Anheuser-Busch Picks Soldier, Hometown to Star in Super Bowl Ad

MIKE SCHNEIDER, Associated Press

In this undated photo provided by Anheuser-Busch, Lt. Chuck Nadd and his girlfriend Shannon Cantwell wave as they ride aboard the famously-red Budweiser beer wagon pulled by Clydesdales in a parade, led by a marching band in Winter Park, Fla. The brewer has fashioned an ad around the parade that will run during the Super Bowl.**(AP Photo/Anheuser-Busch, Hand Out)**

WINTER PARK, Fla. (AP) — Lt. Chuck Nadd knew something was up when Anheuser-Busch's private jet flew him from Fort Drum in New York to his hometown in central Florida within hours of his return from a tour in Afghanistan in early January.

The 24-year-old Army helicopter pilot and operations officer had been told he was on a public affairs assignment to give a speech to a Veterans of Foreign Wars group in his hometown. But when he got to downtown Winter Park, hundreds of residents, relatives, teachers and friends greeted him with a surprise parade complete with tickertape and Anheuser-Busch's Clydesdale horses.

The brewer, which played a central role in putting the parade together, has fashioned an ad around the event. It will run during Sunday's Super Bowl, and Nadd says he hopes it gets people talking about honoring returning soldiers.

"I hope the visibility it gets starts a conversation about recognizing those who have served and served in a greater capacity than I have," Nadd said Thursday. "I would hope this commercial helps people look for those heroes in their communities."

Nadd's involvement in the ad started when his girlfriend, Shannon Cantwell, nominated him for a VFW contest to honor a soldier with a tickertape parade in the soldier's hometown.

Shortly before Christmas she found out Nadd, a 2011 West Point graduate, had been chosen. Cantwell made arrangements for his mother to come in from Alabama where she now lives and for friends to fly in from around the nation.

In Winter Park, a well-heeled city of 30,000 known for its boutique shops and high-end restaurants along tony Park Avenue, city officials were contacted by the local film commission with a question: Could they put together a parade in two weeks? They were told the parade was for a local soldier and sponsored by Anheuser-Busch, working with the Defense Department.

"The logistics were a little tough since the whole thing had to come together in two weeks' time," said Randy Knight, Winter Park's city manager.

But within two weeks, 60 film production workers had come to Winter Park.

Meanwhile in Afghanistan, Nadd was told by his battalion leader on Christmas Eve that he would be going home a week-and-a-half sooner than expected for his "public affairs" assignment. He also was told a camera crew would be following him when he returned for a "documentary" about soldiers coming back from Afghanistan.

He returned to Fort Drum in early January and less than 24 hours later he was on the private jet to metro Orlando. Cantwell, who works in Washington for U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, surprised him at the airport in a moment that is captured in the Super Bowl ad.

"I knew something was up when Shannon greeted me," Nadd said.

From the airport, they drove to downtown Winter Park. Nadd noticed the barricades closing off streets and then saw the crowd of hundreds of people waiting for him. Some held signs that read "We're glad you're home!"

"It was a surprise," said Nadd, who has a look of amazement in the ad when he is told the parade is for him.

Nadd and Cantwell were pulled by Clydesdales aboard the famously-red Budweiser beer wagon through blowing tickertape, led by a marching band, police motorcycles and cheerleaders from his prep school.

The best part of the parade for Nadd was at the end. Not only was he greeted by a bleacher filled with his friends and family from different parts of his life, but his mother was there, jumping up and down in excitement and waving an American flag.

Although the parade was staged for an ad, the emotions were genuine, said Clarissa Howard, Winter Park's director of communications.

"The smiles were real," she said.

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