

*Today's Issue...*

- ▶ [Page One](#)
- ▶ [City](#)
- ▶ [Regional](#)
- ▶ [Sports](#)
- ▶ [Weather](#)
- ▶ [Obituaries](#)
- ▶ [World News](#)
- ▶ [Entertainment](#)
- ▶ [Town Hall](#)
- ▶ [Stock Quotes](#)
- ▶ [Health News](#)
- ▶ [Classifieds](#)
- ▶ [About Us](#)
- ▶ [Archives](#)
- ▶ [Illinois Lottery](#)
- ▶ [e-mail](#)

Star Courier  
[White Pages](#)  
 directory

### Search The Web

  


[Web Directory](#)  
[Yellow Pages](#)  
[White Pages](#)  
[Meet Someone](#)  
[My Page](#)  
[City Guide](#)  
[Lottery Results](#)  
[Weather](#)  
[Movie Listings](#)  
[Maps/Directions](#)  
[Horoscope](#)  
[Greeting Cards](#)



## Thanks is not enough

*By DAVE CLARKE Regional Coordinator*

The world they used to live in is so much different than when they left.

With the exception of a two-week leave and access to webcams, it's been 17 months since members of F Battery, 202nd Air Defense Artillery (ADA) have seen their wives, kids, parents, girlfriends or their dog.

They have never seen "Desperate Housewives" or ever heard of Fantasia Barrino, and when they left, the "Survivor" castaways were still on Vanuatu. For the boys from Kewanee, people were still eating at the now-closed Hog City Grille, the Eagles grocery store was vacant and there was an empty lot on South Street where a new shopping mall now stands.

The National Guard Armory in Galva where they said goodbye to loved ones on Nov. 1, 2003, however, is right where they left it and that's where they will hopefully return sometime this weekend. Families and friends of the 100 or so men who have served in Iraq for the past year are waiting anxiously for the promised three-day notice telling everyone when they'll arrive so last-minute plans can be made.

Battery F, based in Galva and augmented with men from Headquarters Battery in Kewanee and Echo Battery of the 202nd in Dixon, is the first military unit from this area to be called up for combat duty in more the 50 years. Company K, 123rd Field Artillery, Illinois National Guard, from Kewanee, was federalized on Feb. 15, 1952, to serve in the Korean "police action."

The young men of F/202ADA were students, factory

workers, mechanics, and others leading otherwise normal lives when they were interrupted by orders to go to Iraq. Like most soldiers sent to the region, many thought it was a rebuilding mission to help the Iraqi people recover from 30 years of Saddam Hussein's torture and tyranny.

Within days of their arrival, they were dodging bullets, patching up wounded, and dealing with roadside bombs.

This was real war and they were in the middle of it as part of the 1st Cavalry's Task Force Baghdad.

Their mission, for the first four months, was patrolling a section of the main road between the Green Zone and Baghdad International Airport -- "Ambush Alley," now known as the most dangerous stretch of highway in the world.

In November, they were transferred to Taji, just north of Baghdad, where they provided security for a local police station and patrolled a highway in that area.

Between April and February, at least 25 members of the unit were wounded in seven encounters with insurgents. Most were minor injuries and the soldiers soon returned to duty, but five were serious enough to be sent home for treatment. The most seriously wounded, Spc. Dustin Hill, an Annawan High School graduate now living in Wyandot, is still recovering at a hospital in Texas after suffering the loss of one eye, third degree burns to one third of his body, and the loss of his right hand and the fingers and thumb of the other in a car bomb attack.

When they weren't dodging IEDs (improvised explosive devices), the "Boys from Illinois," as they were called, built a water purification plant for an Iraqi village, helped rebuild a school for Iraqi children, and found a wheelchair for an Iraqi boy who could not walk.

They will also be able to tell their grandchildren they helped give birth to a free nation and were present for two of the most important events in the history of Iraq, and possibly the whole Arab world. Their tour covered Sovereignty Day, June 28, 2004, when the government was turned over to the Iraqi people, and Election Day, January 30, 2005, when millions defied death, going to the polls in the first free election in 30 years.

Now, these brave men are on their way home, a time their families have been hoping and praying for every day for months.

Requests for displays of welcome, to say the least, have been met with a generous response. "God Bless You All!" and "You Made Us Proud!" are among the expressions popping up on signboards throughout the area and everyone is hoping the public turns out in large numbers along the streets and highways as they make their way to Galva and the reunions they have so dearly earned. A local GI from another unit who spent tours in Afghanistan and Iraq said seeing the signs and smiles helps to start putting the experience behind you. It "makes the bad stuff go away."

The Star Courier staff has written "Thanks is not enough" across red, white and blue strips on our windows along Main Street, which expresses the depth of gratitude we owe these men for what they have done -- and without suffering one casualty, almost unheard of for units involved in combat in Iraq where 1,500 soldiers have died over the past two years.

They are America's finest -- the citizen soldier -- on the job one day, in the thick of battle the next. They now know firsthand the cost of the freedoms the rest of us take so much for granted.

With the return of unquestionable heroes, the question arises "What next?"

The experts say after the emotional homecoming, all they want to do is get back to the life they left a year and a half ago.

Our advice: Welcome them back, shake their hand, say thanks, then talk basketball, cars, motorcycles, or hunting.

Don't ask them what it was like or how many they killed. Talk about ordinary things in the present or future, not the extraordinary dangers of the past, unless they start the conversation.

When my dad returned after being away from home for 3 1/2 years in World War II, he was discharged in Chicago, took a bus to Kewanee where he arrived at 2 a.m., then took a cab to the family farm near LaFayette. His parents weren't sure when he would be coming home so no one was up. He slipped quietly in the back door and went to sleep on the couch. His dad shook him awake at 5 a.m. and all he said was "Ya gonna do your chores?"

That's all any soldier who comes home from war wants

to hear. Something normal from the world they have missed for so long.

We are about to witness the final chapter in a story that will be part of this area's history for generations to come. The men of Foxtrot went to war, fought for freedom, and came home safe.

They are true heroes who have bonded for life by keeping each other alive.

First, say "thank you" by turning out to wave a flag and cheer as their buses pass by.

Second, say "thank you" by respecting their privacy and helping them readjust to a world at home that has changed since they left.

But last of all, say "thank you" by never forgetting what they have done or the price they paid.

---

[ [Home Page](#) ] [ [City News](#) ] [ [Regional News](#) ] [ [Sports](#) ] [ [Obituaries](#) ] [ [Weather](#) ] [ [Editorial](#) ] [ [Classifieds](#) ] [ [Archives](#) ] [ [Illinois Lottery](#) ] [ [About Us](#) ] [ [Email Us](#) ] [ [Health](#) ] [ [Entertainment](#) ] [ [Town Hall](#) ] [ [World News](#) ] [ [Stocks/Market](#) ]

---

Star  
Courier

TOP

copyright 1999 Kewanee Star Courier