

Bravery, freedom, faith on display

written by Malea Hargett |



Two Marine reservists from Little Rock were surprised with a pint-sized welcome home celebration April 28 at Christ the King School.

Capt. Jud McDaniel and Corporal Jeremy Jagers have been pen pals to a first-grade class because they are related to two of the students. McDaniel is the father of Aimsley McDaniel and Jagers is the uncle of Landry Williams. For eight months the two parishioners served in Iraq in the India Company and returned home April 24.

The 750 students waved American flags and screamed as the Marines and their families entered the gym for the school-wide program, which included four songs and prayers.

"There were days it was really hard for me and Jeremy," McDaniel told the students, thanking them for the care packages and prayers. "It got us through the days and the hard weeks. I can't ever begin to repay you. ... I will never forget this. Christ the King has been a special home for me and my family."

Jagers, 24, asked the children to continue to support the troops.

"It kind of lifts your spirits," he said of the children's cards. "It is like Groundhog Day there. You do the same thing every day. It is a little touch of home."

McDaniel served in the Marines for four years, went back to civilian life for a while and then joined the Reserves as an infantry officer.

"I'm done. I'm getting out. I've had my fill," he said.

McDaniel, who was self-employed as a home builder before leaving for Iraq, is currently looking for a job. Jagers, a rifleman for the Reserves, plans to study history and German at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock this fall.