



By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

The morning of Veterans Day began with a snow/rain mix that hampered the start of activities scheduled in Perkins County.

The parade was cancelled, but the program at the high school and bean feed at the legion went as planned.

Leading up to welcoming remarks by Karl Dudo, the county's American Legion commander, the colors were posted by the guard, Rev. Ron Krause delivered the invocation, and the high school band played the National Anthem.

Introduction was made by Dudo of each post commander across the Highline. Auxiliary president Pat Heinemann introduced the 2010 Boys and Girls Staters who took part in reading a piece of the program.

A special guest at the program was Warrant Officer Dennis Conner, Jr., son-in-law of Dave and Sylvia Deden, who spoke a few words. Conner returned home in September from his second deployment. He is preparing to deploy for the third time in December.

Conner served in Iraq for a year, then spent two years stateside before his most recent deployment to Afghanistan for a year. He'll soon be returning to Afghanistan to work with a special forces unit.

The soldier is married to Maggie (Deden) and they have two young children, Kendryck 12 and Kayleigh nine.

Following a talk by Gerry Pankonin, the band played patriotic selections and the program culminated with the playing of Taps, a benediction by Rev. Krause and retirement of colors.



Those in attendance were invited to a free ham and bean feed at the legion hall sponsored by the Madrid, Grant, Venango and Elsie American Legion Posts and the Perkins County Veterans of Foreign Wars. Trinidad Bean Co. furnished beans for the meal.

The Red Shirt

Speaker Gerry Pankonin told about the history and itinerary of a tour generously offered to World War II veterans to the national WWII memorial in Washington, D.C.

Her husband Elmer was fortunate enough to be among those traveling from Nebraska to visit the memorial and other sites in the nation's capital during May 2008.

Other veterans from Perkins County who have gone on the trip are Vern Mailand, Gerald Werner, Clifford Sexson and Burle Newth.

Pankonin described in detail how the veterans and their wives were warmly treated by organizers everywhere they went.

After taking the Washington Honor Flight trip, Elmer Pankonin hung up a red shirt he and other veterans were given for the travel, remarking that it would be the last time he would wear it.

Then came an invitation to attend a veteran gathering at the Strategic Air Space Museum in September of the same year—he and Gerry happily accepted, and he wore the red shirt. He then hung it up, making the the same comment.

In May 2009 Elmer and Gerry attended a WWI Honor Flight reunion in Omaha—and yes, he got to wear the red shirt.

Pankonin delivered her talk in an amusing but serious way, pointing out how the Honor Flight humbled the veterans yet pointing out the joy and blessed feeling that they were able to travel and enjoy the tour and the follow up trips with veterans across the state.

“The veterans and their families can’t express enough appreciation for all the work, planning, the volunteers and sponsors, and to coordinators Bill and Evonne (Williams) for a gift of a lifetime of memories,” said Pankonin.

“It was just a dream come true and a miracle to touch so many lives. I wish every WWII veteran could have gone.”

“Elmer said, ‘I really, really think this is the last time for the red shirt,’” said Pankonin to laughter and applause as she completed her talk.

