

TELEGRAPH

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Veterans groups welcome home new peers

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The 33 members of Foxtrot Battery of the 202 Air Defense Artillery returned home Saturday. Their comrades, loved ones and citizens gave them a hero's welcome.

As they emerged from the bus in front of the Dixon Armory, cheers went up as the soldiers went looking for their family members and loved ones. There were hugs of joy and tears in the eyes of their fellow soldiers left behind when they shipped overseas.

For many former soldiers who participated, it was the welcome they never received.

"I'm here to welcome these boys home. They have done a job that needed to be done. They were there to serve their country. (I wanted to) give them a little welcome home that we never got," said Jimmy Austin, president of the Rock River Valley Chapter of VietNow.

Veterans from World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam joined others who had served but in peacetime in giving Foxtrot a welcome they will long remember.

Even Gen. Chuck Flemming, the assistant adjutant general of the Illinois National Guard, was on hand in Dixon as he had been in Galva to welcome the troops home.

"I thought it was fantastic," said veteran Richard Herbon. "We never had this for the troops returning from the other wars such as World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam or Desert Storm. (The Dixon unit was never called to active duty during Desert Storm.)



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"The look on these guys' faces this morning, it was worth every minute of it (the planning that went into the welcome)."

Dixon American Legion Post Commander John Carlson said he was proud of the citizens of Dixon.

"We had a good turnout. The parade route was pretty well lined up with people. I'm glad to have our boys home. The Legion Honor Guard and the Marine Corps League Honor Guard were there to salute the troops. They looked good," Carlson said.

Veteran Mel McConnel said it was better than he expected. "There was a good turnout all the way around."

Ed Harris, who served from 1953 to 1955, said the reception given the troops was nice.

"It was a nice ceremony and a nice parade. I didn't have anything like this when I came back 50 years ago."

Don Rogers, a member of the American Legion Honor Guard and a World War II veteran, said he was proud to be a part of the welcome home ceremony, despite the cold weather.

Waiting to greet the troops, Rogers said he wanted to see the troops get the welcome home reception he never received. Rogers served in Europe during World War II.

Former Dixon recruiter Greg Witzleb was on hand at the Dixon Armory to welcome the troops home. "I shipped them off. I'll bring them home. They are all here, every last one of them," he said.

The Humvees were decorated with signs made by Dixon students with a variety of comments ranging from "Welcome home from the sand box" to "You made us proud."

The thank you sign on the lead vehicle was made by Operation Support, an organization that prepared numerous care packages for the troops during their year-long stay in Iraq.

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