

Commander not expecting jump in risk this weekend

Galva unit not to be in thick of possible conflict

By Doug Boock

The elections scheduled for this weekend in Iraq have many observers fearing great upheaval from insurgents. But the commander of the Galva National Guard unit believes his unit won't be at great risk.

Major Mike Kessel said Jan. 24 he thinks a lot of speculation about this weekend's elections — an Iraqi attempt to form a dem-



Mike Kessel

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government — is wrong.

"Everyone here thinks the sky is going to fall with the election. My personal

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gut feeling is that there will be a slight increase in attacks in some locations, but overall things will be normal as usual," Kessel told The Galva News by email.

Kessel attributes part of his belief to weather conditions.

"One surprising thing in our favor is the weather," he said. "The forecast is for showers with a low of 27 and a high of 51. The terrorists don't much like the cold, and make it wet – then they will really be gone."

Some U.S. soldiers could be endangered this weekend, when they deliver voting equipment to election sites. Attacks from insurgents are feared.

But Kessel said his unit – the 120-man F202nd Air Defense Artillery – won't be part of those

operations.

"We won't have anything to do with the election or transportation of supplies. The Army is keeping its distance from the actual process so as not to give the Iraqis or the media the impression that we are influencing the election," he said.

"Even for security, we are only patrolling the areas around the polling station; the Iraqi police and the Iraqi army are the ones responsible for the immediate security around those facilities."

Other than that, Kessel said, his unit is continuing its normal missions and "planning for coming home."

The Galva Guard unit is tentatively scheduled to return to the U.S. sometime in March. It has served in Iraq since March, 2004.