

Guard's replacements arriving

Their presence fuels belief Galva unit will soon come home

By Doug Boock

Replacements for the Galva National Guard unit have begun arriving in Iraq, and the Galva unit will be training them with the plans of returning home in the next few weeks.

According to Maj. Mike Kessel by email Monday, Feb. 14, advance members of the unit that will replace his unit – the 120-man F Battery 202nd Air Defense Artillery – began arriving the middle of last week. The rest should

arrive in the next 10 days.

That's a good sign for the Galva unit and their families. Although it's not a guarantee the Galva unit will return home soon, it indicates such an occurrence is highly likely.



Kessel

Before shipping out, Kessel said his unit will train their replacements for several

"The mind-set of the guys is one of anxiety, naturally," Kessel said of his unit. "We have come so far, (but) we are ready to leave."

days, "giving them as much insight as we can on what we have learned and try to start them off on the best foot possible."

The Galva unit primarily patrols the area, helping Iraqi police.

After the replacements are ready, the Galva unit will leave its base at Taji. One family member of a Galva Guardsman - who wished to remain anonymous - said Feb. 15 the unit plans to leave Taji on March 3 or 4. No official announcement has been made.

The family of another Galva soldier told *The Galva News* last week their

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son has begun selling some of his personal belongings as he packs up and prepares to return home.

Kessel said his unit will move from Taji to Kuwait for a "very few days" before heading for American soil — Fort Sill, Okla. — where they'll stay about seven days before coming back to Galva.

"We know the date we leave, but that is classified, so I cannot share it," he explained.

Meanwhile, the Galva unit has the task of putting homecoming thoughts on hold and staying focused on the job at hand.

"We have to keep our head in the game at this point," Kessel said.

"The battalion commander we are currently working with said the other day that at this point, (we shouldn't) concentrate on the number of days until we leave this desert paradise, (but rather) think of it as how many days do we have left to capture or kill terrorists."

Meanwhile, four Galva unit soldiers were injured in a roadside bombing Friday night.

"It happened around dusk," Kessel reported. "The bomb was in a hole from a previous roadside bomb. They saw it but it was too late to react."

One of the four injured — Jeff Duncan of Erie — is married to the former Paula Hannam, formerly of Galva. Duncan was sent to Germany, where he's had two surgeries. His wife said another surgery may be needed to remove shrapnel near a nerve in his lower back.

The other three soldiers were not seriously injured and returned to their duty. One of them was Nathan Kull, 28, of Kewanee. The names of the other two soldiers were not available.