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 Welcome Home-1.jpg (154 KB)  Calling home-1.jpg (164 KB)  Friendly faces-1.jpg (213 KB)  Great to be home-1.jpg (180 KB)  Lead the way-1.jpg (208 KB)  Planning the next move-1.jpg (...)

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20,000 patients later: The 213th Area Support Medical Company is home from Iraq ~ North Little Rock and Dumas units complete lifesaving mission on the battlefield

by Capt. Chris Heathscott

Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office FORT McCOY, Wisconsin – On July 2, 2007, the Soldiers of the Arkansas National Guard's 213th Area Support Medical Company (ASMC), said their tearful goodbyes to Family and friends and boarded a bus for Fort McCoy, Wisconsin en route to Iraq. On June 26, 2008, those Soldiers revisited this military post, but this time they were heading home.

Despite having to endure multiple travel delays in getting home, the 70 plus Soldiers from the North Little Rock and Dumas based units, made it back safely with a lot to be proud of in their mission. These Soldiers served as the healers of the battlefield, providing 'level II' medical care to all of South Central and Southeast Iraq.

"The only exception between us and regular 'level III' hospital care was we didn't have a chaplain, didn't have a radiologist on staff and we didn't have a dietician, but all the other services that you would get in a hospital, we have," said Maj. Gary Hinkle, commander of the 213th. "Everything from a pharmacy, physical therapy, optometry, dental, a vet, everything else involved in a hospital, we have."

"Our main job was to take care of all sick calls, emergency incoming and mass [casualties] on the base," said Sgt. 1st Class Mark Ross, of Hope. "We did everything from X-rays, PDHAs, which is a pre-deployment health assessment, to your daily medical assessments and we also had a 911 crew."

That "911" crew didn't limit their support to American forces, spreading a valuable asset to our allies in need on the battlefield.

"We provided [Emergency Medical Services] for all coalition forces, US forces and [Third Country Nationals] that were on post," said Sgt. Jerry Claggett, of Conway, Ark. "We were also in charge of triaging any personnel that were coming on to post, most of those were Iraqi Soldiers and Iraqi police.

"I think it was very important," said Claggett, whose wife, Doris, was home with their 19 month old daughter, Ava, waiting his return. "It shows that we are not just there to fight; we're there to care."

Based in Tallil, Iraq, the vast medical services provided by the unit kept them extremely busy over the past year.

"We treated over 20,000 patients," said Hinkle, a Fort Smith native who currently calls Hot Springs home. "We were recognized by brigade as the highest volume ASMC in theater.

"We outdid four of the [Combat Support Hospitals] there as far as patient load and workload," he continued. "We have a single X-ray guy who averaged over 650 X-rays a month by himself. They did an outstanding and excellent job."

Providing such a service on the battlefield is significant enough, but the unit achieved another great feat while working to help others.

"We completed the mission without any Class A, B or C incidents or accidents, which is a good accomplishment in itself," said Hinkle. "We went through the whole deployment without any injuries to Soldiers or any accidents."

As with any deployment, this one didn't come without its sacrifices however.

"After waiting 12 years to see your son graduate and not getting to go, it's kind of heartbreaking." said Ross, who missed a key time in his son's life due to the deployment. "Makes you feel guilty."

Despite the obvious disappointment in missing his son's graduation, Ross went on to discuss the importance of the mission in which he participated.

"It's good to go over and help and know that you done something in life, in the military, to help somebody else across the world," he said.

Ross was one of more than half of the unit who had just completed their second tour of duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the majority of which deployed with the state's 296th Medical Company, from Hot Springs, in 2003.

The common feeling among the returning Soldiers was pride in their accomplishment and a shared feeling of anxiousness to complete their out-processing at Fort McCoy and get back home to Arkansas.

"I just can't wait to get home to see my little girl and my wife," said Claggett.

With the return of the 213th, the Arkansas National Guard continues to have approximately 3,000 Soldiers and Airmen deployed overseas in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Since Sep. 11, 2001, Arkansas has supported the global war on terror with the mobilization of over 11,200 troops, many of the troops represented in this number have served on multiple deployments.

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Photo Cutlines

Friendly faces. Sgt. Daniel Head (front facing), of Maumelle, is greeted by some familiar faces as he steps of the plane in Wisconsin at Camp Williams' Volk Field on Thursday, June 26. The unit was greeted by leaders from Arkansas' 87th Troop Command immediately after the returning troops first touched down at the Wisconsin Air National Guard Base. Shortly after touching down, the unit turned in weapons and loaded buses headed down the road for Fort McCoy where they began out-processing prior to returning home to Arkansas. (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Calling home. Sgt. Gordon Castleberry (rear facing), of Conway, and Spc. Leslie Everett (seated), of Gould, join dozens of others in taking the opportunity to call home shortly after returning to American Soil at Camp Williams, Wisconsin. (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Separation. Sgt. Mark Ross (right), of Hope, turns in a weapon he has carried for the past 12 months. While that separation was enjoyed, he was one of many who endured another that was much more difficult – the separation from Family. "After waiting 12 years to see your son graduate and not getting to go, it's kind of heartbreaking," said Ross, after missing a key time in his son's life due to the deployment. He went on to discuss his overall feelings on the deployment saying, "It's good to go over and help and know that you done something in life, in the military, to help somebody else across the world," he said. (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Lead the way. The unit first sergeant for the 213th, 1st Sgt. Michael Bowman, of Subiaco, leads his Soldiers off the plane after they finally landed on US Soil after numerous travel delays. The unit was originally scheduled to land 24 hours earlier, making the trip that much longer, but the arrival that much sweeter. "Initially, the plane we were on was delayed due to overweight and fuel problems, so we were delayed a night and then next day we still had the same problem," said Sgt. Jerry Claggett, of Conway, Ark., who is pictured in the front of the line of troops on the stairs. "Other than all those delays and a six hour delay in Ireland, we got here," he said. "I just can't wait to get home to see my little girl and my wife." (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Soldier first. Spc. Kelli Rudd, of Hot Springs, turns in her weapon to Sgt. 1st Class Lucien McConnell, who was part of the Arkansas contingent on hand to help receive the returning unit. Although the Soldiers obviously had to carry weapons, the unit actually served as the healers on the battlefield, providing 'level II' hospital care. "The only exception between us and regular 'level III' hospital care was we didn't have a chaplain, didn't have a radiologist on staff and we didn't have a dietician, but all the other services that you would get in a hospital, we have," said Maj. Gary Hinkle, commander of the 213th. "Everything from a pharmacy, physical therapy, optometry, dental, a vet, everything else involved in a hospital, we have." (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Great to be 'home.' Although the unit was still miles from Arkansas, touching down on American Soil

was home enough for the time being as one member of the 213th embraced her battalion commander, Lt. Col. Anita Long, on the flight line. Long was one of several leaders on hand to greet the unit upon their return. The 213th remained at Fort McCoy for several days to complete their mandatory briefings and out-processing prior to returning to their final destination with Family in Arkansas. (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Planning the next move. Maj. Gary Hinkle (left), commander of the 213th, visits with Maj. Doktor Lee, the administrative officer for the unit's higher headquarters, the 871st Troop Command, to discuss the plan for the de-mobilization process. Hinkle, a native of Fort Smith who now calls Hot Springs home, said that not only was his unit recognized as the highest volume Area Support Medical Company in theater, but they did so without incident. "We completed the mission without any Class A, B or C incidents or accidents, which is a good accomplishment in itself," said Hinkle. "We went through the whole deployment without any injuries to Soldiers or any accidents." (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

Welcome Home. Col. Roger McClellan, joint force land component commander for the Arkansas National Guard, shakes the hand of a Soldier returning with the 213th, the unit's battalion commander, Col. Mark Lumpkin, happily awaits his turn. The two men were among several on hand to welcome the troops home and thank them for a job well done. (Photo by Capt. Chris Heathscott, Arkansas National Guard State Public Affairs Office)

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