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July 9, 2008

Family of soldiers reunited on special Independence Day
Three members of Titus clan returns home after deployment in Iraq

By Wade Hurst
Progress staff writer

It was an exceptional Independence Day for one family in Titus, as three of their loved ones recently returned home from deployment in Iraq.









But all three are quick to point out that they're just carry-ing on a family tradition.

Lieutenant 1st Class Jamie Benton, along with her brother, Sgt. 1st Class James Law, both members of the Alabama Na-tional Guard, arrived home nearly two weeks ago after hav-ing been deployed to Kuwait.

"Homecoming never gets old," said Benton. "Desert Storm was the last time we de-ployed. The support that we've received from family, communi-ty and the Guard has been great. We are very proud to serve our country."

Benton worked as a human resources officer for the incom-ing and outgoing troops. She

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also managed the post office for all the troops, ensuring that they received their much-awaited letters from home.

"We were really the gateway for warfighters to and from the theatre of war and also ran the post office for the soldiers. It is very important that the soldiers get their mail and we always tried to provide that service with a great attitude," she said.

Benton said that her husband, Roger Benton, who is a re-tiree of the military, provided great support throughout the process, as she left in his care four boys ranging in ages from 5 to 18.

"I'm sure it was just as hard on him as it was on me," she said. "It was really a family effort, as my mother-in-law often kept the boys."

Benton and Law's nephew, 1st Lt. Jeremiah Griffin, just arrived home on May 1 after also being deployed in Iraq. His unit provided transportation and logistical support to forward operating bases around the Baghdad area, guarding convoys of trucks against the insurgents. He said his family's previous deployment experience was a plus for him.

"They had deployed in Desert Storm with my mother," Griffin said. "Because of this, I was able to relate to them on what I was doing during my training and deployment."

Griffin said the support from his friends and family has been "amazing." They finished building his home during the 12 months he was deployed. But it was the support he received from strangers across the United States that really overwhelmed him.

"The support was unbelievable from people across the country. They enrolled my name on anysoldier.com, which is a Web site where people can send a soldier in Iraq something from home. There probably wasn't a day that went by that I didn't receive something," he said.

Law also spent his time deployed to Kuwait, working mostly in supply, and has had a total of three nephews and two sisters deploy. He said that it is important to remember the good things that are being accomplished in Iraq.

"I don't think the public here is always aware of the progress being made, such as the schools and hospitals that have benefited from our presence. Most of the time, you just hear about the bad things," he said.

Griffin agreed.

"Every day, relations between the coalition forces and the local population gets better," he said. "There were times when we would take things to a local school -- when they see you helping them out, they trust you more."

Benton agreed with her brother's and nephew's assessment of the war effort and added that whether or not one agrees with the war, everyone wants it to be over, and everyone should support the troops because there are many who will not return.

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Everyone agreed that this was a very special Independence Day.

"This was a special Fourth, because we are all back home," said Griffin. "Being deployed has given me a better perspective on what America and our freedom is all about."

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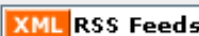
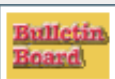
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