

Lansing businessman brings soldiers home

Brig. Gen. Robert V. Taylor commands 8,000 men and women in the Michigan Army National Guard.

In an e-mail to me this week, Taylor offered his best salute to a Lansing businessman he called "a truly great American and selfless servant."

High praise from an old soldier. But as Taylor sees it, the businessman in question — Kellie Dean of Dean Transportation — gave 47 local soldiers something priceless: Thanksgiving Day with their families, before shipping out to Kuwait.

The 47 were members of the National Guard's 263rd Personnel Service Detachment, which left Lansing in mid-October, bound for a mobilization station in southern Indiana. There, they would be prepared for their role in the war.



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Just before Thanksgiving the soldiers learned they would receive four-day passes. That was the good news; the bad news was that each soldier was responsible for his or her own travel arrangements and costs.

For many, the general said, that became "cost prohibitive and logistically challenging."

Homeward bound

Taylor said he still doesn't know how Dean learned of the situation, but on the day before Thanksgiving, he sent one of his

company's executive coaches to southern Indiana to retrieve the 263rd.

Taylor said he happened to be visiting the soldiers in Indiana when they learned that Dean's coach was on its way.

"Calling it a celebratory mood," he wrote, "would be a gross understatement."

Taylor also was with the soldiers four days later when they gathered at the National Guard Armory for their return to Indiana on the Dean coach.

"Tears were flowing," the general wrote, "but, unlike the first goodbye, all the family members were more upbeat. Most expressed their sincere appreciation for the bus transportation, and the unscheduled reunion."

Taylor added: "I am not sure Kellie Dean truly understands what he did for

those soldiers and their families."

Contacted Tuesday, Dean said it was a supremely simple decision: "We saw an opportunity to bring some soldiers home and we did it. It made us feel real good."

On Tuesday, the 263rd left Indiana for Kuwait.

Local hero

CHARLOTTE — While not everyone in Charlotte knows about native son Francis C. Flaherty, some certainly do.

As I wrote Tuesday, Flaherty died in the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, earning a Medal of Honor in the process.

The Rev. Denis Spitzley of St. Mary Catholic Church e-mailed to say that Flaherty was reared in that church, and that the build-

ing includes a memorial to him.

Also, Don Colizzi of Charlotte wrote: "In 2000, three other veterans and I decided it was time to honor Francis Flaherty, so we raised the funds and had a monument constructed.

"The monument, which also honors Michael Hudson (a Civil War Medal of Honor recipient) was dedicated on Memorial Day 2000. It sits in front of the flagpole on the lawn of our courthouse in downtown Charlotte."

One other thing: American Legion Post 42 in Charlotte is named after Flaherty.

What do you think? Call John Schneider at 377-1175, send a fax to 377-1298 or e-mail jschneid@lsj.com.

Include your name, phone number, city, town or township.