

GHS grad tells of long career in U.S. Army

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Friday, 15 November 2013 14:54 -



Janssen retires with highest enlisted rank.

Allen Janssen returned to his hometown Monday, this time with many rows of colorful insignias and bars decorating his Army uniform.

Janssen, who's originally from Korea, was adopted by Ray and Irene Janssen of Gothenburg, and graduated from high school in 1980.

The retired sergeant major, which is the highest enlisted rank in the Army, was the featured speaker at the annual Veteran's Day program at the Senior Center.

Janssen, who now lives in Denver, CO, made a career in the Army for 32 years, serving in such places as Germany, Macedonia, Afghanistan and Iraq.

As the leader of a combat unit going to Afghanistan, Janssen said he didn't think the soldiers had enough time to train.

But once in Afganistan, he said his feelings went out the window.

"They never backed down from a fight and there were everyday heroic acts on the battlefield," Janssen said.

Janssen then shared several heroic acts by soldiers:

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A night convoy driving through enemy territory was ambushed by the enemy. After a gunner used 200 rounds of ammunition to protect the convoy, he was shot in the neck but grabbed another weapon and started firing. The soldier later died from his wounds.

A staff sergeant and his platoon were ambushed and the sergeant ran into enemy fire to bring back a wounded soldier. On his third attempt, he was hit and both died later of their wounds.

Three soldiers each received a purple heart after being wounded three times during a 17-month deployment. When they were told they could return home, the soldiers refused to leave their platoon. Eventually all three made it home safely.



Janssen said soldiers need to be smarter today because of all of the technology in use.

He also touched upon how important families and communities are that support the military, especially since only about 0.5% of the U.S. population serves in the armed forces.

“Don’t forget the family members left behind who have to do many things by themselves,” he said, noting that 60% of Army soldiers are married.

He also said that it takes four civilians to support a combat infantry soldier and that, although they are non-combat, support civilians are often put in harm’s way.

Janssen said the American public is important because they can put pressure on U.S. political representatives to make sure soldiers get paid.

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After Janssen's talk, Korean War veteran Roger Aden spoke to the audience about the honor flight to Washington D.C. that he and twin brother, Rodney, were part of on Oct. 29.

Aden said 135 veterans of the Korean War, plus medical personnel "because everyone was over 80," boarded a charter plane bound for the nation's capital.

The group visited memorials for one day, stopping at the Korean memorial twice—once during the day and at twilight.

"It was illuminated by lights and was very touching and emotional," he said. "There were a lot of tears shed."

Aden recommended the experience to other veterans, noting that the only drawback was going 23 hours without sleep.

During the Senior Center ceremony, veterans in attendance from all branches of the service were recognized.

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