

Welcome Home Ceremony
January 8, 2006

Soldiers, families and friends of Bravo Company: Welcome back to Heidelberg College. But most importantly for our soldiers, welcome home!

Nearly 14 months ago, when we gathered here to send you off on your mission to help grow democracy in Iraq, I remarked that your sacrifice and service remind us of the price of freedom and the privilege of democracy. You helped to pay the price of freedom so we – and the Iraqi people – can enjoy the privilege of democracy.

Know this – we are proud of you. And we are grateful to you. Proud of your valiant service to our country, and grateful for the sacrifices you made on our behalf.

During your deployment, you were never far from our thoughts, and we prayed for this day – your safe return to your families and friends. In your send off ceremony in this gym in November 2004, Capt. Gillmor presented me with a flag and asked that it serve to remind us of you during your time in Iraq.

The flag is a special and cherished gift of the college. We flew it with pride here at Heidelberg on the 11 th and 12 th of every month since your departure as a reminder of your sacrifice and service.

It will remain an important part of the college's history and retained in our archives with each of your names for years to come.

I expect I speak for many who are in this gym when I say that I am humbled to be in your presence today – in the presence of true heroes. The late tennis star Arthur Ashe said this about heroes: *“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”*

When you made a commitment to our country, I'm sure you did it without the expectation of fanfare or accolades, but rather, as Arthur Ashe said, out of your deep sense of service to others.

Let me be among the first in the days ahead to say ***thank you*** for your service. ***Thank you*** for the sacrifices you made – sacrifices that only you and those closest to you can know. ***Thank you*** for protecting and preserving the freedom that we enjoy every day.

As a small gesture of our thanks to you, we are providing each of you with a \$1,000 scholarship to Heidelberg College. Some of you may use it. Others may not. Regardless, as an educational institution we believe it to be the most meaningful way that we can express our gratitude for your service.

It is a great privilege and honor to host you and your families and friends for this celebration today. You have our highest admiration and you have our thanks.

Godspeed on the next step in your life's journey and welcome home.