A warm welcome



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A caravan of law enforcement officials, rescue workers, emergency workers and more than 300 motorcyclists escorted 35 Marines down Highway 123 through Easley, Clemson and Seneca before ending up in Keowee Key on Monday to kick off the Marines' visit.

Upstate veterans, residents salute Marines

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
THE JOURNAL

Some would argue that I'm lucky I don't have anyone close to me who is serving in the military.

Since 2001, thousands of lives have been lost in the United States and in the Middle East. Innocent civilians and courageous service people have given the ultimate sacrifice.

We all know this.

Coverage of the latest death toll and terrorist plots might as well pull up an extra seat at the dinner table.

Amid the yellow ribbons that can be found in neighborhoods across the nation and the parents who worry each day about their son's or daughter's safety overseas, the silver lining is very much present.

That silver lining stretched from Columbia all the way to Keowee Key on Monday.



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A local mother gives out a hug to a Marine. Her T-shirt says "Navy Mom," and her son is still serving. "I wanted to come show my respect," she said.

More than 350 motorcyclists, veterans and appreciative residents escorted 35 Marines from Camp Lejeune from Easley to Seneca in a motorcade that was sure to bring goose bumps to onlookers.

All the way down U.S. 123, families donned patriotic colors and waved American flags. Elderly men wore their service uniforms and didn't stop saluting for the entire parade.

Police officers and emergency personnel blocked exits and controlled traffic while taking a moment to salute the CAT bus that carried the heroes.

I had the honor of riding in the motorcade myself, guilty of waving to those who lined the streets.

You just couldn't help it.

For the three hours I spent with the veterans and Marines, there was no mention of the horror and loss that each soldier has experienced. Instead, there were smiles, hugs and handshakes. The young Marines embraced each person who reached out to them.

I came to the conclusion that Marines don't look at people as strangers. Not like the average person does to men and women walking down the street.

How could they? We are the reason they've chosen to fight for our freedom. We couldn't possibly be strangers to them.

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MARINES: To enjoy R&R at Keowee Key

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It is imperative to remember and be thankful for our soldiers.

To be thankful for their sacrifices, their lack of hesitation to fight those who want our nation to become a distant memory.

I know I am.

For the second year, the "Honoring Their Service" program has welcomed these Marines to stay with host families at Keowee Key. During their three-day stay, they will participate in water sports, luncheons, honor services and special dinner events.

Tonight, the Marines will be part of a ceremony honoring all veterans that will take place at Gignilliat Field beginning at 6:30. The public is invited to attend. The event is free. Barbecue will be sold for $3. There will be music, free kids entertainment and a fireworks display.

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