

# Guard members leave Dixon Sunday

BY CLARK KELLY

STAFF WRITER

DIXON — Thirty-four men, members of the Illinois National Guard, Echo Battery 1, 202nd Air Defense Artillery at the Dixon National Guard Armory, were told Friday they were going forth to "be a part of bringing freedom and peace to Iraq or Afghanistan and you will be doing it on the world stage."

Retired Lt. Col. Henry S. Dixon, himself a former commander of the local national guard, told the departing troops that when "you return you will have an even greater appreciation of what you accomplished than any of us have now. Those accomplishments will be yours as individuals and yours as a unit. No one will ever be able to take that away from you," Dixon said.

He told the men gathered on the Dixon High School football field that they were standing on or near historic ground. He said nearby was the place where Capt. Abraham Lincoln organized his troops for the Blackhawk War and where troops marched from their armory to the Chicago Northwestern Railroad Depot shortly after Pearl Harbor. Others were bused from that same armory to see action in Vietnam, Dixon said.

He said today's soldiers are far better off than their counterparts of previous wars. During the early years of the American Army the troops were ill fed, poorly uniformed, never paid and they had to walk everywhere.

Today's army is the most technologically advanced of any unit ever, Dixon said.

Col. Gerald Newman, commander of the local unit, told the 500 people gathered at A.C. Bowers Field they had only to brave the cool temperatures for about an hour.

"Your sons will be making the ultimate sacrifice of 12 to 18 months of service. They won't have the opportunity to come home every night, they won't have the opportunity to get warm or cool off when they want or be able to get a drink of water when they need a drink.

"They won't get to see their kids every night. They have made the ultimate sacrifice and for that I respect them and I am proud of every one of them," Newman said.

He praised the community for their support Friday and urged it to keep in contact with the soldiers until they come home.

State Sen. Todd Sieben, R-Geneseo, recalled the words of Thomas Paine during the Revolutionary War

when he wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls."

"Freedom has a price," said Sieben. "It has a cost, requiring sacrifice of those who are asked to pay that price."

Paine's words have a meaning that rings in the hearts of the American people, Sieben said. Paine knew that a special kind of devotion and patriotism was going to be needed if the 13 colonies were going to win their struggle for freedom, Sieben said.

"Today we call that kind of patriotism Americanism and for more than two centuries Americanism has kept our country free," Sieben said. "With that special quality fire in our hearts, we have flourished in a way unmatched in world history."

State Rep. Jerry Mitchell, R-Sterling, said seeing the grandson of Charles and Glenna Beckman Friday morning at the breakfast for the departing soldiers at the Dixon American Legion, impressed upon him that this was the reason these men were going overseas — to protect our freedom.

"We depend upon you as you depended on those who fought in Vietnam and before that, World War II. It is something that has to be. For those countries that don't value human life, they are going to see that Echo Company has the skills and the arms to protect our freedoms," Mitchell said.

Mayor James G. Burke said each soldier received a city flag and he urged them to carry it with them to remind them that "there's a heck of a bunch of people back in Dixon, Illinois that have them in their hearts and are thinking of them."

The guard leaves Galva on Nov. 2 for Fort Hood, Texas where they will train until March 1. They then will depart for Iraq.

After the ceremonies the troops were paraded through downtown and past all the area schools.

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