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Iraq deployment a mixed bag for Guardsmen

Galva soldiers excited, dour

September 27, 2003

By DOUG BOOCK
Copley News Service

GALVA - Wonder what's on the minds of Galva National Guard members as they face likely war deployment next month? It depends on whom you ask.

"The thought is like, 'Whoa, it's actually going to happen,'" says Tom Wallenfeldt, 20, of Galva.

Wallenfeldt and his comrades are on "alert" status by the U.S. Department of Defense. Reports say the 65-man unit will be deployed to Fort Hood, Texas, in mid-October and to Iraq in early 2004.

That's drawing mixed reactions from unit members.

"I'm excited," said Chris Rodgers, 20, Oneida. "I can't think of a better time in my life for it. I'm single with no one holding me back.

"We train day in, day out and never get to apply it," added Rodgers, a ROWVA High School athlete before graduating in 2001. "It's like football practice - now we get to go play the game."

Kevin Mundy's perspective's a little different. If deployed, he'll leave family behind.

"I have a 5-year-old son I'm really going to miss," said Mundy, 30, Alpha. "I think that's the hardest part - I'm going to miss him and my wife."

As a result, Mundy's scrutinizing how he spends his time.

"I would just like to know the exact date," said Mundy, who works at Great Dane Trailers, Kewanee. "I'm trying to spend as much time with family as I can. Time has become important."

Eric Werkheiser of Galva agrees. He knows his service will come at a cost.

"It doesn't bother me that I have to go, but it bothers me that I have to leave family and friends behind," said Werkheiser.

"I signed up for this," said Werkheiser, who's a junior studying Law Enforcement at Western Illinois University, "and I have to do what my country asks me to."

Lucas Siemers, 19, is one of the youngest unit members. But he's bravely facing the potential call-up.

"Whatever comes up, comes up," said Siemers, a 2002 Galva High School graduate. "I'm going to serve my country. I'm under contract. That's my duty."

Nolan Thomson of Galva says he's "nervous, but excited." A 25-year-old father of two small children, Thomson says he'll miss his family.

"But it will still be a new and neat experience for me to be able to go and come back and share (stories) with my kids and grandkids," Thomson said.

Thomson also said a call-up would probably make his grandfather, Wayne Abbott, a Galva veteran, "kinda proud."

Alan Dennis of Galva's served in the military 15 years. But he notes the potential call-up is unlike anything else he's seen during that time.

"I'm kind of excited about it," said Dennis, 34, a forklift driver at Farmland Foods, Monmouth.

"We never get a chance to do anything like this."