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Welcoming Troops from the Front at Dawn

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Welcoming Troops from the Front at Dawn

SYLVIA ROJAS VAUGHN

The time was approximate until early that morning, when the terminal at D/FW was also disclosed. We dressed in red, white and blue, carried baskets of chocolate bars, stuck miniature flags in gimme caps. We talked about shaking hands with the service men and women, perhaps patting their shoulders, backs. We wondered if any would stop for a moment to share a war story or say they couldn't wait to see Heather back home. The USO organizers passed out lapel pins, announced we must observe some rules. For safety. Our jaws dropped as if we'd just learned confetti cannons had shelled the enemy outside the Green Zone. No cheering or clapping. No sudden movements. Allow the returning personnel to initiate contact. Smile but don't wave. We quieted ourselves as the GIs strode past—some smiled and waved, many accepted candy, some looked straight ahead, expressionless. They all stopped at a cooler to fish out bottled water before boarding an idling bus.