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## Kewanee soldier expected to recover

### Doctors tell grandparents he's 'doing really well'

Wednesday, December 29, 2004

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BY LISA COON

OF THE JOURNAL STAR

**KEWANEE** - On the afternoon of Christmas Eve, Karen and Don Ramsey received a call they'd prayed would never come.

Someone from the State Department was on the other end, informing the Kewanee couple the grandson they'd raised since he was 15 had been wounded when his military truck was bombed near Baghdad. The Ramseys' now 20-year-old grandson, Spc. Marcus Johnson with the Illinois National Guard's Battery F of the 202nd Air Defense Artillery based in Galva, was seriously wounded when shrapnel from the blast entered his left lung. His back and neck also received lacerations.

"We were just devastated," Karen Ramsey told the Journal Star during a telephone interview Tuesday. "On Christmas morning, we got a call that he was stabilizing" after having undergone surgery.

Even then, it would be Sunday before Johnson, a 2002 graduate of Wethersfield High School, would be flown from Iraq to a hospital in Germany.

On Tuesday, the retired Wethersfield High School teacher of 35 years, spoke to her grandson's doctor.

"He's doing really well," said Karen Ramsey, who owns the town's bowling alley with her husband, Don, a Caterpillar Inc. retiree. "He's off the respirator, but still has tubes down his throat to drain the blood."

She had hoped to speak to Johnson and hear that familiar, "Hey, Grandma. What's up?" But Ramsey said the tubes prevented him from talking.

"He's going to be fine. Hopefully, they'll be flying him out of Germany on Saturday to Walter Reed (Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.)," she said. "I'll be flying out there as soon as I can to be with him. They're thinking he'll be there a week and then they'll fly him to Brooke (Army Medical Center) in San Antonio."

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### **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.

Karen Ramsey said Johnson was the gunner behind the gun in the truck when it was hit. The unit's commander, Maj. Michael Kessel, was riding in the front seat.

According to an e-mail from Kessel to the Ramseys, it first was believed Johnson's wounds weren't too serious. Then the medics removed his vest and saw that shrapnel had entered Johnson's left lung.

"When the bomb went off, I remember the truck lifting off of the ground before slamming back down on all four blown tires," Kessel's e-mail said. "The truck also immediately filled with smoke and dirt from the explosion. When we came to a stop, the driver side doors were jammed, but fortunately I was able to get mine open."

Johnson and another man, a civilian police adviser from California, were the most seriously injured and were on a helicopter to the 31st Combat Surgical Hospital in downtown Baghdad within 10 minutes of the explosion, Kessel wrote.

"He is a great young man, a hero," Kessel wrote in his e-mail to the Ramseys. "He will fully recover, but will be missed here in the meantime."

Karen Ramsey said her grandson joined the guard at age 17, just before 9-11. The Galva unit has been in Iraq since March. Johnson hopes to start at Western Illinois University in the fall where he'll study law enforcement.

"He's just been a wonderful boy," she said, noting that the Christmas presents he sent - watches for grandma and grandpa, a necklace for his girlfriend Mariah Wyant of Toulon and Sponge Bob Squarepants DVDs for his cousins - all arrived in time for Christmas.

Johnson also gave his grandma Gen. Tommy Franks' book, "American Soldier," which she plans to read during her trip to Walter Reed.

The best present for Karen Ramsey, however, was knowing her beloved grandson "will have a full recovery."

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