



Hill steps along to recovery

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SAN ANTONIO -- While the road to his recovery may be long, Specialist Dustin Hill has taken another major step forward.

"Dusty has given up his wheelchair!" said his mother, Liz Kelm of Wyanet. "It now sits in his room collecting dust and whatever else may land in it."

Hill is at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, where he has been recovering from injuries he received in a car bombing Sept. 21, while serving with the Galva National Guard unit in Iraq.

Hill, who was the gunner in the vehicle at the time of the attack, suffered the loss of one eye and third-degree burns on about 33 percent of his body. So far, he has had his right hand, about three inches of his right arm and all of the fingers and thumb of his left hand amputated.

He was presented with the Purple Heart on Jan. 14 for the wounds he received.

Kelm said Thursday it was the third day her son was able to walk wherever he has needed to go.

"This is a big step because he knows that being independent is one of the main keys of getting home," she said.

According to Kelm, she and her son hoped to be in attendance when the rest of his unit arrived home, but it does not look possible at this point. The unit's commander, Major Michael Kessel, sent a letter to the Bureau County Republican on March 3 and said he anticipated the Galva unit would return to Illinois on or about March 20.

In the meantime, Hill remains in the hospital receiving antibiotics. Kelm said he is doing well and still has a daily routine for physical and occupational therapy.

Hill recently received an updated prosthesis with a wrist rotator, which allows his hand to rotate 360 degrees.

The mother and son hope to return to Bureau County for a few weeks sometime this spring. Upon returning to the medical center, Hill will begin plastic surgery and continue working on his life skills. Kelm said Hill is considering amputating the left hand because a prosthesis on both sides would be more functional.