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Joy and grief bring war home to Upstate
Hugs, smiles, tears welcome Guard unit

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SPARTANBURG -- Amid the pomp and circumstance, hugs were given, tears flowed and one soldier stood holding his baby, simply touching hands and feet with a look of awe on his face.

Greenville mother Ora Donald hugged her daughter, Sgt. 1st Class Cathy Donald.

"I'm thankful to God that she's home," Ora Donald said.

The 35 citizen soldiers in the South Carolina Army National Guard returned safely Wednesday to the National Armory in Spartanburg from a year's duty in Afghanistan.

Advertisement They're not scheduled to go back, according to Staff Sgt. Julie Weathers. The Guard, known as "citizen soldiers," intended to serve in emergencies such as hurricanes, fires and riots, drill one weekend per month and two weeks every year, Weathers said.

The 228th Signal Brigade Forward 5 climbed off a bus to a cheering crowd.

Ora Donald told The Greenville News, "You pray for them all, not just for your own. I'm still trying to figure out why we're over there in the first place."

But her daughter said she told her mother, "We needed to help out. We needed to make sure we don't have problems on our own soil."

The group that returned worked to support the Afghan communications infrastructure, according to Weathers.

Fewer than 600 of the state's Guard troops are deployed now in Iraq, Afghanistan and the United States, said South Carolina Guard spokesman Col. Pete Brooks. Two years ago, the state Guard deployed 4,000, he said.

U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, who welcomed the troops, told The Greenville News the recent resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan isn't surprising.

Although the military is saying troop strength is sufficient, he is certain Congress would give President Bush and military commanders funding if more were needed.

He said, "The Taliban seemed to me to be very fanatical in their determination for a theocratic state. We don't support theocracies."

Simpsonville resident Katherine Keasler, who welcomed her son, Sgt. Kentrelle Scott, home, said, "You stay pent up the whole year, and you don't realize the release that you feel once you see them get off that bus or

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that plane. It's just a load of weight off your shoulders. It's joy."
