acorn Networks.

Video including Facebook boosts, websites with a select three day infeed and a selected twitter market

[Click for more information](#)

Work Locally.

[Click here to check out our job postings online.](#)



Events Calendar

« JUNE 2015 »						
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	1	2	3	4	5

TUE 02 Senior calendar: May 29-June 4
June 1 @ 8:30 am - June 4 @ 4:00 pm

TUE 02 Catholic Daughters meeting
June 2 @ 6:30 pm

now the first-ever Men's Club vice president. Both are involved with the local VFW 9460. They are a formidable bocce ball team. They play golf together at Short Beach.

The stories from war

The foundation of this easy, retirement-lifestyle friendship rests on shared experiences, some poignantly clarifying the shadowy line of human experience and soldierly duty, some hilarious, and some close shaves.

Now 60 years past the end of the war, these two friends share stories and show that no moment in war — big or small — is ever truly forgotten. For veterans like Barsky and Batka, years in active service have become a complicated net of powerful and vibrant memories.

"We were about 500 yards off shore," Batka retells in an even and low voice. He had been ordered from his battle station on the U.S.S. Wisconsin to retrieve new communications equipment. "I was going back to the [communications] shack to get a new phone. When I did, it was dark and I didn't know that I walked underneath a five-inch .38-caliber twin gun turret, just as they went off. Well, I lost my hearing in both ears. I got to the shack and I couldn't hear a word the guy was saying. I had to use [hand gestures] to tell him what I needed. ...

"Heading back, I see a marine has the hatch open and he was waving to me to hurry. I still couldn't hear a thing," Batka said. "After a while, my hearing returned, and I was told there were sparks bouncing off the bulkhead where I was walking. They were firing at us from shore, and I luckily didn't get hit. But I had to keep going. They couldn't do anything until they had those phones."

When you are given an order you do it, and you don't ask questions, Barsky and Batka agreed. One thing that being in the military taught them: discipline.

The 'forgotten war'

The Korean War is a conflict that has long been considered "the forgotten war." After World War II, control of Korea — a former Japanese colony — was divided along the 38th parallel by the Soviet Union in the north and the United States in the south.

After internal strife and dual elections in 1948 led to a communist North Korean government and a pro-western South, the North invaded the South in June 1950. The conflict lasted three years, involving United Nations forces led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur. After the armistice in June 1953, the conflict became significant for its political orchestrations, the lead-up to the Vietnam conflict, the emergence of China as a superpower, and United States' new identity as a force against communism.

The experiences of the soldiers and civilians on the ground seemed pushed aside.

Barsky and Batka's stories range from near-death to humorous. Men serving overseas were sometimes "young and foolish," Barsky said, so far from home. On shore leave to a cherry blossom festival, Barsky and friends learned the hard way why the Japanese drink sake in very small cups.

"We had a magnum of sake, and we had big glasses like water goblets," said Barsky. "Well, initially it went down great. We were eating and dancing. It was fun. Then slowly but surely, a few hours later, we were all falling nicely on the grass. We all had cameras, so we took pictures of each other piled up."

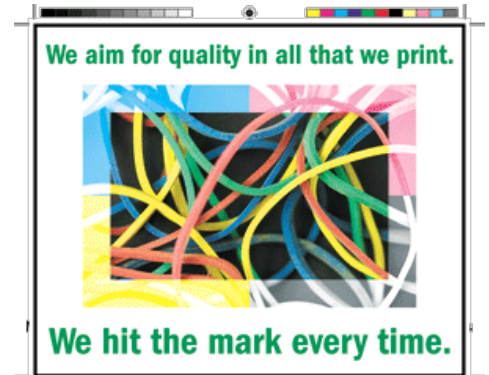
Hard to discuss

Their stories unfold like a collage, with moments disconnected in time, but

TUE **CHIRP 2015**
02 June 2 @ 7:00 pm

THU **Major League Baseball Umpire**
04 **Mark Hirschbeck**
June 4 @ 10:00 am

THU **Thursday Night Ballroom Dance**
04 **Party**
June 4 @ 7:30 pm - 11:00 pm



seemingly placed together as ballast. The light and heavy balance each other.

"You have two jobs in the Navy: one is your regular job, like I was a yeoman doing admin work, and the other, which was my battle station," said Barsky. "We used to shoot off thousands of rounds because we would be looking for targets that were near the beach. There were trains going through caves to carry ammo and moving people. We would be firing at these, and there would be helicopters acting as spotters to see where the range was for our guns going off.

"Now what North Korea used to do, they used to have sampan boats loaded up with families trying to get the contraband to the South. Our job was to blow them out of the water because they were told not to be there. They would come out at night with mines and put them at the bow of the ships. If the ship started off, it would hit the mine and blow up. We lost a few ships that way."

Batka recalls similar orders.

"I remember a couple things I don't really like to talk about much, and one was being in the turret above and training the gun on the junks — on the boats — and watching all these people waving to us, and we were ordered to fire, and the whole thing went up because they were carrying contraband."

The stories, Batka said, are hard to forget. But he has not shared them with many people. Barsky said that his brother, who served in World War II, only once told him the story of how he got a long scar. ("I used to use a flame-thrower and I'd go into the caves and I'd burn out the Japs. That's what we called them at the time.")

"I believe we have two ears and one mouth for a reason: to listen more and not to talk so much," Barsky said.

But Batka also asks, Do you think people are even interested in the stories? The question hangs in the air.

In the last few years, Barsky has interviewed 25 Korean veterans. Most of them, he said, have a hard time talking about what they saw and did during their tours of duty. All of them came out of the service in an era before research into post-traumatic stress disorder, or even an acceptance of talk therapy. Barsky said that about 25% to 30% of the men he interview were disconnected from their communities and even reclusive.

"There was not a lot of people, except me, taking their history," he said. "When I read the obits of the guys who have passed, you can see the families don't really know. I guess it was hard for them to discuss."

Lifelong bond

Still-living Korean veterans would average in age around 79 or 80. Each one carries with him reams of history in vivid detail. Each maintains storied relationships that shaped who they became.

Barsky toured in combat with an Iowan named Don Kurth. Kurth's homespun tales of rural acreage, livestock and wide-open spaces influenced the New York City-raised Barsky to escape tenement life and move to Connecticut.

Batka and another Marine, Walt Malawski, met in Hartford during their physical. They remained together throughout their tour of duty and then remained lifelong friends.

"It's a common bond," Barsky says, "when you tell someone a story and they have been there and they have experienced what you have experienced. It is more meaningful than if you tell someone who has no idea what occurred. That is what keeps you going."

No related posts.

Tags: [Korean War](#), [Navy veterans](#), [war stories](#)



HERSAM ACORN
hanRadio
@hanradio
news, sports
& entertainment
in southwestern ct

PUMPKIN PRESCHOOL Early Learning Centers Fairfield Westport 203.255.7505 203.226.1277		NOW ENROLLING Shelton 203.926.1800
---	---	---

Subscribe to the HAN Radio podcasts!
Listen to the shows when it's convenient for you.
Now available on iTunes.



 NEWS RSS	 SPORTS RSS
---	---

[Log In](#)

Previous Post
**Thanks to 911 dispatcher, Stratford
Fire and EMT**

Next Post
Behind the News

By participating in the comments section of this site you are agreeing to our [Privacy Policy and User Agreement](#)

0 Comments stratfordstar.com

3 smallstate ▾

♥ Recommend ↗ Share

Sort by Oldest ▾



Start the discussion...

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON STRATFORDSTAR.COM

WHAT'S THIS?

Fighting to acknowledge Whitehead's first ride in flight

1 comment • 4 days ago



Yes To Truth — A new book presents the case for Gustave Whitehead as "first in powered flight and inventor ...

LETTER: Come support For Stratford on June 6

4 comments • 5 days ago



Tom Yemm — Try us, dear Christine-- we've plenty of ideas, ideas we've shared among our members and ...

Divide on schools budget

7 comments • 19 days ago



George Mulligan — Besides the UNFUNDED MANDATES costing TAX PAYERS \$ 10 Million annually in the ...

Baseball: SWC final moved to tomorrow

1 comment • 6 days ago



Let's Play Fair — Was that to give Bunnell the upper hand and give Rossomando an extra days rest?

✉ Subscribe

D Add Disqus to your site

🔒 Privacy



Hersam Acorn News Sites

Amity Observer | Bridgeport News | Darien Times
Easton Courier | Fairfield Sun | Greenwich Post
Lewisboro Ledger | Milford Mirror | Monroe Courier
New Canaan Advertiser | Redding Pilot | Ridgefield Press
Shelton Herald | Stratford Star | Trumbull Times
Valley Gazette | Weston Forum | Wilton Bulletin

Section B
Advertise
Classifieds
Article Reprints
Print Archives
Subscriptions
Privacy Policy & User Agreement

Follow us on Twitter
Like us on Facebook
100 Things to Do
Stratford Answerbook
About Us
Contact Us
Submissions