A flag given to Gothenburg Public Schools when Alex Peyton was a sophomore made such an impression

on him that he returned the favor last Thursday.

During a special ceremony, Peyton—a U.S. Army military intelligence analyst—presented an American flag flown over an Allied base in Tillil, Iraq, to his alma mater.

“It’s a symbol of freedom,” Peyton said.

In an interview Friday, Peyton said he was impressed five years years ago when Greg and Kathi Viergutz of Gothenburg gave the school U.S. and Nebraska flags flown over the nation and state capitols, the county courthouse and city hall and also taken on a mission by the USS Nebraska submarine.

Peyton, a 2008 GHS graduate, was deployed to Iraq last August with the Battlefield Surveillance Brigade after he finished basic and individual training at Ft. Sill, OK.

Although he can’t talk about some of his duties at brigade headquarters, the 21-year-old said some of his responsibilities have included providing security for U.S. troops on tours of ancient ruins and conducting analysis of enemy operations.

He told students Thursday that there are Iraqis who don't want U.S. military forces there.

"That's understandable because it's their country," Peyton said. "I wouldn't want people from other countries patrolling the streets of Gothenburg."

Yet, many Iraqis have welcomed the U.S. military, he said.

On Friday, Peyton said many nationals are paid to work on U.S. bases.

"For them, it's honest work," he said.

Peyton said it's important that the United States helps the country "get back on its feet to sustain itself."

"In the future, that's possible."

Already, Peyton said the withdrawal of U.S. troops is evident with some smaller bases closing entirely and others being turned over to the Iraqis.

"We still get insurgent action here and there but it's reduced," he said, noting that rockets have damaged and destroyed equipment and injured a soldier on the base since he's been there.

Those things can be nerve racking, he said, but usually the base is a peaceful, quiet area.

"It's also dirty and hot."

When Peyton arrived,

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