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Air Guard colonel salutes Korean war vets

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By Joanne Glamm

The man who is the top officer for the area's sixth largest employer traces the organization's success to Siouxland communities and their people.

Brian Miller, wing commander for the 185th Air Refueling Wing, Iowa Air National, in Sioux City, singled out Korean War veterans for their role in the success of his unit when he spoke in Le Mars last week.

"The young people in my organization are doing great things, but I want to tell all of you thanks," Miller told Korean War veterans and their guests at the Korean War Last Man's Club annual meeting.

He thanked the veterans for what he said was a great example.

"Thanks for setting the bar high as we continue to carry on where all of you left off," Miller said.

Carrying on the millitary tradition at the air base in Sioux City are 850 guard members who earned top marks when ranked with 96 other organizations like his, he said.

The local Air Guard has been recognized the last three years for being the best guard unit in the country, Miller said.

"We're ordinary people just like everyone in this room, but when we come together, we can do it better than anybody else and that's a great reflection of the whole Siouxland area," he said.

In addition to the traditional guardsmen, there are 70 full-time military workers at the base and 274 state and federal employees.

Sioux City is the home base for nine KC-135 planes with a mission of refueling other planes around the country and around the world, Miller explained.

Planes leave Sioux City to refuel aircraft at speeds of 350 miles an hour in the air, flying up to 12 hours for 7,000 miles before they need fuel.

"At any given time, on average, two of the KC-135s are gone somewhere," Miller said. "Once in a blue moon all nine are there."

Guardsmen are deployed everywhere from the Pacific Rim to Guam, Singapore and the Middle East, but the deployment isn't like traditional military forces, he said.

"On any given month, 50-100 of my people are deployed -- most of them in the southwest Asia region for one to six months at a time," Miller said.

The work of the air refueling wing extends beyond refueling, he told the Korean War veterans.

"You just think of us as flying airplanes and refueling other planes, which we do a terrific job of, and we do a lot of it," Miller said.



(Sentinel photo by Joanne Glamm) Col. Brian Miller, wing commander for the 185th Air Refueling Wing, Iowa Air National Guard, in Sioux City, praised the contributions of Korean War veterans when he spoke in Le Mars last week. Miller talked to the veterans during the 15th annual meeting of the local Korean War Last Man's Club.

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Medical evacuation flights take the local guardmen to locations to transport patients who are critically in need of care, such as soldiers flown from Afghanistan to Germany.

The inside of the 136-foot-long planes can be converted for critical care patients in six hours, he explained.

The planes were used to help people evacuate in the southern U. S. during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The 185th also has firefighting and security forces, Miller said.

"You name it, we have it," Miller said. "We're deployed all over the world, all the time and we do a tremendous job."

The local guard unit also keeps other planes in the air by repainting an average of one plane a week.

"We paint fighter aircraft from not only all over the country, but all over the world," Miller said. "That facility is booked for the next 14 months."

Miller began his career with the Air Guard in 1980 as a part-time mechanic.

Six years later he went to pilot's training and has advanced through the years to the top rank of wing commander.

"If you work hard and apply yourself, you can end up running the place," he said of his career.

He asked the Korean War veterans at the annual meeting of the Last Man's Club last week to help recruit men and women to join the guard in Sioux City.

"They'll be joining a world class organization," Miller said.

Approximately 50 people retire from the Sioux City Air Guard each year, he said.

"If you know of good young people in your community, please send them our way," Miller said.

He also talked to the veterans' group about the possibility of reducing military units in the U.S.

"The most valuable thing we own out there is the reputation we have in Siouland, nationally and globally," Miller said of the 185th. "That is the best asset we have to stay open."

At this point, the wing commander said everything he hears indicates the guard group is in great shape.

"So we've been pressing forward, and, hopefully, we'll find even more ways to get jobs in and do it more efficiently," he said.

Miller spoke to 64 Korean War veterans and their guests at the 15th annual meeting and banquet of the Korean War Last Man's Club last Thursday.

Thirty-five of the veterans have died since the group was formed in Le Mars at Wasmer Post 241 of the American Legion.

There was one death in the past year.

Emmett Freking, of Le Mars, died June 30.

Officers re-elected include Don Law, president, Larry Petersen, vice president and Bud Vander Well, secretary-treasurer.

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