It's a tradition that's been around since the 50s. It takes creativity, ingenuity and a whole lot of Wartburg spirit.

The Wartburg rivalry with Luther College has long been intense, and so have the pranks. Jan Striepe, director of alumni and parent relations and graduate of the class of 1993, was a student at Wartburg when the prank tradition began with the mystery of the missing Knight armor.

Striepe said at that time the Knight armor was kept in a special little cubicle in the P.E. Complex. This was ‘rather inaccessible,’ watching over the basketball court near the press box. “All the sudden one day it was gone,” she said.

Shortly after was the Wartburg vs. Luther basketball game at Luther in Decorah. The gym was packed, and many Wartburg students were there. “I was there,” said Striepe.

During half time, the Luther pep band played a song called, “Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue.” But the Luther students had changed the words to “Five foot nine, does it shine, has anybody seen our Knight?” Striepe said, as she sang the tune. And then, the slender Knight appeared. A couple of Luther students had sneaked into the P.E. Center and snatched the Knight.

To retaliate, Wartburg students painted Luther’s statue of Martin Luther yellow.

“I think that was the start of the intense rivalry,” said Striepe.

In years following, the pranks continued—sometimes in a somewhat destructive way. John Kurtt, Wartburg College athletics director and coach from 1961 until 1993, remembers one prank when he said students may have gone overboard trying to top each other.

“They (Luther students) put a big ‘LC’ in the middle of our (football) field,” Kurtt said. “They (Luther students) put a big ‘LC’ in the middle of our (football) field,” Kurtt said. “It was very exciting,” Waldstein said. “It was in the year 1974. It was a really exciting time, and the fans were really into it.”

Dr. Paul Torkelson, class of ’76 said another Wartburg prank was to “go into the Luther student section and take all their clothes off.”

Wartburg students responded by burning a huge ‘W’ in the Luther football field. Kurtt said they used a chemical called atrazine, so Luther had to dig down three feet to get rid of the Knight’s symbol.

But apparently Luther hadn’t dug deep enough because Kurtt said the big ‘W’ on the Norse field showed up for three years after the prank occurred. “The vandalism is one of those that we tried to put a stop to,” said Kurtt.

Dr. William Hamm, current president of Waldorf College and a 1960 graduate, was a student when Wartburg and Luther instituted “the battle of the britches” tradition to continue the rivalry.

“Actually, I’m somewhat embarrassed to admit that the ‘battle of the britches’ was my idea. I’m embarrassed because my good friend Duane Shroeder later told me he thought it was the worst idea he’d ever heard,” said Hamm.

The idea was that the student body president of whichever college lost the Wartburg vs. Luther football game had to move his pants in front of the crowd and hand them over to the winning school’s president.

The intent was to try to improve the positive aspects of the rivalry and reduce the level of inappropriate behaviors, Hamm said. “David Hutson, ’61, was the first president to lose his pants.” Hamm was Wartburg’s student body president his senior year, and the game was at Luther.

“I planned carefully for an appropriate undergarment,” he said. “We had a huge crowd, and we took a horse and someone in the suit of armor as a mascot for the day. We had a great time despite the freezing temperatures, and the fact I lost a good pair of trousers!”

Striepe said she remembers the tradition, especially the year when both presidents were women sometime in the mid 70s. It had the potential to be a very sticky situation for President Cindy Kasper, ’78, but Striepe said, “It was very tastefully done.”

Striepe said she wore a tight skirt, which she gracefully removed and twirled above her head before handing them over.

Dr. Paul Torkelson, class of ’76 said another Wartburg tradition in the mid 70s was the “Malta,” a group of students who dressed in gangster outfits and carried violin cases to the basketball games.

The group walked into the gym for the first half of the games and sat right in the middle of the bleachers.

Dr. Fred Waldstein, class of ’74, was a basketball player on the Wartburg team during this time when the Wartburg/Luther rivalry was extremely intense.

“It was very exciting,” Waldstein said. “It was an intensity that created a festive atmosphere around the college.”

The bleachers were always packed for every game; even at way games at Luther, there were almost more Wartburg fans that Luther fans, he said.

“The crowd enthusiasm can give you that extra momentum that makes a difference between winning and losing,” said Waldstein of his experience.

“It does definitely give you a lift… makes you play better and harder.”

Striepe said she remembers the gym being packed for the Wartburg vs. Luther games.

(continued on pg. 3)
The Antics of KWAR

**OPERATION: Groundhog Day 2000**

From: John Boleske
To: Luther College
Subj.: Groundhog Day

Greetings! And Happy Groundhog Day!

I am John Boleske, station manager of Wartburg College’s radio station KWAR-FM.

I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone at Luther for making today’s stay enjoyable, safe, and fun one.

This morning, half-a-dozen “transfer students” walked into classes at Luther College. They were not registered for classes, were not on any of the professors’ rosters, and did not have student IDs. The pranks, planned and carried out by KWAR staff, was dubbed “Operation: Groundhog.” We attended 9 a.m. classes around campus, went to opening convocation, ate in the cafeteria, and attended 12:30 p.m. classes. The day was a joy for us and for the listeners back here at Wartburg College.

To the professors who hosted these mysterious transfer students: Thank you for your hospitality; unfortunately we won’t be back to class anymore at Luther. We missed Wartburg too much.

Again, thanks for the day and we hope there are no hard feelings! We’re the ONE for College Pranks...89.1 FM KWAR.

John Boleske
KWAR station manager

**OPERATION: Everyone Loves a Parade**

Linda Moeller, 2001

In the latest chapter of the Wartburg-Luther rivalry, members of KWAR-FM radio station not only infiltrated the Luther’s Oct. 17 Homecoming parade, but they did a live broadcast of the entire escapade.

The station, which airs on the 89.1 frequency and calls itself “The manager Jay Boeding ’99 of West Union said it was the second consecutive year KWAR has pulled off a clandestine operation at Luther.

Last year, posing as a church youth group from La Crosse, Wis., staff members got a campus tour, a free lunch, and free tickets to the Wartburg-Luther football game. During the tour, they surreptitiously left KWAR bumper stickers throughout the campus.

After learning of the hoax, Luther officials billed the Wisconsin church for the students’ expenses, and Boeding happily picked up the tab.

This year, the Wartburg-Luther football game coincided with Homecoming for the Norse. Admittedly influenced by the college movie classic, Animal House, KWAR staffers decided to enter a float in the Luther parade. Passing themselves off as the Organization of Nature Enthusiasts (ONE) from Lanesboro, Minn., they got permission to participate in the parade and even notified the mayor of Lanesboro, who agreed to verify their status in case someone from Luther called his office.

On a drizzly fall Saturday, the KWAR entourage took a minivan and a cellular phone to Decorah, where they had arranged for a trailer to be waiting. They decorated the trailer, donned Luther clothes, put Luther signs on the van, took their place in the parade, and began a live broadcast, via cell phone, to the folks back in Waverly.

When the float reached the parade observation stand, where Luther radio station KWLC was broadcasting, the students “cut the cake,” ala Animal House. They ripped off their Luther clothes to reveal Wartburg orange and black, they hauled out Wartburg signs, and they tore the Luther signs off the van. Boeding said about 40 Wartburg students who were at the parade—and reportedly even some alumni—eventually fell in step behind the float and joined the KWAR staff in yelling Wartburg slogans and distributing orange and black candy kisses to the pro-Norse crowd.

Although some observers registered disapproval and the float got its share of boos, the incident provoked no trouble. “The Luther students were good sports about it,” said Boeding. “They congratulated us and were laughing about it.”

For those who missed the live broadcast, KWAR aired a replay several times in the week following the parade.

Knights Rise Above Norse in Fall Caper

Linda Moeller 1998

Wartburg-Luther highjinks reached new heights last fall when junior David Max and sophomore Jeffrey Huber flew a light plane to Decorah for an aerial leaflet assault on the Luther College campus.

“I hope it’s something that will be remembered for awhile.”

Says Max, noting that the air drop was reported in every major newspaper in Iowa and even got national mention on the ESPN network.

The mission grew out of a longstanding rivalry between the Wartburg and Luther cross country teams. Max says the rallying point this time was a Luther stocking piloted away from the Norse two years ago. After Luther runners stole the cap back at a cross country meet last fall, the Knights opted for retaliation.

The mission fell to Max, a team member who had completed requirements for his pilot’s license earlier in the month. He rented a plane from the Waverly Airport and took off on Oct. 24 with Huber, a teammate from Keota, Iowa, along as bombardier. They were armed with 3,000 handbills warning, “The time has come/You need to fear/A holy war is drawing near/We will be avenged,” and requesting the return of the cap.

A report in the Des Moines Register said Max and Huber missed the Luther campus and dropped most of the leaflets in the Decorah swimming pool. However, three cross country team members who drove to Decorah to witness the air strike disagreed, noting in a subsequent letter to the editor that “approximately 80 percent of the pamphlets landed on the Luther campus and 20 percent drifted with the light wind to the city swimming pool and private residences.”

“Plus the swimming pool is so close to the campus that it should count as a direct hit,” Max adds.

The pilot says he had weighed the consequences of the prank before the trip, and he made sure he didn’t violate any Federal Aviation Administration regulations on the flight.

“We wanted to keep it safe, harmless, and offensive but not vulgar or profane,” he said. “The Wartburg-Luther rivalry is about having fun.”

The Decorah police chief apparently missed that point and quickly contacted his counterparts in Waverly, who greeted the duo when they landed at the airport. Max and Huber were charged with littering and pleaded guilty at a November court hearing in Decorah.

The Luther flyover cost them each $90 in fines and court costs, plus an admonishment from the magistrate that “the next time you decide to fly the friendly skies, don’t do it around here.”

Wartburg students quickly rallied to the cause and came up with about $140 in donations toward what has become another legendary chapter in Knight-Norse folklore.

“You have to have something to tell your grandkids.” Concludes Max, whose own grandfather, Dr. Herbert Max, taught in the Wartburg Education Department for 23 years and still lives in Waverly. George Max ’64. Dave’s father, was a four-year cross country runner at Wartburg and is now a chemistry professor at Lenoir-Rhyne College, an ELCA school in Hickory, N.C. Dave’s sisters, Laura ’93, and Sara ’96, were members of nationally ranked Wartburg women’s cross country teams and are now graduate students at the University of Iowa. “They even have friends at Iowa who graduated from Luther,” concedes their brother.
The Wartburg Five tell their story
Norm Singleton 1977

Wartburg vs Luther
(continued from page 1)

The four students sporting anti-Luther t-shirts.  Yearbook 1991

Now it can be told.

Few persons around here have heard the whole story of the Wartburg Five. The reason for this is that the tale of the five brave stalwarts has been reamed for a simple display of school spirit has never been officially released. Well I know. I was one of the Five. The privilege cost me $55.50 and I was happy to pay it.

I’d like to know who sent the bill to. I could bill the countless alums who have perpetuated the tradition of burning a “W” on Luther’s football field. Or I could bill Bob Siefkes for organizing the John Wayne Game Club here.

But maybe I should just absorb the cost and get on with the telling.

It goes back to Monday, Oct. 17, 1977, when the aforementioned Siefkes commissioned me to be a part of the commando squad leader, 15 feet away and oblivious of our presence, got out, us crept along this same cover until we were within 100 yards of midfield. Then, Campus Security drove up.

Wileken, armed with a flared gun to warn us of intruders, was left to guard the road covered by the fringe of fir trees that limited harassment. There were five of us, and our plans were to commit a flash to the gas.

At least, that’s what I was told.

At 2300 hours on Wednesday, Oct. 19 we departed wear-

ing commando outfits, i.e. dark clothing, dark hats and camouflage on our faces, and still bearing the vestiges of tear-

ful farewells from numerous female well-wishers. There was some talk of consequences that might affect us.

“The worst that could happen would be to spend a night in the Decorah jail,” Wilken said.

Right.

Iverson drove us to the edge of the fog-shrouded Luther campus, where the five of us debarked to cautiously tra-

verse the mile to the field, twice hitting cover to avoid being shot.

Don’t p-p-panic, men,” Siefkes said. The security guard, 15 feet away and oblivious of our presence, had left to guard the road covered by the fringe of fir trees that limited harassment. When the security guard, 15 feet away and oblivious of our presence, had left to guard the road covered by the fringe of fir trees that limited harassment.

Wileken, armed with a flared gun to warn us of intruders, was left to guard the road covered by the fringe of fir trees that limited harassment.

We were海滩的五个人跑步 to the field with the gas can.

We sent for Waverly as an aide with striped bottom, still wondering if the damn thing ever went off.

We were海滩的五个人跑步 to the field with the gas can.

We sent for Waverly as an aide with striped bottom, still wondering if the damn thing ever went off.

Then we ran. And laughed. It had been so easy.

The next day we found out.

At the briefing session at 2400 hours the following night, Siefkes handed out mission assignments. Iverson, being familiar with the lay of the land around the Luther campus was appointed as scout and driver. Wilken drew the heavy.

Assignment.

It was the first [prank] KWAR has ever done and it never came.

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