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'Finally hitting us now'

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Sleeping in and eating home-cooked meals were at the top of the agenda for many soldiers of the Foxtrot 202 Air Defense Artillery unit after a weekend homecoming.

"He said it was the best he ever had," said Mary Rodriguez of Sterling, mother of Sgt. David Rodriguez, about the chicken alfredo dinner he ate Saturday. That dish was David's first choice of food when he returned home.

"We just had our family alone and then a bunch of neighbors and relatives over last night, so that was nice," she said.

David was sleeping in Monday morning and his family was getting used to the fact that he is home to stay.

"I think it's finally hitting us now," Mary Rodriguez said. "I keep telling him he's not leaving the U.S. anymore."

The schedule for the week, as it will be for many of the soldiers, is going to be one of taking it easy and letting David decide what he wants to do.



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"We're going to just hang out," Rodriguez said. "We're going to let David call the shots now."

"It feels wonderful," said Glenna Beckman of Dixon, mother of Spc. Brian Beckman. Brian too was asleep early Monday. "We had family here, we cooked some of his favorite meals."

The Beckmans attended their church, First Presbyterian Church in Dixon, on Sunday. Capt. David Hage, who returned to Dixon Thursday after a deployment in Kuwait, also attends the church.

"During the service they were both welcomed home and they both got up and spoke, then we sang 'God Bless America,'" Glenna said. "It was really special."

Their week too will be one of relaxation. Glenna, who works at Reagan Middle School, has the week off for spring break and Brian's sister returns from Virginia on Thursday.



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"We're going to be celebrating Christmas and Easter on Saturday because we didn't get to have Christmas," she said. "We've had a lot of fun, we're just hanging out."

For Mike Bowman of Haldane, as for other family members, the weekend and the return of the soldiers, including his son, Pfc. Tim Bowman, means readjustments.

"It's much better now, the constant edginess all day long is gone," he said. "We don't have to watch the news and we don't have to check the Internet every couple of hours."

For the Bowmans, the party will come later.



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"It was a very quiet weekend," Mike said. "Tim laid down and said to wake him up in a couple of hours. Fourteen hours later, he woke up. I think the guys were a little tired."

Today, the Bowmans will open Christmas presents under a tree that's been up since December. Other than that, there are no scheduled events.

"We're letting Tim set his own schedule," Mike said. "We're learning that he has transitions he is making, almost on an hourly basis."

The 33 Sauk Valley soldiers of the National Guard's Foxtrot 202 Air Defense Artillery unit were greeted with a hero's welcome Saturday as they returned to the area after being deployed in Iraq since March 2004. Crowds turned out to welcome the returning soldiers home as a convoy of soldiers and their families moved through Rock Falls, Sterling and Dixon.

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