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Star Courier City

KEWANEE
ILLINOIS



Galva artillery officer launches website for local soldiers, families

By DAVE CLARKE Regional Coordinator

The war is getting closer to home every day as the sons of Kewanee area families prepare to leave for Iraq.

Mothers, fathers, wives, children, fiancées and others are learning that any word about their loved one in uniform is more precious than gold, and more so the closer they get to Baghdad.

One more step in the Galva National Guard's march to Iraq was taken last week when a new, interactive website went online featuring news, photos, messages and opportunities for exchange of information for families and others interested in Battery F of the 202nd Air Defense Artillery, or any other service members from Galva serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

The Galva Armed Services Page went up Tuesday, Feb. 17, the same day President Bush visited Fort Polk, La., where members of the Galva unit are training for deployment in the next few weeks to Iraq.

We found out about it late last week through an e-mail from 1st Lt. Christopher Doherty of Galva, whose father, Jim Doherty, started the site after realizing four "kids" on his block were about to leave for Iraq with the Galva unit. His son, Chris, a fire support officer with the 82nd Field Artillery, 1st Cavalry, also is scheduled for deployment to Iraq in about a week and a half. He is stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, where the Galva Guard trained from Nov. 1 through Feb. 1, and recently trained in Jordan with officers from the

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39th Infantry Brigade, the outfit to which the Galva boys are now assigned. The 39th also is now part of the 1st Cavalry, so Doherty and the Galva unit will be serving with the same division in Iraq. "I can assure you all that the Galva unit will be in capable hands," Lt. Doherty wrote. "After serving with the 1st Cavalry Division for a year, I can say without a doubt that Galva's sons are deploying with one of the most capable divisions in the Army. They are in good hands with 'America's First Team,' " as the 1st Cavalry is called.

Doherty is a 1997 graduate of Galva High School and recently graduated from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, where he was enrolled in the ROTC program. The son of Jim and Pam Doherty, he is fulfilling his ROTC commitment with the 82nd Field Artillery.

The home page can be found at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Galvaarmypage> and includes a message board, chat site, photos, and links to other sites, including the Star Courier, the Army Times, and other newspapers. There also is a link to a site set up by John Wallenfeldt, brother of Tom Wallenfeldt, a member of the Galva unit, on which he is archiving just about everything written about the Galva unit since activation and related articles.

Lt. Doherty has filed a number of photos, from his wedding pictures to shots of the Nov. 1 mobilization ceremony in Galva and several of his unit training for their mission in Iraq, which will be similar to that of the Galva unit. The weather conditions and forecast for the Galva-Kewanee area were posted Tuesday, which would be of interest to guys in the local unit, whether at Fort Polk or Baghdad.

It also includes information on deployment, financial assistance to families, overseas mailing, and first-hand reports on what it is like in Iraq from people now stationed there. Most of what is now posted on the fledgling site is Doherty's, but that will undoubtedly change as more people become aware of the site and contribute material.

One message posted by a soldier now in Baghdad gives a glimpse of where our boys will be staying. "By late January 2004 engineers from the 1st Armored Division were midway through an \$800 million project to build half a dozen camps for the incoming 1st Cavalry Division (of which the Galva unit is now a part). Army planners expect to finish by March 15. The new outposts will improve living conditions for soldiers and allow the military to return key infrastructure sites within the Iraqi capital to the emerging government,"

military leaders said. Moving to the outskirts of town will allow Iraqi police and civil defense to take a lead role in the city's security, the message states.

There also are messages about efforts by the Galva American Legion to raise funds for care packages for the troops.

We were member 14 on the three-day-old site which was up to 21 as of yesterday. Hopefully this column will spike membership a bit.

The site, however, is set up as a Yahoo group, so to get access to anything beyond the home page, you must become a member and receive a user ID and password. There's no charge, and it's really slick once you are "dialed" in, but it is a little confusing.

To address this, Jim says that in "the next week or two," they will have a new, more user-friendly site up and running at www.galvapatriot.com which will serve the same purpose, but be more directly accessible.

You know this is not your daddy's war when you realize the local troops will be able to access these sites when they get set up in Iraq and for whom it will be a "touch of home." To those of us back here, it will be a reminder that, though in a distant and dangerous land, they are never more than a click away.

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