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KEWANEE
ILLINOIS

'My daddy's got your back'

By *DAVE CLARKE* Regional Coordinator

There were many fine things said from the speaker's podium during Saturday morning's moving sendoff ceremony for Battery F, 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, Illinois National Guard based in Galva.

All appropriate and appreciated.

There was a poem, however, that seems to have struck a chord with many who were there to see their loved ones off to eventual assignment in Iraq.

We have received several requests for a copy of the poem, written from the standpoint of those left home by those who go off to war, so we tracked it down.

It took a bit of research to find out which one of the several people who spoke that day actually shared the poem which has since been attributed to several dignitaries who spoke on that sunny fall morning. Sgt. Curt Rowen, at Headquarters Battery of the 1st Battalion, at the Kewanee armory, pointed us in the right direction.

It was read by a young man named Eric Schuller of Chicago, who represented Lt. Gov. Patrick Quinn for whom he works as a policy advisor.

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Schuller was kind enough to e-mail us the text:

My Daddy's Got Your Back

I am a small and precious child, my dad's been sent to fight

The only place I'll see his face is in my dreams at night.

He will be gone too many days for my young mind to keep track.

I may be sad, but I am proud.

My daddy's got your back.

I am a caring mother. My son has gone to war.

My mind is filled with worries that I have never known before.

Every day I try to keep my thoughts from turning black.

I may be scared, but I am proud.

My son has got your back.

I am a strong and loving wife, with a husband soon to go.

There are times I'm terrified in a way most never know.

I bite my lip, and force a smile as I watch my husband pack.

My heart may break, but I am proud.

My husband's got your back.

I am a soldier, serving proudly, standing tall.

I fight for freedom, yours and mine by answering this call.

I do my job while knowing the thanks it sometimes lacks.

Say a prayer that I'll come home.

It's me whose got your back.

Schuller also asked if we could pass along additional information on the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund (IMFRF), which he mentioned briefly in his remarks Saturday in Galva.

For the complete story, check www.OperationHomeFront.org on the Internet.

The fund was recently established by act of the General Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Blagojevich to provide grants to families of Illinois National Guard members called to active duty since Sept. 11, 2001.

The grants, which range from \$500 to \$2,000, depending on status or need, help families defray the costs of food, housing, utilities, medical services and other expenses that become difficult to afford when a wage-earner has temporarily left civilian employment to be placed on active military duty.

"Foxtrot" Battery is expected to be on active status for at least 18 months, including a year in Iraq.

The enabling legislation, introduced by State Rep. Mike Boland of Moline, also establishes a checkoff box on Illinois income tax returns beginning in 2004 which will allow taxpayers to voluntarily contribute to a trust fund which will provide financial assistance to families who are suffering from a decline in purchasing power because the military pay of the breadwinner is substantially less than their civilian salary.

Individuals or groups can also send contributions directly to the fund by sending donations to:

Illinois Military Family Relief Fund

P.O. Box 8889

Springfield, Ill. 62791.

All contributions are tax deductible and 100 percent of all donations go directly to assist military families. Questions about the fund can be directed to a toll-free number -- (866)417-8889.

Those wishing to apply for grants can go to the site listed above, or call 866-524-ILNG (4564).

Sgt. Rowen said Maj. Mike Kessel, the commanding officer, report that all members of Battery F arrived safely at Fort Hood, Texas, late Sunday, and spent Monday and Tuesday completing additional processing. "They hit the ground running and haven't stopped since," said Rowen.

Several people have asked about printing a roster of members of F Battery and, indicative of the world in which we now live, that information cannot be given out by the military.

We did, however, ask for and were given a list of hometowns represented in the 122-member unit and were somewhat surprised.

Expecting a list of a dozen or so towns, mostly local, Sgt. Rowen supplied us with a list of 70 towns from five states, including Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin and even Texas.

There are 13 members from Kewanee, seven are graduates of Galva High School and six are from Annawan. Other nearby towns represented include Cambridge, Toulon, Sheffield, Neponset, LaFayette and Atkinson.

We've been saying "men and women of Battery F," and will have to change that to men only.

Apparently the Galva unit is not authorized to include females since all positions are directly related to combat, according to Rowen.

There are a number of women in Headquarters Battery in Kewanee since that unit has broader functions, several of which may be related to, but not directly involved in combat. Everyone with the Guard unit, including top brass from Springfield has been extremely impressed and appreciative of the local support

shown last Saturday.

Now it's time to continue that tremendous support by tying yellow ribbons around the tree in your yard and proudly displaying the American flag on the front porch.

Blue Star window emblems are also available at the Kewanee VFW and Star Courier office for families of military personnel on active duty.

One thing is obvious after watching kids we've raised, taught in Sunday School or coached on the athletic field, in uniform heading off for duty in what amounts to a shooting gallery, you realize the War in Iraq is hitting close to home.

It's no longer just the lead story on the TV news every night.

We are now involved and whether we agree with what's happening or not, we all need to show we're behind those who are putting their lives on the line -- show them we've got their back.

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