

Illinois National Guard Soldiers Officially Welcomed Home, Fallen Hero Remembered

Written by Sgt. Michael Camacho, 108th Sustainment Brigade Public Affairs
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PEORIA (03/17/2012)(readMedia)-- Approximately 75 Soldiers with 709th Area Support Medical Company (ASMC) in Peoria were recognized March 17 at Illinois Army National Guard armory in Peoria at their Freedom Salute ceremony honoring their sacrifice and service.

The 709th was mobilized in January in support of Operation New Dawn and came home in November. The 709th provided medical care to more than 14,000 U.S. and coalition servicemembers in Iraq.

As a National Guard unit tasked with a unique mission, the 709th received recognition from active duty counterparts and exceeding other units in overall performance and operations said Maj. Dennis McWherter of Chicago, the 709th's company commander.

Operating out of the Sgt. Ivory Phipps Troops Medical Clinic the 709th was the last primary care medical unit on Joint Base Balad, successfully ending medical operations on the base and transitioning operations to the Iraqi government. As the clinic closed its doors, the 709th brought back the memorial plaque that hung in the clinic honoring Staff Sgt. Ivory Phipps of Chicago, an Illinois Army National Guard Soldier who died in Iraq in 2004. He was posthumously promoted to staff sergeant.

Phipps was assigned to the Paris-based 1544th Transportation Company when he was killed in Iraq on March 17, 2004, said Brig. Gen. Robert Pratt, the director of the Joint Staff from the Illinois National Guard. In 2006 the 710th ASMC from North Riverside opened the Cobra Clinic

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in Balad, the Illinois unit would later begin the process to rename the clinic after Phipps. In 2008 the 206th ASMC of the Missouri National Guard officially renamed the clinic.

The original plaque was given to Phipps' son, Elijah Phipps, 8, accompanied by his mother received the plaque honoring his father.

"I felt proud," said Elijah, "because he did a great job serving the country. He made a great sacrifice."

The unit felt it was only right to give the original plaque to Phipps' son, said McWherter.

"Too often a fallen Soldiers' story is not recorded for their children," he said. "Elijah doesn't have his father to tell his stories. We wanted to give Elijah something to remember his father, something that shows our respect for him and his sacrifice."

Two replicas were made, one given to the 710th ASMC having opened and named the clinic and the other given to the 709th ASMC closing the clinic five years later.

"As Soldiers we will honor our fallen and remember them as they were in life, friends, Soldiers, leaders and truly, truly heroes," said Pratt.

Related Media

- Soldiers with 709th Area Support Medical Company (ASMC) in Peoria were recognized March 17 at Illinois Army National Guard armory in Peoria at their Freedom Salute ceremony honoring their sacrifice. : http://app.readmedia.com/news/attachment/38564/DSC_0548.JPG
- Elijah Phipps, 8, accompanied by his mother, Latoya Phipps, receives the plaque that hung in the Sgt. Ivory Phipps Troop Medical Clinic at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.: http://app.readmedia.com/news/attachment/38565/DSC_0689.JPG
- Elijah Phipps, 8, accompanied by his mother, Latoya Phipps and brother Emmanuel Lindsey, 5, holds the plaque that hung in the Sgt. Ivory Phipps Troop Medical Clinic at Joint Base Balad, Iraq. : http://app.readmedia.com/news/attachment/38566/DSC_0712.JPG

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