

Sergeant serves families

Duties keep him at Galva Armory

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By ANN RING

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GALVA - Staff Sgt. Martin Gibson sincerely thanks the men and women in Iraq helping behind the scenes in ways never seen 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.

During a reporter's visit, Gibson handled all phone calls and situations promptly. 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 to 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 electronics 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.

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

Initially he signed up for three years. He kept re-enlisting 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 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' "

What Gibson fails to mention - unless pried - is when asked by his superiors whether he wanted to go to Iraq or stay in the States he offered to go to Iraq. But the military chose to use his talents, maturity and level of expertise here.

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 knows 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.' "

Gibson stays at the Galva armory 24 hours a day, except for occasional weekend visits to his 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. ..."

"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."