

# Local soldiers share experiences during 2012 Veterans Day program

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Each year, Veterans Day offers people across the country a chance to contemplate the sacrifices and stories of the men and women of the armed forces.

In Vermillion Monday morning, two local veterans shared their own stories during the 2012 Veterans Day Program at W.H. Over Museum.

Sgt. Marty Nygren and Staff Sgt. Neil Wallin offered the main addresses of the annual ceremony, during which they recounted their experiences in the Middle East.

Nygren enlisted in the Army National Guard when he was only 17, joining the 665th Maintenance Company out of Mitchell. His first two-year activation started in 2003, and his most recent deployment began in 2011, during which he served with the 139th Brigade Support Battalion as part of Task Force Shadow.

"Our first week in (Iraq) was spent training with the soldiers we would be replacing," Nygren said. "My job on the deployment was to serve as the NCO in charge of maintaining the shop office. I was tasked with ordering, receiving and shipping of all parts of tactical and non-tactical vehicles.

"Our task force supported units at four operating bases throughout the entire theater of Iraq," he said.

As their time there drew to a close, Nygren's task force was responsible for shutting down operations bases in Iraq.

"Our unit had to arrange for all personnel and equipment to either be flown or hauled from Iraq to Kuwait, and then flown back to the United States," he said.

He later transitioned to a receiving unit for equipment coming out of Iraq.

"Another soldier and I were tasked to locating all missing cargo in Kuwait that belonged to us. We

spent a month going from base to base searching for equipment," Nygren said. In those 30 days we discovered \$2.3 million worth of equipment that was either dropped off at the wrong location by the driver, or the shipping documents had gotten lost. After locating our equipment, I would arrange to have it shipped back to our base and escort the convoy."

Neil Wallin has served as a medic and X-ray technician with the South Dakota National Guard for more than 16 years. He served with the 730th Area Support Medical Company from 1996-2008, with one deployment to Iraq from 2003-2004, and transferred to the 211th Engineer Company in 2009, and was deployed to Afghanistan from December 2009 to September 2010.

After Wallin arrived in Iraq, his unit operated out of Bagdad International Airport.

"We treated the 3rd Infantry Division soldiers as they were trying to return home," he said. "This was a huge eye-opener. We had heard of battlefield fatigue and the thousand-yard stare, but this was seeing it firsthand."

He was later stationed at a remote base that was mortared almost every night.

"It got to the point where we would sleep through some of the mortar attacks because we could tell if the mortars were close or not," Wallin said. "I could not help but think about the soldiers in World War II sitting in their foxholes with actual artillery shells coming in on them constantly for days. What I was going through wasn't that bad in comparison."

Wallin decided to join the 211th in November 2008 when he received an e-mail that said the company was requesting medics.

"I thought it had been a while since I had been deployed, and there were soldiers who were already on their second and third deployments," he said. "I figured it was my time."

The deployment also gave Wallin a chance to earn the Combat Medic Badge. While his father had earned the award years before, Wallin himself had not because of the type of unit he had been serving on.

He later went on to receive the badge, which he said brought him closer to his father.

"Although I could not understand what he went through to receive his, I can now understand what it means to be referred to as 'doc' by my fellow soldiers," Wallin said. "To a medic, this is the greatest honor you can have, because it means the complete respect of your fellow comrades."

Nygren and Wallin both described undergoing similar experiences in the Middle East, one of which was the heat, which they each described as something akin to standing in front of an open oven.

Another was noting the cultural differences between the Middle East and the United States.

Nygren said the lack of traffic laws was one thing that stood out for him.

"They do not abide by any sort of speed limit, they drive as fast as their vehicles will allow, and many are terrible drivers," he said. "Children are not in car seats. In fact, many times they would stand in the back window of the vehicle waving at us."

Another difference Nygren described was how women walk around completely covered except for their eyes.

"One thing I found difficult to get used to is that in their society women do not make eye contact. In fact, if we found ourselves talking with a Middle Eastern man who was accompanied by a woman, we instructed not to even attempt to address her," he said.

Nygren and Wallin each concluded their remarks by the present veterans for their sacrifices.

"You have shown us what it's like to be a soldier, what it means to fight with morals, ethics, courage and most of all pride for the United States," Wallin said.



Sgt. Marty Nygren (top photo) and Staff Sgt. Neil Wallin (bottom photo) offered the main addresses at the 2012 Veterans Day Program held at the W.H. Over Museum Monday morning in Vermillion.

(Photos by David Lias/Plain Talk)

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