

US Cavalry/Infantryman surprises nieces at CVES

By Lisa Fischer

SCOTIA -- “Autumn and Alandra knew their Uncle JJ was coming back, they just didn’t know when,” said their mom Melissa Smith. “He leaves the states next week for his reassignment in Germany.”

JJ Smith is a 15-year active duty member of the U.S. Army who was accompanied to Central Valley Elementary School (CVES) by his sister Melissa, mother Peggy Griffin and step-son DJ Griffin. The trio spent the afternoon with Autumn and Alandra after spending the morning at Ord Elementary where JJ surprised his brother Stuart’s three children. His final surprise visit was reserved for his daughters who reside in Deshler.

“What is miss most when I’m away from Nebraska is my family and the farm fresh food,” JJ added. “I love what I get to do though, and I’m looking forward to living in Baumbauer, Germany.”

JJ graduated from St. Paul High School in 2000. After graduating, he joined the Army Reserves, and joined the U.S. Army two years later. He completed Basic Training at Fort Sill, Okla., and Advanced Individualized Training, as a Heavy Equipment Operator, in Texas. After his initial assignment in Fort Bragg, N.C., he was sent to Fort Riley, Kans. and then to Fort Hood, Texas. While actively serving his country, JJ was sent to Iraq and Kuwait twice and Turkey once. He operates heavy equipment as part of the 1st U.S. Army Cavalry Division and the 1st U.S. Army Infantry Division.

“I operate truck and trailers that weigh about 140 tons, with a load capacity of 70 tons” JJ noted. “That’s a lot of weight rolling down the road.”

Initially, joining the military was a way for JJ to earn money to help pay for college. After becoming an active duty member of the U.S. Army in 2003, he learned it was much more than a way to pay college tuition. JJ recalls a humanitarianism mission where he was tasked with helping set up and rebuild Iraqi schools. A young child, who stood quietly nearby, caught his attention and gently kicked a soccer ball in his direction.



He recalled laughing and kicking the ball back and forth with the child for almost an hour.

“Kindness knows no language,” JJ added. “We’re protecting back here, by helping over there.”

Even though JJ is looking forward to his time abroad, he is already planning on trips back to Nebraska to visit his family and for his wife Laurie to come and stay with him while he is overseas. He appreciates his time serving his country and can hardly wait to experience Germany.

“Life is as big as you make it,” JJ said.