

# This soldier works home front

By Ann Ring

Staff Sergeant Martin Gibson sincerely and thoughtfully thanks the men and women in Iraq, in helping the Iraqis behind the scenes in many ways we never see on television.

Just like what he does in his own work at Galva's National Guard Armory.

Gibson serves as rear detachment officer for Battery F, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, the Galva National Guard unit.

His daily job consists of assisting the unit's Family Readiness Group and military families, updating records, and fielding many phone calls, especially following such events as the recent attack on the U.S. military base in Mosul (Iraq).

During a reporter's visit, Gibson handled all phone calls and situations promptly, never once mentioning he was in an interview or suggesting he return their call. Upon hanging up after one particular call, Gibson said, "When they (military families) see things like that (attack) on the news, it bothers them. The only advice I can give them is not watch the news.

"But their friends and family will ask, 'Did you see . . . ?' And when you are bombarded by other people coming at you saying, 'Did you see this on the news?' then I get more phone calls."

Originally from Kewanee, Gibson's military career began several years ago when he joined the Navy and trained as an electronic technician, a highly valuable position in being able to repair radar, sonar, and other communication equipment.

He originally planned on a 20-year commitment, then retiring from the Navy, for whom he initially served. He even received the Order of Magellan certificate for traveling around the world in half a year.

But after being out at sea extensively and lacking valuable e-mail capability, he decided six years was enough.

After four years away from the military, one of Gibson's friends in the Kewanee unit convinced him to join the Illinois National Guard.

"Typically you don't have to be away. Typically it's one weekend a

month and then two weeks out of a year" for the Guard's service training requirement, explained Gibson.

When he initially joined the National Guard 11 years ago,

Polk (La.) to have their evaluation train-up before they went overseas, that's when they separated us. And they said, 'Sergeant Gibson, you're definitely going to stay back ... "'

committed.

Gibson also doesn't tout his work schedule: he stays at the Galva armory 24 hours a day, except for occasional weekend visits to his



Photo by Ann Ring

Martin Gibson, rear detachment officer for the Galva National Guard unit, works on some papers in his office at the Galva armory recently. Gibson has been working out of the armory while the Guard is serving in Iraq. His job is to serve as a liaison between the Guard and families, as well as providing information to the public and media when possible.

Gibson said he read his contract, "and low and behold at the bottom it says that 'You are eligible for active service,' which means that when in need, they'll call you up."

Initially he signed up for three years. At the time, there weren't any electronic technician openings available, so on his ship (out to sea once more) he was trained to fire a Stinger missile (capable of destroying enemy aircraft) in just one day.

He kept reenlisting with the Illinois Army National Guard. Eventually, that led him and fellow members of the Galva Guard unit to Fort Hood, Texas, where they went in November, 2003 for training before heading to the Middle East.

"At the time," said Gibson, "they were still not sure if I was going to have to go forward (to Iraq) and not have a rear detachment at all. They weren't sure if they were going to need every person that they had . . . we all had to train.

"Then when our men went to Fort

What Gibson fails to mention - unless pried - is when asked by his superiors whether he wanted to go to Iraq or stay in the U.S. he offered to go to Iraq. But the military chose to use his talents, maturity, and level of expertise here - literally back home at Galva's National Guard Armory.

At first, Gibson felt guilty about his mates going to the Middle East and him staying home.

"I didn't understand it. Why would you keep somebody at home that wanted to go forward?" he noted.

Over time, though, he's seen what help he can provide the Family Readiness Group and know that soldiers and families truly need the support.

"I just wish there was more I could do," he said. "I've always asked the State of Illinois, 'If there's anything more I can do, let me know - whatever it is.'" No one can say that Gibson isn't

family in Annawan. Staying at the armory is something he chose to do "right away."

"If a family needed something in the middle of the night and they didn't know who to call, they know one number where they were for sure going to get a hold of somebody - right here," he said.

He agrees he could have given the Family Readiness Group his home phone number, but "then I'd have to come all the way down here to take care of whatever I had to take care of, so it made no sense to me to continue traveling back and forth when all I had to do was stay here ..."

He is also at the Armory at least one weekend a month for National Guard training and for Family Readiness Group meetings.

As we discuss the FRG's role in the soldiers returning home, the phone rings. Afterwards, as he writes notes, Gibson states, "If there's one thing I hate. it's a soldier

His family supports Gibson, and our soldiers in Iraq.

"It's a small sacrifice for me to stay here . . . compared to soldiers being gone," he said. "I absolutely take no sympathy for what I'm doing here.

"I think any soldier would relish the job to have the opportunity to be home with their family, and I just hope I'm doing the best I can for their families . . . It's all about the families."

Gibson considers himself to be a religious person, and prays a minimum of four times a day for the men and women in the military.

"I believe prayer is a big factor in anything the military does, because if you don't have the support of the Lord, then whatever mission you're doing has no purpose," he said.

He added that prayer shapes a person, giving him a foundation to be a better person, and being understanding of what other people's needs or feelings are.

When asked who inspires him, Gibson cites "leaders," such as retired General Tommy Franks.

"The one thing that he kept in mind was 'always take care of the troops,'" he explained. "That's what I try to do: Take care of our troops and our families."

Gibson says the U.S. military is doing a "fabulous" job in Iraq.

"They're not only do the fighting that you see on television but they do things that you don't see — they help rebuild schools, restore power, restore water to towns. We've sent close to a ton of school supplies to children over there, to various towns throughout and around the Baghdad area."

Just like our soldiers work behind the scenes in support of Iraq and other countries around the globe, it appears Gibson is also doing a remarkable job, 24/7, in support of this area's military and their families. Just like General Franks, he may never know his true circle of influence.

"We hope for all the best for our guys, and we pray for them," he said.

"And families and everybody can't wait until they get home."



## Serving Here

Not all members of the Galva National Guard unit are serving in Iraq right now. Staff Sgt. Martin Gibson (left) is serving his unit — and others — by putting in many hours at the Galva armory.

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