

Homecoming bittersweet for Korean vets

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 07 November 2013 14:32 -



Rodney and Roger Aden, other vets finally receive hero's welcome.

Bands played and well wishers waved American flags when 135 Nebraska Korean War veterans disembarked at Omaha's Eppley Field.

Shortly before, fire truck hoses sprayed water over the jet that carried the vets much like how fire boats shot water into the air in San Francisco Bay when twin brothers Rodney and Roger Aden of Gothenburg returned by ship to the United States from Korea 60 years ago.

During last week's ceremony, a delegation of Korean women, dressed in native clothes, thanked the veterans for fighting in Korea.

"We had a better homecoming this time," Rodney said.

The brothers were part of a Heartland Honor Flight to Washington D.C. on Oct. 29 that included a visit to the Korean War memorial and others.

Both men, now 83 years old, said highlights of the trip were the changing of the guard at Arlington Cemetery and the Korean and Vietnam War memorials.

"I saw tears running down some of the old boys' faces," Roger said of the changing of the guard.

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Viewing life-sized infantry men in ponchos poised to fight at the Korean memorial was also touching, they said.

“It was cold and wet there,” Roger said about the northern part of Korea during the war.

Both men were drafted in 1951 and did basic training in Ft. Riley, KS, where they said they encountered a mean sergeant.

LOCAL VETERANS DAY CEREMONIES ON NOV. 11	
Gothenburg Public School 10:30 p.m. in the south gymnasium. Veterans and families invited to lunch. Speaker is John Grinde of Council Bluffs who was a U.S. Army sergeant.	Ken Janssen, a Gothenburg High School graduate, and Roger Adens, a Korean War veteran who will talk about the Heartland Honor Flight to Washington D.C. Tickets for dinner \$10. They are available from Jeff Morris, 537-7419; Jack Osterwald, 537-5296; Dean Kupler, 537-7423 and Bob LeBemeyer, 537-5333.
Stone Hearth Estates 2:30 p.m. featured speaker Cliff Reed of Brady on third floor.	
Gothenburg Senior Center 8 p.m. dinner for everyone. Speakers retired Sgt. Major Al-	The public is invited to all of the ceremonies.

Roger had married his high school sweetheart, Shirley France, who followed him to Fort Riley but he had difficulty getting weekend passes to see his new bride.

“He couldn’t keep his rifle and boots clean enough,” said Rodney with a laugh.

Rodney received weekend passes and, because the sergeant couldn’t tell the twins apart, they switched dog tags. Rodney also slept in Roger’s bunk when he left camp to see Shirley.

“The sergeant would shine his flashlight on my face for a few seconds but it felt more like 15 minutes,” Rodney said about the sacrifice for his brother.

Once the Adens and other soldiers shipped out, they sailed to Japan and took a train that passed by Nagasaki and Hiroshima, cities that were leveled by atomic bombs near the end of World War II.

“It was black and horrible with junk and steel lying around,” Rodney said.

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Roger said it looked like the area had been wiped off the face of the earth.

After leaving the ship in Japan, soldiers whose last names started with A and B were trained as combat medics while the rest were infantry or had other designations.

“We were very lucky,” Roger said.

While stationed in Pusan, Korea, as part of the 561st Medical Ambulance Company, the twins met wounded from the front lines and took them to assigned medical facilities in the area, including the SS Hope, a U.S. hospital ship moored in the harbor.

The brothers also transported prisoners of wars to camps.

They moved the wounded in buses converted to hold stretchers and could haul 13 soldiers at a time.

“Sometimes they’d die on the way,” Roger said.

Both men also remember when a fireworks factory exploded.



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“We were picking up limbs from the tops of the buildings,” Rodney said.

During the 18 months they spent in Korea, Rodney and Roger also witnessed war refugees who lived on the streets in Pusan and begged for whatever they could get.

“They covered themselves with cardboard or blankets with no bathroom facilities,” Roger said.

Something amazing about their time in basic training and in Korea was that the brothers were never separated.

Although Navy policy encourages siblings to not serve together, exceptions can be made as long as the ship is not in a hostile firing zone.

The policy came about when five Navy sons of an Iowa couple perished in the 1942 sinking of the USS Juneau off the Solomon Islands.

“We couldn’t believe we stayed together,” Roger said, noting that staying with his brother was like being at home. “It wasn’t nearly as lonesome. Some guys got so homesick they cried.”

Rodney said they gave each other moral support.

During the war and afterward, the Adens said they never knew why the United States was fighting in Korea because war had not been declared by Congress.

Rodney said he appreciated his time as a combat medic which had been an interest of his.

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When a medic is killed, Rodney said seven soldiers die because of lack of medical care.

Transport medics, Rodney said, could perform such procedures as setting bones and treating bullet puncture wounds although the first need always was preventing shock.

“Making sure they are covered up and warm and then stopping any bleeding,” he said.

The Adens said it was honor to be chosen for the Heartland flight, noting that from 500 applications for the most recent trip, 130 were chosen to go.

“I wish every vet who went over there could’ve gone on the trip,” Roger said. “We thank those who got us there.”

Bill and Evonne Williams, of Patriotic Productions in Omaha, help organize and raise funds for honor flights to Washington D.C.

After a hero’s return welcome last week, the brothers don’t put themselves in that category.

“The ones that died are the heroes,” Rodney said.

After the war, Shirley Aden and Arlene Block, who was Roger’s fiance at the time, picked up the twins at Ft. Carson, CO, and drove them back to Gothenburg.

Roger and Rodney re-joined their father and another brother in farming which they did for 30 years until retiring and turning the operation over to their sons.

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