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Welcome home 33rd IBCT

Photo by Mike Chrisman, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

HOME AT LAST: **Staff Sgt. Cory Ginger of Marseilles, a member of Troop B, 106th Cavalry in Dixon, hugs his 8-year old daughter after the two reunite during a homecoming ceremony in Marseilles on Sept. 19. Ginger is one of nearly 3,000 Soldiers from the Illinois National Guard's 33rd IBCT who deployed to Afghanistan as part of the largest overseas deployment of Illinois National Guard Soldiers since World War II.**

■ Mission complete: 3,000 Soldiers return

By Mike Chrisman
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – Tears of sadness turned to tears of joy as thousands of Illinois families recently hugged their loved one for the first time since their Soldier was deployed into harm's way.

After more than a year away from their friends and family, the Soldiers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) are home. The overseas deployment of nearly 3,000 Illinois National Guard Soldiers from 30 units across the state was the largest in state history since World War II.

The 33rd IBCT was mobilized during the summer 2008 as Task Force Phoenix VIII in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Their primary mission was to train and mentor Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police forces. The Soldiers were mobilized to assist the emerging government of Afghanistan as the country struggles to recover from nearly 30 years of conflict.

The first group of Soldiers returned home on June 1 and the last welcome home ceremony was on Sept. 30.

"These Soldiers did a number of remarkable things while they were deployed and we are proud of everything they accomplished," said Maj. Gen. William Enyart, Adjutant General for the Illinois National Guard.

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ILNG loses six more Soldiers

By Staff Sgt. Stephanie McCurry
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SPRINGFIELD – All but of a few of the nearly 3,000 Soldiers who deployed with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) to Afghanistan last fall have returned home to Illinois. Soldiers and families celebrate this return, but all remember those who did not make it back.

Eighteen Soldiers from the 33rd were lost during the deployment. These Soldiers range in the age from 19 to 35 and lived as far north as Glenwood and as far south as Germantown. In just three months, from May to July, six Soldiers paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Staff Sgt. Paul Smith, 43, of East Peoria, assigned to Troop C, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry based in Aurora, and Staff Sgt. Joshua Melton, 26, of Germantown, assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry based in Marion, were killed in action June 19 when their vehicle was hit by an improvised explosive device (IED) in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Smith had a wife, Kim, and two children, Benjiman and Sarah, waiting for him at home.

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Illinois supports Medal of Honor Convention

By U.S. Army Sgt. Kassidy Snyder
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

CHICAGO-The Chicago Police and Fire Department line the jet way to the airplane that is bringing Medal of Honor recipient, Bernard "Bernie" Fisher of Kuna, Idaho, into Chicago's O'Hare Airport. Master Sgt. Matthew Allen, a recruiter with the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield, anxiously stands at the terminal door awaiting the arrival of his recipient. The door opens and the flight attendant announces there is a Medal of Honor recipient on board. A standing ovation starts on the airplane and continues onto the runway and into the terminal. Crowds gather throughout the terminal to recognize Fisher for his service to the country.

Allen was one of four Illinois Air National Guard members selected to be a military escort for the Congressional Medal of Honor Convention, which was held Sept. 14-19 in Chicago. Out of the 95 living Medal of Honor recipients, 57 of them attended the convention. Allen's job included being a personal aide to Fisher for the duration of his trip.

"I was honored to represent the entire Air Force and have the great opportunity of meeting real American heroes," said Allen.

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Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Kassidy Snyder
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

MORE THAN AN 'HONOR': **Master Sgt. Matthew Allen of New Berlin wheels Medal of Honor recipient, Bernard Fisher of Kuna, Idaho out to the opening ceremony of the Medal of Honor Convention at Soldier Field in Chicago Sept 15.**

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Nearly 3,000 return from Afghanistan

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"The Illinois National Guard family extends its thanks and appreciation to these extraordinary Soldiers and to the entire 33rd on a job well done."

Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Phoenix VIII was directly responsible for nearly 8,000 combined U.S. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, including the Illinois National Guard's 33rd IBCT. The CJTF Phoenix VIII fielded 88 Embedded Training Teams and mentored 30 Afghan National Army Battalions in six Afghan Regional Security Integration Commands. Its 93 Police Mentor Teams advised Afghan National Police and Afghan Border Police and CJTF Phoenix VIII controlled 19 Operational Coordination Centers across Afghanistan.

"These Soldiers came together to accomplish a common task and did a terrific job," said Col. Michael Haerr of Eureka, Deputy Commander of the 33rd IBCT. "The most fun I have had over the last year is the recent welcome home ceremonies and seeing these troops come home to their families. Planning these welcome home ceremonies was no easy task and we couldn't have done it without the help of the veterans service organizations and community volunteers. From Woodstock to West Frankfort and everywhere in between, these groups helped make it a success."

Many of the Soldiers were split from their original company when they arrived in Afghanistan, with the brigade helping to support 226 bases in Afghanistan. Some of these accomplishments include:

Helped reduce the poppy crop production in Afghanistan:

- Discovered and later burned 11.2 tons of poppy seeds
- Assisted with 19 road projects
- Helped dig 135 wells
- Helped build 12 medical clinics
- Helped build 15 schools
- Helped repair 14 civic or cultural centers
- Provided 200 emergency tents for flood victims
- 2.7 million pounds of humanitarian assistance distributed

During the course of the deployment, more than 4,600 awards were given to Soldiers from the 33rd IBCT. This includes 66 Purple Hearts, 606 Bronze Stars, eight Bronze Stars with valor, 909 Meritorious Service Medals, 765 Combat Action Badges, and 576 Combat Infantry Badges.

Photo by U.S. Army Staff Sgt. April Hawes, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

FINALLY OFF THE BUS: **Staff Sgt. John Hemingway, of Chicago, assigned to Company E, 634th Brigade Support Battalion based in Joliet, recently returned home from a year-long deployment in Afghanistan with the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. He returned Aug. 20 with Company G, 634th BSB based in Crestwood.**

While the Soldiers were deployed, the Illinois National Guard Chaplain Corps worked hard stateside. Lt. Col. Jerry Gleason of Bartlett is an Illinois National Guard Chaplain who worked with families in 17 different armories during the 33rd deployment. He helped families in distress because ofthe deployment and aided families of wounded and fallen Soldiers.

"I am as relieved as the families are that these Soldiers are home," Gleason said. "It was the highlight of my job to attend some of these homecoming ceremonies and see children and wives rush to the arms of their dad and husband. It's a great feeling to see these families reunited."

Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Lalita Laksbergs, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

BIRD'S EYE VIEW: **Hundreds of supporters turn out Aug. 2 to welcome home members of the Kankakee-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry. The Kankakee unit was one of 30 Illinois National Guard units mobilized last year and deployed to Afghanistan as part of the largest overseas deployment in state history.**

"I am very proud of everything we accomplished," said Col. Scott Thoele of Quincy, Commander of the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. "We helped expand the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police and improved their training. Our Soldiers also had a big part in making the Afghan elections successful by making the polling sites secure. The troops did a tremendous job and made us all proud."

While the Soldiers get most of the credit for the war they fight overseas, many times the loved ones back home are the forgotten heroes. Kris Fuhr, of Park Ridge, spent a year apart from her husband, Lt. Col. Dan Fuhr, and said it was great to finally have him home.

"As the leader of a Family Readiness Group (group of military families), I was really proud of how the families pulled together and supported each other and the Soldiers during a really stressful year," Kris Fuhr said. "We are all so happy to have our loves ones home."

More than 1,400 American Soldiers have been killed in Afghanistan since the United States began operations in 2001. A total of 18 Soldiers from the 33rd IBCT died during the deployment and more than 90 others were wounded. Those that lost their lives over the course of the deployment include:

- **Sgt. Joshua W. Harris**, 21, of Romeoville, Sept. 17, 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery, Robbins
- **Staff Sgt. Jason A. Vazquez**, 24, of Chicago, Sept. 17 2nd Battalion 122nd Field Artillery, Sycamore.
- **Sgt. Kevin D. Grieco**, 35, of Bartlett, Oct. 27 2nd Battalion, 122nd Field Artillery, Sycamore
- **Staff Sgt. Jason E. Burkholder**, 27, of Champaign, Feb. 8, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, Marion
- **1st Lt. Jared W. Southworth**, 26, of Oakland, Feb. 8, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, Marion
- **Sgt. Schuyler B. Patch**, 25, of Galva, Feb. 24, 2nd Squadron, 106th Cavalry Regiment, Kewanee
- **Sgt. Scott B. Stream**, 39, of Mattoon, Feb. 24, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry Regiment, Effingham
- **Sgt. Simone A. Robinson**, 21, of Dixmoor, March 1, 634th Brigade Support Battalion, Crestwood
- **Sgt. Christopher P. Abeyta**, 23, of Midlothian, March 15, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock
- **Sgt. Robert M. Weinger**, 24, of Round Lake Beach, March 15, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock
- **Spc. Norman L. Cain III**, 22, of Mt. Morris, March 15 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock
- **Sgt. Lukasz D. Saczek**, 23, of Lake in the Hills, May 10, 1st Battalion, 178th Infantry Regiment, Woodstock
- **Staff Sgt. Joshua A. Melton**, 26, of Carlyle, June 19, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Marion
- **Staff Sgt. Paul G. Smith**, 43, of East Peoria, June 19 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry, Aurora
- **1st Lt. Derwin I. Williams**, 41, of Glenwood, July 6 Troop B, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry, Dixon
- **Sgt. Chester W. Hosford**, 35, of Ottawa, July 6, Troop B, 2nd Battalion, 106th Cavalry, Dixon
- **Spc. Christopher M. Talbert**, 24, of Galesburg, July 7 Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Marion
- **Sgt. Gerrick D. Smith**, 19, of Sullivan, July 29 2nd Battalion, 130th Infantry, Illinois Army National Guard, Marion

Over the next three months the 33rd IBCT will officially mark the end of its deployment by participating in reintegration activities

Photo by U.S. Army Spc. Lalita Laksbergs
Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Office

SOLDIER IN THE MAKING: **A child waits by a crowded Freeport street amidst flags anxious for his Soldier to come home from Afghanistan. Members of the Freeport-based 333rd Military Police Company were deployed in August 2008 and returned Aug. 26.**