

[News Summary](#)[Photo Report](#)[Metro News](#)[Sports](#)[Life](#)[Regional News](#)[Police & Courts](#)[Jobs & Money](#)[Obituaries](#)[News of Record](#)[Editorials](#)[Illinois](#)[Iowa](#)[View Points](#)[News Archives](#)[Weather](#)[Classifieds](#)[The Leader](#)[Home page](#)**Quad-Cities  
Online**an edition of **THE DISPATCH**

Posted online: March 20, 2005 12:33 AM

Print publication date: March 20, 2005

## Galva welcomes its Guard unit home from Iraq

**By Brian Krans, [bkrans@qconline.com](mailto:bkrans@qconline.com)**

Four small children walked up to the soldier and tugged at his camouflage pant leg. He looked down, smiled and leaned to kiss one on the head.

As soon as Staff Sgt. Troy Wolford of Knoxville was dismissed with the rest of the Foxtrot Battery, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, he scooped the kids up in his arms, two at a time.

His children, Brenda, 5, and Macy, 3, and nieces Emily Wall, 6, and Abby Wall, 3, were among hundreds of friends and family there to welcome "the boys from Illinois" back to a ticker-taped Galva Saturday morning.

"It's awesome. It's great to be home. I like to see everyone who supports us. You don't always see that," said Sgt. Wolford, who returned home with 107 other Illinois Army National Guard soldiers after 466 days.

They were assigned to the United States Central Command, which oversees actions in the Middle East, and stood guard in the sands of Iraq, protecting main thoroughfares, including the most violent, from Baghdad to the airport.

Last Easter, the F/202 ADA was involved a horrific firefight with insurgents known as the Battle of Holy Week. Afterwards, many soldiers were honored for their valiant efforts, with 25 percent of the battery earning at least one Purple Heart.

Unit commander Maj. Mike Kessel said the unit suffered no fatalities. "God was watching out for us, keeping us safe."

Five soldiers from F/202 ADA were injured in September when a makeshift bomb exploded near where they were doing traffic control. At least 20 others were injured during their tour, but few seriously.

Valor-medal recipient Sgt. Ben Sleaford, 27, a patrol gunman from Geneseo, was back



**Photo: Dan Videtich**

Spc. Jestin Squires of Sesser, Ill., is welcomed home from Iraq by his mother, Peggy Squires of Sterling, wife Melinda, center, sister Jessica Sotelo of Sterling, and her daughter, Kara Sotelo, during the homecoming celebration Saturday for the 202nd Air Defense Artillery unit of the Illinois National Guard at the Galva National Guard Armory.

[More photos from this shoot](#)

### [QC Symphony](#)

**Exceptional**

in the arms of his fiancée, who he proposed to when he was home on break last September.

His mother, Keitra Sleaford, said her son didn't want to get engaged until his tour was over. "But I think you really got things prioritized over there," she said, adding that an October wedding is planned.

Allison Wittenauer of Amboy cried hysterically as she hugged her husband, Staff Sgt. Jason Wittenauer. "I'm just so excited. It's like I can finally breathe again."

She handed him their 8-month-old son, Caden, who rested against his father's shoulder, his tiny fingers gripping the military uniform. It was the first time they had been together since a 15-day leave seven months ago.

But Sgt. Wittenauer didn't go to Iraq without family. His youngest brother, Josh Wittenauer, 27, was there, the two keeping each other safe. "It worked out well for us. We were able to watch out for each other."

Sharing the same platoon, one meal a day and news from home, Josh Wittenauer said having his brother there made things easier, except for when they went into harm's way.

"Anytime one of us went outside the wire, it was a little nervous for us."

Staff writer Brian Krans can be reached at (309) 786-6441, Ext. 271.

[Printer-friendly Page](#)



**Website**

[back to top](#)