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Brothers reunited at school

Returning soldier visits 2nd-grade class at Willits

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By **CAROL CLARK**

of The Register-Mail

MONMOUTH - Chase Carnes literally leaped for joy Wednesday afternoon when his brother, Eric Werkheiser of Galva, surprised him in his second-grade classroom at Willits Elementary School.

Werkheiser returned home from Iraq March 19 with the Galva unit of the Illinois National Guard, but Chase had not seen his older brother since his return.

To surprise Chase, the boys' mother, Megan Grant, Monmouth, arranged for Werkheiser to visit Chase at school. Before Werkheiser walked into the classroom, teacher Brooke Buchen had the students stand up and face away from the doorway. She then told the students to turn around and meet their guest. Chase stared in disbelief. When the teacher asked who the guest was, Chase said, "That's my brother."

Chase then ran to Eric and jumped into his arms.

After a tearful reunion, the brothers took a seat and Werkheiser took time to answer questions from the students.

Werkheiser said he was 23 years old and had spent a year in Iraq, primarily in the Baghdad area. The students also wanted to know how tall he was and if he had a best friend while in Iraq.

"I had a lot of best friends," he said. "We had 120 guys in our unit."

Students asked the color of his uniform and the types of weapons he had. Students were surprised to learn it took nine hours to fly to Germany on his way to Iraq and another four hours to get to Kuwait. After that, he said it took about two days to drive to Baghdad.

One student asked him if Iraq really had a "Deck of 52 cards" referring to the playing cards featuring Iraqis wanted by American authorities after the fall of Baghdad. Werkheiser assured the students that such a deck of cards really exists.

Werkheiser was asked if his tour of duty in Iraq changed him.

"Somewhat," he said. "My view of the world is different. I didn't realize how different the cultures were."

Werkheiser also told the students it was really hot there, reaching between 130 and 140 degrees in the summer. When he left, temperatures were around 70 degrees during the daytime, dropping to 25 to 30 degrees at night.

"I was so happy," Chase said of his brother's visit to his school. "I was surprised. I am glad he got to talk about what he did over there."

Chase is the son of Megan and Wayne Grant, and Cardie and Joyce Carnes, all of Monmouth. Werkheiser also is the son of Ron and Vicky Werkheiser, Galva.

Contact Carol Clark at (309) 734-4721, or cclark@register-mail.com.