

The Bend Bugle

'Until we meet again:' Guard unit given send-off [Prev](#) | [Next](#)

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June 29 - REDMOND – It wasn't about the speeches, or the 234th Army Band's crisp rendition of "When the Caissons Go Rolling Along." The 1,200-plus people who packed the Middle Sisters Room of the Deschutes County Fairgrounds Tuesday morning were there to show support, gratitude and love for the 150 Oregon National Guard soldiers of G Troop, 82nd Cavalry, and to offer up fervent prayers for their safe return from a year's duty in Iraq, late next year.

There were stories to read – of hope mixed with fear, pride mixed with tears – in the eyes of every person, young and old, who joined the standing-room-only crowd, so many that they ran out of programs for the event.

They needed fine print on the back of that program to offer "special appreciation" to the dozens of businesses that donated to the special send-off, from bigshots like Target and Wal-Mart to numerous local restaurants, Royal Blend Coffee, D's Hobbies, etc.

Family and co-workers, dignitaries and just plain folks felt a need to be there, to shake hands, offer hugs, and say – well, not good-bye, that's too final and downbeat. But "see you later," or as one citizen soldier put it, "auf wiedersehen," which means, "until we meet again."

It was far from a unique gathering – even for Oregon, even for this week. About 80 soldiers had a similar farewell gathering in The Dalles on Monday, before heading to a bigger mobilization ceremony Wednesday for the 3rd Battalion, 116th Cavalry.

The tears could be held back by many loved ones, for a few days at least. They don't really depart until Saturday – first for Fort Bliss, Texas, for several months at training, then on to "Operation Iraqi Freedom."

"No other group is better prepared" for the mission, said Craig Campbell, Gov. Ted Kulongoski's senior policy advisor. He relayed a message from the governor, a former Marine: "You are the best of this state. ... You are what makes Oregon great." And like the others who spoke, the message was clear: Godspeed, God bless, and come home, safe and soon.

"Each of you is an instrument of American power, without which America's leaders would be powerless" to defend freedom around the world, said Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore. "It's our obligation to make sure you lack nothing to achieve success in that mission." When they return, he said, "The country will be here. The world will be safer."

With the troop lined up before him, and

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*Mostly the big,
burly bikers make a*

their families and friends literally and figuratively behind them, Brig Gen. Raymond Byrne Jr., the Oregon Guard's acting adjutant general, quoted President Bush: "We will not tire. We will not falter. We will not fail."

"Be confident in all that you do," Byrne urged, amid the squeals of babies and chatter of toddlers. "Have the warrior ethos and the warrior spirit in your heart and mind at all times." That ethos: "Never accept defeat. Never quit. And never leave a comrade behind."

*point of coming up
to shake your hand.*

Pfc. Joseph Whitney
Redmond member of Guard's G Troop

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Families focus on upbeat

Soon, the order to fall out came, and as the soldiers moved to be with their families, a steady round of applause began, followed by hugs, picture-taking and knowing glances.

Toward the back of the room, Cameron Jones, 5, of Myrtle Creek, sat on mom Karrie Jones' shoulder, smiling as he held aloft a heart-emblazoned sign that proclaimed, "Dad's My Hero." Soon, Sgt. James Jones joined them and daughter Makayla, 9, who had to give her dad a big hug.

Asked if he was more proud or nervous about his son James' deployment, Wayne Shortreed said, "I'd say about 50-50." The father is a lieutenant with the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office, and said, "Being a cop for all these years, now I know what my wife goes through every day when I go to work."

Shortreed said his son had been on inactive reserve status for six years, with eight months to go, and "they reactivated him," leading to a surprise phone call to his father.

Pfc. Joseph Whitney's work "family" was on hand to wish him well. "I'm the oldest guy in the unit," said the 45-year-old, who moved to Redmond 10 months ago, knowing the deployment was a distinct possibility. He's been working as a security officer with Security Pros Inc. of Bend, and Dianna Shawver, the firm's vice president/COO, said his job will be waiting for him, when he returns.

"We didn't want him to go," Shawver said. "He's had to do the weekends (of training), and we had to

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Spec. Matt St. Amand
Bend member of G Troop

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scramble to replace him, but he's worth it, a great employee."

With his 23-year-old son, Brian at his side, Whitney said he had a 22-year break after leaving the Coast Guard in 1981, before joining the Guard. And he expressed gratitude for "the great community support in this area" for the troops: "It's basically small-town America."

"I came back from two weeks of training at Camp Rilea, and I was still in my uniform when I stopped at this little restaurant by Detroit Lake," he recalled. "Three people shook my hand, and two offered to buy my breakfast."

Mostly the big, burly bikers make a point of coming up to shake your hand."

So, as he heads for war, in the dismount role on a Humvee, is Whitney worried? Not really, he

said: "I've got a lot of extremely well-trained leadership. We always plan on victory."

'Taking fire, not fighting fire'

Before a group lunch, most of the Guard members and families milled about and chatted out in the warm sun – though not as hot as it'll be in Texas, much less Iraq.

Spec. Matt St. Amand of Bend was, like many this day, surrounded by his family – which for the 25-year-old included his 2-month-old granddaughter, Ivy something rare but probably not unique in these days of blended families.

"I'm not nervous – I know I'm coming back," said St. Amand, though he doesn't like being away from his family, which includes daughter Desiree, 16, and foster daughter Lindsey, 18.

Wife Robin also gave the 50-50 answer to whether she's more proud or fearful about what might happen. "We only had a week to prepare," she said. He'd injured his ankle doing infantry training, and was taken off the deployment list, only to be put back on days ago.

St. Amand's wife will keep busy, going to school (through a Florida online university) for her criminal justice degree.

"She likes CSI," her husband said. "I want to be a forensic scientist," said his wife, a former EMT.

The guys at the Sisters-Camp Sherman Rural Fire District brought their shiny new truck to offer a send-off to Spec. Brett Miller, 29, of Sisters, who's a volunteer with the department and works for a private contract wildfire fighting firm.

He won't be fighting fires in Iraq: "We'll be taking fire, not fighting fire," Miller quipped. As for the fire department back home, with another wildfire season at hand, Miller isn't too worried. "I think they'll manage," said Miller, who didn't fight the B&B blaze last year, because he was working on fires in Idaho.

"It was overwhelming, to see the fire truck here," Miller said, as a friend shook his hand and said, "See you when you get back." He posed for photos with his girlfriend – who he introduced as his fiancée – Val Murray, whom he met three months ago while she was among the firefighters he was training.

"I want him to go," Murray said, "He wants to go serve his country, but I also want him to return – and quickly." Are they really going to marry, having known each other so short a time? "We're both pretty confident," she said. "We figure it will only make things better." How can that be? "Cause if we can survive this, we can survive anything."

Staff Sgt. Scott Lehman of Redmond also was in a warm circle of family and good friends, including a copy that gave him a "great" Christian book to read on his travels.

While Lehman takes the role of a Humvee gunner, wife Cathy will take care of their two kids, 14 and 10, and while many might avoid it, "I'll watch the news," she said, feeling a need to.

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Val Murray

Fiancee of Guard member Brett
Miller

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Lehman said he's "nervous, yes, but not scared. What happens happens."

So Matthew, 14, can keep in touch with dad by e-mail and occasional phone calls. Do they argue all the time, like so many teen-age boys and their dads? "Not all the time," he said. In that regard, Cathy mentioned one upbeat side of her husband's deployment: "The horseplay won't be going on in the living room."