

Looking back: Oregon troops return home

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The final round of Oregon Guard soldiers who have reached their 24-month service cap for high operation tempo are returning home from Iraq. A law enacted by congress shortly after 9-11 limits a Guard or Reserve soldier's active duty obligation to 24 months within a five-year time span. The law was established to help avoid the abuse of reserve forces.

The Second Battalion, 162nd Infantry sent home a total of 60 Soldiers of the 95 who qualified to return to the states. Thirty chose to stay in Iraq while another five were sent back for rehabilitation due to battle injuries.

Bat. Cmdr. Daniel Hendrickson spoke to soldiers during a recent awards ceremony and explained that he respected their decisions to leave Iraq.

"You guys have paid your dues on the deployment and on previous deployments — that has earned you the right to go home," Hendrickson said. "You all have families and guys and families come first because they will be here after this career is over."

Soldiers from Oregon who qualified to return home served on the Sinai Peninsula as part of a multinational observers force that was established in a peace agreement brokered by for-

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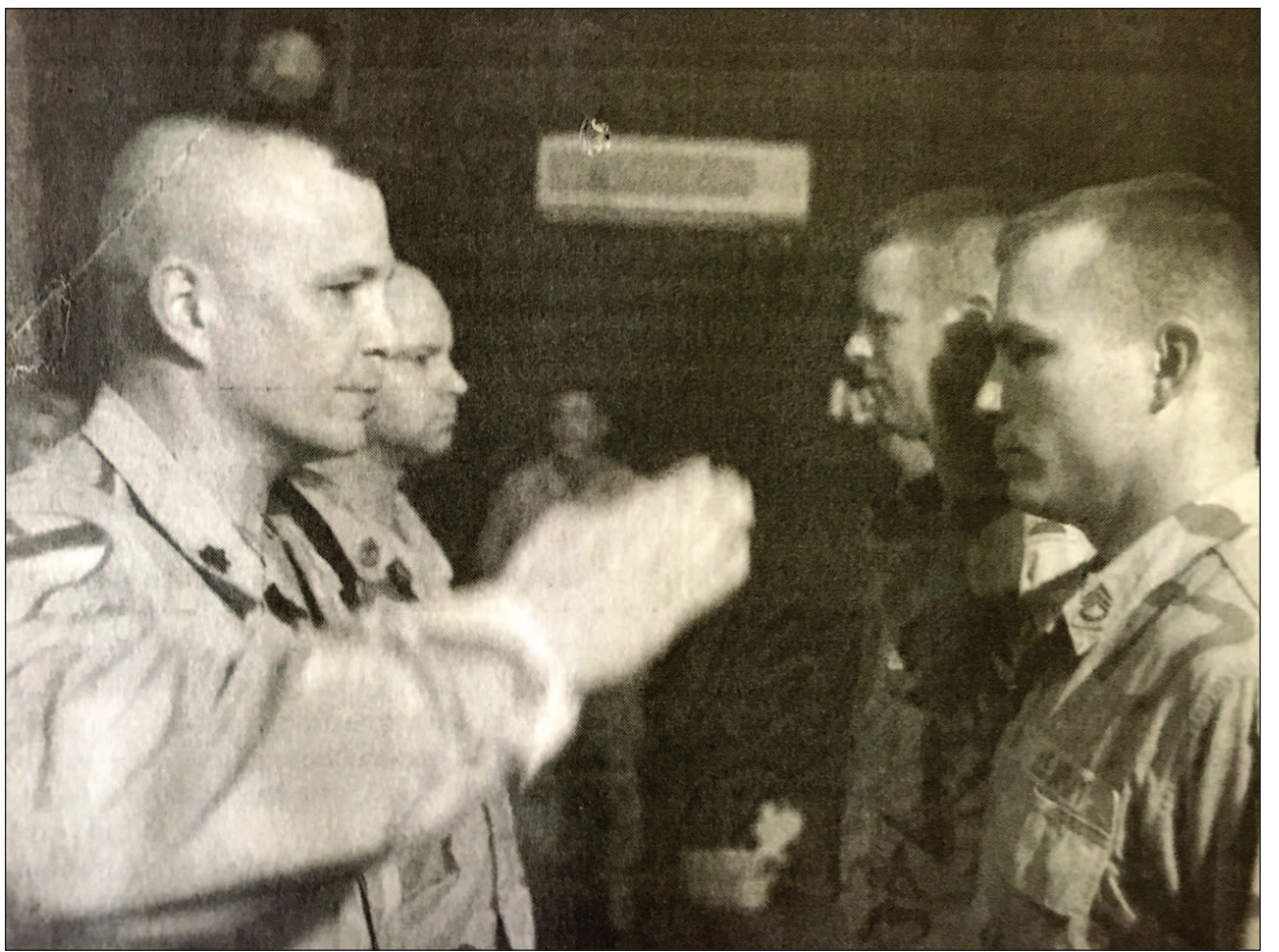
— Lt. Col. Hendrickson

mer President Jimmy Carter between Egypt and Israel in 1979. The soldiers returned to their civilian lives after completing their deployment in Egypt but were mobilized again eight months later for duty in Iraq to fill out the Second Battalion, 162nd Infantry, headquartered in Cottage Grove.

Hendrickson said he wished soldiers would stay because he didn't like breaking up a good team but he understood their choices.

"This Team is known as one of the top-two battalions in the First Calvary Division," Hendrickson said. "That's coming from Maj. Gen. Peter Chiarelli and Ass. Div. Cmdr. Of Supply Brig. Gen. Hammond."

The Soldiers returning home have served and fought in some of Iraq's most tumultuous areas, including East-



Lt. Col. Daniel Hendrickson, left, gives one of his soldiers a final salute for his service in Iraq. Soldiers who reached their 24-month service cap were given 'end of tour' awards for their time spent in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

ern Baghdad's Sadr City, Adhamiya and Taji, a city located just 20 miles north of Iraq's capital. Other elements of the battalion have fought in Najaf and aided in Fallujah with the First Calvary Divisions, Second Battalion, Seventh Calvary Regiment. The battalion as a whole has lost nine soldiers and seen 51 wounded in action.

"We've lost good men — they've been wounded and they've been killed,

but none of you quit. You did the right thing," said Hendrickson speaking to soldiers. "I will savor every moment I have shared with you, both bitter and sweet."

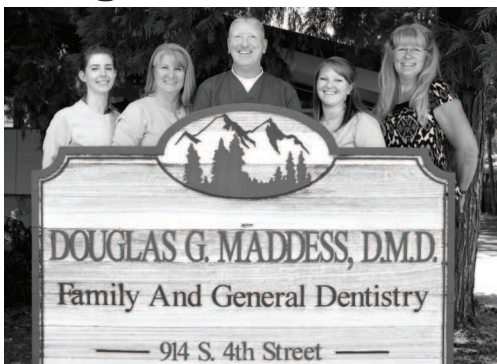
The 30 Oregon soldiers who chose to stay will be paid an extra \$1,000 a month as incentive from the Department of Defense for each month that extends past their 24-month obligation.

Soldiers returning home were expected to arrive in Fort Hood, Texas, last week where they were to spend five days in a series of debriefings before returning to their families in Oregon.

The rest of the battalion will remain in Iraq to complete its scheduled one-year "boots on the ground" rotation. Officials anticipate the rotation will culminate sometime in March.

We Salute our Veterans!

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On Veterans Day, we salute the American veterans and active-duty military whose courage and dedication have protected our freedom and our way of life for generations. We recognize their service and their sacrifice, their selflessness and bravery, their hard work and their faith. Please join us in celebrating the men and women of our military, past and present, this Veterans Day. Proudly fly your flag, thank a veteran and show your support for those who continue to serve today.

Thanks, Veterans!