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From Beasley to Iraq — and back

By Randy Lefko

PALATKA — Air Force 1st Lt. Amy Wallace made a quick stop at Beasley Middle School to return some items sent to her for Christmas, but she wasn't there for a refund — just to say thank you.

"The kids sent my crew in Iraq a Christmas package of tree ornaments and it just made our Christmas that much more special," said Wallace, a 1999 Palatka High School graduate. "I just wanted to come back, say thanks and give them back to them so they can give them to other children if they want. It was very special."

Wallace's sister, Mary Bock, teaches eighth-grade math at Beasley and invited Wallace. Her parents are Earl and Ann Williams in Palatka.

"I have kept in touch with her and some friends from around here, but we don't get much down time over there," she said.

Wallace was passing through Palatka en route to Fort Benning, Ga., to attend airborne jump school. She is a communications expert in the Joint Communication Support Element. She started her active duty in Guam, but in November she was shipped to her base command in Balad, Iraq. Wallace was there from November until March.

"We were on a base so the danger level is minimum," she said. "But, it is there. I don't leave the base area too often. We are a highly mobile unit and can get deployed anywhere in the world."

Wallace entertained questions from her audience who were students in Lanny Taylor's eighth grade class and Jan Vandiver's 6-8th graders. Taylor initiated the present to Wallace after getting word from Bock that her sister was in the overseas battle.

"I was sending three packages through the any soldier.com Web site that allows for such items," said Taylor. "I was told Amy was over there by her sister, so we unboxed, repacked and sent our items to her."

Wallace was appreciative of the gesture and gave a folded American flag to the school and also certificates of appreciation from her Air Force unit for Taylor and Vandiver. She even signed autographs for the students.

"It is nice for any of us to get mail," she said. "They even sent Ramen noodles, which are great."

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