

Eugene rallies show support for troops

Eugene residents, including friends and family of National Guard soldiers, rallied Saturday to support troops

Roman Gokhman and Jan Montry
Staff Writers

While Sheila Robertson might not agree with every reason the Bush administration has given in defense of war with Iraq, she has no doubt of her support for American troops. Her husband Jeremy, who has been in the Army National Guard for 10 years, is currently stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado, awaiting deployment to Kuwait.

To show support for her husband and other local National Guard soldiers at Fort Carson, Robertson and 70 other friends and family members gathered Saturday afternoon near the Ferry Street Bridge to wave flags and voice their opinions.

The gathering was organized by the Alpha Family Support Group, which was formed in January to provide assistance to families of soldiers. It was one of two rallies held Saturday to support troops.

"He's patriotic, and he believes in this country. He believes that they are doing the right thing, and I do too."

Alma Beck
rally attendee

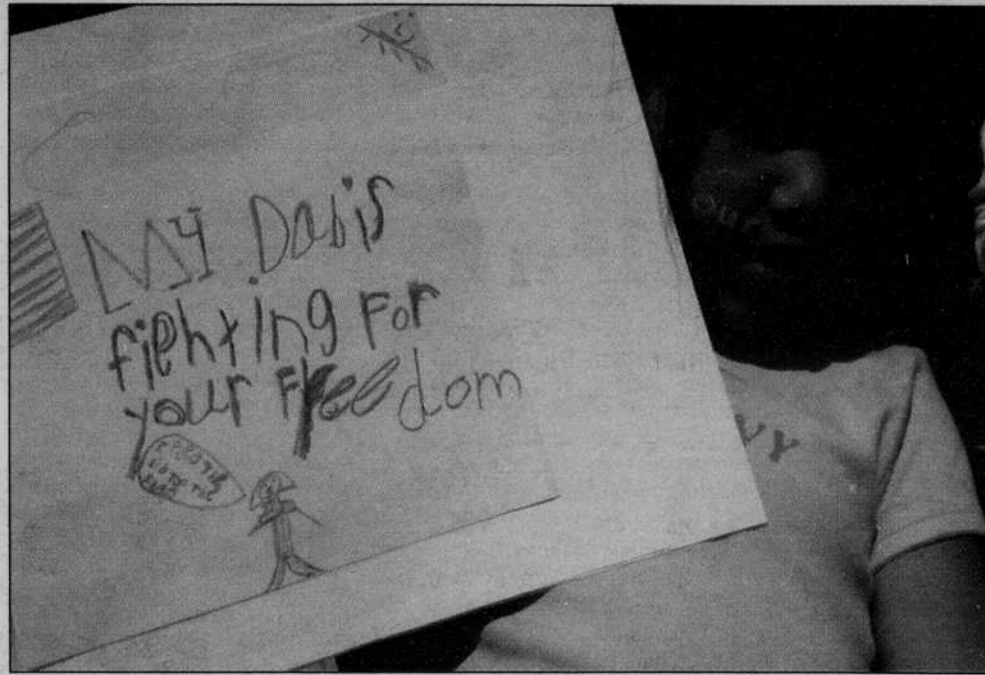
"The soldiers at Fort Carson are grateful," Robertson said. "(This is) to let them know we're OK and doing fine."

Robertson added that her husband is ready to be deployed to the Middle East to fight alongside his fellow soldiers.

"He's excited that he finally gets to use all the training he learned in the past 10 years, but he wishes he was with his family," she said, adding that the rally was meant to support troops — not to promote war.

"For me, this has nothing to do with the war," she said. "I have enough to worry about with my husband being gone."

Other rally attendees, such as



At the rally at Eugene Armory on Saturday, Amalia Jennings shows support for her father Michael Jennings, who is in the infantry. "He fights for our freedom," she said.
Roman Gokhman
Emerald

Alma Beck, agreed with the U.S. government's decision to attack Iraq. Her son, Dave Beck, is about to be deployed.

"He's patriotic, and he believes in this country," she said. "He believes that they are doing the right thing, and I do, too."

Beck said her son was married on Feb. 10 and left Eugene for training five days later, but that he feels proud to defend the country. She added that neither she nor her son understand why anti-war protesters don't understand that war is sometimes necessary.

"Dave said, 'What they don't understand is that freedom is more than the absence of war,'" she said.

Across town at the Veterans of Foreign Wars building on Willamette Street, more than 400 people — veterans, reservists and community members — also gathered Saturday to show support for U.S. troops.

People held American flags and cheered at passing cars before beginning a march to the Federal Building for more events, including a ceremony honoring troops who have been deemed killed in action or missing in action.

After reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and "The Star-Spangled Banner," the crowd filled the right lane of Willamette Street and proceeded to the Federal Building for a second rally, chanting "support our troops" and waving signs. Many cars traveling opposite the throng showed their equal support, honking and cheering as they drove past.

Larry and Susan James, who were among the marchers, carried a picture of their son Ian, a Navy soldier currently stationed on the USS Carl Vinson. The couple also have a nephew, Jacob James, who is overseas.

"They are heroes," Susan James said. "They've got our backs. ... He's our only son, and he's fighting for us."

A small crowd of about 20 anti-war protesters met the marchers at the Federal Building, mostly gathering across the street. Aside from a few brief scuffles and both groups yelling insults to each other, the rally remained civil. EPD had little presence as the day progressed.

Camille Perezselsky, a Lane Community College student among the anti-war protesters, said she had friends going to the Middle East on Sunday, and she supported them but not the war.

"I think it's an immoral war," she said. "I think that all Bush and (the military) are doing — it's imperialism for the 21st Century."

Contact the news reporter at romangokhman@dailyemerald.com.
Contact the news editor at janmontry@dailyemerald.com.

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