

## Second Front

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### Nolde brothers ready to live up to their grandfather's name



Brothers Byron (left) and Bart Nolde are both preparing for careers in the U.S. Army. Their grandfather Col. William B. Nolde was the last American soldier killed prior to the 1973 cease-fire that ended the Vietnam War. Photo by C.J. Carnacchio.

March 31, 2010 - Around Oxford High School, the last name Nolde is a familiar one to many students and staff. Byron Nolde graduated there in 2008 while his younger brother, Bart, is preparing to receive his diploma in June. But what many Wildcats may not realize is that the Nolde name has some historical significance to it on a national level. Colonel William Benedict Nolde, grandfather to Byron and Bart, has the distinction of being the last American soldier killed in the Vietnam War.

#### William Nolde

He was killed in action on Jan. 27, 1973 at An Loc when an enemy artillery shell exploded just 11 hours before the truce began. He was 43 years old. Although Col. Nolde was not the last American to die in Vietnam, his death was the last one recorded prior to the cease-fire, making him officially the last of the 45,941 Americans killed during this nation's longest war.

He was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with full military honors. During his life, he served in the Korean War and acted as an advisor to the South Vietnamese during their war with the communists from the north. He received four medals including the Bronze Star and Legion of Merit. Thirty-seven years later, Byron and Bart, who live in Metamora, are preparing to carry on the proud tradition of military service started by the grandfather they never met.

Byron is in his second year at Central Michigan University where he's part of the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. His fields of interest are intelligence, aviation and armor (tanks).

After he graduates high school, Bart will join his brother at CMU where he too will enter the ROTC. Bart's

leaning toward intelligence, but he's also expressed an interest in engineering and military police work.

The brothers plan to live together at college.

Nolde is an honored name around the CMU campus because their grandfather was once a professor of military science there. His memory lives on in a scholarship and lecture series named for him. After college, both Byron and Bart will enter the U.S. Army as officers. "Pretty much since I was a kid, I've always wanted to be in the military," said Byron, who's attending CMU on a full scholarship from the Army. "Nobody's every pushed me into it. It's always been something I've wanted to do."

"It's a career I find interesting and would love to do," Bart said. "I thought about being a cop or a lawyer, but it's not the same." Bart noted his grandfather's military legacy helped "inspire" his career choice. For Byron, there's a "pride issue."

"Our last name's so respected in the military, I'm proud of that and I've got to make sure that I keep it that way," he said.

Byron and Bart have both visited Arlington National Cemetery and seen their grandfather's simple grave. When they were younger, they set up little plastic army men around it. Years of stories about their grandfather combined with the solemn history surrounding the cemetery and its occupants left both of them in "awe."

"It was a powerful moment," Bart said. Byron noted his grandfather didn't want a large, elaborate grave. "He just wanted a standard military grave just like his soldiers had gotten. He didn't want anything special," he said.

Serving in the military seems to be a family business with the Noldes. Their father, Bart Nolde, Sr., who lives in Pennsylvania, served in the Army from 1982-90, spending three years as an intelligence officer guarding the West-East German border during the Cold War.

Nolde Sr. spent about 200 days in the field with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment preparing to defend against the Red foes east of the Iron Curtain. "We would have been the first units that would have taken on the Soviet Union had they decided to invade and start World War III," he said. "Fortunately, that didn't happen."

Nolde Sr. could not be prouder that his boys have chosen to enter the military. "My sons are really the culmination of a family history that believes there's a responsibility to serve your country," he said. "I never told them that's what they had to do . . . They feel that it's important their generation of Americans step to the plate like the World War II generation did and the generations that fought in Korea and Vietnam."

As America continues to fight radical Islamic terrorists who wish to destroy our way of life by driving planes into buildings and blowing themselves up in public places, Nolde Sr. said it's important to have young men and women who are willing to be the nation's protectors.

"I'm very proud of my sons for wanting to be part of the solution, instead of trying to put their heads in the sand and hope it goes away," he said. "I want to keep our country safe and protect it the best I can," Bart said. "It means a lot to me."

Byron is more than willing to go to Iraq or Afghanistan and help fix things. He believes the U.S. has a responsibility to do this. "A lot of people are saying 'pull out,' but I don't think we need to do that until the job is done," he said. "You can't go into a country, basically break it, then leave. We've gone into that country and we've broken their stuff, so we need to fix it. If I have to go over there to do that, I'm perfectly willing to because it's the right thing to do."

Given the ongoing war on terrorism, Nolde Sr. said many parents are steering their kids away from military service because they're scared. "A lot of parents think if they're son goes in the military, that he could possibly be killed," he said. "Well, that's true, but really the (amount of ) people that face actual combat is a very small percentage of the military." Nolde Sr. said most personnel are engaged in giving support – information, logistics, supplies – to frontline soldiers, which is "just as important."

He admitted "the risk is there" for his boys and "as a parent I will pray everyday," but ultimately, he believes "it's honorable that my sons want to serve."

"They do believe we can make a difference around the world," Nolde Sr. said. "That's what made America great."

**Article By:**

CJ Carnacchio is editor for The Oxford Leader. He lives in the Village of Oxford with his wife Connie and daughter Larissa. When he's not busy working on the newspaper, he enjoys cigars/pipes, Martinis/Scotch, hunting and fishing.