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Farewell – A Tribute to Terry Barnich

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Terry Barnich was remembered on a chilly day in Chicago by approximately 200 friends and colleagues at St. Alphonsus Church on the north side of the city. The cavernous and echoing church may have seemed empty on other days, but on June 3, 2009, most of the pews were full by those who knew Terry, either personally or by reputation, and wanted to say their goodbyes and honor him alongside others that knew him well. Ambassador Harry Thomas, Director General of the Foreign Service, spoke first about Terry and presented the American flag to Terry's mother. Terry was then awarded the Thomas Jefferson Star in recognition of an individual who is killed or disabled while serving abroad on official business. The award was presented to Terry's mother by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Richard Schmierer, and included a certificate signed by both President Obama and Secretary Clinton, who sent their condolences.

A longtime fixture in the telecommunications space, and the former Illinois Commerce Commissioner, we at Pipeline were familiar with Terry and his work through our relationship with New Paradigm Resources Group, a firm that he helped found and that we've been fortunate enough to have a working relationship with for some time. More recently, however, Terry was known for helping to rebuild major infrastructure projects in Iraq. It was there that he was killed by a roadside bomb last week, and the echo of that tragic day was among the echoes that filled St. Alphonsus on a cool June day, thousands of miles from the site of the event.

Those attending that didn't know Terry were surely left with a picture of a man who had a good nature and was filled with humor and laughter. His supervisor in Iraq was Karen Aguilar, Director of the Iraq Transition Assistance Office (ITAO), US Embassy Baghdad. She was also traveling in the convoy in which Terry lost his life. Karen Aguilar spoke of him fondly. Through a voice cracked with emotion, she described him as "exquisitely mannered" and "groomed to a standard incredible in a warzone." She also spoke of his "generosity of spirit," and how, the last time she saw him alive, she helped him put sunscreen on his nose, a sort of shield from the sun that, she commented with a seemingly broken heart, wasn't enough to protect him from what was to come. She shared with everyone how Terry had once told her that his work in Iraq was important to him and how "he had never been happier or so fulfilled professionally." Jim Stamos, Terry's friend of twenty-six years gave a speech that was bittersweet, and though at times provoked laughter, also gave a touching and real



portrait of Terry's life. Also in attendance was Governor James R. Thompson, who gave a reading from the First Letter of Peter, which he prefaced by saying "[Terry was] a man with a thirst for adventure and a passion for service to his country."

With a full choir in a crowded church, Terry Barnich was remembered as a man who lived passionately, gave of himself when necessary, and went through life with humor and grace. His services to both his own country and to the citizens of Iraq will never be forgotten.

However, even in the light of a remarkably touching memorial service, the impulse among many in the news media is to focus on the deaths of men like Terry Barnich, rather than on their lives. And it was in life, as those at the service and those who knew him know, that Barnich shone. He was an intelligent and humorous man who lived by his convictions. He was a pupil of history and a keen observer of the telecommunications space and the world at large. He was a remarkable man.

"The coverage has been very kind," said his longtime friend and colleague, Craig Clausen, "and I don't think they've overstated the case as to what he's accomplished." In the time the two spent working together at Chicago-based New Paradigm Resources Group, Clausen was able to see the inner workings of his friend's motivation for heading to Iraq, and the sort of changes Barnich was hoping to facilitate in the war-torn country.



There are a wide variety of reasons why Americans have made their way to Iraq over the last few years. Some are led by starry idealism. Others by the promise of profit. According to Clausen, Barnich was there out of a sense of conviction. "It started around three and a half years ago. Terry was a student of history and understood what regimes are all about. He was certainly of the mind that things needed to change there." However, it was not enough for Barnich to wish for change in a far-

off land, but do nothing to support such a change. "His position on the war was that it's not about sitting in our La-Z-Boy and watching what goes on. If we're going to help them form a democratic solution, we need to make sure certain things are accomplished." And that's what sent Barnich to Iraq. A personal need to help certain things get accomplished.

As soon as the first wave of combat operations ceased in Iraq, it was clear to Barnich that the job there was not accomplished. "We can't just say that we cleaned up the threat for us, now you guys take care of it," Clausen said, conveying his sense of Terry's stance. "The infrastructure was in rough shape to begin with." This, according to Clausen, was a key sticking point. He felt that democracy is a difficult process, and that it takes an educated population and focused, thoughtful people to keep democracy going. This means creating an environment in which people can rely on certain basic utilities (water, sewage, electricity, communications) so that they can focus on the hard work of reforming government and engaging in a new system of governance that is more fair and inclusive than the autocracy they faced in the past.

"Terry was feeling that and felt he had something to offer," Clausen related. "It began on the telecom side, and expanded into electricity and water." In fact, it was while working on just such a project that Barnich met his tragic end. "He was coming back from a wastewater treatment facility that would free up potable water for the people around Fallujah."

However, Clausen asserted that Barnich was never the type to feel defeated or victimized. He was all about forward motion. "He never shied away from trying to make a difference," said Clausen. That effort to make a difference led him from a comfortable life in the Chicago area to the Green Zone, which he would often jokingly compare to the Bill Murray opus *Groundhog Day*. You wake up, go to work for hours and hours. Come home. Go to bed. Repeat. Repeat. And yet, he remained because there was work to be done. Initially committed to eleven months, Barnich continued to return because he saw just how much there was left to do.

His approach to his work in Iraq, it seems, was very much an extension of how he lived his life. It wasn't, to Barnich, a question of accomplishing one thing, and that being the key to growth and progress in the country and the region. It was a far more complex proposition. Clausen relates that Barnich often decried what he referred to as the "Etch-a-Sketch Brain," which was characterized by the fact that thoughts and memories only lasted a short time before they were shaken away. "Terry knew that life isn't about creating silos," said Clausen. "You can't look at telecom today and forget about transportation tomorrow. If you're creative, there's no limit to what you can accomplish."

And Terry was creative. His intelligence and creativity may have been lost on some he encountered. His ability to see common threads and draw parallels between seemingly disparate topics was one of his hallmarks. Barnich could (and did, in at least one case) make a direct comparison between Virtual Network Operators and 17th Century Dutch Shipbuilders, and while the analogy would sail directly



over the heads of some in the room, others would remember the comparison years later (as I do, vividly).

And so, we should all take some time to remember and mourn this remarkable man. However, we must all remember that there is much work to be done, at home and abroad. The world is a little poorer for no longer having Terry Barnich in it. And yet, it is all the richer for the model he left behind. Change is difficult, and in order for it to work, people must be prepared to work hard and sacrifice in order to accomplish that change. Wishing is not enough. Action is required. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Terry Barnich was one of those thoughtful, committed citizens, and the rest of us should take this opportunity to work that much harder as a tribute to Barnich and the way in which he lived.

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