



ference, so I recommend making all of your South Dakota and Nebraska friends and family aware of that before you leave so they don't call you at 5 o'clock in the morning Alaska time!!

First on my itinerary was the Welcome Home ceremony held the day following my arrival.

What a sight to see!

More than 3,000 soldiers dressed in uniform in one building. Although the ceremony was a short one, it was a very humbling time for me. As I looked all around me, I was surrounded by brave men and women who have chosen to defend our country, sacrificing, among other things, their safety and time with family and friends. I won't lie. I felt a little insignificant standing amongst all of them, but immensely proud to be an American. The ceremony included honoring the fallen and wounded soldiers of the unit and I reminded myself how fortunate I was to be able to sit next to my son and not down on the main floor with those families who lost someone or were caring for a wounded soldier.

My fondest moment of the entire ceremony was when the soldiers all stood to sing. (I don't recall EVER hearing my son sing a single note, so this was special!) The USARAK March was sung first but when they launched into The Army Song, and sang the line "the army's on its way", it literally sent a chill up my spine. It still brings tears to my eyes just thinking about it.

Like our very own Charlie Battery, these soldiers are proud to do what they do and are 100% dedicated to defending the best

place in the world to live, the great United States of America. I am so proud to have a son who is a part of this group.

After the ceremony, I was cordially invited to a 'hell and farewell' party. Normally I say yes to a party invitation, but I wasn't so sure about this one based on the name. It was sort of like a "mini-roast" of the soldiers that are leaving the military or are transferring to another duty station. The company's First Sergeant makes them all stand in front of the crowd. He talks about each one and the accomplishments they had made and what their future plans are. And then the fun begins. Anyone in the crowd is welcome to say something about that soldier. And let me tell you, they don't hold back. It's all in fun though and a good send off by their buddies who have been through a lot together and formed lasting friendships.

Throughout the course of my stay, I indulged in great food!

I had the best fresh Alaskan salmon at a busy little restaurant in downtown Anchorage called Humpy's. Apparently, it's a popular place to go, since it was packed on a Tuesday evening! I wondered what the weekends would have been like? I fully intended to have king crab legs but they were a little too expensive for my poor little pocketbook. I assumed that they would be more reasonably priced in Alaska since they are abundant there, but not so. In fact I could get them for about half their price at any of our seafood restaurants. (But then again, I thought their gas prices would be

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