

Galva unit begins to train replacements

GALVA NEWS

Replacements for the Galva National Guard unit have begun arriving in Iraq, and the Galva unit will be training them with the plans of returning home in the next few weeks.

According to Maj. Mike Kessel by e-mail Monday, advance members of the unit that will replace his unit — the 120-man F Battery 202nd Air Defense Artillery — began arriving the middle of last week. The rest should arrive in the next 10 days.

That's a good sign for the Galva unit and their families. Although it's not a guarantee the Galva unit will return home soon, it indicates such an occurrence is highly likely.

"The mind-set of the guys is one of anxiety, naturally," Kessel said of his unit. "We have come so far, (but) we are ready to leave."

Before shipping out, Kessel said his unit will train their replacements for several days, "giving them as much insight as we can on what we have learned and try to start them off on the best foot possible."

The Galva unit primarily patrols the area, helping Iraqi police.

After the replacements are ready, the Galva unit will leave its base at Taji. One family member of a Galva guardsman — who asked to remain anonymous — said Tuesday that the unit plans to leave Taji on March 3 or 4. No official announcement has been made.

The family of another Galva soldier told The Galva News last week their son has begun selling some of his personal belongings as he packs up and prepares to return home.

Kessel said his unit will move from Taji to Kuwait for a "very few days" before heading for American soil — at Fort Sill, Okla. — where they'll stay for about seven days before coming back to Galva.

"We know the date we leave, but that is classified, so I cannot share it," he said.

Meanwhile, the Galva unit has the task of putting thoughts of their homecoming on the back burner and staying focused on the job at hand.

"We have to keep our head in the game at this point," Kessel said.

"The battalion commander we are currently working with said the other day that at this point, (we shouldn't) concentrate on the number of days until we leave this desert paradise, (but rather) think of it as how many days do we have left to capture or kill terrorists," he added.

A scare was thrown into the Galva unit Friday night when four soldiers were injured in a roadside bombing.

One of the four injured, Jeff Duncan of Erie, is married to the former Paula Hannam, formerly of Galva. Duncan was sent to Germany, where he's had two surgeries for his shrapnel injuries. His wife said another surgery may be required to remove shrapnel imbedded near a nerve in his lower back.

The other three soldiers were not seriously injured and returned to duty. One of them was Nathan Kull, 28, of Kewanee. The names of the other two soldiers were not available.

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