

[NEWS](#) [SPORTS](#) [ENTERTAINMENT](#) [BUSINESS](#) [LIFESTYLES](#) [OPINION](#) [CLASSIFIED](#) [SEARCH](#)[SEARCH ARCHIVE](#) [Go](#)[Weather](#)
[Random Acts of Kindness](#)
[America at War](#)
[Obituary listings](#)
[Illinois Lottery](#)**NEWS**[State of the Union](#)
[Tri-County](#)
[Regional & State](#)
[Nation & World](#)
[America at War](#)
[Obituary Lists](#)
[Death Notices](#)
[Police, fire, courts](#)
[Local Updates](#)
[Causes for Concern](#)
[Road Construction](#)
[Our Community](#)
[Matters of Record](#)
[Bankruptcies](#)
[Births](#)
[Building Permits](#)
[Divorces](#)
[DUI Dispositions](#)
[Felony Dispositions](#)
[Marriages](#)**COLUMNISTS**[Phil Luciano](#)
[Terry Bibo](#)
[Statehouse Insider](#)
[Hotline](#)
[Word on the Street](#)**GOVERNMENT**[Illinois links](#)
[State contacts](#)
[Federal links](#)
[Federal contacts](#)**FRONT PAGE****WEATHER****SPORTS****OPINION****BUSINESS****ENTERTAINMENT****FEATURES****NEIGHBORS****KJS****SPECIAL SECTIONS****MULTIMEDIA****CLASSIFIED**

Months of therapy await soldier

Central Illinois man undergoes rehabilitation in Texas after car bomb explosion in Iraq

Monday, January 31, 2005

Advertisement

BY LISA COON

OF THE JOURNAL STAR

Dustin Hill's days are filled with grueling hours of therapy as he learns how to walk again and master the electronic prosthesis that is now his right hand.

Hill is a bilateral amputee, losing both hands as result of third-degree burns he sustained on about a third of his body when a car bomb exploded behind the Humvee he was in while stationed in Iraq. The 22-year-old generator mechanic with Galva-based Battery F, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery of the Illinois National Guard also lost his right eye in the blast.

The specialist is recovering and rehabilitating at the Amputee Center at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. In the four months he's been at the medical center, Hill has undergone 16 surgeries, including numerous skin grafts and procedures to repair broken bones in his left leg and right ankle, his mother, Liz Kelm of Wyanet, told the Journal Star during a recent telephone interview from guest facilities at the base.

On Jan. 14, Hill received a Purple Heart. His mother was at his side, just as she's been every day since he arrived at BAMC. She'll never forget the September day the phone rang and the girl on the other end was saying Kelm's second oldest son was injured.

The bombing happened about 3:45 p.m. Iraq time - "about 6:45 a.m. our time. I got the call about 10 hours after he was injured," Kelm said.

The "call" came from "a girl. That's her job, to make the phone calls to tell you they've been injured and then she gives you an 800 number to call," Kelm said. "When the girl first called me, I told her she was mistaken. I didn't believe he was injured. Two weeks before he got hurt I had a gut feeling something was going to happen. In just chatting with him by e-mail . . .

you could sense things were getting worse there."

Auctions
Automotive
Employment
Farm & Ranch
Garage Sales
Homes/Apartments
Merchandise
Mortgage Market
Personals
Public Notices
Recreation
SERVICES
Celebrations
Contact Us
Internships
Media Kit
Newspaper In
Education
Photo Reprints
Report a Birth
Single Copy Outlets
Site Map
Submit an Ad
Subscriptions
Yellow Pages
More

Edit the Editors

Nobody's perfect, right? Well, the Journal Star strives to be. Do you see misspelled words, incorrect grammar, things that don't make sense? Do you have questions about why we covered a specific event in a certain way? Do you have a news tip, or a question about this story we didn't cover? Or would you like to write a letter to the editor? We want to know what you think.

Hill doesn't remember Sept. 21.

He doesn't remember being the lone soldier in a Humvee stopped alongside the road near the Green Zone in Baghdad. He doesn't recall his fellow soldiers getting out of the vehicle as a convoy they'd been escorting passed by. And he certainly doesn't remember the civilian car trailing the convoy slipping in behind the stopped Humvee.

And then there was the explosion.

"It was practically on top of him . . . He doesn't remember anything about the car bombing - about that day," Kelm said.

From Iraq, Hill was taken to Ramstein Air Base in Germany. It was there Kelm finally got to speak to a doctor to learn the extent of her son's injuries - he had lost his right eye from shrapnel, had third-degree burns on his arms, hands, abdomen, part of his leg and the top of his head, the little finger on his right hand had been severed, the femur in his left leg was broken and the knee cap shattered and two bones in his right ankle were broken. The burns on his hands would later require amputation, leaving the palm area of his left hand and reliance on an electronic prosthesis for his right.

On Sept. 23, he was sent to BAMC, where Kelm, a licensed practical nurse on the surgical and medical floors at Perry Hospital in Princeton, was waiting for him along with Hill's father, Leon, and brother, Scott.

"I knew what he was going to look like . . . he was probably triple the size he normally is and wasn't really recognizable," she said. "But as a mom, there are parts of your child you know - I knew it was his chest, his feet - you know it was your kid."

Hill remained heavily sedated for weeks.

The first day he remembers was "sometime in November," said Kelm.

Since then, the days have been filled with one therapy after another. Hill, who graduated from Annawan High School and went to work building truck trailers for a Kewanee business, walked unaided for the first time last week. While he still relies on a walker and wheelchair, those solo steps indicate he's improving. Months of therapy await him, however.

Hill joined the Guard in 2002 because all of his friends from the Annawan area had joined and he liked the uniform, he's told his mother.

"And he wanted to see the world," Kelm said. "I try to back my kids on what they want to do. It was the National Guard . . . I thought it would be good - the discipline, the togetherness."

Hill says he'd do it all over again.

He has some difficult moments, he admits, but takes comfort in providing comfort to families of other soldiers who have been brought to BAMC with similar or more serious injuries than his own.

"He has a pretty good outlook on things," Kelm said. "He plans on going to school, getting a college education. He doesn't know what else he wants to do, other than go fishing.

"There are two things he really likes to do - work on his old Ford truck and go fishing."

[Contact Editor](#) | [Copyright](#) | [Make us your home page](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Archives](#) | [Submit an Ad](#)

© 2005 PEORIA JOURNAL STAR, INC. :: ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

1 News Plaza, Peoria, IL 61643 :: 1-309-686-3000