

OUR STORIES

Welcome Home, Sgt. Mitchell... your daughters miss their hugs



(Top Photo: Sgt. Naysheelia Mitchell surprises her daughters, Toni and Danyelle, after returning home early from a tour of duty in Korea. (Photo/Jill Moberley, Dayton Public School)

(Below Photo: Sgt. Naysheelia Mitchell with her daughters, Toni (left) and Danyelle (right). (Photo/Jill Moberley, Dayton Public Schools)

The day began like any other. Toni and Danyelle Gaddis jumped out of bed, donned their school uniforms, and with a little nudge from dad, were off to class at Valerie PreK-6 School. Toni joined her classmates in the fifth grade, while Danyelle joined the third graders. Teachers taught, lunch was served, and then it was on to an assembly where Montgomery County deputies warned the children about the dangers of drugs.

That is where any similarity ends. Members of the media arrived and stood inside the gymnasium, cameras rolling. Teachers seemed anxious as Principal Shawnkeida Whitlow unveiled a rather unusual plan for an otherwise usual day. The principal told the students sitting

in the gymnasium bleachers to wave their newly acquired American Flags when they heard a special cue from Deputy Larry Lane. Lane called for two volunteers from the audience to help him. He coincidentally selected Toni and Danyelle, or so it seemed. The plan was put into action. Students heard their cue, started to wave their flags, and out walked the girls' mother (have tissues handy), who just returned home from a one-year deployment in Korea.

"Mommy!" Danyelle exclaimed. "I was excited and shocked. I was surprised, maybe it wasn't real."

It was real, alright. There was Naysheelia Mitchell in full Army fatigues, ready and waiting to greet her two daughters. Toni looked stunned at the sight of her mother, who surprised her girls with a homecoming one week earlier than expected.



"I turned the other way at first. I didn't know she was behind me. I hugged her. I missed her a lot," Toni said.

"(I thought) She was coming in six more days. I was counting down the days," Danyelle said.

Both girls say they missed their mother's hugs the most, and oh yes, let us not forget, the way their mother makes a tasty pot of green beans.

Cooking skills aside, Sgt. Mitchell spent the last year in Korea, working as a supply specialist. It is her job to handle equipment and supply requests in her unit. She enlisted in the Army eight years ago, having also served in Iraq and Afghanistan, so communicating with her daughters hasn't always been easy. They are often bonding over FaceTime on the internet or on the phone.

"They're getting older, so it's hard to talk on the phone. It's 'hi mommy, bye mommy,' but I call them daily," Sgt. Mitchell said.

Mitchell, who is a 2004 graduate of Patterson Co-op High School, will spend two weeks with her family, then head to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where she will be stationed. Her daughters will join her in December.