

REFLECTIONS ON TERRY BARNICH
BY PHILIP R. O'CONNOR
FEBRUARY 5, 2012 WASHINGTON, D.C.
NARUC CEREMONY INAUGURATING THE
TERRY BARNICH AWARD

On behalf of Terry's family and his many friends, I thank NARUC for naming this award in recognition of his international work. I also would like to thank Chairman Armstrong and the international staff, Erin Skootsky, Bevan Flansburg, Chris Mahon and Michelle Malloy for giving me the opportunity to suit up one more time at NARUC.

Terry Barnich was my closest friend for 25 years. I can also claim to have convinced him to ask Governor Jim Thompson, who Terry served as legal counsel, to appoint him to chair the Illinois Commerce Commission in 1989.

Terry was a proud member of NARUC. He regarded as his signal NARUC achievement the basketball game that is going on at this very moment – and where his spirit may actually be at this moment as well. He believed in the innovation and experimentation that can come from State regulation. He took the ICC job with a preference for competition and customer choice as the way to bring technology and creative services to consumers.

Monopoly local telephone service is a distant memory due in no small part to Terry. He jolted the industry in 1991 when he proposed “The Telecommunications Free Trade Zone” to bring competition into the local exchange.

He was an elegant writer and speaker and carried the message of modernized regulation into his private consulting business, New Paradigm Resources Group. He and his business partner, Craig Clausen, advanced the cause of customer choice in telecommunications not only in the United States but also in such places as South Korea, Japan, Indonesia and Qatar. The firm continues to do so.

Terry served in Iraq for nearly two and a half years. It was as if he had been born to do the job. He'd had a lifetime of preparation for the mission.

Terry grew up in the shadow of the Chicago steel mills in the far southeast side neighborhood known as Hegwisch – as far as you can get from Chicago and still be in Chicago. The office we shared in Baghdad was festooned with large City of Chicago and State of Illinois flags -- a less than subtle statement that the tribal politics of Iraq was no mystery to him.

Terry knew that getting things done in Iraq, just as in Illinois, demanded strong personal relationships. His talent for friendship was never put to better use than in the bonds he forged as a true confidant of Iraq's Minister of Electricity. He became a trusted friend of numerous other Iraqi officials. He was even inducted as an honorary member of the Al-Jubouri tribe by the Minister of Antiquities and Tourism. His Iraqi friends felt his loss as deeply any of us. Terry produced results. He was the one who drove to conclusion the multi-billion dollar electric turbine deal between Iraq and General Electric.

He also persuaded the Iraqi Ministries of Electricity and of Water Resources and the State Department that hiring high quality international lawyers was essential to help Iraq with big commercial transactions. The prior pattern had been poorly drafted contracts followed by delays and litigation. Terry's goal was to prepare Iraq to attract private investment in a climate of enforceable contracts. Let's hope this will become the rule.

But Terry was not just into big deals. He'd come back from R+R with iPods and Italian soccer team jerseys for the Iraqis on the Embassy cleaning crew. Also for "the guys," as we called them, he would haul outside the Embassy checkpoint huge bags of broken radios and lamps as well as great quantities of toiletries donated by Embassy personnel. The guys could make a few extra dinars for their families selling all of this. Terry was a free enterprise guy.

Terry allowed our embassy office to be a kind of bullpen for Iraqi interpreters, or "terps" as they were called, while they nervously awaited interviews to qualify for immigration visas. Over a hundred are now in America and, as they often tell me, they pray for Terry in gratitude. Amidst all this, Terry managed to schedule gym time and to read at night. Both showed. He always looked great, was the best dressed guy in an active war zone and was the most well-read man I ever knew.

As I contacted many of the terps with the bad news about Terry, one said to me, "Dr Phil, Terry is a martyr." Indeed he is.

Terry Barnich died for his beliefs. He was convinced that freedom is either advancing or in retreat – no in-between. He believed that liberty will always be at risk for those of us who enjoy it if we fail to help those not yet blessed with it to obtain it.

On Memorial Day 2009, Terry was part of a team inspecting a troubled wastewater treatment project in Fallujah. They were helping the Iraqi people have something we usually take for granted -- clean water.

When Terry Barnich, Dr. Maged Hussein and Navy Commander Duane Wolfe, died alongside one another in Fallujah, they were living out the command that we love our neighbors as ourselves. For Scripture tells us that there is no greater love than for one to lay down his life for his friends.

That spirit of giving simply because it is right also animates NARUC's international program and the outstanding work of Kevin Gunn and his Missouri colleagues.

One final note. At about this time of year in 2008, a young lady in her mid-20s arrived to work in the Embassy. She had given up a political appointment in Washington so she could serve in Iraq. She had joined a small group of us for an impromptu barbecue. Terry was kidding her a bit and asked why she had come to Iraq. She hesitated and mumbled a bit. Terry gave her his trademark smile and said, "For the rest of your life, when anyone asks you that question, just tell them that you'd heard America was in a tight spot over here, so you saddled up and rode to the sound of the guns."