

Soldiers return home

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By **Caitlin Davis**
FORT LEE - Natalie Murphy will be helping her husband, Soldier Daniel Murphy find a place to live in Virginia. Brian Olver wants to spend the weekend with his daughter, Soldier Lea Olver. Vickie McCarthy will be cooking for her son Capt. Christopher Franklin.

These soldiers were among many who returned home to their friends and family on Wed. March 7. The 54th Mortuary Affairs

Company deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait in August 2011. The company returned to the states to be greeted by friends, family and other soldiers. As they walked in the door, the shouts could be heard throughout the gymnasium.

"These heroes you see before you had the very unfortunate, yet personal, important duty of handling the war remains of the fallen warriors," CSSB CDR LTC Austin W. Elliott said.

Elliott said even though these soldiers were faced with such a daunting task, they respected the country well.

"They did so with reverence, respect, humility and fierce professionalism. With that they deserve our respect and our admiration," Elliott said.

With that, the gym broke out into a round of applause for the returning soldiers.

Elliott said he had recently returned from Afghanistan and some of

their work.

"What was amazing to me was to see how respected and admired that handful of soldiers was by the senior leaders in Afghanistan", Elliott said.

Elliott said because of these soldiers, families of the fallen soldiers should know their loved ones are properly cared for from the battlefield to the final resting place.

After Elliott finished congratulating the company, those in at-

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tendance began singing "The Army Song."

Then it was a mad dash in the gym as the soldiers and friends and family ran to one another and gave out kisses, hugs and some tears were shed.

McCarthy, who had tears streaming down her face as she watched her son greeting the

other family members, said she will be cooking all weekend for her son.

"It's cooking time in my house. It will be a restaurant in my kitchen," McCarthy said.

McCarthy, whose family drove from Stafford to greet Franklin, said she will be cooking all his favorite foods.

"Lasagna, mashed po-

tatoes, cinnamon buns... as long as it doesn't move, he'll eat it," McCarthy said.

Franklin said he was happy to be home with his family.

"I'm going to enjoy my family then it's back to work," Franklin said.

Franklin said he was going to go home and enjoy one of his favorite

foods, lasagna.

Natalie Murphy, was happy to have her husband back home. She said she has been looking forward to his return since he left in August. Even though he was gone for six months, she still connected with those closest to him.

"I hung out with his

family," Murphy said.

Murphy also said that while he was gone she was still able to talk to him everyday.

"I talked to him everyday on Skype. That made it a lot easier," Murphy said.

The gym was filled with hugs and kisses and tears as the returning soldiers made their

way through the crowd and to their loved ones.

Many soldiers were greeted with flowers, presents, balloons and gifts from family and friends. Others just wanted the gift of time.

"I'd like to take her home and spend time with her," Brian Olver said of his daughter soldier Lea Olver.