

The Highlander

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USO gives Highlanders heros' welcome . . . and send off



Staff Sgt. Alicia Chivers, of Spokane and Hustla Co, stands with a group of R&R Soldiers and staff of the Military Assistance team along with Lone Star Park-Grand Prairie President Drew Shubeck at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, Texas (Photo & story by Capt. Mike Vincent)

Coming home . . .

Like many Soldiers taking a short rest and recuperation from Iraq, Staff Sgt. Alicia M. Chivers of Hustla Company took part in her R&R traveling 19 hours in an airplane with fellow Soldiers from Kuwait City to Dallas, Texas; Chivers final destination was her hometown, Spokane, Wash.

Her journey began three days ago at Joint Base Balad, where she is based along with the other members Task Force 1-161.

With little sleep, going from station to station, waiting in countless lines, paperwork and eating on the move, Chivers finally made it to the states, Dallas – Ft. Worth International Airport three days later.

Exhausted from not being able to sleep and never comfortable flying, she grabbed her bags and was stopped at yet another station, stamping her leave form and customs. With frustration mounting and patience wearing thin, she stood again waiting through another brief, but in the United States.

"It's nice to feel appreciated and to know that the people back home haven't forgotten about us still being over there."

Sgt. Alicia M. Chivers
Convoy Commander,
Hustla Co

The doors opened and she walked down the long hall to the DFW terminals to catch her connecting flight. Just past the last turn, she was met with a sea of red, white and blue and the well deserved hero's welcome by the citizens of the United States of

America: the volunteer members of the United States Organization.

Hand shakes, hugs, flags met the returning veterans as they stepped onto American soil. Complete strangers in the early morning greeted

the Soldiers as if they were family. Some with tears, hugging the Soldiers when they could and wishing them all, "Welcome Home". This was an awe-inspiring display of true American patriotism. Only a few times in one's life can one experience such a display of thanks for ones efforts. "It's nice to feel appreciated and to know that the people back home haven't forgotten about us still being over there." said Chivers.

Many of the USO volunteers are veterans themselves or have military
(continued on pg. 4)

Highlander 6 sends -

LTC Greg Allen

Hey Muldoons, 30 days and counting Hooah! Yes, we're in the home stretch and yes, "I think we're going home!" However, we aren't home yet and we still have a lot to do. Our counterparts are starting to arrive but we can't allow that to distract from our mission at hand. We've been stressing discipline and "doing the right thing" since I took command nearly 4 years ago and I'm sure you're tired of hearing it, but now is truly the time that we make things happen and do it right and do it right, all the time.

Whether on mission, driving in the motor pool or around base, loading connexes, hanging out at the pool, etc. we've got to take care of each other and ensure that our focus is taking care of business the correct way in order for us to get on planes in less than 3-4 weeks. You have truly set the standard for every battalion in theater. You Muldoons have driven over 1.5 million accident free miles to nearly every FOB in Iraq and conducted over 1,300 missions without loss to your fellow comrades, loss of cargo or loss of equipment. NO ONE in theater can boast that, but again, our mission isn't over. We've stressed avoiding complacency, but we'll stress it till the day we touch down in Seattle and Spokane.

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Now is the time that we need to teach and show the 1-155th Infantry the "Highlander" way of conducting our convoy mission, which by the way, is the 3rd ESC standard. Stress the little things, i.e. seat belt / GRS use, speed, EoF, etc., that have made you all successful, to include staying alive. Teach them the lessons learned from the EFP / IED detonations we had and the actions that you took in order to save the lives of warriors such as William Johnson, Mark Fletcher, Chris Songer and Travis Henschel. Show them your PCC / PCIs, your SOPs, battle drills, etc. that you have perfected and turned into doctrine.

As for going home, I know it's on your minds and it should be.

If you haven't spoken to your family or your employer in awhile, do it. The reality is we'll all be home by early to mid August and it's never too late to work those relationships. We've had tons of briefings and yes, I know that sometimes they're painful, but the harsh reality is that we've all changed a little and maybe our families have too. Leaving Iraq should be a joyous occasion; we need to keep it that way.

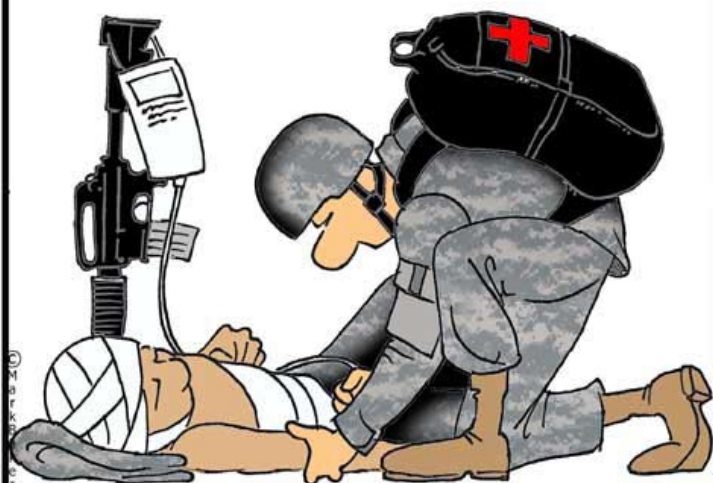
I can't thank you enough for the job you have done, but you are all heroes and I'm proud to serve with you everyday. See you downrange.

Highlander 6



Pvt. Murphy's Law- Mark Baker

US ARMY COMBAT MEDICS



A tribute to all those who serve in the medical corps



Highlander 7 sends - CSM David Windom

Sprint to the finish! Highlanders, that needs to be our motto for the next 30 days or so. This deployment has been a marathon with some of us now on 13 months but now it's time to finish and finish strong. We can look back proudly on the things we've accomplished but this is no time to relax. Each one of us needs to maintain our focus and our energy toward the goals of making sure our mission gets accomplished, that it gets handed off in a professional manner and that we check all the boxes for getting out of here.

Setting ourselves up for a successful re-integration into our families is a process that starts right now. In your letters, emails, calls and chats with your family start talking about your expectations as well as theirs. You may want to take your whole leave loafing around the house and knocking back some beers. Your spouse may have a cruise to Alaska in mind. You can see where these competing ideas may cause a conflict so start communicating those ideas and plans now. Remember OPSEC as you talk to family and don't talk about travel dates. All our dates are fluid so don't make concrete plans and start buying those cruise tickets just yet.

Our replacements have already started hitting the ground so give them a great welcome. Share all those ideas, tips and let's make this a very positive transition to the 1-155. We're going to have a relatively longer period to get them up to speed than we had so take advantage of that time so the switch from left seat to right seat is as smooth as possible.

Very soon we'll have some of our high-speed Soldiers leaving for NCOES courses. These men and women are taking the next step into becoming the leaders of the future. They've completed a long and difficult year and are still motivated and leaning forward in the foxhole. I want to thank them for their service this past year, that I'm honored to have served with them and that I wish them the best success in their NCOES. They'll be coming back to us trained and ready to accept the challenges that go into being professionals both in peace and war.

Again Highlanders, we're the battalion that sets the standard throughout all of the Iraq theater of operations. Keep your heads in the game and let's finish this race as only the Highlanders can!

Highlander 7 out.

Chaplain's Corner - CH (MAJ) Joe Hammiel

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."

-- 2 Corinthians 9:8, NIV

Eighteen Inches of Grace

Everywhere I go, on almost every day, if I have eyes to see and ears to hear, I notice examples of God's mercy and grace to us. Picture this scene from my recent R & R leave – I'm arriving at Vancouver International Airport where my family is waiting to pick me up. It has taken me over 24 grueling hours to make it home – from the first two hour flight sitting on cargo nets aboard a swelteringly hot Air Force C-130 to the extremely cramped seat ing on the contracted World Airlines DC-10 flight, which lasted over 14 hours. In Atlanta, the airport is crowded with Memorial Day weekend travelers, thus decreasing my odds of getting an earlier flight to Chicago with a connecting flight to Vancouver. In fact, I have to wait for over six hours in Atlanta before I fly to Chicago, despite being on five stand-by lists for earlier flights. The flight from Chicago is delayed and arrives in Vancouver almost an hour after the scheduled time.

Before leaving Iraq and on the trip home, one of my recurring thoughts concerns how Skyelyn (my youngest daughter) will react to me when she sees me at the airport. I brief Soldiers weekly on what to expect when they go on R & R and one of the things I remind them of is that their younger children may not recognize them at first and may even be afraid of them since they have been apart for so long. I know it may happen to me when I go home, but knowing about something doesn't always make dealing with it any easier.

In Vancouver, I proceed up the jet-way ramp, then through the long corridors, and finally out of the International Flights exit doors, and I see them in the distance: my wife (Wendy) and kids (Sierra, Logan, and Skyelyn) waiting on the other side of the dividing rope. To my surprise and utter delight, Skyelyn sees me, recognizes me from a distance, runs across the waiting area, leaps the last 18 inches into my arms and showers me with hugs and kisses!

Miserably long trip – absolutely; tired and exhausted from my travel ordeals – to be sure. But right on the heels of my unpleasant circumstances, God pours His grace over me in the form of an 18 inch leap from my two-year-old little girl, instantly dispelling my fears and filling me with an indescribable joy!



Vancouver, BC International Airport

Fast forward almost four weeks and I'm finishing up my last convoy prayer on a Sunday night – earlier in the evening, I prayed for fellow Soldiers who were heading out on a mission – it's one I've been on many times before, and I know it's relatively short with little to worry about when it comes to enemy threats.

After my last convoy prayer, I'm talking with Soldiers from another company when one of our staff members drives up and asks, "Did you hear what happened? Our guys have been hit and we have injuries!" I hurry to their company area to get more details and find out that the Medevac chopper flight should be arriving in the next 30-45 minutes, so I make my way to the Joint Base Balad hospital.

In the ER, the staff hears the intercom announcement that the chopper will be landing in one minute and they are waiting, each ready to jump into his or her role in treating the casualties. Our Soldiers are wheeled in on large green gurneys and the nurses, doctors and technicians immediately spring into action. Both Soldiers are alive and even responsive, but both will require immediate surgery.

Many Soldiers from their platoon and company make their way to the hospital and wait in the wings with anxious faces to hear any news concerning their battle buddies. After about eight hours, both Soldiers are out of surgery and wheeled to the ICU ward; they are cared for by the nursing staff and doctors on shift. As we suspected, their bodies have been seriously damaged, but not beyond recovery.

The way the explosion hit their vehicle turns out to have been a blessing for everyone involved – had it struck

them only 18 inches further along the road, it could easily have been fatal to the entire crew, and it would have been a very sad day for a lot of us, both here and at home! Once again, in just 18 inches, God poured out His grace on many lives.

Eighteen inches is also the approximate distance from my head to my heart. Unfortunately, all too often my head perceives the reality of something, yet my heart misses the essence of God's grace displayed in those ordinary things. It's hard to see His grace sometimes because I get so selfish, and the difficulties and pain of my circumstances frequently blind me to what's right in front of me. But sometimes I'm awake enough to notice. From the sound of crickets chirruping in the wee hours of the morning to remind me of the gentle beauty and glory of God's creation, to the cold water I freely take from the fridge after a blazing early morning run, God reminds me of His goodness and love.

God grants His grace to us not because we deserve it or have earned it in any way but just because of who He is. The Bible teaches that God "causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45). This strongly suggests that God, in His goodness, shares common graces with all people everywhere, whether we deserve it or not. The truth is none of us deserves anything from Him, and yet He continuously showers us with His grace in all its varieties 24 hours a day, seven days a week!

Eighteen inches – such a short distance for us, but in the last few weeks, God has demonstrated the enormity of His grace in that small dimension. So my prayer for us is that we may have eyes to see and ears to hear the wonders of God's grace given to us in a thousand ways every single day!



MEDEVAC helicopter @ Joint Base Balad

USO welcome . . . and send off *(from pg. 1)*

family members past and present. Many donate their time and money to bring a little comfort and ease to military members and their families while traveling.

Chuck Lechner of Plano, Texas and a USO volunteer said, "Being a veteran of Vietnam, I understand the challenges these Soldiers go through. I always vowed to myself that never again would we as a nation treat of returning veterans like we were when we came back from Vietnam".

The USO program at DFW airport is all volunteers and made possible through their donations and the American people.

The program is broken down into two programs; "Operation – Welcome Home" and "Operation – Send Off". "I thought it was really cool that veterans like ourselves, volunteer their time and put forth all this effort into coming out and welcoming us home. That was really neat to see," said Chivers. Each operation gives special consideration to the individual needs of the service members.

"Operation – Welcome Home" is a volunteer meet and greet program that allows USO volunteers to park at the airport, free of charge and wait to greet the daily arrivals of service members from overseas. Staff Sgt. Leyla Oxford of Grandview, Wash said, "I think it makes the veterans feel good to know that we are appreciated for our sacrifices and also, for those Vietnam veterans, I think it gives them pride to give us the support that they didn't have returning from Vietnam." Oxford continued. "The veterans of Vietnam are coming out to make sure what happened to them doesn't happen to us and that history doesn't repeat itself."

Chivers was headed home to Spokane, Wash. for her 15 days of R&R leave after nine months of active duty. As she boarded the bus in Dallas to take her to her connecting flight, she remarked, "When the veterans come out and show their support, we as American service members know and recognize their sacrifice here for us; as well as what they sacrificed for our freedom many years ago."

Heading back . . .

Returning to Dallas after 15 days of rest and recuperation with family in Spokane, Chivers was ready for the long trip back to Iraq.

Arriving at DFW after a brief delay in Seattle, Chivers waited in a long line of Soldiers also returning from R and R.

Luckily, USO volunteers welcome them with beverages and handmade neck pillows for the long flight back.

After marking her baggage, the check in line was long but hurried to get in; an hour passed waiting along with several service members. On the intercom, an announcement said, "The last Soldier for tonight's flight has now checked in. The



Before singing the National Anthem, country singer Norma Valles stands before Soldiers honored by the USO at the Lone Star Park-Grand Prairie at Grand Prairie, Texas.

rest of you will have to return tomorrow. The sixteen of you are stamped in and now under military regulations."

The frustration had returned and Chivers realized she would not make the return trip that day.

"You will be transported to a hotel for the night and you must report back for tomorrow's flight," said Maj. Patrick McAfee of the DFW Military Personnel Assistance Point.

The 16 soldiers were flooded with thoughts of home and not looking forward to a lonely hotel room. Just then, an older gentleman approached.

"My name is Bert Brady of the USO's Operation Send Off. We are looking for a few volunteers willing to join the folks at Grand Prairie, Texas for a little dinner and appreciation for all the hard work y'all do for us. Any takers?"

Chivers, a little reluctant at first, decided to go after being coaxed by her travel buddies.

At 7:30 p.m., two vans pulled up to the hotel with McAfee and Sgt. Maj. Victor Allen, also of the Dallas Military Assistance Command. Chuck Lechner of Plano, Texas, a USO volunteer, brought additional trucks for any other Soldiers who may have had a change of heart. All the R and R soldiers jumped in. After a brief stop at the hotel to check-in and drop off their baggage, they were on the way to the race track.

As the vans approached the Grand Prairie city limits, they were met by a motorized police escort. As traffic stopped, the Grand Prairie citizens honked their horns and flashing lights in salute as the USO motor-

cade, filled with the 16 Soldiers.

"I was really shocked to know that there were so many people out there that support us and will go to great lengths to show their support," Chivers said.

The USO vans arrived at the Lone Star Park-Grand Prairie, a professional horse racing track and entertainment center, and were greeted by country singer Norma Valles and her husband, Alphonzo, David Albert, Caryn Ochoa and Lone Star Park-Grand Prairie President Drew Shubeck.

"They are all huge supporters of the USO and the events we put together for the returning service members," Brady said. "Norma and David own a restaurant together in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and each month, they donate 50 percent of one day receipts to the USO and the Dear American Hero organization in support of the Soldiers overseas."

"The food was awesome. It was really great that all of these people did this for us. It was a

pleasant surprise," said Chivers. "The Texas hospitality was extraordinary. Everything from the police escort, to the greeting at the gate and dinner was just wonderful."

Kicking off the races, the Soldiers were honored for their service and sacrifice by Valles and the guests of Lone Star Park-Grand Prairie with the singing of the National Anthem. Afterward, the Soldiers enjoyed dinner, dessert and the races from their seats in the president's private suite.

Before the sixth race, the group was invited back down to the Winner's Circle and the park announcer introduced each Soldier. They announced that the sixth race will be dedicated as "The U.S. Military Mile," in honor of the Soldiers' service and sacrifice to the nation.

For the USO's and Lone Star Park's efforts and generosity, McAfee presented Mr. Shubeck and Mr. Albert, a military coin on behalf of the Military Assistance Command.

Shubeck replied, "This is the least we can do for all of you. You and your Families sacrifice so much for us here at home. We just wanted to show a little gesture of appreciation for all you do. Thank you so much for your service."

At the end of the evening, the Soldiers returned to their hotel to rest and wait for their long flight back to Kuwait City.

Forever in the Soldiers' memory will be the gesture of gratitude of the USO volunteers, the Military Assistance officers and noncommissioned officers and people of Grand Prairie, Texas.



ABOVE: Spec. Rudy Herrera of Abu Co. evokes memories of "Rocky" character Apollo Creed with his stars and stripes trunks during the task force boxing smoker at Joint Base Balad.

BELOW: CPL Christopher Tallada, an Abu truck commander from Kent, watches his opponent stumble after landing a right hook during the task force boxing smoker at Joint Base Balad.



From the field -- Highlanders in "action"



ABOVE: MSG David Carr of the Mover Co. Personal Security Detachment lands a right jab on SPC Jacob Dick from the task force S-6 section as CPT Aron Horiel, a referee from Bonecrusher Co, watches during the task force boxing smoker at Joint Base Balad.

Write a "LETTER TO THE EDITOR"

- story ideas - announcements
- suggested changes, additions

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Contact the editor at david.isaac@us.army.mil
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(All photos, illustrations and content by Highlander PAO, unless otherwise noted)



LEFT: SPC Robert Ainslie of Abu Co. gets smiles from the crowd for his work as a 'ring girl' during the task force boxing smoker at Joint Base Balad.



ABOVE: Over 150 Abu Soldiers and other Highlanders pack the ICU of the Air Force Theater hospital at Joint Base Balad after Abu Soldiers SGT Travis Henschel, SPC Christopher Songer and SPC Robert Fische were awarded the Purple Heart for injuries suffered in an IED attack. All three Soldiers also earned the Combat Infantryman's Badge.

BELOW: BG Michael Lally, 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command Commanding General shows SGT Travis Henschel his Purple Heart certificate at the Air Force Theater hospital at Joint Base Balad. Henschel was promoted to Staff Sergeant later in the day.



From the field -- Highlanders in "action"



ABOVE: BG Michael Lally, 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command Commanding General presents SPC Christopher Songer, left, and SPC Robert Fische the Purple Heart at the Air Force Theater hospital at Joint Base Balad.



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