

MARTINSVILLE BULLETIN

Family welcomes Marine home

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By PAUL COLLINS AND KIM BARTO - Bulletin Staff Writers

Yellow bows, a welcome-home poster and decorations in red, white and blue welcomed Marine Pfc. Clifton Dean Barrow Jr. home to his mother and stepfather's Axton residence Monday evening.

Hours earlier, inside Beverly and Tim Riddle's house, 15 or more relatives and friends were eagerly awaiting word from Barrow, who would soon be arriving on a flight to Atlanta for a 15-day break from his tour of duty in Al Sad, Iraq.

The call came: After a layover in Atlanta, Barrow was to fly to the airport in Greensboro, N.C., on Monday afternoon. A caravan of friends and family members, perhaps 20 or more, planned to drive to Greensboro to greet Barrow and bring him back home to Axton. The vehicles were decorated with messages and signs in his honor.

Barrow's sister Melissa Francisco of Axton said that nearly 25 businesses in Henry County and Martinsville also were displaying signs, such as, "Welcome Home, Pfc. Barrow."

The welcome party planned to beat Barrow to the airport and meet him at the gate with their signs, but their plan was foiled when his flight came in early, said his mother, Beverly Riddle. Nevertheless, it was a happy, tear-filled reunion, full of "big ole hugs," she said.

"I don't know how to even say it. It's indescribable," Riddle said. "We're so thankful he's home. We've counted down the days."

Barrow was all smiles as his friends and family readied for a big dinner and party in his honor. "I knew they were planning something, but just the surge of emotions was unexpected," he said of his homecoming.

Sweating slightly in his uniform as he stood in the early evening heat, Barrow nonetheless insisted, "It's not hot here, compared to Iraq. It's 120 degrees over there. When the wind blows, it feels like a hair dryer."

Barrow said his first deployment was "a little bit of culture shock at first, and then you get used to it." Spending major holidays apart from family was hard, he said, but he also found himself "missing the little things, like wearing tennis shoes and jeans."



Family and friends gave Pfc. Clifton Dean Barrow Jr. a big welcome Monday evening, when he returned to Axton for a 15-day break from a tour of duty in Iraq. The group celebrated with dinner and a party in Barrow's honor at the home of his mother and stepfather, Beverly and Tim Riddle. Here, Shirley Morton hugs Barrow, her grandson, shortly after he arrived home.

When he got home Monday, one of the first things Barrow did was change out of his uniform into jeans and a T-shirt. "Today was the first time I've worn jeans in six months," he said. Several family members and friends at the home Monday expressed how proud they are of Barrow. His mother and maternal grandmother, Shirley Morton of Axton, said they are proud too, but they have been afraid for him.

"It was so good seeing him, but of course I cried," Morton said of their reunion. She also said she has been very worried. "I didn't want him to go."

Morton said Barrow helped put Christmas decorations up for her every year, but this year he wasn't home for Christmas, so she didn't put decorations up. "I'm not putting any up till he's back to put them up," she said.

Morton said she is "so happy" about his return and "very proud" of him. She said a lot of men tried to go into the Marine Corps but "couldn't make it through boot camp" at Parris Island, S.C. "He left a boy and came back a man," she said of her grandson.

Clifton Barrow, now 20, graduated in 2007 from Magna Vista High School, where he played saxophone in the marching band. He had played football and baseball at Laurel Park High School before consolidation.

After graduating from high school and working at a local restaurant, he felt he didn't have much of a future, job-wise, so he began to consider joining the Marine Corps, Riddle said. The first time a recruiter came, "I cried the whole time," Riddle said. The recruiter backed off and so did her son, she said, noting that Barrow wanted her to approve. But a couple of months later, "he said, 'I feel like I'm not going anywhere,'" and Riddle gave her approval, though it was not legally required. She said she didn't want him to join because of the danger. "I was scared to death. I'm still scared to death," Riddle said.

Barrow joined the Marines in April 2008. After completing boot camp, he was stationed at Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C., before leaving in late January 2009 for a tour of duty in Iraq, Riddle said. She believes his deployment will end around February 2010, and then he will return to Camp Lejeune for several months. He more than likely will have a tour of duty in Afghanistan beginning in 2010, Riddle said.

She said Barrow communicates with her just about every day, or, if he's on assignment, every few days. "If I don't hear from him every day, I worry, or every other day," Riddle said. Tim Riddle, Barrow's stepfather, said, "I'm very proud of him. He's serving (his) country. I'm glad he's coming home."

Barrow is not allowed to talk about much of what he does in Iraq, Beverly Riddle said, noting that her son is in the motor pool and "very mechanically inclined."

In all, Barrow is scheduled to serve four years of active duty and two years of nonactive duty. He said he does not plan to make a career of the military. Instead, it is "a first stepping stone in life."

After he finishes his service, Barrow said he wants to take advantage of his military education benefits and study mechanical engineering in college.

Jonathan Fulcher, a friend of Barrow's who is in the USMC Reserves, said: "It's very honorable him being over there. ... We're all very proud of him. It was hard to see him leave. We're glad he's back."

Beverly Riddle said that plans for the 15 days Barrow will be home will be up to him. Barrow will want to spend time with friends and family and enjoy his 2000 Mustang that he's paid to have refurbished with a new paint job, tinted windows, sound system, and new wheels and exhaust system. She described the car as "awesome."

Barrow is assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 10th Marine Regiment, Detachment 1 Headquarters, according to information supplied to the Bulletin. He has received these awards: Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal and National Defense and Iraqi Campaign medals.

His father is Clifton Barrow Sr. of Ridgeway; and other grandparents are Jackie Morton of Axton, Huel Puryear of Roxboro, N.C., and Katherine Seay of Ridgeway.

