

Prince George Journal
January 12, 2012

Last logistics battalion in Iraq returns home to hero's welcome

FORT LEE— When Soldiers from the 275th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion deployed to Iraq last March, they embarked on an historic 10-month mission that helped close the chapter on more than eight years of American military operations in the country.

At a "Welcome Home Warrior Citizen Ceremony" attended by friends, family members and dignitaries honoring the returning troops here in Bunker Hall's Green Auditorium on Sunday afternoon, Lt. Col. Christopher "Sam" Houston, commander of the 275th CSSB, said the unit's initial mission in Iraq was similar to that of preceding CSSBs supporting Operation New Dawn.

"We went to (Contingency Operating Base) Speicher, which is in Tikrit, Iraq," Houston said. "At COB Speicher we were responsible for the combat sustainment of United States Division - North in a geographic area that encompassed over 60,000 square miles."

Houston said their mission changed quickly, and the 275th became responsible for retrograde operations, directing the logistics of a drawdown operation larger than any tackled by the U.S. military since World War II.

"We had to do some-

thing that no CSSB had ever done before ... the complete closure and drawdown of United States and coalition forces out of Iraq," Houston said.

The 275th accomplished its mission at COB Speicher with such efficiency that it was ordered south to Camp Liberty in Baghdad to close down bases for U.S. Division - Central. After a repeat performance there, the 275th was sent even further south to COB Adder near Nasiriyah, Iraq to close the remaining bases.

The 275th was expected to maintain a constant level of logistics support to troops still in Iraq even in the midst of relocating - something the unit had never done - but Houston said they pulled it off like true professionals.

While in the country, he said the 275th moved 1.8 million cases of bottled water, supplied 16 million gallons of fuel, processed 40,000 shipping containers and issued 16 million rounds of ammunition.

It was a major accomplishment for a unit as relatively new as the 275th, which was activated in November 2006 as the first Army Reserve CSSB under the 55th Sustainment Brigade, based at Fort Belvoir.

"There have been other drawdowns of forces,

even in this same area, but what made this one different is that there was no cease-fire agreement, there was no peace treaty," Houston said. "Of the retrograde that was conducted out of Iraq was under threat of hostile enemy action, and often times our convoys were under attack while we completed our mission. But we are proud to say that we safely completed it without losing any Soldier to hostile enemy action."

Before the 275th deployed to Iraq, Col. Theresa Baginski, 55th Sustainment Brigade commander, told its Soldiers: "There will be years in the future when Soldiers and units and generals will come forward, and they will study what your sustainment unit has done as part of this retrograde mission when we're faced with a similar situation."

Baginski was here Sunday to greet them again, and praised them for the unit's success in completing its mission. "Be proud of what you accomplished," she said.

Houston said the 275th closed the doors on the final installations in Iraq Dec. 18, 2011, the same day U.S. troops made their way across the border into Kuwait. "It felt very good to turn the



(Photo by Stephen J. Baker, Fort Lee Public Affairs

Congressman J. Randy Forbes welcomes home Spc. Figueroa Cortes with the 275th Combat Support Sustainment Battalion during a redeployment ceremony at Fort Lee Sunday. The unit was the last CSSB to leave Iraq.

lights off in Iraq," he said.

"You get up every day and you put on the cloak of a hero," said U.S. Rep. J. Randy Forbes, R-Va., who was on hand to welcome the Soldiers home. The 275th includes Soldiers from the Richmond area, Hampton Roads, Northern Virginia and other parts of the state.

Capt. Dássie Jones of Virginia Beach deployed with the 275th CSSB. The father of two said, "It's good for the Soldiers to finally reunite and get back to some normalcy with

their families."

Forbes said most Americans have little understanding of how much the nation's military members sacrifice on their behalf.

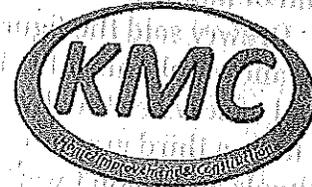
"To the members of the 275th: let me thank you on behalf of the United States of America," he said.

His voice brimming with emotion, Houston told his troops and the audience:

"The only remaining mission is the mission we're on now - to successfully reach home."

Mission accomplished.

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