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KEWANEE  
ILLINOIS

## Community shows support for deployed Guardsmen

By TAMMY WILKINSON and DAVE CLARKE Of The Star Courier

GALVA -- A sea of patriotic support could be seen in what was reported as one of the largest crowds ever at the Galva High School stadium Saturday for the ceremony mobilizing F Battery, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery for duty in Iraq.

Galva residents said it was the largest crowd to pack the bleachers and line the football field since Galva made the playoffs in 1994. Maj. Tim Franklin, Illinois National Guard Public Affairs Officer from Springfield, said it was the first time in this deployment they have attended a ceremony held at a football field. The event is usually held indoors in an armory or auditorium, he said.

The Galva unit is comprised of 65 Guardsman from the Galva Armory, 34 from E Battery based in Dixon, and 22 from Headquarters Battery, in Kewanee.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld approved the Army's request to mobilize F Battery on Sept. 26 as part of the 39th Enhanced Support Brigade headquartered in Little Rock, Ark.

The Galva unit was ordered to active duty on Oct. 12. During the past month, the Galva soldiers have undergone preparations including physical conditioning and additional training to prepare

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them for duty in Iraq where they are expected to arrive around March 1, 2004.

The unit has been told it can expect to be in the Iraqi theater up to 12 months, following six months of training at Fort Hood, Texas. The unit is under the command of Maj. Mike Kessel, with Capt. Greg Reinhardt, a former Wethersfield High School teacher and coach now living in southern Illinois, as executive officer.

Last Tuesday, an advance party of 12 Galva Guardsmen left for Fort Hood to prepare for the arrival of the remainder of the unit who were expected to arrive on base Sunday afternoon.

The Galva troops are expected to be in Baghdad by mid-March and will provide protection and security for military forces there.

Maj. Thomas Burhorn, Kewanee, battery commander, served as master of ceremonies for Saturday's sendoff and read the official orders activating the unit for "contingency operations" in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Brigadier General Randal E. Thomas, Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, commended "Foxtrot Battery" on their preparation for duty and offered words of comfort to the families affected by the deployment. "Don't let accidents hurt you," Thomas warned the soldiers. "Where you are going there will be challenges. Look out for one another. You do your job -- and we'll take care of your families back home."

Other guests included Big. Gen. Charles Fleming, a Kewanee native, Assistant Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard; Brig. Gen. Ronald Botz, Commander, 404th Chemical Brigade; and Lt. Col. Michael R. Zerbonia, Commander of 1st Battalion, 202nd ADA.

From the podium which faced the formation, LTC Zerbonia said, "Remember three things. Use your head. Fight as you were trained and we'll see you when you come home."

Also taking part in the ceremony was Galva Mayor Don Hagaman who presented a city flag to the unit which will be

flown at Fort Hood and in Iraq. "This flag is to help you remember where you left from and where you will return to," Hagaman said.

Illinois State Rep. Don Moffitt said, "You are heroes. Don't ever forget that. Stand for freedom and stand for America. You will be in our prayers. Come home safe."

Eric Schuller, policy advisor for Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn, told the soldiers, "We've got your back." He told about the Family Relief Act recently signed into law by Gov. Rod Blagojevich which guarantees assistance for families of Guard and Reserve members called to active duty. "In spite of a huge budget deficit, the Governor took \$5 million from the General Fund to insure your families are taken care of. Do what you are trained to do and we'll take care of the families here at home."

Gerry Lack, a representative for Illinois Congressman Lane Evans, also commended the local unit and said, "America's gratitude has never been greater."

Also taking part in the ceremony were the remaining members of the Guard units from Kewanee and Dixon. The Galva High School band, directed by Brian Woods, provided music for the ceremony.

In reflecting on his grandson's departure, Army veteran Wayne Abbott, Galva, had mixed feelings about his grandson, Nolan Thomson, 25, shipping out. "I'm as apprehensive as hell about sending him over there. I wish he didn't have to go," said Abbott. "I pray to God he comes back to us safe, but I am sure he will. I wish all of them luck and I hope they all know that we're here for them."

Twenty-year-old Paul M. Calhoun, Kewanee, said as a Galva Guardsman, the last thing he expected was deployment.

In August, Calhoun enrolled as a full-time student at Western Illinois University where he was pursuing a degree to become a history teacher. Upon his return, the 2002 Kewanee High School graduate will have to re-enroll in college and start over.

After an open house at the armory following the ceremony, the troops were given the rest of the afternoon and part of the evening off to spend the time with family.

At 8 p.m. the soldiers said their farewells and were placed in lock-down at the armory to prepare for departure. A steady stream of vehicles lined the street in front of the armory as the Guardsmen carried in their gear. Early Sunday morning, the troops boarded three charter buses which took them to O'Hare Airport in Chicago where they were scheduled to take a commercial flight to Fort Hood.

The first bus arrived earlier than announced, pulling in at 12:38 a.m. In a pouring rain, the first group of troops was loaded and the bus left at 1:30 a.m. The two remaining buses arrived at 2 a.m. with the second bus departing at 3 a.m. The third group packed up and drove out of town at 3:30 a.m.

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