



Ben DeVries/Rockford Register Star

U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo (left) and Mayor Doug Scott draw cheers Saturday at the Support Our Troops rally at Memorial Hall in Rockford. At least 400 people attended the rally.

WAR ON IRAQ: RALLY FOR TROOPS

Hundreds support 'vote of freedom'

By **CARRIE WATTERS**
Rockford Register Star

ROCKFORD — A veteran stoically sat with wetness in his old, blue eyes as another pair of baby blues shown in the face of a Navy-dressed toddler, who squirmed in the arms holding him Saturday afternoon at Memorial Hall.

They were two of at least 400 people who filled the veteran-dedicated hall in a Support Our Troops rally.

It was a crowd with its wind momentarily knocked out as a KIA, killed in action, was among the names of active-duty troops read one by one.

The Indiana soldier, who died in the 10-day-old war in Iraq, was remembered at the rally by his godfather.

Among speakers drawing patriotic cheers and flag-waving were Mayor Doug Scott and U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan.

People filling the main floor and balcony with hands joined in song were parents of soldiers, a daughter whose mother is in Iraq, children with fathers away from home, and a young woman tightly hugging a framed photo of a U.S. Marine in dress blues.

Manzullo told the crowd the toughest vote of a congressman is the vote to go to war. "It's a vote of freedom," he said. "America has to commit itself to our principals to keep the war from coming here."

The youngest son of Debbie Johnson of Shannon wore his National Guard uniform to the rally. The Eastland High School senior said he is ready to be activated. "I want nothing more than to join my brothers in arms," said Zach Johnson, 18, with the polite manners of a well-trained soldier.

Even among the patriotic crowd, literature promoting peace silently was passed by a few. But both sides of the war were put aside as people cheered in support of U.S. troops.

"It's the soldier, not the politician, that gives the right to vote," said Darrell Gilgan of Rockford VietNow, in closing remarks. "It's the soldier, not the reporter, who gives freedom of the press."

Contact: cwatters@registerstar
tower.com; 815-987-1242