

## Benched

A FINAL FAREWELL TO CANADA'S  
ATHLETES AND SPORTS CHARACTERS BY  
TOM HAWTHORN

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09

### Ray Tran

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*Ray Tran (left) and younger brother Len Tran gave the Vancouver Capilanos a formidable double-play combination in 1949 and '50. Photograph courtesy of Dave Eskenazi.*

#### **William Raymond Tran**

**Born:** January 11, 1919 (Kamsack, Saskatchewan)

**Died:** January 15, 2015 (Gardnerville, Nevada)

Ray Tran anchored the infield of the Vancouver

Capitanos for three seasons after the war during which he formed a formidable double-play combination with his younger brother, Len.

The brothers turned 180 double plays in 1950 to set a Western International League record for twin killings.



Tran was known for his rifle arm at shortstop. As a college player in 1939, he set a record by throwing a baseball 411 feet, 6 inches.

Tran enjoyed his best season as a pro in 1949, when he hit .322 for the Capitanos with 24 doubles,

three triples and a home run in 543 at-bats. He had a career average of .270 over 10 pro seasons.

The 5-foot-9, 170-pound infielder lost several seasons of his career to wartime service.

William Raymond Tran was born to Marion and William Tran at Kamsack, a village in the Assiniboine River Valley near Saskatchewan's border with Manitoba. Five children would be born to the family, though two would die in infancy. When Ray was aged six, his family emigrated to Seattle, where Len was born in 1927.

Young Ray captained his elementary school soccer team to a city championship. During the Depression, he played football and baseball at Franklin High School, where his teammates included future pros Fred Hutchinson and Dewey

Soriano, as well as future newspaper columnist Emmett Watson.

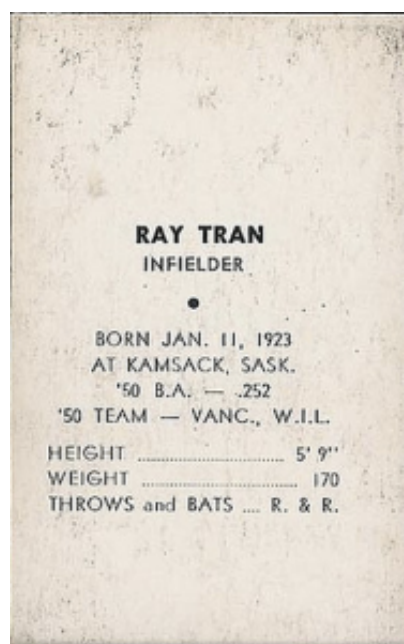
In summer, Tran played American Legion baseball for a team sponsored by the Palace Fish Co., winning a Western championship in 1934 before competing for the national title at Topeka, Kan.

He gained an athletic scholarship to play baseball for the Gaels of St. Mary's College at Moraga, Calif., under coach Earl (Whitey) Sheely, a former Chicago White Sox first baseman. Tran made his record throw at an athletic meet.

Tran turned professional at age 19, playing shortstop for the Anaheim Aces of the Class-C California League. The San Diego Padres of the Pacific Coast League intended for him to be their starting shortstop in 1942, but he was drafted shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor and was posted to Camp Callan at nearby La Jolla. Before entering the army, he married Margaret Palm, a singer from Fullerton, Calif.

Stationed in Hawaii, Tran served as a recreation sergeant responsible for arranging sports and entertainment to bolster troop morale.

By 1944, though, he was serving in Europe with his company landing at Normandy on D-Day +1. His company found the battle through occupied France to be a tough slog. "With little rations to sustain them in France, his gunnery crew appropriated a



local farmer's cow and enjoyed a much needed American-style barbecue," his brother later said. "The farmer discussed the missing cow with the American crew, but they had eaten it all and buried the entrails to evade responsibility."

After the defeat of Nazi Germany, Tran snuck into Hitler's off-limits stronghold at Berchtesgaden, where he cut out the backs of chairs as a souvenir.

A season with the Modesto Reds got him back into playing shape and by 1947 he was the Padres starting shortstop, his Triple-A , Pacific Coast League debut delayed six years by war. He hit only .213 in 531 at-bats, a poor average perhaps the result of a dislocated left shoulder suffered when he fell during a hotbox rundown on memorial Day. He spent most of the following season with the Class-B Tacoma (Wash.) Tigers where it was hoped he would regain his batting eye.

At age 27, he joined the Capilanos, where he would enjoy his greatest success alongside his brother. The Caps, managed by Bill Brenner, won the WIL championship in his first season with the club in 1949.

The Tran brothers were popular figures in Vancouver, as both hit for average and thrilled crowds with their sparkling defence at Capilano Stadium (both the old wooden bandbox at Fifth and Hemlock and, after June, 1951, its namesake concrete replacement in the lee of Little Mountain).

While with the Capilanos in 1952, Tran was pressed into service for one game as manager while skipper Edo Vanni recovered from ptomaine poisoning. He guided the Caps to a 12-5 victory over the Victoria Tyees.

By 1951, younger brother Len was gone, but the keystone duo reunited with the Tri-City (Wash.)

Braves for the 1953 campaign. Ray Tran retired as a player after suiting up for 10 games with the Braves in 1954, by which time he was 35. (Like many players, Tran fudged his age, so as to not seem over the hill. His birth year is listed as 1922 in several baseball sources, while his 1951 popcorn card gives birth year as 1923. The family states he was born in 1919.)

Tran opened a produce business serving Orange County, traveling to the Los Angeles produce markets before dawn each morning so as to have the best fruit and produce to deliver to Anaheim institutions. He sold the business after his wife died, retiring to Shelton, Wash., where he golfed with his brother. A diagnosis of prostate cancer led him to move to Nevada to be closer to his children. He died there four days after his 96<sup>th</sup> birthday.





*The Seattle Times, May 23, 1947. Thanks to J.G. Preston.*

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## 3 THOUGHTS ON "RAY TRAN"

**Rachel Christensen**

— MARCH 13, 2015 AT 8:02 PM

He was a great man. He taught his family to always work their hardest, never give up and enjoy life to the fullest! We all miss you grandpa!

[Reply](#)**Jason Tran**

— MARCH 14, 2015 AT 6:16 AM

Our grandpa was a great man who, together with grandma, raised 5 amazing children. I'm so thankful to him for going to work every day (and night) to provide for his family. He instilled a tremendous work ethic in his kids and that has become a family trait that will continue with generations to come. You'll missed and never forgotten gramps.

[Reply](#)**Mark Tran**

— MARCH 14, 2015 AT 7:20 PM

Wonderful uncle and super all around guy. Another chapter could be written about his fishing exploits which are legendary the American Pacific Northwest. We will miss you Uncle Ray!

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