

# South Dakota National Guard

## Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: [pao@sd.ngb.army.mil](mailto:pao@sd.ngb.army.mil)  
Web: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil>  
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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **200th Engineer Co. returns home from deployment**

PIERRE, S.D. – Soldiers of the 200th Engineer Company reunited with family, friends and community members today in Pierre after a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan.

The 184 Soldiers of the 200th received a hero's welcome, as hundreds of people gathered to cheer and greet the returning South Dakota Army National Guard unit along the streets of Fort Pierre and Pierre. More than 2,000 people were in attendance at Riggs High School for a welcome home ceremony held in their honor.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Sen. John Thune, Pierre Mayor Laurie Gill, Fort Pierre Mayor Sam Tidball, and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, the adjutant general of the SDNG, were featured speakers at the ceremony and congratulated them for a job well done.

"I want to say thank you to each and every one of you for what you have done for your fellow Americans, fellow South Dakotans and for the people of Afghanistan," said Daugaard. "We are safe and we're free. You don't need body armor to come to Riggs High School gym. You don't need body armor to stand on a parade route and clap. You don't have to worry about IEDs as people applaud your return home. The reason you don't need any of those things is because of the American Soldier."

"It is great to have you back...I am extremely proud of this unit," said Reisch. "The South Dakota National Guard has a tremendous legacy that goes back 150 years, and this unit – without question – has extended that legacy."

"Today, we are filled with a lot of pride and joy as we come back from our tour in Afghanistan," said Capt. James Forbes, 200th commander. "The Soldiers did an outstanding job over there. We had a mission where we really helped the people of Afghanistan. Civilians needed those bridges just as bad as U.S. and coalition troops needed them."

The 200th, of Pierre, Chamberlain and Mobridge, deployed in May 2011 as a multi-role bridging unit with a mission to maintain, repair and replace existing military bridges throughout Afghanistan.

While in Afghanistan, members of the 200th built five bridges, deconstructed one, completed 54 bridge repair missions, conducted 10 reconnaissance missions to support theater engineer operations, and conducted 16 inspection missions to support theater bridging operations.

To complete these missions, the 200th traveled a total of 12,500 miles throughout five regional commands in the country – sometimes traveling up to 760 miles on a single mission, and increasing their exposure to the number one enemy tactic in Afghanistan, improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

Additionally, supply and maintenance personnel for the 200th were responsible for more than \$110 million in equipment – three and a half times the amount of equipment that the same staff size is responsible for back in the United States. Maintenance personnel raised the initial readiness rate of this

equipment from 61 percent, when the unit first arrived in theater, to 95 percent in four months. The unit also constructed a new maintenance facility to support current and future operations for follow on U.S. forces.

“We pushed our Soldiers hard over there. We pushed them to high standards because we knew what kind of Soldiers they were, and they executed every mission we through at them,” said Forbes. “With all these great things that we did, none of it would have happened if it weren’t for the outstanding support we got back here in South Dakota – from our families, our communities and our employers.”

The 200th was awarded one Purple Heart Medal, nine Bronze Star Medals, 13 Navy Commendation Medals, two Navy Achievement Medals, 144 Army Commendation Medals and 33 Army Achievement Medals for their efforts in Afghanistan. An additional 21 Combat Action Badges were awarded to unit members for having received direct enemy fire while on missions.

“We accomplished a lot over there. However, today is also a day of sadness. We have two huge holes in our ranks,” said Forbes.

Spc. Dennis Jensen died from injuries suffered in an accident on Aug. 16 while working with bridge materials near Camp Leatherneck in Helmand province in southern Afghanistan.

Spc. Jared Roe also died in a boating accident on May 9 in South Dakota, one week prior to the unit’s deployment.

“Dennis and Jared, you’re gone but not forgotten,” said Forbes.

This was the second deployment for the 200th, the unit deployed to Iraq in 2003-04 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

“We really walked away from this deployment proud of what we’ve done,” said Forbes. “We definitely left a positive mark on Afghanistan.”

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**120512-A-1234X-006:** Capt. James Forbes, center, commander of the 200th Engineer Company, is congratulated by Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard, during a welcome home ceremony for the unit at Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D., May 12, 2012, after completing a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (SDNG photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss) (RELEASED)



**120512-A-1234X-007:** Soldiers of the 200th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, stand during “roll call” at the welcome home ceremony for the unit at Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D., May 12, 2012, after completing a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (SDNG photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss) (RELEASED)



**120512-A-1234X-003:** Staff Sgt. Jeff Wright, a Soldier with the 200th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, shares a laugh with his niece, Lakyn, during the welcome home ceremony for the unit at Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D., May 12, 2012, after completing a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (SDNG photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss) (RELEASED)



**120512-A-1234X-010:** Gov. Dennis Daugaard speaks during the welcome home ceremony for the 200th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, at Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D., May 12, 2012, after the unit completed a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (SDNG photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss) (RELEASED)



**120512-A-1234X-011:** Capt. James Forbes speaks during the welcome home ceremony for the 200th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, at Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D., May 12, 2012, after the unit completed a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (SDNG photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss) (RELEASED)



**120512-A-1234X-002:** Staff Sgt. Cory Icenogle, a Soldier with the 200th Engineer Company, South Dakota Army National Guard, holds his daughters, Faith and Rebekah, during the welcome home ceremony for the unit at Riggs High School in Pierre, S.D., May 12, 2012, after completing a yearlong deployment to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. (SDNG photo by Maj. Anthony Deiss) (RELEASED)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** please contact Maj. Anthony Deiss at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail [pao@sd.ngb.army.mil](mailto:pao@sd.ngb.army.mil).