

Foundation Grants 1st Indiana Wish (6th Overall) to Family Who Lost Home in Fire



December 15, 2009

Specialist Christopher Rekitzke (13-13 EN) returned home from northern Iraq last week, but not under ideal circumstances. The 33-year-old Cedar Lake resident, who joined the National Guard 3 years ago, returned home after finding out the home he and his wife, Annie, had recently updated, caught fire and burned beyond repair. The Dec. 2 blaze began accidentally, and investigators believe it was ignited by an iron. Neither Annie nor their 4 children were hurt, but the family lost a dog and two cats to the fire.

Specialist Rekitzke deployed last June with a National Guard Engineer Company performing tactical counterinsurgency and civilian projects.

"Imagine being 7,500 miles away and getting the call that your home and everything we had was gone. I was in shock. I couldn't believe it," he said.

Although he already used his leave in September to come home and celebrate their wedding anniversary, the Army sent him home again to help restore his family's financial affairs.

THE WISH

"We have been in contact with the leadership at Camp Atterbury and heard that this family was in need of everything, from clothes to food," said Jeff Wells, President of *Wish For Our Heroes*. "We wanted to take some of the pressure off of Christopher and Annie, by helping to provide their children with a nice Christmas."

So, Gary and Harry Sherman, members of the Foundation board and owners of The Phoenix Group, deployed to Cedar Lake on Tuesday and personally delivered wrapped gifts consisting of hats, gloves, coats for all, Star Wars and GI Joe figures, a \$500 Meijer gift card for groceries, and a pocket digital photo storage device so Christopher can view his family's photos wherever he goes. A total value of \$2,000. 'It was truly an honor to meet such a wonderful family and to give them a morning of smiles during this very difficult time,' said Gary Sherman.

The Rekitzke's have had a huge outpouring from their community, and the family plans to build a new home next year. First, another eight months on the battlefield for Christopher, as he returns to Iraq on Wednesday, December 16th. Christopher had previously held a management position at Wal-Mart, where Annie and he first met, but he reflected, "I had an opportunity to sign on with the Army. Now I know I'm making a difference, and what I'm doing is greater than just making money for someone. I am very proud of my service."



Gary and Harry Sherman presented the Rekitzke's with gifts for the holidays.