

State mourns deaths of soldiers

By Spc. Mark Watson

129th MPAD

South Dakota mourned the loss of two guardsmen in April when Sgt. Dennis Morgan and Staff Sgt. Cory Brooks were killed in Iraq.

Morgan, 23, from Valentine, Neb., was assigned to Detachment 1, Company A, 153rd Engineer Battalion, located in Winner, S.D. He was the first South Dakota guardsman killed in action since World War II. He was killed April 17 when his armored personal carrier was hit by an improvised explosive device.

The following statement was prepared by Morgans' family.

Dennis Bryan Morgan was born January 8, 1982, in Valentine, Neb. He was killed serving his country on April 17, 2004, in Al Iskandariyah, Iraq.

Dennis graduated from Winner High School with the class of 2000. He enlisted in the National Guard on March 30, 2000.

Dennis married Cassie Jo Hockenbary in Valentine, Neb., on November 29, 2003. They made their home in Valentine, where Cassie worked and waited for his return.

Dennis ranched and also worked for the Lamb Pest Control until the 153rd Engineer Battalion, that he was a member

of, was called to serve in Iraq.

He was a member of the Legion Post #169 of Winner and the Evangelical Free Church in Valentine. Dennis enjoyed working on vehicles, dirt biking, killing rattlesnakes, searching for artifacts, watching movies, listening to music and spending time with his wife, family and friends.

Dennis is survived by his wife, Cassie Jo

touched everyone that he met. He died doing what meant the most to him. His last correspondence reflected a proud soldier who loved his family very much and longed for the day he would be home to see those who meant the most to him.

Brooks, 32, leaves behind a mother and father, Darral and Marilyn Brooks of Philip, S.D. and a sister and brother-in-law, Angi and Mike Kiewel of Rapid City.

Cory loved his nephew and niece, Hunter and Hannah Kiewel with all of his heart. Cory also leaves behind a very special, loving and trusted friend, Heidi Linnngren of Rapid City.

Cory graduated from Law School at the University of South Dakota in December of 2000. On that same date, he received a Master's of Science in Administrative Studies.

He had retuned home to Philip after graduation to pursue his career and spend time on his family's ranch, with his very large

yellow lab, Zeke, both of which he loved very much.

In addition to those mentioned, Cory left behind many, many, close relatives and friends. The family asks for peace at this time and that everyone keep them in their thoughts and prayers.

Brooks joined the Guard in May of 1989 as a combat engineer. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant in September of 1999. His unit deployed to Iraq Feb. 21.

Maj. Gen. Michael A. Gorman, the adjutant general, said both Morgan and Brooks were exemplary soldiers.

"The great soldiers, both were very dedicated," Gorman said. "Neither were afraid to jump in to volunteer and get the job done."



Dennis Morgan



Cory Brooks

(Hockenbary) Morgan, of Valentine, mother Diane Mangelsen, brothers Lee and Wayne Mangelsen, mother-in-law and father-in-law Lawrence and Tera Hockenbary, brother-in-law Blane Hockenbary, special grandparents Art and Doris Morgan, Murrin and Shirley Keffler, Rodney and Theresa Hockenbary, stepfather Carl Mangelsen and many other special family and friends.

Six days later, Brooks, from Philip, S.D., also assigned to Detachment 1, died April 23 from a non-combat incident.

Brooks' family issued the following statement.

Cory's family and friends were as proud of him in death as they were in his life. Cory's tender heart and healthy laugh

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Commander's Corner

AG Comments

As I write this message to you, we have just been processing the 1742nd Transportation Company through Fort Carson for their demobilization. This is always a pleasure to do, and I am looking forward to doing the same soon for the 740th and the 842nd (both units were extended in theater) and all other units when their time comes.

As the Adjutant General for the state of South Dakota, I have three primary responsibilities. I am the commanding general for our Army and Air National Guard, I am in charge of the Division of Veteran's Affairs for the state of South Dakota, and I am in charge of the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans' Home at Hot Springs.

Lately, I have been busy in all three capacities. A great many of you have recently qualified as "veterans" under state law, so I think I should address some of what we have been doing lately in that arena.

I am truly concerned that all veterans understand the benefits and entitlements they have earned and that they know how to access those benefits and entitlements. These benefits can range from routine issues – like education benefits, or getting your South Dakota veteran's bonus – to getting help if you have emotional issues adjusting back to your civilian life after deployment. Somewhere, in between, lay all the issues of obtaining medical care from the veterans' administration system to filing a claim for benefits.

I want you to know that we are being proactive in making sure you understand what you have earned and how you obtain the benefits that you are eligible to receive.

With that in mind, I want to tell you about some

innovative things that we have been doing recently for units returning and those still deployed.

A lot of this is about education, or giving you the right folks to contact regardless of your issue. We have sent teams from our Division of Veterans' Affairs and our County Veterans' Service Officers to the mobilization station to brief our returning units about their benefits. In addition, we have sent similar teams to your Family Support Group meetings to explain the same benefit package.

We have also met with the Human Services agencies of state government and with the Vet Centers in Rapid City and Sioux Falls to ensure that assistance is available to address readjustment issues. I can assure you that it is ... for both you and your family on a no-cost basis. I would encourage you to take advantage of the available support. Many of the issues that you and/or your family will face in readjustment are a normal part of your getting re-engaged with the life you left behind. It is far better that you seek assistance with these trained professionals versus attempting to "tough it out" and end up thinking what is happening to you is beyond repair.

You will receive many packets full of handouts when you demobilize. Your families will get the same information. If you have any trouble sorting it all out, please call Michele Anderson at our family assistance center in Rapid City at 1-800-658-3930 or your County Veterans' Service Officer.

We are all proud of the fact that we have been proactive in this regard and I want to thank all who



Michael A. Gorman
MG, SDNG
The Adjutant General

have made this work. Remember that you are important to us as soldiers, airmen, and now, in most cases, as veterans. My pride in your accomplishments is immense! Thank you and welcome home!

the Coyote

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The Coyote Magazine is an unofficial publication of the South Dakota Army National Guard, published quarterly on the South Dakota National Guard website: www.sdguard.ngb.army.mil for its soldiers. The Coyote is published by the 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, Camp Rapid, 2823 West Main Street, Rapid City, South Dakota 57702, in accordance with AR 360-81.

Views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the South Dakota Army National Guard.

Contributions to the Coyote are encouraged. Send articles, photos and art to Editor, 129th MPAD, 2823 West Main Street, Rapid City, S.D. 57702, or e-mail: anthony.deiss@us.army.mil



CSM Comments

We have a lot of things going on in the South Dakota National Guard at this time. South Dakota has many soldiers deployed overseas and here in the state. Soldiers are doing what has been asked of them. Even more important are the sacrifices the families are making.

I will tell you that none of us several years ago would have dreamt that we in the South Dakota Guard would be doing what we are today. How is this going to effect the future of the South Dakota Guard? I, for one, don't know the total effect it will have on the Guard. I believe that what is happening today will effect us in the South Dakota Guard for sometime to come.

I ask myself, how will what we are doing today effect recruiting and retention? Will soldiers stay in the Guard when their deployments are over? Will their families support the soldier staying in the Guard? Will their employers still support us? Each of us serving in the South Dakota Guard need to do everything we can to support our soldiers and



families and employers in anyway we can.

Many soldiers' jobs are to support the deployed soldier but what about the soldiers working at home station? Are we stressing them? Are we supporting them also?

These are just a few of the questions that keep running through my mind. I believe that each soldier and family needs to evaluate their own lives. You soldiers need to look at what has happened to you and what is best for yourself and your families.

I would like to see all of you stay in the Guard but it is your decision. I want to thank all of you for what service you have given.

Michael L. Birnbaum
CSM, SDARNG
State Command Sergeant Major

Competition lists winners

By Sgt. Wes Nowitzki

129th MPAD

This year's Adjutant General's Indoor Shooting Match, which was held in Mitchell and Rapid City on different weekends, brought in over 50 soldiers from around the state.

The soldiers participating in the match were required to shoot in four different disciplines: combat rifle, combat pistol, small bore rifle, and small bore pistol.

"It is kind of a moving run and gun type of a match that consists of standing, sitting, kneeling, and prone positions," said Sgt. 1st Class Phillip Lakner, marksmanship trainer for Joint Force Headquarters South Dakota. "Sometimes different positions all in one match."

One scenario in the rifle and pistol combat disciplines is the soldier shoots the first shot standing up, then drops to the kneeling position and fires the second shot. The soldiers must complete this task in seven seconds. There are other scenarios with different positions and time limits. These scenarios require the soldier to be quick-aimed and agile.

"This type of a match is basically focused towards a combat style of shooting," said Lakner. "The other two disciplines are more focused on concentration, relaxing and accuracy."

Small bore rifle and pistol uses a bull's-eye-shooting target. The shooters have 10 rounds and 10 minutes to accurately hit a bull's-eye that is smaller than a .22 bullet.

"It makes an individual control their body to shoot in a precision style that carries over to combat training because their accuracy improves," said Lakner.

The indoor match isn't the only competition of the year. The South Dakota Army National Guard also held an Adjutant General's Outdoor Match, which was May 22-23 at the Guard ranges at West Camp Rapid. The outdoor competition is similar to the indoor match. It has a rifle, pistol, machinegun, and sniper contest.

These competitions promote battle-focused marksmanship training and are available for all soldiers and airmen in the South Dakota Army National Guard and Air Guard. The top shooters at these competitions will have the chance to represent the South Dakota Guard at national competitions held around the United States.

The winners for the indoor shooting match are as follows: Combat Rifle and Small Bore Rifle, Sgt. 1st Class David P. Mutziger, 665th Maintenance Company; Combat Pistol, Staff Sgt. Michael S. Witte, 114th Fighter Wing; and Small Bore Pistol, Master Sgt. Chris S. Dyes, 114th.

The winners for the individual outdoor shooting match are as follows: Combat Rifle, Sgt. 1st Class Mutziger; Combat Pistol, Sgt. Richard Zolnowsky, 88th Troop Command; Combat Pistol Excellence in Competition, Lt. Col. Harold Walker, Joint Force Headquarters; Machine Gun, Sgt. Loren Gregerson 665th; and Sniper, Staff Sgt. Witte.

The team championship winners for the Combat Rifle and Combat Pistol were Joint Force Headquarters and 88th Troop Command teams. The Joint Force team members were Lakner, Chief Warrant Officer James McGuire, and Walker. Troop Command team members were Mutziger, Zolnowsky, and Staff Sgt. Marlyn Heckel. For information call 605-737-6526 or send an e-mail to john.gregor@sd.ngb.army.mil.

From the Chaplain

Being sent with one's unit to annual training can be both challenging and stressful. When it's hot, it's easy to get dehydrated, feel grungy and tired, and be irritable. When it's cool and wet, it's easy to complain about the wet boots, the chills, the lack of dry clothing, and be irritable. Being irritable is a human condition when things don't go our way. It's easy to be short with others when they don't read our minds as effectively as we'd like them to. So, here's some advice to get along better with your fellow workers and soldiers when conditions aren't optimal.

First, follow this advice that the Apostle Paul wrote from his prison cell: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4) If Paul could write this from prison, surely we should be able to rejoice in God's gift of life if all we have to deal with are some minor weather-related inconveniences or irritable fellow soldiers.

Second, pray about your situation rather than complain about it. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4:6) Prayer connects us with the infinite creative power of God. Complaining focuses on the perceived shortcomings of those around us or the disadvantages of our present situation. A proper prayer focuses on possibilities and solutions - in God's time and God's way.

Third, forgive your fellow workers, your neighbor, your acquaintances, and, especially your family members, for all the perceived slights and sins you feel they have inflicted on you. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against." (Matthew 6:12) It's a familiar prayer, but a very difficult situation. Holding a grudge is like trying to hurt someone by picking up a burning coal with our bare hand and throwing it at the one we dislike. Holding a grudge hurts us a great deal more than it hurts the one against whom we have a grudge.

Last, train your mind to see the best in each situation and person. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:8-9) Good things are accomplished by those who have a clear image, or vision, of the positive outcomes they desire. Focus your mind on those true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable issues and outcomes. A mind focused in such a manner can not help but accomplish great things.

Regardless of your situation, discipline your mind to rejoice. Regardless of the situation, pray. Regardless of the personal attacks or slights against you, forgive. Regardless of situation, look for the best in each situation and focus on the good that can come out of it. You will never lose by following these guidelines from God's word.

Morris E. Nelson
CH (LTC), SDARNG
JFHQ State Chaplain

Extended soldiers can receive extra money

By Gary Sheftick

Army News Service

WASHINGTON — About 20,000 soldiers who have been involuntarily extended beyond their expected 12 months of duty in Iraq or Kuwait will be eligible for extra pay of \$1,000 a month.

The incentive package includes an additional \$200 in hardship duty pay (above the \$100 already being received) and \$800 monthly in Assignment Incentive Pay, or AIP. This pay will be available to Soldiers in 42 units required to stay in theater past their expected rotation date due to operational needs, officials said.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced the unit extensions April 15, saying the period would be for up to 90 days in Iraq plus another possible 30 days in theater before redeploying home.

The extra pay will only be available once a soldier exceeds 365 consecutive days in the Central Command theater. That's 12 consecutive months or 365 days out of a 15-month period, explained Lt. Col. Gerald Barrett, chief of compensation and entitlements, G1.

"This is the Department of the Army's way of providing for soldiers in the identified units who were promised that they were leaving at a certain time, but because of operational requirements, they were required to stay longer," Barrett said

earlier this year when the incentive-pay program actually began.

The program began in February when about 1,500 soldiers from 12 units were required to stay in Iraq longer than their expected 12-month rotation. Then the Army offered the \$200 hardship duty pay and either the \$800 Assignment Incentive Pay or a guaranteed stabilized assignment once they redeployed. If they opted for the stabilized tour, soldiers were guaranteed to spend at least the same amount of time at home station as they did in theater.

No one opted for the stabilized tour, though, said Deborah Holman, a senior compensation analyst for the Army's G1.

Barrett said the old stabilization option will no longer be offered. He said this is contrary to what was misreported in the Army Times. Only the extra pay will be offered to troops recently extended.

In order to receive the \$800 AIP, extended Soldiers must sign a DA Form 4187, personnel action form, recognizing that their extension was involuntary. The signature is necessary because, by law, AIP must be based on a written agreement between the secretary of the Army and the soldier,

Holman said.

This is only the third time the Army has ever offered Assignment Incentive Pay, Barrett said. He said the Navy first used the special pay for a number of specific "hard to fill" assignments.

In February, the Army offered AIP for the 1,500 soldiers extended in Iraq. Originally, the AIP program for soldiers in Iraq was to expire June 1, but now has been extended.

"In order to maintain equity, we will apply the involuntary extension incentive to this group also," Barrett said referring to the 20,000 troops just extended. "We want to be fair to soldiers."

The \$200 extra hardship duty pay and \$800 AIP will both be given to soldiers who serve in theater any amount of time past 365 days.

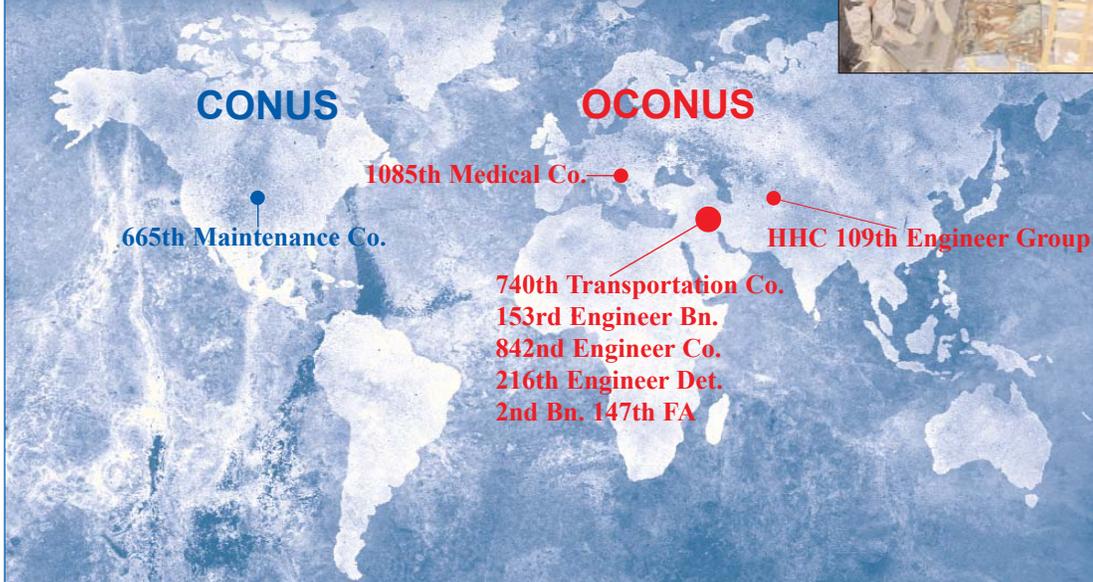


By Sgt. Wes Nowitzki

109th Group departs for Afghanistan

Soldiers from Rapid City's HHC 109th Engineer Group board a military aircraft for the long flight to Afghanistan. The 109th is a command and control unit that will plan engineer projects for subordinate U.S. and coalition units. The 109th departed May 17 and is scheduled to be overseas for one year.

DEPLOYMENTS



Families rejoice soldiers' homecoming

By Spc. Mark Watson
129th MPAD

Tears of joy trickled down many faces in late March as 361 soldiers of the South Dakota Army National Guard returned to their families after serving for more than a year on active duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Members of the 727th Transportation Company, 200th Engineer Company, and Company B, 109th Medical Battalion all arrived safely and received a heroes' welcome complete with hugs, parades, welcome home ceremonies and thanks from thousands of supporters who lined parade routes and packed auditoriums.

"It's wonderful, absolutely wonderful to be home," said Staff Sgt. Shane Toupal, Company B. "The welcome we received, and to be able to spend time with my family is just fantastic. To see my family again is indescribable. I dreamed for more than a year to see them again, and when I did, it was one of the happiest days of my life."

The first unit to return in the recent arrivals, – the 122-member, 727th Transportation Co., – arrived March 26 in Brookings. Unit members were met with the open arms of family members at their armory and hundreds of supporters who lined the several mile-long parade route and packed the Swiftel Center.

During the welcome home ceremony, Maj. Gen Michael A. Gorman, the adjutant general, said it was great for the soldiers to be back in South Dakota.

"On the 18th of January of last year, there were a lot of tears of concern, tears of apprehension, and what I see today are tears of joy and thanks that you all came home safely," Gorman said. "Ladies and gentlemen, the 727th answered the call and rose to the occasion. Every report that I heard from over in theater was good."

The commander of the 727th echoed the general's comments and said their soldiers performed outstanding.

"They are the best anyone could ask for," said Sgt. Maj. Mike Bekaert, who was the company's first sergeant. "I had a platoon that had never touched a (Palletized Load System) 10 days before we left. They couldn't have performed any



Photos by Spc. Mark Watson
(above) A family welcomes home their soldier at the 727th Transportation Company's welcome home ceremony March 26 in Brookings.
(left) A family member of a 727th soldier wipes a tear from her face as she searches for her soldier. The unit returned home March 26 after serving nearly 14 months on active duty.

better and I am pretty proud of all of them."

The unit, which was one of the first South Dakota units called to active duty, drove more than 1.1 million miles and completed 505 missions hauling supplies and equipment into Iraq with its palletized

load systems.

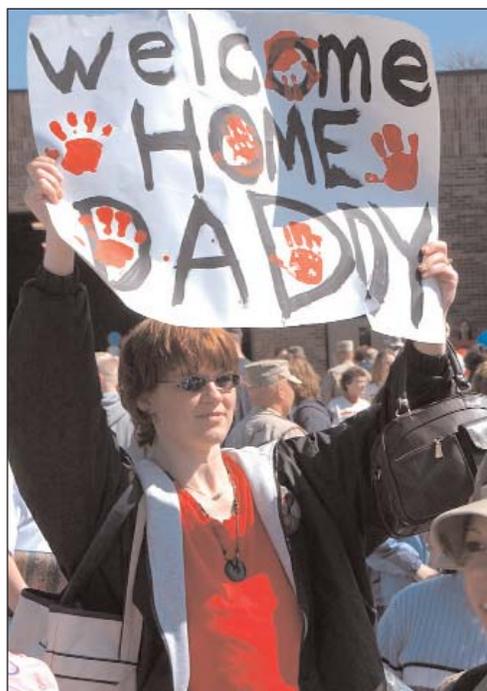
Attached to the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, the unit earned the Navy Presidential Unit Citation. Individual unit members earned nine Bronze Stars, 20 Army Commendation Medals and six

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Units overcome deployment challenges



Photos by Spc. Mark Watson
(above) Spc. Ethan Jones, 200th Engineer Company, greets his loved one at the Pierre, S.D., armory as part of the unit's welcome home activities.
(right) A family member of a 727th soldier holds a welcome home sign as she looks for her soldier.



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Navy Achievement Medals. Three soldiers were also injured when they were struck by a vehicle while at a rest halt. Fortunately, they were able to make recoveries.

Three days later, another 170 soldiers saw their homes as the 200th Engineer Company returned to Pierre, the unit's headquarters.

After enduring a summer with temperatures reaching 158 degrees and then times when 90 degrees was "pretty nice," the engineers arrived in Pierre, March 29.

Spc. Leighann Dunn reflected on her initiation to Iraq.

"I wasn't prepared for what we were going in for," Dunn, a member of the 200th, said. "I didn't think it was going to get that hot. I didn't think it was going to be that tough living without normal things we take for granted, like laundry machines or showers. That was pretty hard. Living in a small tent with nine other females was pretty hard and eating (Meals Ready to Eat) every day, that was pretty different. They don't get any better, you just learn to mix certain foods with cheese or salsa."

While in Camp Warhorse, near BaQuba, Iraq, the unit constructed an Army assault ribbon bridge that provided vital access across the Tigris River. The unit was tasked with guarding that bridge for the duration of its 333 days in Iraq. During that time, soldiers were on the receiving end of more than 400 mortar rounds, six rocket attacks and multiple firefights with Iraqi insurgents. Soldiers earned four Purple Hearts, nine Bronze Stars and two Army Commendation Medals with V devices.

Throughout their time in the desert, soldiers said they faced many challenges. One member of the unit said they overcame the challenges with flying colors.

"It was difficult and there were a lot of challenges that we came across," said Sgt. John Karn, a medic with the unit. "At first it was, 'we can't do that.' Well, we discovered there were a lot of things we can do if we really put our minds to it. The upper echelon said it needs to be done, and well, we're the South Dakota National Guard and we'll get the job done. Sometimes, it isn't according to their rule book, but we do it and do a good job at it. Our reputation preceded us wherever we went."

As a licensed practitioner nurse in his civilian job, Karn said the locals loved having medical help so near to them.

"They came in droves right off the bat," he said. "It was a big change from working in a nursing home to working on the streets with the local civilians. There were a lot of things that we couldn't help them with, but to give them a little comfort and tell them what they needed to do or who they needed to see was interesting.

"Fortunately, we didn't have any major trauma with our Guard members," he added. "That was something that worried me a lot, getting (improvised explosive device) or a mortar round. I was dreading the fact if someone got hit. We are all one big family."

Although four members of the unit were wounded, two by shrapnel from a mortar round and two when a Rocket Propelled Grenade struck their Humvee, their wounds were not life-threatening and they were able to make full recoveries.

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1742nd Transportation returns to families



Photo by Kristen Strissel

Sgt. Terry Wessling hugs his daughter at the 1742nd Transportation Company's welcome home June 12.

By Kristen Strissel

SDNG Public Affairs Office

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – Strangers became neighbors when the citizens of Sioux Falls welcomed home the South Dakota Army National Guard's 1742nd Transportation Company. The unit ended its year-long tour in Iraq and Kuwait by returning to the open arms of loved-ones and a grateful community.

On June 12, hundreds of friends and family members waited anxiously on the hot tarmac of Joe Foss Field, hoping to catch a glimpse of the chartered plane that carried the unit's 102 soldiers. Cheering loudly, the crowd boosted flags and signs into the air as the plane taxied to a stop.

Spc. Nick Castillo was the first soldier to emerge from the plane, proudly carrying the unit's maroon flag. "It is really great to be back here with our families," he said. "I was just counting the days."

Emotions ran high as the troops blended into the crowd. Reunions between husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children brought everything from smiles and laughter to tears.

Even while exchanging stories with their family and friends, soldiers grabbed loved-ones for another tight hug. These embraces were a lingering reminder of the pain and hardship felt from over a year of separation.

After being deployed to the Middle East on June 9, 2003, the unit was stationed at Camp Anaconda just northeast of Baghdad. During their tour of duty, unit members were in a variety of

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Soldiers make sacrifices for freedom

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The latest unit to return to their families, Co. B, 109th Medical Battalion, arrived in Vermillion on April Fools Day. Families of the 69-member unit lined the road in front of the Coyote Medics' armory with flowers, tears and welcome home signs. One family made two signs, one said "Welcome Home," the other "April Fools, Ha Ha."

During their tour, the medics treated nearly 40,000 patients to include 12,000 coalition troops, 1,500 civilians and 26,500 Iraqis.

They also completed 628 ambulance missions that involved more than 1,000 patients.

Toupal added that the locals appreciated the help that the soldiers were able to provide for them.

"The civilians were very grateful," Toupal said. "We represented health care

that they hadn't seen in a long time."

For one member of the unit, Sgt. 1st Class Jerry Anderson, this marked his second war as he was deployed during Operation Desert Storm.

Although he said this deployment was more difficult than the previous war in some ways, he said his fellow soldiers performed remarkably.

"This time I went with a bunch of young troops, and I really think they grew up a lot over there," Anderson said. "They did a fantastic job. We treated close to 40,000 people, worked 12 hour shifts at first, seven days a week."

Anderson said they treated a wide variety of people from U.S. soldiers to Iraqi civilians.

"If they were there, we treated them," he said. "Once they walked through that door, we didn't ask who they were, they all got the same treatment."

Two soldiers assigned to Company B received Bronze Stars and there are several Bronze Star awards under recommendation.

During the soldiers' deployment they faced many difficult tasks in difficult positions.

"All the soldiers in this great unit deserve our eternal gratitude for the part they played in Operation Iraqi Freedom," Gorman said. "In this, the first war of the 21st Century, you defended your fellow citizens against ruthless enemies, and because of your sacrifices, you made this country a safer place to live. You guys and gals are all great soldiers. We are all proud of you. You saw hard duty, but the defense of freedom is always worth it. Because of your service, because of your bravery and dedication, the world is better off today and the people of America are more secure."

Truckers return after year in combat zone

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dangerous circumstances ranging from close-calls to instances resulting in significant injury.

Sgt. Jeff Cox remembered one such moment when his convoy was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades. "We were driving around Baghdad and I heard a loud explosion. Then, we heard over the radio that another part of the convoy had been attacked," he said softly. "We didn't know if it was one person out there or a group."

Staff Sgt. Marcus Frey also remembered the dangerous attacks with reverence. "I was back at the unit headquarters, hearing reports that our convoys had been attacked, it was really hard just sitting there and waiting for more reports," he said.

One of these attacks left Spc. Dana Bindert with shrapnel penetrating his right leg in six places. The injury forced him to return to South Dakota in May. Nevertheless, Bindert was present at the unit's homecoming, sitting in a wheelchair and ready to greet his comrades as they exited the plane.

While one might expect the harsh environment or the hostile atmosphere to present the greatest challenge to soldiers, the internal struggles were often the hardest to face up to.

"At first the biggest (struggle) was the heat," said Frey. "After that, it was being away from the family and realizing how long you are going to be away."

"The uncertainty was the hardest part of going over there," said Cox. "The day we stepped off that plane, there was a feeling that is hard to explain."

The soldiers were not the only ones to feel the trials of separation. Colton Hanson was among the crowd waiting for the 1742nd's arrival. Hanson, the young son of 1742nd Staff Sgt. Colleen Convey-Wilson, said his mother's absence was a very painful experience. "I missed her so much," he said. "I thought 'why couldn't they send someone else?'"

After receiving gentle reproof from his mother for the outburst, the youngster turned to her with a look of protest. "What? It's the truth!" he said. As if proving his point, he curled back into his mother's arms and grinned broadly.

Following the reunion on the tarmac, the soldiers and families were taken by bus to the beginning of the parade route. Citizens

and well-wishers lined the streets, welcoming the troops with warmth and gratitude. Shouts of 'thank you' and 'we missed you' continuously erupted from the crowd. Banners expressing the same sentiments were held high. Even young children smiled and waved to the passing men and women clad in tan camouflage.

Immediately after the parade, the entire unit reassembled at a semi-private awards ceremony held in the Sioux Falls Multicultural Center.

Lined-up in front of their fellow troops, 13 soldiers received awards including one Purple Heart, with two more pending, and 12 Bronze Stars.

The final event of the day, held in the Multicultural Center auditorium, was an official homecoming ceremony. Upon entering the auditorium, the unit was met with the thunderous applause of roughly six hundred people.

Qadir Aware spoke, not only as the director of the Multicultural Center, but as a native Kurd who came to the United States in October 1997. Aware was a freedom-fighter who had been placed on Saddam Hussein's infamous execution list.

"Our country at home, in Iraq, is free because of your dedication," he said to the soldiers. He went on to say that their work would have a lasting impact on his life and the lives of many others in the Gulf region.

After being able to call his sister for the first time recently, she told him, "Sweetheart, we are celebrating the freedom." It was this freedom that Aware thanked the troops for providing.

On June 20, Aware will return to his native country. "This time, I will walk freely in my country because of you," he said. The soldiers responded warmly, giving Aware a standing ovation, to which he humbly bowed from the stage.

Saying that he had received nothing but favorable reports about the unit, Maj. Gen. Michael Gorman called the day "a fitting tribute for this outstanding unit."

"Are you glad they're home?" he shouted to a crowd, which responded with loud cheering and raucous applause.

The unit's commander, Capt. Jeff Norris, closed out the ceremony by commending the troops on their performance. "You were tasked heavily," he said. "You rose to the occasion. You did a job and did it damn well."

Joint Force Headquarters receives new commander



Col. Timothy Reisch, Deputy Commander of Joint Force Headquarters, South Dakota, receives the Joint Force guidon from Sgt. Maj. Darald McElroy, Joint Thunder Exercise Sergeant Major, during a change of command ceremony June 22. Col. Keith W. Corbett, took command of the unit.

Photo by Sgt. Wes Nowitzki



Photo by Sgt. Wes Nowitzki

The South Dakota Army National Guard took advantage of nice weather to practice bucket training at Legion Lake in Custer State Park. Crews from Rapid City's 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) transported the water and dropped it over simulated fire hot-spots as part of their wildland fire suppression training.

1085th trains for fire suppression

By Sgt. Wes Nowitzki
129th MPAD

CUSTER STATE PARK, S.D. – Helicopters from the 1085th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) hovered just over the surface of Custer State Park's Legion Lake as the unit completed its annual Wild Land Fire Suppression recertification on May 21.

Three helicopters, one fuel tanker, and 31 soldiers were involved in the exercise.

Bystanders watched the helicopters lower buckets into the lake and dump water over specific targets.

"The training provides an excellent opportunity to train with wild land suppression ground crews and it certified us for the Rocky Mountain Region," said Chief Warrant Officer Mike Reindl, 1085th facility operations officer.

According to Reindl, the certification gives the unit the clearance to fight fires in Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, Wyoming and Colorado.

The 1085th also trained with approximately 130 ground crew members and more than 50 firefighting vehicles from around the state. Ground crews communicated with the helicopter pilots, telling them where to release the water during the training.

"Ground crews created smoke-pots and started dead trees on

fire to be used for targets," said Reindl.

As the helicopters were flying at a height of roughly 100 feet, any spilled water had the potential to inflict significant harm on people below. As a result, pilots and crew members had to use caution when releasing water, making sure not to hit the ground crews below or civilians using the lake and surrounding areas.

"The water buckets hold about 660 gallons which weighs about 5,500 lbs," said Reindl. "So an accident would be extremely bad."

The 1085th helicopters provide air support for firefighting efforts, similar to slurry bombers. Slurry bombers carry large loads of fire suppressant, which is dropped over areas in the path of a fire. This summer, the federal government grounded 33 slurry bombers, saying they were unfit for use.

"We are probably a higher priority because of all the groundings," said Reindl.

Without the bombers, firefighters will have to rely on other techniques to stop wild fires from burning down homes and acres of natural forest. The National Guard helicopters and other agencies may be called upon to help extinguish or contain these extremely dangerous fires.

Three of the unit's six helicopters are in Kosovo with the roughly 30 members of the 1085th who are currently serving there.