

# Working with the Red Cross — My Second Day

By Shani Lewis



**Hugs were plenty as soldiers returned**

I couldn't believe he could be so grateful because I didn't see my involvement in moving items out of a van as that valuable. Later, when I walked into the room where the majority of the families were sitting and waiting, I felt a little awkward and uncomfortable. All around me there were soldiers and Red Cross volunteers preparing for the arrival of the troops, and family and friends specifically waiting for someone. Knowing I was only there for the experience as a public relations intern made me feel slightly guilty.

There were people there hurting because they hadn't seen their husbands or wives or children for nearly a year. Before going to Fort Dix to see the soldiers come in I didn't think about the wars much. But being around these families made me want to learn more about what they were going through.

I started talking to families one by one, some longer than others. One young woman told me she married her husband just a few days before he left for Afghanistan and had no real contact with him except for phone conversations. Another woman told me she was waiting for her brother who has been in the service for ten years. There were

children and families wearing t-shirts with cute slogans about their fathers' coming home. Also, I met a board member of the Burlington County Red Cross chapter there to welcome back his nephew who was stationed in Afghanistan.

However, I wasn't prepared for the feeling that welled up inside of me when I saw families running to embrace each other when the soldiers arrived. Seeing genuine happiness of people just in that moment overwhelmed me to tears. And taking pictures of these families, who were not concerned about anything else but being with each other, was well worth the wait. This was definitely an experience. I am glad I had the opportunity to be part of it!



**Burlington County Red Cross board member with his nephew**

I began my internship with the American Red Cross on Thursday, May 28th. On Friday, we headed down to Fort Dix. I never really considered what to expect before arriving at the base, even though I was told I would see many families and children anxiously waiting for their soldiers. The idea didn't fully set in until I actually got there and took a look around myself and wondered, "What am I getting myself into?"

Unloading the vans into the kitchen with the supplies for the families awaiting the soldiers' arrival didn't make me feel like I was making a huge difference in anyone's life, but then one soldier came over and shook my hand and thanked me for being with the Red Cross and helping out with the arrivals. I



**Newlyweds reunite for first time since departure**