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Last of 4th BCT return home

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3rd ID's role in Operation Iraqi Freedom 5 ends



By Frenchi Jones

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1 video in Multimedia.

The 3rd Infantry Division's role in Operation Iraqi Freedom 5 has come to an end as the last of Fort Stewart's 4th Brigade Combat Team returned home to their families earlier this week.

Seventy-seven soldiers, who made up the brigade's trail party, were welcomed home a little after 7 p.m. Thursday at Fort Stewart's Cottrell Field.

The troops were greeted by the brigade's commanding officer, Col. Tom James, and the division's commander, Maj. Gen. Anthony Cucolo.

"You turned off the lights and shut the doors for the 3rd Infantry Division's role in Iraq," Cucolo said. "But tonight, all you need to know is that these folks behind me are incredibly proud of you and the job that you have done."

New York resident Allen Singer said no one could have been prouder than he was of his returning son, Spc. Matthew Singer. When the troops were released from ranks, Allen stood holding his son for more than 10 minutes while tears ran down his face. "He told me to be strong, and I told him that I've have been strong for a year," he said.

Allen's appearance came as a shock to Matthew, who was told that his father would not be able to make it to the ceremony.

"It's sort of ironic," Matthew said. "(The Army) teaches you to expect the unexpected, and I didn't expect this."

The 4th Brigade's return also came as a surprise to many. The unit came home 30 days ahead of schedule after serving 14 months in south Baghdad.

"It has been a really good Christmas present for their families, Fort Stewart and the community," said Fort Stewart spokesman Maj. Lee Peters.

The 4th BCT was responsible for blocking weapons from entering the Iraqi capital, protecting the local population, and training Iraqi security forces.

Pam White and Angela Owen said the troops' early return made for the best New Year's celebration that a wife and mother could have.

Their soldier, Pvt. Richard White of North Carolina, left for Iraq two weeks after he and his wife married. His mother said he had not seen his apartment or new furniture yet.

"We still have the Christmas tree up," she said. "So we're definitely going to be opening up gifts tonight."

"We're very proud of him, and let me tell you, I've worn my knees out praying."

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