Thousands line route of Returning Warriors

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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SALEM — In war, far from home, smiles are rare.

However, for Returning Warriors stepping off a tour bus and being greeted by hundreds of patriotic supporters in Easley on Monday afternoon, smiles were easy to come by.

"Man, I feel like a rock star," one appreciative soldier said as he stepped off the bus.

Forty Marines will be staying with host families at Keowee Key and other lake communities for the next three days.

They will be there for much deserved rest and relaxation as The Returning Warriors program enters its third year.

The Marines came to the J.B. Red Owens Sport Complex in Easley and fell in line behind 400 motorcycles lined up, ready to lead them through Clemson, into Seneca and on to Salem.

"To be able to ride these guys into town means a lot to me," Jamie Poole said, who only started riding last year and couldn't wait to participate in this parade.

"It means a lot to a lot of people, as you can see. If we, as a community, can do anything to honor our troops, you can bet your bottom dollar that I'm signing up. Frankly, I think it's sad when so many others don't show their support."

Maggie Wilson, mother of two servicemen in active duty, said it brings tears to her eyes watching so many young men and women get off the bus.

"I would love to be able to say or think, 'There are my sons right there,'" she said. "But they aren't and I can't. They are serving, safely right now, but it's a blessing to see any and all of them return home, alive, even if it is just for a short time. Being a mother of military boys certainly takes its toll on your heart, but my pride for country and them helps make up for it."



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A group of bystanders waves to the passing Marines from the 123 Overpass in Seneca. The 10x19 American flag was hung by Vietnam veteran Lou Hansen, second from left. The flag once flew over the U.S Embassy in Moscow.



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Returning Warriors smile and wave at those welcoming them as their parade comes down U.S. 123.

Celebrate OCONEE!

Cory Minor, 10-year-old son of bike rider Sam Minor, said he has plans to be a Marine when he grows up.

"They are like superheroes," he said. "I especially like their swords that they carry in the commercials. They save lives and fight the bad guys. That's what I want to do."

The Marines will be at Keowee Key for the next three days, enjoying the lake and camaraderie of their fellow Marines.

Tonight, they will be honored at a program that will feature music, games for the kids, fireworks and barbecue plates for $3, starting at 6:30 p.m. at Gignilliat Field in Seneca.

There is no charge to attend the event.

Check upstatetoday.com and The Journal this week for continuing stories and in-depth coverage of their stay.

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