Roger Barnhart died last Thursday at the age of 89.

Born on the Fourth of July, 1928, he was raised in an Oregon family where “character” was deeply admired by parents who cared about humanity.

Always a student, he was admitted to the University of Chicago at age 15, after two years transferring to Lewis & Clark College. He got a BA in English & Philosophy. He taught for a year, traveled around Europe, and briefly worked as a newspaper reporter. Roger then enlisted in the Korean War, becoming an officer. He reported to a series of commanders who recognized his character; in return, he deeply admired them. Though in artillery, he also trained in a small program including Jump School with the 82nd Airborne to be a “Green Beret” before there were any.

One day lieutenant Barnhart was called in by his commander. Pointing to Chinese territory behind the lines, the Colonel said, “Go sit on that wall, by that tree. Carry these cigarettes. When a Chinese officer asks for one, give him the pack. Then bring back the pack he gives you.”

Roger followed his orders. At the wall, a clean-cut Chinese general sat next to him. The General had gone to MIT, chatted about Boston, then asked, "Do you have a cigarette?" They traded packs, and Roger brought it back to his base, microfilm still in it. His commander said, "Boy am I glad to see you! I was worried!" Scotch appeared and they both had a stiff drink. That kind of camaraderie was idealized by Roger.

He led a small company of men, often behind enemy lines. On one of these sorties, Wong Goo, a Korean in Roger's team of Special Services men was shot. Though Wong died on the way, the men wouldn't leave him behind. Whenever they stopped, his head was cradled in Roger's lap. The men insisted upon returning their comrade to his home and family. It took three days, on foot.

Roger cried easily, now you know why. He had seen real courage.

He served doing patrols for six months before a truce was imminent and the ops were disbanded, then was an officer in a howitzer battalion. He won a bronze star with an oak leaf cluster. After his tour in Korea, he went to the University of Oregon Med School, re-upped, and the Army was his home for his internship and residency as a military doctor in Hawaii, then he was sent to Germany. Back in the states, he held several army medical posts in Denver and Oklahoma before returning to civilian life as a full colonel in the reserve. He was honored in various Army events often since.

Coming to Bellingham about the same time as Dan Cheney, Roger had a distinguished Ear, Nose & Throat practice with Bob Newell. He volunteered three times to serve in Papua, New Guinea doing field medicine. With his first wife, Beth, he raised a son, Matt, and daughter, Dana, and had a grandson, Ian.

He loved cars, especially Triumphs, Porsches, and Acuras. Sailing became an important hobby; he was proud and honored to be in the Cruising Club of America. He joined this Rotary Club in 1979, sponsored by Newell, and served as our president in the 2001-2 year.

After retirement, divorce and in 1996 a second marriage to Nancy, Roger went back to teaching. Hired for $1 a year at Options High, he taught the most difficult kids, abused or into drugs or living alone with no family. Roger saw the potential in each, and with caring and field trips largely supported by this Club, he taught them how life could be lived positively. He showed them the best military and John Wayne videos at his Vining Street home, and they learned how life could be lived ethically. One result was his getting the only state-wide teaching award ever given to a volunteer employee. He called his course, “Rhetoric”, and taught it for 12 years.

In the past year, Roger went downhill, but his character remained. He didn’t know your name, but he smiled and listened carefully to what you said, with eyes that would tear up with sympathy or concern. He was truly a Rotarian, building goodwill and offering Service before Self.

Nancy and the family are holding private ceremonies for Roger. A public memorial service will be announced.

His grandson Ian, when a child, once pointed at Mount Baker. “Is that where God lives?” he asked.

Roger answered, “Mostly, Ian, I think God lives in our hearts”.

Let us bow our heads.

Thank you, Lord, for the chance to know the Roger Barnharts of the world, who do their best to serve humanity and their countries. Let them be an example to us of Service Above Self. And when their lives end, comfort those they leave behind.

Amen