

THURSDAY ** AFTERNOON/PRIME TIME ** SEPTEMBER 8
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adjutant general said. "But very few would go to combat with another unit like Dennis did." Jensen's awards include the National Defense Service Medal, Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon and the Army Service Ribbon.

The Rev. Joe Schulte, the Yankton church's pastor, called Jensen "a fighter in the best sense of the word." "(Jensen) has been a fighter from birth. He was born prematurely and weighed less than 2 pounds, and yet he survived," Schulte said.

Jensen fought to enter the military not only to benefit himself but also for others, Schulte said. Jensen showed that love for others when he would remain on the phone with his sister, who was feeling anxiety following her move to Minneapolis, until she fell asleep.

Jensen showed zest for a life that ended all too early, Schulte said. "As his grandmother said, 'At least we had him for 21 good years,'" the pastor said. Besides Bestgen's greeting to the audience, Jacob Jensen offered remarks on behalf of the family.

the two cousins spoke of Dennis' military service. "I could tell he had a warrior's heart," Jacob said. "He had the desire, you could see it in his eyes. He had the focus and pride in the way he carried himself."

Jacob spoke of dreams that will now go unrealized with his cousin's passing. "We were both meandering spirits. We bonded in lots of ways," he said. "I looked forward to having him at my side when I got hitched some day, of getting old with him."

Jacob choked back tears, pausing before he spoke of his admiration for his cousin. "Dennis was never taller than me, but I got to look up to him," he said with a smile.

The service included remarks from U.S. Sen. John Thune (R-SD) and South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard. Americans enjoy freedoms because of soldiers such as Jensen, the senator said.

"(These soldiers) are devoted to duty, honor and country. They go to faraway places like Helmand province," Thune said. "Today, we say thank you the best we can."

Daugaard spoke of Jensen's passing at a young age when so many years should have been ahead of him. Death comes quickly, and we all need to let others know at every possible moment how much we love

them, the governor said, noting it would have been what Jensen wanted.

The entire state has felt the pain of Jensen's passing, Daugaard said. "We are all diminished, and South Dakota is less for his loss," the governor said.

Daugaard had ordered flags flown Thursday at half-mast in Jensen's memory.

During a video tribute, the family mixed sobs with occasional smiles and soft laughter. During one tribute scene, Bestgen pointed and smiled at a man in the balcony, who returned the recognition.

Musical selections echoed through the church, filling the air with emotional moments. Kathy Koenig sang "Ave Maria," accompanied by her daughter, Maureen Koenig McFarlane. During two other selections, five bagpipe players performed at stations around the sanctuary. For the final number, four bagpipe players exited as the remaining player completed "Amazing Grace."

After the casket was removed from the church, Jensen's family and friends, along with dignitaries, gathered on the church steps for the 21-gun salute and "Taps." Besides Thune and Daugaard, the dignitaries included U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD), First Lady Linda Daugaard and Lt. Gov. Matt Michels.

Following the Yankton funeral, the procession of family, friends and Patriot Guard Riders traveled U.S. Highway 81 to Madison, then to DeSmet and Pierre in recognition of his Guard units. Upon reaching Pierre, the Patriot Guard Riders were

scheduled to drop out of the procession while the remaining vehicles proceeded to Sturgis. Spc. Jensen's interment was Friday morning in the Black Hills National Cemetery near Sturgis. During Thursday's service, Bestgen pledged her family's

support for those in attendance. "We are a village, and our family understands that all of you are grieving," she told the gathering. "If you ever need anything, our arms are open to you as well."

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