

VICTORY SOLDIER UNVEILED IN ABERDEEN



American News Photo by John Davis

Solemn moment: The statue of the Victory Soldier was unveiled by a group of area veterans and current military personnel during Tuesday's dedication ceremony outside the new War Memorial Building at the Aberdeen Regional Airport.

Tribute given to veterans

By Elissa Grossell
American News Writer

Celebration centers on those who served, new War Memorial Building

background to open the airport with," said Omland, who sits on the Airport Board.

The mild weather drew about 350 people — public and private, military and civilian, young and old — to the grand opening of the War Memorial Building. The event included speeches by various officials, songs by the Aberdeen Regional Men's

Chorus and the unveiling of the first War Memorial statue.

The \$6.6 million terminal actually opened in August, but the grand opening was held on Veterans Day in honor of the building's name.

Tuesday's event was to pay tribute to the "tremendous work and effort" that went into the terminal

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More than 1,000 at Civic Arena event.

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project, said Mayor Tom Hopper. It was also to "celebrate the men and women who have served and continue to serve this country in

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Behind proud melodies of patriotic songs and numerous rounds of applause, the roar of airplane engines and the whir of propellers could be heard at Aberdeen Regional Airport on Tuesday.

It was music to Aberdeen City Commissioner Jacki Omland's ears.

"What an appropriate

Veterans: More sculptures planned



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military service."

Aberdeen's airport shows the community is progressive and "geared toward the future," Hopper said.

Representatives from the offices of the state's congressional delegation read statements from Sens. Tim Johnson, Tom Daschle and Rep. Bill Janklow congratulating Aberdeen on its airport. They could not attend themselves because the Senate and House are in session.

Veterans and current military personnel unveiled the 7 1/2-foot-tall bronzed Victory Soldier. Eventually, a sculpture of a soldier in combat will stand to the right of this soldier, said sculptor Ben Victor. To the left will be a statue of a soldier showing the emotions felt in war, said Victor, a Northern State University art student. The final project cost will be about \$210,000, with that money being donated by government boards, businesses and individuals.

Victor said the Victory Soldier, holding an American flag and staring off with a "fearless" look in his eyes, is a symbol of



Hopper



Omland

the strong patriotism in this country and represents past and present military men and women.

Veterans pleased: Tim Pond, who spent 20 years in the Marine Corps, helped unveil the statue.

"It's big," said Pond, 43, of Aberdeen, laughing. "It's pretty nice."

Pond and Harley Hansen, a member of the Naval Reserve, also liked the terminal's name and appreciated the fact that the airfield itself will still be known as Saunders Field in honor of its namesake, the late World War II hero Gen. LaVerne Saunders, a local native who flew fighters for the Air Force.

Hansen, 37, of Stratford, also helped unveil the statue.

World War II veteran Ken Thompson, 77, of Aberdeen, also thought the War Memorial Building is a fitting name for the new terminal. Although Thompson said he envisioned more of a Korean War-type dress on the Victory Soldier statue, "obviously it's a great sculpture."

Mike Erickson, an eight-year Airport Board member and past chair, said he flew in and out of Aberdeen several times in the late 1960s during his service in the Vietnam War.

Each time he thought, "You know, I might not ever see that airport again."

The day he came home for good was one of the most exciting days of his life, Erickson said. He hopes people flying into the new terminal — especially fellow veterans and military men and women — will feel the same way.

He hopes "they too will be proud to land safely at Aberdeen Regional Airport and say 'I am home.'"

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