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Wounded Galva Guardsman given hero's welcome home

By DAVE CLARKE *Of The Star Courier*

GALVA -- If all goes as planned, the Galva National Guard unit will be pulling out of Iraq on Tuesday and begin a nearly month-long trip home, but for one soldier, the welcome home celebration began Saturday night.

A crowd of about 50 family and friends, including a bus load from the First Baptist Church in Galva, was on hand to give SPC Jeff Duncan a hero's welcome when he arrived at the Quad City International Airport from Texas, the last stop on his journey through hospitals in Baghdad and Germany after being wounded by shrapnel from a roadside bomb on Feb. 11.

Duncan, 24, of Erie, was accompanied by his wife, the former Paula Hannam of Galva, and his mother, Sandy of Erie.

A limousine was waiting outside the airport terminal to take Duncan and his family, including children Kassady, 10, and Trey, 9, home to Erie.

Duncan was awarded the Purple Heart while being treated at the U.S. military hospital in Landstuhl, Germany.

He and three other soldiers, including Nathan Kull, 28, of Kewanee, were returning from patrol when their Humvee passed a roadside bomb that had been placed in a hole left by an earlier explosion. Duncan, a gunner who rides atop the military vehicle, took most of the explosion's impact. With shrapnel wounds and a broken hip, he underwent two surgeries at the military hospital in Baghdad before being flown to Germany where

doctors operated on him a third time.

Kull and SSG Jon Arneson of Dixon were treated and returned to barracks. The fourth soldier, SPC Kavran, was also flown to Germany for treatment. His condition is not known.

The 1st Cavalry Division, to which the Galva unit has been attached since it arrived in Iraq nearly a year ago, was scheduled to officially transfer responsibility for operations around Baghdad to the 3rd Infantry on Sunday. The 1st Cavalry has begun returning to its base at Fort Hood, Texas, after completing its one-year tour.

If all goes as planned, the 120 men of Battery F, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, Illinois National Guard, should be back in the United States by mid-March and back in Galva by the end of the month.

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