

Operation Welcome Home (Maryland)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Marylanders Welcome Troops Home at BWI

Linthicum, Maryland— This past Saturday, approximately 200 U.S. troops returning from the War on Terror received an unexpected welcome from nearly 300 Marylanders from all over the state. Navy, Army, and Air Force troops arrived at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport Saturday afternoon after being deployed to Iraq.

The greeters brought bottled water, homemade cookies, prepackaged snacks, and handmade “thank you” cards and assembled care packages onsite. When the troops entered through the International Arrival terminal, the volunteers showered praise on the troops, cheering them on, hugging them, offering them a care package, and thanking them for their service. Over one hundred care packages were also delivered to the USO headquarters at the airport, filling up every space of their cupboards.

Saturday’s event, the third since March 2007, was organized by Operation Welcome Home (Maryland), a name recently adopted by the group. Grassroots involvement has grown since the first event in March when 100 volunteers turned out to greet the troops at BWI Airport. In May, nearly 200 Marylanders reported to BWI Airport to welcome the troops home, and then Saturday, the number grew to nearly 300 supporters on hand. Volunteers have learned about these “Welcome Home” events through grassroots e-mails passed along through various church and community groups, cub scouts, and Republican clubs from around the state. The welcome home events are nonpartisan.

“The majority of troops arriving to BWI airport have other connections to catch and are not expecting a hero’s welcome in Baltimore. It’s an incredible surprise for all of them,” said Kathy Thorp, co-chair of Operation Welcome Home (Maryland). “They are so grateful that we are there, and it is a moving experience for all involved. It’s our goal in collaboration with BWI administration, to greet every flight back from theatre with a well deserved homecoming.”

John Flynn, co-chair of Operation Welcome Home (Maryland) stated, “When you go to one of these welcome home events, you cannot help but want to come back. You are forever changed by the whole experience. We are definitely making a difference in the lives of the troops and they see they have our unconditional support back home.”

Operation Welcome Home (Maryland) is developing a Web site to meet the demand for information on the various opportunities in Maryland to welcome our troops home.

The organization is planning another “Welcome Home” event at BWI Airport in August. Groups and community organizers interested in joining the listserv for updates may contact operationwelcomehome@comcast.net.

The epic and classic war poem, “In Flanders Fields” – written by a soldier – Lt. Colonel John McCrae, MD (1872-1918), Canadian Army, “In Flanders Fields”:

IN FLANDERS FIELDS the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.