Commander rejoices in elections, praises his men

Says good weekend is start of long process

By Doug Boock

Maj. Mike Kessel couldn't hide his glee.

Just hours after a successful mission by his Galva National Guard unit, which helped provide security during the Iraqi elections this past weekend, Kessel signaled victory via email.

"Greetings from Free and DEMOCRATIC Iraq," Kessel

Mike Kessel

wrote early Sunday morning.

As Kessel announced a week ago, his unit –the 120-man F202 Air Defense Artillery – didn't expect to be in major

Guard

warfare areas during the turbulent elections. They basically set up blocking positions to control traffic that might be going into Baghdad, including searching all vehicles that passed through.

"While it was not a `glamorous' job, it was important and we can take pride in the part we paid," Kessel said Sunday.

Kessel said Saturday – election day – "was not totally violence-free," noting the death toll across Iraq as of Sunday morning was 31.

"Considering all that was fore-casted and what a normal day is like, that is not bad," he said.

Kessel also said that many of the terrorists that did conduct acts of violence, won't do it anymore.

"It appears from all the reports across the region that they were left to use the third-string team of terrorists. We have either killed or captured 85 percent of the terrorists who committed acts today," he explained.

Although the elections were able to be conducted, Iraq's far from out of the woods in heading toward true democracy. Some reports say it'll take a year to put major pieces into place in the new government. But Kessel expressed hope.

"We have a long way to go before Iraq is able to stand on her own, but today, a very large step was taken," he said.

"It has been a good day, a day the Lord has made! He has protected us and with His protection and blessings, we have been able to ensure that those how who have been injured and those who have died, have not done so in vain."