

RUDY LOPEZ

The honor of
a lifetime

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who ARE we?

Washington's Kaleidoscope



Rudy Lopez, director of the Washington State Veterans Cemetery at Medical Lake, looks on as Harry Goedde, a Purple Heart recipient from the Battle of the Bulge, addresses a gathering at the cemetery in 2015 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II. *U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Benjamin W. Stratton*

In the gently rolling hills 20 miles southwest of downtown Spokane, you turn left at the osprey nest at the north end of Medical Lake, pass farmhouses with wrap-around porches and watch for wandering deer. The Washington State Veterans Cemetery is just ahead—an immaculate expanse of lawn with precise rows of military headstones. The mournful bugle call of “Taps” and rifle volleys often echo over the 25-acre site. But most of the time it’s serenely quiet, save for birdsong and flags flapping in the breeze. Even the lawnmowers seem respectfully muffled. Every veteran interred here is accorded a frequent flyover by Boeing KC-135 Stratotankers from nearby Fairchild Air Force Base. Sometimes three or more will lift off in sequence, gaining altitude in a carefully timed parade from the east horizon.

As Rudy Lopez, the cemetery director, strolls the grounds with a visitor he spots a discarded coffee stirrer and stoops to



Lopez adjusts a flag at a veteran's grave.
John Hughes photo

pick it up. Rudy Lopez is a detail man. In a 30-year military career, he achieved the highest enlisted rank in the U.S. Air Force. Non-commissioned officers have always been the backbone of the military. Command Chief Master Sergeants are something special. Lopez was the go-to guy for colonels and generals.

Lopez has lived all over the world: South Carolina, Florida, New Mexico, California, Hawaii, Turkey, Germany. But when he landed in Spokane in 2010 to become the top sergeant with Fairchild's 92nd Air Re-

fueling Wing he realized he never wanted to leave. Now he is one of Washington state's 600,000 veterans, many of whom settled here after leaving the military. Rudy Lopez is not an exuberant man, but his eyes brighten when he starts talking about the Northwest's mountains, lakes and rivers, game-filled forests and golf courses. "People pay good money to come to places like this just to go fishing," he says. "We bounced around for 30 years, lived in a lot of different communities and certainly could have moved to any one of them. But we had not seen a community that embraces its military and veterans like this state, especially Eastern Washington. It didn't take us long to figure out this was going to be home. It just felt right."

After retiring from the Air Force in 2013, Lopez landed the job with the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, overseeing the \$8.8 million cemetery that opened at Medical Lake in 2010. He calls it "the honor of a lifetime." His job is to make sure vets from east of the Cascades have a final resting place that salutes their service to their country.



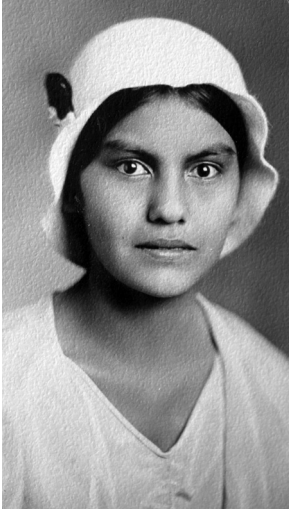
Two-year-old Rudy with his sister and dad in Fabens, Texas, in 1964. *Rudy Lopez collection*

Where Rudy Lopez comes from, who he became and how he got to Spokane are all part of the kaleidoscope of who we are in Washington state.

RUDY LOPEZ, like his father, mother and grandparents, grew up in a West Texas town called Fabens, some 30 miles southeast of El Paso along the Rio Grande.

On a map, Fabens looks like the tip of an anvil between old Mexico and New Mexico. It's about as far west as you can go and still be in Texas. They pick cotton and grow pecans in Fabens. Hispanics account for 96.8 percent of its 8,400 citizens. In Fabens, unless you're a stranger passing through, everybody knows your name. Rudy, suffice it to say, never felt like a "minority." He's just another proud American. In Texas, his family has settler bragging rights you can't touch with a pricey, pearl-gray Stetson and a new Chevy Silverado. Rudy's paternal great-great-grandparents, Guadalupe Lopez and Maria Pilar Gandara, were born in sparsely populated Mexican Texas—*Tejas*—around 1823. That was just two years after Mexico gained its independence from Spain. Stephen F. Austin's colony of white settlers from the U.S. had just begun homesteading along the Brazos River.

Though Fabens escaped the worst of the Dust Bowl, where suffocating windstorms swept topsoil from the Panhandle's parched prairie, life was still hard for farm laborers in rural Texas in the middle of the Depression. That's when Rudy's father, Donaciano "Don" Lopez Jr., was born. The tombstones in the cemetery at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church testify that life was often tragically short. The Lopez family was fractured twice by heartache during Don's boyhood. On a hot summer day in 1944, his 2-year-old brother wanted to go to town with



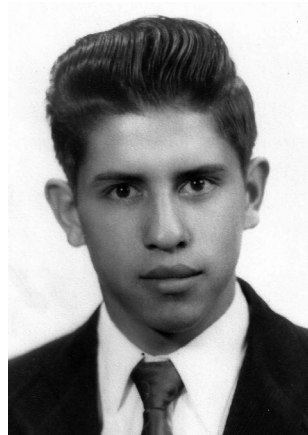
Rudy tragically never knew his Grandma Maria, who died in childbirth in 1945. *Rudy Lopez collection*

their papa but was told he couldn't. The boy climbed onto the bumper of the pickup truck and was fatally injured when his father—not realizing he was there—backed up. A year later, Don's mother died of complications from childbirth. The baby survived. That was Rudy's uncle Luciano.

Rudy's grandfather was traumatized by the back-to-back tragedies. His four motherless sons—including little “Lucie”—went to live with his widowed brother, who had 10 kids of his own. “So there were 14 kids under one roof, from toddlers to teenagers,” Rudy says, shaking his head in wonderment. “The older ones were pitching in every day—laundry, meals, babysitting, getting kids

ready for school and also working the farm. My great-uncle was tough, but you had to be tough to raise that many children. If you didn't have standards everything would go off the rails. By the time I knew him he had mellowed out a bit. By then, however, he didn't have all those kids to raise. It says a lot about him that they all did well for themselves career-wise.”

RUDY'S FATHER, a handsome, industrious boy, worked hard on the farm and raised prize-winning hogs as a member of the Fabens FFA chapter. After high school, the military was a way out—and up—for thousands of dirt-poor kids like the Lopez brothers. Don joined the Navy and became an electrician. His kid brother Lucie followed in his footsteps; the other two boys, David and Sixto, joined the U.S. Air Force.



Rudy's dad, Don Jr., at Fabens High School. *Rudy Lopez collection*



Rudy's dad during his Navy days. *Rudy Lopez collection*

Don Lopez was stationed on Puget Sound for a while, but most of his hitch was spent at sea. Four years of that was enough. He had learned a valuable trade. Don returned home to Texas, became a journeyman electrician and married a beautiful local girl, Francisca "Frances" Misquez. They had five children. Rudy, in 1962, was the second, and the only boy.

The Lopez kids were steeped in the church. It was important to keep the faith, help others and take pride in your work. "My dad wired the lights for the Sun Bowl at the

University of Texas at El Paso, so whenever we drove past that stadium he burst with joy," Rudy remembers. "You could see a glow come over him. He served on the School Board and was always helping people. A lot of times he'd come home from work, grab something to eat, then go off to a small job to take care of somebody's needs in the community. I was his tag-along. It saved me from my sisters! But I learned quite a bit about the electrician's trade. I also pushed back pretty hard. He wanted me to become an electrician, but I wasn't sure that's what I wanted to do."

Rudy was a good student. He also loved sports. But at five feet, five inches, he was too small to make the varsity, except in golf. It became one of his passions. Rudy acquired his first set of clubs by chance around the age of 8. He calls it his Lee Trevino Story. Like "Supermex," the poor Texas kid who became one of the game's all-time greats, Rudy started out with hand-



Rudy, a dapper toddler. *Rudy Lopez collection*



Rudy's parents, Don and Frances Lopez, out dancing when Don was home on leave from the Navy. *Rudy Lopez collection*

me-down clubs. His cousin, who worked at a service station on the interstate three miles north of Fabens, discovered them in the trunk of an abandoned car. “They took the shortest club—the nine-iron—to my grandfather, who cut about seven or eight inches out of the shaft and welded it together.

We lived right across the street from the high school practice fields. I would jump the fence and go shag balls all day long.” Rudy Lopez, unsurprisingly, is a fine golfer who has played courses all over the world. “It’s a game that teaches you a lot about life,” he says. “It’s you against the course. Integrity matters. My one regret is that when I left home and joined the military I didn’t take that nine-iron with me.”

In 1983, when Rudy left home and joined the military, dropping out of college at the University of Texas-El Paso, his father was furious. Rudy had made up his mind to kick himself in the butt. “I was spending too much time with my friends and not enough focusing on an outcome. ‘I’m leaving,’ I said just days before walking out the door. I’d already enlisted. My dad tried to convince me to withdraw. He said he would help me pay for college. ‘It’s not about the money,’ I said. ‘It’s the lack of direction that’s missing.’ ”

The career field he chose had its genesis in those ride-alongs with his dad whenever someone around Fabens needed help wiring a ceiling fan or washing machine. “Two of his best friends were pharmacists, so we’d pop into the drug store and I’d get a cherry soda or ice cream sundae. I always had respect for the pharmacists. They were on the front lines of the medical profession. I told the recruiter, ‘If you can’t get me pharmacy I’m not going to enlist.’ ”



Rudy, far right, first row, during basic training at Lackland Air Force Base at San Antonio in 1983. *Rudy Lopez collection*

THE MAN WHO made it to the top of the U.S. Air Force's enlisted ranks in 18 years nearly flunked basic training. Five days in, Rudy fell ill, needed emergency surgery and spent 2½ weeks recuperating. When he joined a new flight of recruits, he failed two consecutive locker inspections because he didn't know all the rules. Rudy was otherwise such a model recruit that they had someone help him redo his entire locker. "That's when we found out I was hanging my pants in the wrong direction. My career could have come to an end at the beginning had I not been given one more chance."

He graduated with honors from pharmacy apprentice technical school, emerged as one of the brightest young airmen in the career field and was placed on the fast track to sergeant after only three years in the service. At Holloman AFB in New Mexico, his first duty station, Rudy had "one of the best supervisors one could wish for"—a veteran sergeant who pushed his pharmacy techs to learn their craft. "He would take out the package inserts that accompanied every drug and give us homework assignments," Lopez remembers. "We'd study



A young sergeant receives a leadership award. *Rudy Lopez collection*

them every night and get ready for his quiz the next day. You learned what worked and what didn't. You learned the dosages and all the potential side effects. You became a walking encyclopedia of the PDR (Physician's Desk Reference book)."

All the pharmacists and NCOs were impressed with Rudy's conscientious maturity. He welcomed responsibility and excelled every time they gave him more.

"In the Air Force we always joked that pharmacies were 'the clinic attached' because they are the most visited spot in a health-care facility," Rudy says. Given that drugs can make us well or sick; save lives or, with one mislabeled prescription, cause death, he chose a career field ideally suited to someone whose mantra is painstaking attention to detail.

"Early on at Holloman I was responsible for the compounding section of the pharmacy—all of the pharmaceuticals that didn't come prepared," he remembers. "We would do research on the drug and determine what compounds it would be compatible with. We often made suspensions, ointments and creams from recipes we would develop and have the pharmacist check to make sure we had done the correct calculations. You don't hear much about compounding pharmacies

these days because so many products are commercially available. But back in the day a lot of the suspensions and medicines for children were not available. We would have to take the tablets or capsules, crush them, add the right base or solution and find the flavors that would mask the bitter taste so the kids would take them. We made suppositories and heat rash ointment—you name it. There was a lot of science in those days.” He was learning logistics, too. “I was managing a million-dollar budget. It was up to me to get it right—to balance purchases so that we’d never run out of medication and stay on budget within the fiscal cycle.”

He also got it right when he proposed to Maria Luisa Sanchez. They had worked together at a grocery store in El Paso. She was very attractive and exceptionally bright.

AFTER FIVE YEARS in New Mexico, the young couple departed for Rudy’s first overseas tour of duty: Izmir, Turkey. It was Maria’s first plane trip. Rudy was wearing a staff sergeant’s four stripes. “Arriving in Istanbul in 1989 was very intimidating,” he remembers, smiling at their naiveté and the culture shock. “Not speaking a lick of the language, we had to make our way to the domestic terminal. There were police on every corner with sub-machine guns. So we were a little bit shaken, to say the least.”

Three years in Turkey were followed by three years in Germany. Rudy, steadily advancing, became the non-commissioned officer in charge of the pharmacy at Spangdahlem Air Base in the Eifel Mountains.

In 1996, they were transferred back to the states. Rudy graduated from the Senior Non-commissioned Officer Academy and in 1999 became the Medical Support Squadron superintendent at McClelland Air Force Base near Sacramento. By 2002, he was a chief master sergeant and the USAF’s pharmacy career-field manager, based at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina. “I was doing my job dual-hatted, serving as pharmacy group superintendent at Shaw while overseeing the training platforms for the career field, with some travel to the Pentagon in D.C.”

His career field had gone through a major change. Now



Rudy has his chief master sergeant's stripes “tacked on” by his commander and his son, Mark, as his wife looks on. *Rudy Lopez collection*

there were outpatient clinics at bases that used to have Air Force hospitals. The Air Force had decided to congregate its surgeons at large facilities so it could boost their combat readiness. “It was a wise decision,” Rudy says. “We hadn’t gone to war in a long time. It allowed us to bring specialists under large umbrella facilities and get them really good at their craft. Smaller Air Force hospitals like the one at Fairchild here in Spokane were downsized to outpatient clinics. And we would just buy the care we needed in the local community. But our training for pharmacy techs, from entry level on up, hadn’t kept up with that paradigm change. It hadn’t been touched for eight years. That’s what I inherited. So we rewrote 11 programs and redid the entire training plan for pharmacy while I was the career field manager.”

FOR ALL HIS ACHIEVEMENTS and awards—numerous NCO of the Year honors and the Air Force Meritorious Service Medal with six oak leaf clusters—Rudy Lopez was frustrated that he had never been deployed to a combat zone.



Rudy helps a trauma team move a combat casualty from a field stretcher onto a CT scanner. “This was an incredible asset to have in theater,” Rudy says. “With two CT scanners, surgeons were able to rapidly isolate and attend to life-threatening injuries.” *Rudy Lopez collection*

“Early in my career, the Cold War was winding down. Every now and then something would pop up. In New Mexico, I was on a deployment team that trained a lot but never got



Lopez with actor Gary Sinise at Joint Base Balad in Iraq in 2007. Sinise frequently visits military bases around the world. *Rudy Lopez collection*

to go anywhere. When I got to Turkey, the Gulf War kicked off. We all raised our hands, only to be told, ‘You’re considered forward deployed; there’s a reason you’re drawing hazardous duty pay already.’

“Then when I volunteered to go to Kosovo, I got sent to a base

in England for 30 days. And the tech sergeant there was sent to Kosovo even though he didn’t ask for it. So I was always chasing something. All the years of training and playing in the dark were for naught. That was the story of my life.” Until 2007.

Lopez was serving as the pharmacy group superintendent at Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii when he was selected as superintendent of the 332nd Expeditionary Medical Group at Joint Base Balad in Iraq. He arrived during the height of the “surge.”

Rudy’s five months in a combat theater, 40 miles north of Baghdad in the embattled Sunni Triangle, rank as a highlight of his life: “You train your entire career to do exactly what we were doing: to be there when things go bad, and be that insurance policy for that commander to motivate his or her troops to go into harm’s way with the knowledge that when things go bad someone’s going to be there to catch them and take care of them. During the Vietnam War our battlefield-injury survival rate was 75 percent. In Iraq and Afghanistan it was—and still is—98 percent,” Rudy says. The key factors are better training for combat medical teams, pharmaceuticals like *QuikClot* to keep severely wounded soldiers from bleeding out and speedy helicopter airlifts to strategically placed combat zone hospitals.



Rudy's family celebrates his promotion. From left, his mom, sister, wife, nephew and son. The bust of a Native American chief was a traditional presentation. *Rudy Lopez collection*

“If we could get a casualty from anywhere in the battlefield to a trauma facility in what we called ‘The Golden Hour’ we had a very good chance of saving that life, regardless of the injury.” The men and women doing the fighting deserve nothing less than the best, Rudy says.

“We had physicians who were experts in what they did. It goes back to the decision to aggregate specialists. At Balad we had two of every specialty: two orthopods, two urologists, two neurosurgeons. They had CT scan capability in the desert. We were operating out of tents—like M*A*S*H—in a dirty, dusty environment, yet we had a very low infection rate, one that would compare to any other medical facility. The surgeons were incredible. They were pioneering poly-trauma for battlefield injuries. My boss had a pile of requests from major teaching institutions in the U.S. They wanted to be able to send their surgeons into our facilities to learn and bring that knowledge back. I have no doubt that many of the surgeons who were with us will be writing textbooks on poly-trauma. What people may not realize is that we weren't there just to take care of U.S. service members and our coalition partners. We treated just



Rudy and Maria wave to the crowd during the Lilac Festival Armed Forces Torchlight Parade in Spokane in 2012. *Airman 1st Class Ryan Zeski, U.S. Air Force*

as many Iraqi citizens—and bad guys, too. We didn’t discriminate. We did all we could for whoever came through the gate.”

The pride in his voice is practically palpable. He had waited 20 years for this chance.

“You wouldn’t ordinarily find someone like me, a pharmacy tech, in an operating room. But because of my position as group superintendent they allowed me to go in and observe. One day I watched them treat an Iraqi Army soldier who had sustained a direct shot to the head. They removed the bullet, taking precise care to avoid damage to the brain, and in the days to come I saw the amazing resiliency of the human body—how it can absorb trauma and heal itself. The very next day I watched as they treated a young girl who nine months earlier had sustained an injury from a car accident. Her brain had swollen, so to relieve the pressure the surgeons removed a couple of pieces of her skull and planted them inside her chest cavity so they would stay viable until they could put them back

in place. Three days after the follow-up operation she walked out with her parents.”

IN 2010, Lopez arrived in Spokane to become Command Chief Master Sergeant for the 92nd Air Refueling Wing. It was the first and only time in his career that he was not functioning as a health-care manager. As the commander’s top enlisted adviser, overseeing 3,300 enlisted personnel, he was handed a daunting logistical challenge: The runway at Fairchild Air Force Base was a half century old. It needed a major resurfacing, but the mission of providing gas stations in the sky had to continue.

In January of 2011, Rudy and his boss moved their fleet of KC-135 tankers a hundred miles west to the former Larson Air Force Base at Moses Lake. The Air Force had resurfaced several major runways in recent years, but none of the projects had been completed on schedule. “The closest came in three or four months late; the longest was years behind,” Rudy remembers. “We had 11 months to get it done, keeping in mind that some of that construction would happen in the winter months. We were able to get that project started and completed on schedule and on budget. And the wing’s mission never faltered. I was running back and forth, making sure the airmen’s motivation levels were up because the deployment cycle didn’t stop throughout. Fairchild was the lead wing for aerial tanker operations out of Manas, Kyrgyzstan, the central Asian air base. It was supporting all refueling operations for Afghanistan, and we never missed a beat while also supporting missions on the West Coast. We developed a rotation plan, moving specialists back and forth from Spokane to Moses Lake: cops, firemen, mechanics. It was no small feat, but the teamwork was remarkable.”

It was a perfect way to cap a 30-year career. Lopez is characteristically modest about what he achieved: “I’m humbled and privileged by the chance to serve my country. I just think I was at the right place at the right time and that all of this would have happened without me.”

Rudy’s proud papa, who died in 2011, always wore his son’s military rank on his ball caps.



Lopez points to a vacant niche at the Washington State Veterans Cemetery at Medical Lake. *John Hughes*

Rudy was mulling what to do in retirement when he learned the Veterans Cemetery was looking for a new director. The job seems tailor-made for a retired command chief master sergeant.

In a crisp sky-blue dress shirt, tie carefully knotted, suit jacket buttoned, Rudy greets a trio of elderly men, one wearing a VFW cap. They’re there to bury a comrade. A few hours later, an Air Force Honor Guard in spotless blue blouses, shoes spit-shined to glossy perfection, arrives from Fairchild for another service. Whenever Lopez sees a young airman it must remind him of himself.

THE EPITAPHS on the headstones and vaults at the Veterans Cemetery range from whimsical to touching:

“See your sparkling blue eyes at the cabin.”

“Gone fishing.”

“Go Steelers!”

“Rise up on Eagles Wings.”

“The Army was his life.”

“Served God and country faithfully.”

“Just another road trip.”

“It is really claustrophobic in this box.”

And of course, “Semper Fi.”

Like personalized license plates, the epitaphs are screened for double meanings and offensive language. But one old soldier’s survivors managed to slip some fractured Latin past the censors—perhaps at his last request: “*Illegitimus non carborundum*,” which roughly translates to “Don’t let the bastards grind you down.”

Unclaimed cremated remains have their own wall of honor in Section A of the cemetery. Each vault is inscribed with “Served his (or her) nation with honor.” Rudy and his staff team up with the Missing in America Project, a nationwide effort to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed remains of military veterans. “We also do a lot of work ourselves. Establishing relationships with funeral directors is really what it comes down to. There are so many reasons remains go unclaimed. There may be family. Or maybe not. It’s often a lack of funds. We want to make sure they’re not forgotten.”

Each autumn the Veterans Cemetery has a special service to salute veterans whose remains have gone unclaimed. For the last five years, by coincidence, a previously forgotten veteran from each of the five military branches has been interred with full military honors, including rifle teams and a bugler. Flags from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard are unfurled simultaneously, then folded and placed on stands since there’s no family to receive them.

Besides overseeing the cemetery, Rudy is a military history detective. “Here’s something special,” he said, handing a visitor a presentation case containing a Purple Heart. How the medal came into his possession is a story punctuated with serendipity. Rudy’s wife, a civilian employee at Fairchild Air Force Base, received it from a co-worker who said a friend had found it somewhere, perhaps at a yard sale. She figured Rudy would know how to find its rightful owner or his survivors. That a medal awarded to someone wounded or killed in combat was now flotsam struck all of them as just plain wrong. The medal’s reverse was inscribed “Wayne G. McCloud.” Rudy’s research led him to believe McCloud was an airman from Walla Walla killed over Germany during World War II. The



Lopez hopes to find surviving relatives of the Army Air Forces officer who received this Purple Heart posthumously during World War II.
John Hughes

inscription may have misspelled his last name.

As luck would have it, the visitor was from the Office of the Secretary of State in Olympia. He contacted State Archivist Steve Excell, who used the office’s vast Digital Archives to quickly track down a key military record. It confirmed that Walla Walla native Wayne G. McLeod was an Army Air Corps second lieutenant. He was buried, as Lopez suspected, at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in Missouri in 1950 when a group of servicemen’s remains were returned from

overseas. Still, there might well be more than one Wayne G. McCloud—or McLeod—who received a Purple Heart. Rudy is still searching for relatives to pinpoint the medal’s rightful owner and ensure it is handed down appropriately.

“We’re blessed to have a nation that’s dedicated to not leaving a man or woman behind,” Rudy says. “Over the years we’ve sent servicemen and women to all corners of the globe, and thousands of them lost their lives protecting our freedoms. Many of their remains were never recovered. There’s a team that works year-round to get credible intelligence of sites where there is the potential for recovering the remains of servicemen and women—from Europe to Vietnam. They’re forensic archaeologists, searching for remains or artifacts—dog tags, boots, pieces of clothing—that will help them make a positive identification. They take the recovered remains and artifacts to Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii and do all the forensics there. When they get a positive identification, they notify the families. We’ve got two of those cases here. One is

a soldier who was killed early in the Korean War. His remains were recovered only recently and positively identified in 2014. His daughter lives north of Spokane. His remains were interred here with full honors.”

FOR RUDY, there’s another story that sums up the true meaning of closure.

At a Department of Veterans Affairs event in Coeur d’Alene in the spring of 2014, Lopez met Andy Norberg, a 69-year-old Spokane Valley resident. Andy has inquisitive eyes and a frontier sheriff’s bushy white mustache. “I’ve got a cemetery for me,” he said. “And I’ve got one for my mom, but how about my dad?”

Andy was six months old in the winter of 1945 when he lost his father. Lt. Carl E. Norberg, 23, a Naval Reserve pilot, was en route from Whidbey Island to California when a military transport plane went down in a savage storm over the Cascades. A passenger who survived watched Norberg and the pilot bail out before jumping himself. Rescue parties were hampered by eight feet of snow. They searched again come spring. Lt. Norberg’s remains were never found. Nor were the bodies of three others on board.

“As soon as Andy said ‘Navy Reserves’ that set off a caution,” Rudy says. Military reservists and members of the National Guard don’t automatically qualify for burial at the Veterans Cemetery. “Active duty is the primary qualifier. We’re looking to see if they were called up for federal service for something other than training, whether it was two months or a year. If that service was all honorable the veteran would likely qualify for burial here. Alternatively, they can qualify by earning a retirement. Lieutenant Norberg obviously didn’t retire; he lost his life serving his country. But Andy only had a story; he had no documentation.” They stayed in touch and swapped leads. Finally they were able to document that Lt. Norberg was on a “federal” mission when he died and that he had not been memorialized elsewhere.

On November 30, 2015, 70 years and one day after his father was last seen, Andy Norberg watched as a plaque was



Rudy explains the different resting places at the cemetery. *John Hughes photo*

unveiled at the cemetery to commemorate his father’s service to his country.

“Without Rudy,” he said, “none of this would have happened.”

Rudy maintains he didn’t do all that much, just his job. It’s all about helping people, he says—a lesson he learned from his parents in that West Texas town all those years ago.

“I’m so blessed,” he says, surveying the fastidiously manicured grounds of the cemetery. “There are a lot of heroes resting here.”

John C. Hughes
Legacy Washington
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Washington's Kaleidoscope

21st century Washington is rapidly changing. Our diverse state is made up of independent and innovative people who persevere against long odds. Who are we? Where do we come from? Who do we become? Follow the journey of key Washingtonians in a series of online profiles published by Legacy Washington.