



Commander reports Galva Guard sees action, earns Purple Hearts

Major Michael Kessel, commander of Battery F, 202nd Field Artillery, Illinois National Guard, recently issued a report on the unit's activities since arriving in Iraq on March 24.

During the month of April, the unit was involved in three combat-related encounters.

In the following account, Maj. Kessel details those incidents and offers a general report on how the local troops are doing. -- Ed.

By Maj. Michael Kessel

Foxtrot Battery, 2nd ADA

BAGHDAD, Iraq -- Our mission in a nutshell is to ensure freedom of movement along a major supply route for both military and civilian traffic, and to conduct stability and support operations. The latter includes everything from police-style patrolling to meeting locals in order to find their needs to fighting insurgents and terrorists.

We patrol a major section of a six-lane highway to ensure convoys can move through without the danger of attack.

It would be an understatement to say that F/202 ADA has done its job well. F/202 ADA was the first unit to be named "Hero" of the 1st Cavalry Division because of its efforts during the Battle of Holy Week, April 7-11. F/202 ADA soldiers also were awarded the first medals the commanding general has awarded in Iraq.

- During a routine patrol on April 7, third platoon was attacked with rocket-propelled grenades, rifle fire and a roadside bomb. The insurgent forces attacked from a neighboring two-story school building. The platoon engaged the enemy, but was forced to pull back from the fight to treat three wounded soldiers. They were treated at the local American military hospital. Two -- Sgt. Jon Arneson of Dixon, and Spc. William McDaniels of Peoria -- were returned to duty. Spc. Jeremy Wrotny of LaSalle, sustained a facial wound and, after additional treatment in Germany and Washington, D.C., is now home recovering from his injuries.

- On April 11, Easter Sunday, second platoon was in a convoy heading back for ammunition resupply after coming under attack while checking out a possible detonation device. As they were approaching the entrance to the Baghdad International Airport complex, they saw another unit beginning to leave. They stopped them to ascertain their direction of travel and were told they were headed in the other direction,

out of the danger area. Each proceeded on its path.

By this time, the headquarters platoon had hastily put together an emergency resupply mission and they had arrived at the front gate. Second platoon was in the process of reloading ammunition when someone spotted two large black plumes of smoke rising from the highway. They knew the convoy they had just passed had been hit.

Both the second platoon and the headquarters platoon headed off to counterattack. Also by this time, the remainder of the battery had been alerted and was rolling towards the scene as well.

Upon arrival at the attack site, two fuel tankers were burning, four soldiers (from the other unit) were wounded, one critically.

F/202 soldiers immediately began engaging the enemy and treating the wounded. They called in a medivac helicopter which landed near the scene to transport the wounded to safety. As the fight continued to rage, air support was called in and two AH-64 Apaches arrived on the scene. After less than five minutes of engaging the enemy, one of the Apaches was shot down by a surface-to-air missile. As the soldiers watched in horror, the Apache crashed to the ground in a ball of flames; there were no survivors.

The entire battle lasted more than 30 minutes before the enemy pulled back and the convoy was able to move back to the safety of the airport compound. Only one F/202 ADA soldier -- Spc. Mark Bomleny of Atkinson -- was injured during the battle and he was returned to duty the next day.

- A few days later, on April 13, while on routine patrol, third platoon discovered a suspicious car parked under the overpass. The subsequent investigation revealed that it was a car bomb.

The platoon secured the scene and the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit was called. It was determined that it was in excess of 200 pounds of explosives, set to be detonated by a cell phone. Sgt. Bruce Hartman was asked by EOD to shoot the cell phone and the windows with his M14 sniper rifle. He did so with two shots, the minimum possible. EOD then had their robot set up the charges needed to detonate the device safely. The resulting explosion sent a fireball high into the sky.

Since that time things have calmed down considerably, hopefully because the insurgent forces have learned not to mess with the "boys from Illinois." We are now back out meeting the locals and beginning to take care of schools, water and sewer projects and other basic nation-building projects.

[Pictorial book recalls Kewanee history](#)

One of the most popular -- and most successful -- projects ever undertaken by the Star Courier was a pictorial history book published in 1991. It was a hardcover, coffee table-sized book with a drawing of the old city hall on the front by Bob Tellier, then a graphic designer with the paper.

[Father, son arrested in Toulon](#)

TOULON -- A 40-year-old Toulon man faces drug charges after being

arrested Friday morning at his home by agents from the Peoria Meg Unit of the Multi-County Narcotic Enforcement Group and officers from the Stark County Sheriff's Office.

[Five get federal drug sentences](#)

ROCK ISLAND -- Five Kewanee man have received lengthy terms in federal prison on drug charges, and a sixth has pleaded guilty to a drug charge and is awaiting sentencing.

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[Firefighters, city in arbitration](#)

KEWANEE -- City officials and the Kewanee firefighters union probably won't know until at least July how an arbitrator rules in a grievance filed by the firefighters over last fall's layoffs in the department.

[Consolidation survey planned in Wethersfield](#)

KEWANEE -- Consolidation -- or at least a study on the pros and cons of consolidation -- was a hot-button topic at Thursday night's monthly Wethersfield School Board meeting.

[Police blotter](#)

A tall grass complaint was received from the 400 block of North Grove Street.

[Communication for Life is theme of special month](#)

May is Better Hearing and Speech Month and speech-language pathologists and audiologists throughout the United States are celebrating their profession and the positive role each plays in the rehabilitation of the newborn through the lifespan.

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