

Home Sweet Home

Family, friends await the homecoming of loved ones in Iraq

By Chelsea J. Carter
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN DIEGO — Audrey Trevino has played it over in her mind a thousand times: Her Navy husband steps off the ship after months at sea supporting the war in Iraq, grabs her in his arms and kisses her.

"I'm going to be there waiting when the ship comes home, whenever that is," said Trevino, 27, of San Antonio, Texas.

Now that the battle for Iraq is over, the lingering question for her and other military family members is when will the troops come home?

For some, it's a matter of weeks. In San Diego and Everett, Wash., the anticipation is growing after word came that the USS Abraham Lincoln, a floating airfield for the Navy's most modern fighter jets, is on its way home.

The Lincoln and its seven-ship battle group have been at sea nearly nine months, longer than any U.S. carrier group now on duty. It will offload its airwing and leave some of support ships in San Diego before returning to its home port in Everett.

For others, especially families of Marines or Army soldiers, the wait will be much longer. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said it likely will be several months before most of the ground troops leave Iraq.

Antonia Aurilio, 28, of Bridgeport, Conn., said she has known from the day her husband, Gunnery Sgt. James Aurilio, was deployed that it would be months before he returned with the 1st

Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division to Twentynine Palms, Calif.

She just hopes he's back by August, in time for the birth of their second child.

"The rumors are starting, and you just hope they are true," she said.

Ten-year-old Jake Rabidou of Camp Lejeune, N.C., also doesn't know how long he's going to have to wait to see his father, a Marine gunnery sergeant deployed since January. He wants his father home soon, Jake says, "because I miss him."

Kathy Delay of Everett, Wash., is happy her husband, hospital

Corpsman Mark Delay, is headed home aboard the Lincoln, but her thoughts also are with those whose spouses remain in the Middle East.

"Our husbands are on the way home. There are men on the front lines who are going to be there for months," she said. "So it's hard to be so excited."

Some cities already have had homecoming celebrations. In Norfolk, Va., and Groton, Conn., transport ships and submarines returned to thousands of flag-waving family members.

Members of the 507th Maintenance Support Company

based at Fort Bliss, Texas, remain overseas, although five former POWs from the company returned to the base Saturday. Two Apache helicopter crewmen who were among the rescued POWs also returned Saturday to their base, Fort Hood, Texas.

"We will have several welcome celebrations, not only for (the 507th) but for all our soldiers," Fort Bliss spokeswoman Jean Offutt said.

The wife of former POW Army Spc. Joseph Hudson already has plans for when her husband returns. "He just wants dinner

cooked for him. He's told me that he wants green chile chicken enchiladas," said Natalie Hudson of El Paso, Texas.

Everett plans a welcome home party for the USS Lincoln, with cheering crowd waving 20,000 yellow pompoms. Club Broadway has even begun collecting donations from local customers so it can throw its own party for the crew.

For Trevino, the return of her husband's transport ship, the San Diego-based USS Dubuque, can come soon enough. That ship is not part of the Lincoln's group.

She and her husband, Signalman Victor Trevino, have been married a little more than two years, half of which her husband has spent at sea.

"I'll just keep thinking about it," she said. "It kind of makes it worth it."

She's looking forward to sharing the journal he has kept throughout the war.

"I know this is going to be a really big thing that happened to him, and he's going to want to talk about," she said. "He doesn't want to forget any of it, and I don't want to."

Though families look forward to the homecomings, nearly as many say the hardest part will come with the end of celebrations.

"I've never had a husband come home from war before," Aurilio said. "I understand it's going to take time to get back to normal. I know they have seen stuff I can't comprehend."



RALPH LAUER • KRT CAMPUS

Texas Chief Warrant Officer David Williams waves to the gathered 1st Cavalry and family members during a welcome home ceremony Saturday, April 19, 2003, for Williams and fellow POW Chief Warrant Officer Ronald D. Young.

Aggie Marine leads effort to rescue POWs

I am writing on behalf of my fiancé, Brett Eubank. Brett is Class of 2001, former member of Corps of Cadets Company E-2, and red sash of the Ross Volunteers. After graduating in December of 2001, Brett began his career as a Marine Corps officer. His first year was spent in basic training and the infantry school. Shortly after his graduation from infantry school, he was deployed to Operation Freedom in Iraq.

He is a part of the 3rd Light Armored Vehicle division of the Marine Corps. Brett has been on the front lines since the beginning of the conflict. I received the most amazing news yesterday through his Captain's wife. She informed me that it



PHOTO COURTESY OF AGGIENETWORK.COM

Brett Eubank, Marine Corps officer

was Brett's platoon specifically that found and rescued the seven POWs in Samarra. This was an incredible rescue for many reasons.

The 3rd Light Armored Vehicle Division does not perform special operations and basically stumbled into this situation. Brett Eubank was the

commanding officer of the historical POW rescue. I am so proud and the entire Aggie family should be as well.

-Mary-Lauren Ashley, Class of 2001

Source: The Association of Former Students, www.aggienetwork.com



RALPH LAUER • KRT CAMPUS

Above: Chief Warrant Officer Ronald D. Young points to his 1st Cavalry patch on his uniform as his stepfather looks on during a welcome home ceremony Saturday, April 19, 2003, at Fort Hood, Texas, for Young and Apache pilot David Williams.

A jubilant crowd waves American flags as they welcome home former POWs, Chief Warrant Officer David Williams and Chief Warrant Officer Ronald Young, Jr. during welcome home ceremonies at Fort Hood Army Base in Killeen, Texas late Saturday night, April 19, 2003. Williams and Young returned home to a hero's welcome at the base after both were held prisoner in Iraq after their helicopter went down.



MONA REEDER • KRT CAMPUS

Texas POWs set to return home after medical tests

By Chris Roberts
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EL PASO, Texas — After a brief examination and a check of their medical files, the commander of the William Beaumont Army Medical Center said late Sunday that five former prisoners of war could be headed home by the end of the week.

"It's probably going to take close to the rest of the week" to finish the required examinations, Col. Glenn Mitchell said. "Then we can turn them over to their units and they'll probably be put on convalescent leave."

Mitchell said it appeared that none of the five members of the 507th Maintenance Company who were taken prisoner on March 23 near Nasiriyah, Iraq, would have to be hospitalized.

He said the examinations would include such things as a test to make sure they didn't pick up any gastrointestinal infections during their captivity.

Mitchell said most of the work on Sunday involved going through medical files from the military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany. "We have done our best to leave these people with their families and loved ones," he said.

The soldiers spent the day with family members, sequestered at Fort Bliss where they will begin to ease back into life in the United States.

"I would imagine they are just kicking back and enjoying each others' company," said post spokeswoman Jean Offutt. She said the families and soldiers are all staying together in a hotel-like building within the protective confines of Fort Bliss.

Offutt said the soldiers will begin their tests on Monday.

On Saturday, Mitchell said he had given the five soldiers a quick examination and found them "in great shape and in great spirits."

Spc. Shoshana Johnson, 30, of El Paso, had gunshot wounds to her ankles during an ambush. Although others also were wounded, they have been able to walk on their own. Johnson has required wheelchairs to get around.

However, military officials in El Paso have said it is still possible Johnson will be treated on an outpatient basis.

During the ambush, nine members of the 507th were killed and taken prisoner, including Pfc. Jessica Lynch, who was rescued from an Iraqi hospital on April 1.

Lynch is still recovering from injuries at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

The 507th soldiers taken prisoner were: Johnson; Joseph Hudson, 24, Alamogordo, N.M.; Spc. Edgardo Hernandez, 21, Mission; Pfc. Patrick Miller, 23, Park City, Kan.; and Sgt. James Riley, 30, Pennsauken, N.J.

They returned to Fort Bliss Saturday evening as thousands of onlookers cheered and waved American flags.

Also among the returnees were two First Cavalry Division Apache helicopter pilots from Fort Hood: Chief Warrant Officer Ronald D. Young Jr., 26, of Lithia Springs, Ga., and Chief Warrant Officer David Williams, 30, of Orlando, Fla.

After returning to Fort Hood Saturday night, Young and Williams joined President Bush at Easter church services at the military post on Sunday. Bush met with the men and their families afterward, saying he had "a good talk with them. Good, strong men."

Williams said the meeting "was an absolute honor."

Added Chief Warrant Officer Ronald D. Young Jr.: "We stand 100 percent behind whatever our president decides to do. We're honored to serve him. And this is definitely one of the highlights of my life absolutely."