

My mother, my hero

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Her hair done up in red, white and blue pigtails, 2-year-old Jaylynn Buchan waited for her mommy to return from her deployment in the Middle East. When soldier Brianna Buchan, of Austin, got to Austin's National Guard armory, she grabbed hold of Jaylynn with all her might.

Mommy and daughter held on to each other tightly. Buchan bombarded that little face with kisses, as Jaylynn offered up smiles and giggles, her pigtails bobbing all around.

"It's amazing," Buchan said. "I couldn't wait to get off the bus. All I want to do is be with her."

Thirty-four soldiers returned to a welcome-home celebration about 2:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Austin National Guard Community Center. The soldiers were part of the 1135th Combat Support Company, 2nd Battalion, 135th Infantry Regiment. They had been deployed in Iraq and Kuwait since August.

Buchan, who returned from her second deployment, had quite the welcoming crew of family and friends, including her mother, Darci Buchan, who had looked after Jaylynn while Brianna was deployed.

Darci Buchan said she was a little worried about how the little one would handle the reunion, since her mom had been away for so long. All appeared well.

"She hasn't let go yet," Darci Buchan said. "I don't think she'll let go for awhile."

The same could be said for others welcoming home their soldiers. Darian Weigel, 19, waited with his brothers and aunt Cassie Boettcher for his dad, Doug Weigel, of Albert Lea, to return home from his fourth deployment.

Since they're veterans of seeing their dad leave and come home from service, Darian Weigel said you get used to it. He was simply looking forward to seeing his dad.

"It'll be nice to have him around," Darian Weigel said.

Plenty of community members also showed up to welcome the soldiers. Knowing that people are thinking about them means something, Brianna Buchan said.

"It helps us out a lot," Brianna Buchan said.

The soldiers were originally scheduled to make their entrance at 3:20 p.m., which was moved up to 1:10 p.m. earlier in the day.

Families milled around the community center as they got updates on where the bus was before it finally arrived at 2:30 p.m. They had already waited months.

"We can wait another hour," Boettcher said.