

Soller waiting to step down from Honor Guard

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Jack Soller can't stand so tall anymore.

And holding a 10-pound Army-issued rifle for any length of time is out of the question.

Yet the 84-year-old member of Gothenburg's Honor Guard isn't ready to hang up his dress blues just yet.

He's waiting for the military funeral of friend and honor guard comrade Cliff Geiken who's 94 years old.

"I want to say a few things," Soller said. "Cliff kept it (honor guard)going and if it wasn't for him, we probably wouldn't have one."

Soller and the rest of the honor guard have, for many years, provided an honorable military presence at the funerals of veterans buried in Gothenburg and at Fort McPherson National Cemetery. They also participate in annual Memorial Day services.

In addition, guard members raise the American flag at local football games, lead the annual Harvest Festival parade and participate in other activities.

Soller has been part of the local guard since 1958 when Geiken, a World War II veteran, was already commander.

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Geiken started the Gothenburg Honor Guard shortly after World War II and commanded the group for 60 years. Deteriorating physical health forced him to quit in 2007 and Vietnam War veteran Roger Wahlgren took over as commander.

Soller has been involved in the military for more than 70 years.

Born in Gothenburg in 1937, he and his family later moved to Oakland, CA, where Soller joined the high school ROTC program at age 14 and was involved in honor guard activities.

In 1952, he joined the U.S. Air Force and served in the military police which included a 1-year stint in North Africa.

Soller stayed connected to family and farming, returning to Gothenburg to work for his uncle Bill Soller during the summer.

He came back permanently to farm in 1958 and joined the local honor guard.

“I like the guys,” Soller said about his long service in the guard. “They’re a dedicated bunch—all of them.”

These days, Soller doesn’t participate in honor guard activities very often and spoke of another reason for stepping down.

“I’ll quit when I don’t look like a soldier anymore,” he said.

