

Marion gives U. S. Army Reserves unit a warm welcome home

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It was a much happier gathering in downtown



Marion Friday than a year ago.

In August 2013 the crowds were sending U.S. Army Reserves 760th Engineering Company off to Afghanistan with tears and best wishes for their safety. Yesterday, they were welcoming the soldiers home with smiles and congratulations for a job well done.

The 760th, a vertical engineer company of about 150 members organized to handle a wide range of missions, had been deployed to Afghanistan for a retrograde mission to close forward operating bases and pack up and send equipment back to the United States.

Many of the men and women with the 760th, headquartered in Marion are from surrounding counties and states and as far away as New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. For deployment they joined the 489th Engineer Battalion out of Arkansas.

“Welcome home. We’re glad you’re here,” said Mayor David Helms, who praised the troops for their sacrifice in risking their lives for their country and all the things they missed being away from home. And he praised their families for their support and the sacrifices they made being without their loved ones.

Helms was among hundreds of well-wishers from near and far gathered around town hall for the special ceremony. The soldiers returned from Afghanistan late in the summer and wanted to go directly to their homes so the welcome-home ceremony was delayed to give them time with their families.

Many of those family members were among the cheering crowd in downtown Marion as the soldiers arrived on school buses and marched to town hall led by VFW Post 4667’s color guard and members of the 1st Virginia Battalion U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps. The procession was led into town by members of Rolling Thunder Tennessee Chapter 4 of East Tennessee.

Speakers at the ceremony included Congressman Morgan Griffith, Del. Israel O’Quinn and Herbert “Turk” Johnson, former commander of VFW Post 4667.

Griffith called Marion one of the most patriotic towns in Southwest Virginia. “You’re the answer to how we project American interests around the world,” he told the reservists.

O’Quinn said the pride and patriotism brimming over on the day the unit left was tinged by sadness but today there was only happiness. He thanked the soldiers for their sacrifice and promised the commonwealth’s support of their needs.

Johnson, a Vietnam veteran, said he was proud to see the community welcome the troops back with flags and songs and prayer. “This is my hometown, Marion, Virginia,” he said. “Welcome back veterans.”

Johnson accepted from Commander Ronald William Arnold the American flag that was sent with the 760th on their journey. This flag draped the World Trade Center steel beam that came to Marion from New York City. It flew over the company’s base in Afghanistan and has now been returned to the town of Marion.

World War II veteran Gordon Widener, who just turned 92, sang at the ceremony accompanied by fellow veteran Dave Thomas and surrounded by elementary school children from around the

county waving flags and signs welcoming home the troops. Marion band students also performed.

“It was fantastic,” said Helms of the ceremony. “Everybody worked together for a great turnout.”