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## Wait getting shorter for Galva Guard's homecoming

By DAVE CLARKE Of The Star Courier

GALVA -- The Galva National Guard unit may be home a little sooner than expected -- emphasis on "may."

In an e-mail to families and the media Thursday, unit commander Maj. Mike Kessel said the 120 men of Battery F will hopefully be leaving their barracks and begin the journey home "late this weekend." It had been announced earlier that the unit would begin its journey home sometime around March 1.

The unit has been performing security and stabilization duty in the vicinity of Taji which included patrolling a stretch of highway and helping guard a local police station.

The battery, which includes men from the Galva, Kewanee and Dixon National Guard units, has been in Iraq since last March assigned to the 1st Cavalry and was first stationed at Camp Victory North, near Baghdad International Airport where it patrolled a section of one of the major highways.

Kessel, who could not give specifics for security reasons, said the unit will be airlifted from Taji to the Baghdad airport where it will stay for about a day before heading south to Kuwait. Once there, Kessel said, the men will have an opportunity to call family and friends back home for the first time since a pre-departure blackout was imposed on phones and e-mail about two weeks ago. "The lines will probably be incredibly long, so don't be upset if you don't get a call," Kessel warned loved ones.

After a layover of approximately three days in Kuwait,

the unit will be flown to Fort Sill, Okla., where it will spend about seven days before heading back to Illinois.

"I am anticipating we will be back in Illinois on or about Palm Sunday, March 20," said Kessel who planned on sending another update from Kuwait. "Everyone is ready to leave and it has been nice not to have any missions for the past few days."

Earlier estimates had the unit home sometime during the week of March 21 and hopefully by Easter Sunday, March 27.

Kessel had said earlier that National Guard officials in Illinois have indicated they will let families and the communities along the route the unit will take back to Galva know three days in advance. Upon its arrival at the armory in Galva, the unit is scheduled to hold a brief formation, be given the date of its next drill, and released to be welcomed home by waiting well-wishers.

Battery F's Family Readiness Group has set a homecoming preparation meeting for 1 p.m. Saturday at the Galva Armory. Following a short meeting, the group will make signs, posters, bows and other items for the welcome home event. Schools, churches, businesses, emergency services and others wishing to be involved in the homecoming should contact SSG Martin Gibson, rear detachment officer, at the armory in Galva at (309) 932-2197.

- Also on his way home after nearly a year in Iraq is 1st Lt. Chris Doherty of Galva, a member of 2nd Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Cavalry, who arrived in Baghdad at about the same as the Galva National Guard unit. Doherty, an artillery officer in charge of a Bradley Fighting vehicle, was stationed for 10 months in Sadr City, which includes the worst slums in Baghdad.

His parents, Jim and Pam Doherty, received word from their son Monday that he had arrived in Kuwait for the second time. Originally scheduled to leave in mid-February, his unit was called back from Kuwait to Baghdad on a security mission, according to his father. "Chris is now in Kuwait (hopefully to stay this time) and will be on his way to the states in a few weeks," his dad said. 1st Lt. Doherty's unit is stationed at Fort Hood, Texas.

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