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Star Courier City

KEWANEE
ILLINOIS



Galva National Guard leaving soon to convoy from Kuwait to Baghdad

By DAVE CLARKE Of The Star Courier

GALVA -- The Galva National Guard may be hours away from heading north to Baghdad while three Bradford natives have already arrived at their home for the next year 40 miles north of the Iraqi capital.

Word has been received by family members that Galva's Battery F, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, may be leaving Kuwait as early as tomorrow and heading north in convoy to their home for the next 12 months which, at last report, will be a base located on the southwest edge of Baghdad. One soldier, Tom Wallenfeldt of Galva, told his family in a five-minute phone call late last week that he may be heading north as early as yesterday with what may be an advance team.

According to a story in Sunday's Peoria Journal-Star, which has reporters embedded with the Peoria-based 106th Aviation Regiment, Illinois National Guard, the unit arrived at its forward base, Camp Anaconda, in waves between March 10 and March 15.

Members of that 316-man unit include Luke Hewitt, Cory Noder and Eric Reay, all graduates of Bradford High School.

The 120-man Galva unit has been in Kuwait since March 5, preparing their vehicles for the long trip north.

Several members have been able to call home, although pay phones are the only method and lines are reportedly one to two hours long.

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Josh Newman of Kewanee told his parents, Jerry and Pat Newman, in a recent call that they have been busy lining their Humvees with sandbags and plywood for protection from bullets and roadside bombs, a constant threat in almost any part of Iraq.

Capt. Ron Jeanblanc of the 202nd ADA's Headquarters Battery in Kewanee said Monday that conditions have been "pretty primitive" at Battery F's base camp in Kuwait, according to word he has received from family members who have received calls or Internet messages, which, at this point, seems to be the best and only source of information from the region.

Local Guard officials are not sure just where the local unit has been stationed, but most of the staging has been at Camp New York, a major U.S. staging area in Kuwait.

Battery F is also no longer a part of the 39th Infantry Brigade, an Arkansas National Guard unit with which they trained at Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Polk, La.

The Galva Guard is now attached to the 4th Battalion, 5th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, the air defense element of the 1st Cavalry, based at Fort Hood.

1st Lt. Chris Doherty, an artillery officer with the 1st Battalion, 82nd Field Artillery of the 1st Cavalry Division, who arrived in Kuwait on March 13 from Fort Hood, sent a message to his parents, Jim and Pam Doherty in Galva on Saturday via the Internet. His unit is staging at Camp Udairi, where he reported he has spent most of his time either sleeping or teaching classes on ROE (rules of engagement), convoy procedures, and going to different rifle ranges. He said the tents are climate controlled and temperatures are in the 80s during the day and 50s at night. Regular meals and snacks are available through Army/Air Force Exchange Services and the PX, leaving MREs (meals ready to eat) for exercises in the field.

There's a Burger King trailer, but Doherty said the burgers "taste kind of funny -- more like camel burgers." Doherty said he has encountered a herd of camels which had to be driven off range for live fire exercises. "If you shoot a camel, you have to pay the owner \$3 a pound," Doherty said.

He had his first opportunity to check the Galva/Kewanee Armed Services page which he and his father put online Feb.

17 so local soldiers and families could keep in touch. The site is now up to 111 subscribers. "I hope our guys are checking in now and then. It's awesome to see this kind of support when you are far from home."

To subscribe to the site, log on at www.groups.yahoo.com/group/Galvaarmypage. There is no charge to join the group.

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