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## Galva Guard unit on its way to Iraq

### Bound for Baghdad in a month

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By DOUG BOOCK

*Copley News Service*

GALVA - Ready or not, Galva National Guard members are now overseas, or soon will be.

"A third of the battery is over there, or in the air over the Atlantic right now," Maj. Mike Kessel said Monday night.

"By this time next week everybody will be in Kuwait and by this time next month, we'll be at Baghdad, establishing control," said Kessel, Galva Guard commander.

The unit's departure from Fort Polk signals the beginning of the Guardsmen's call to enter harm's way, something they've been told they'll do for at least 12 months. Kessel said his men are ready.

"The mood is still very, very good. Everybody's ready to get over there and get the clock ticking and get the job done," said Kessel, a Champaign stock broker.

The unit - 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery Battery F - has been waiting to go to the Middle East since being alerted last summer. In October, it began formal preparations at the Galva armory before heading to Fort Hood, Texas, on Nov. 2. Guardsmen have been training at Fort Polk, La., for the past few weeks, awaiting their departure to Iraq.

"Everybody's tired of moving around every few months or every few weeks," Kessel said, noting his men are ready to stop drilling and to begin foreign duty.

Many local people traveled to Fort Polk over the past weekend to see their loved ones before the Guard shipped out. Some stayed through

Wednesday, the last day families could spend time together.

"Everybody was ready to see their families," Kessel said.

Except some who'd seen loved ones a few weeks earlier.

"They just didn't want to say good-bye one more time," Kessel said.

The Guard also was visited by U.S. Rep. Lane Evans, D-Rock Island, who attended a flag-casing ceremony Saturday. The ceremony signifies the end of the soldiers' training. During the ceremony, the unit retired the colors; they will re-post them when they arrive in Iraq.

The unit will be located near Baghdad and provide security, Kessel said.

"We'll be conducting a lot of patrols and just basically looking for the bad guys," he said.

Asked if his men were entering dangerous duty, Kessel answered shortly and succinctly.

"Can be," he said.

Kessel said his unit's success will be measured by fulfilling a handful of objectives, primarily safety.

"If we come back, if everybody comes back," he said quickly.

"And if commercial aircraft is landing on a regular basis, and there's freedom of movement. Plus, if we are able to turn control over to the local authorities so they can self-govern themselves" also will be measures of the unit's success.

The unit, which has about 120 members, will be going to a "pretty fertile" area, Kessel said. Iraq's seasons are similar to the Midwestern U.S., with spring coming soon. Current high temperatures are in the 60s and 70s, but could reach peaks of 150 degrees in August, Kessel said.

"It'll be a little warmer in Kuwait and we'll be able to climatize well and acclimate ourselves as the temperatures go up," he said.

Guardsmen will sleep in trailers, two men per room. Air conditioning will be available. Four meals a day - including a late-

night snack - will be provided.

A movie theater, workout gym and Burger King restaurant will be available. Kessel said his men will work shifts that allow "plenty of time" to relax.

"Their attitude and motivation are very high," Kessel said. "I'm very proud of them."

The deployment is the first into war for a Galva unit since the Korean War.

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*Doug Boock is the editor of the Galva News.*