News of the end of American war operations in Iraq haven't been widely announced. Conversations have led to, "I didn't know that" or "I haven't heard about that yet."

President Barack Obama announced Oct. 21 that all troops would leave Iraq by the end of the year. Dec. 15, that announcement became a reality, according to many credible news sources.

The uncertainty is felt in Holyoke. Calls to a few local families with loved ones at war found they haven't heard, well, anything. Everyone associated with or those who have loved ones at war simply sit and wait. Wait to hear from loved ones to know they are all right.

On Sunday, Dec. 18, it was reported the last of the American troops had left.

U.S. Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta declared the official end to the Iraq war, formally wrapping up the U.S. military's mission in the country after almost nine years.

It was reported Tuesday, Dec. 20 that General Lloyd J. Austin III would return the United States Forces-Iraq command flag to U.S. soil to mark the formal conclusion of the military mission in Iraq.

Austin lowered the command flag in Baghdad last week and will be met at Andrews Air Force Base by President Obama, according to White House and Pentagon officials.

In a CNN report Sunday, Dec. 18, it was stated, "In a final tactical road march, the last U.S. troops in Iraq crossed the border into Kuwait on Sunday morning ... About 500 Fort Hood, Texas-based soldiers and 110 military vehicles made the journey south from Camp Adder, near Nasiriya, to the Khabari border crossing, from where they will head to Camp Virginia in Kuwait before flying home."

President Obama spoke last Wednesday at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

“For all of the challenges that our nation faces, you remind us that there’s nothing that we Americans can’t do when we stick together,” Obama told troops at Fort Bragg. ”For all of the disagreements that we face, you remind us that there is something bigger than our differences that makes us one nation, one people.”

The president spent the week saying a long goodbye to the war he once described as “dumb.” After nearly nine years of conflict, Obama made clear, “it is harder to end a war than to begin one.”

“Our effort in Iraq has taken many twists and turns. It was a source of great controversy here at home, with patriots on both sides of the debate. But the one constant was your patriotism; your commitment to fulfill your mission; and your abiding commitment to one another,” the president said.

“We are ending a war not with a final battle, but with a final march toward home,” Obama told service members in his first visit as president to Fort Bragg, home to Army Special Operations and the 82nd Airborne, among others. “This is an extraordinary achievement, nearly nine years in the making. And today, we remember everything that you did to make it possible.”

An article from the Baltimore Sun said, “It may be years before we know whether the sacrifice our men and women in uniform made during America’s longest and most unpopular war since Vietnam was worth it. A total of 1.5 million U.S. troops have served in Iraq since 2003, and the cost of the war has been staggering: nearly 4,500 dead, some 32,000 wounded and $1 trillion from the federal treasury that added to the national debt and weakened our ability to respond to the current recession.”

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