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Galva Guard takes break from war in Iraq for Thanksgiving feast

By Star Courier staff

The troops of Battery F, 202nd Air Defense Artillery spent Thanksgiving away from their loved ones and on duty in Iraq. The unit recently moved from a base near the Baghdad airport where it had been stationed since March to a new location near Taji about 25 miles north of Baghdad. The following account was sent to the Star Courier Thursday by the unit's commander, Maj. Michael Kessel. -- Ed.

CAMP COOK, Iraq -- Thanksgiving here is about the same as any other day except there was a special meal. We continued to patrol our area of responsibility as we do every day; we have pretty much been patrolling by platoon 24/7 since the battery arrived in Iraq. We have found that this is the best way to keep the terrorists off balance and thereby defeat them in our area of operations.

One thing I love about our guys is that they don't complain. They have come to understand that doing this is one reason we have suffered so few casualties. So again, Thanksgiving was pretty much a normal day for us, everybody did their normal routine.

One bit of excitement on our new FOB (Forward Operating Base) was the new PX and dining facility that just opened. Also, opening today was Burger King and Pizza Hut. They soon will be joined by Subway. The inaugural meal in the new dining facility was Thanksgiving, so the place got a workout today.

The meal today consisted of turkey, ham, chicken (baked and fried), prime rib, crab legs and shrimp,

mashed potatoes and gravy, macaroni and cheese, cornbread dressing, black-eyed peas, green beans, corn-on-the-cob and collard greens. Also several salads and desserts. The commanders and senior staff officers in the division served the meal.

As far as the new surroundings, the trailers are about the same as before, they are a lot closer together and things like the motor pool, headquarters building, chapel, etc. seem a little more spread out, but the guys have adapted.

It has turned drastically colder here. It is actually funny seeing some of the guys who were saying a month ago that it was never going to get that cold, suddenly wearing nearly every piece of cold weather gear they have been issued. It has been ranging from the 30s to the 40s and low 50s. Of course it gets dark here by 5:30, so weather-wise, it has actually felt like Thanksgiving.

Today I am thankful that all of my soldiers are still alive. Yes, we have been beat up a little, but for what we have done and been through it is literally a miracle and an answer to the prayers of a lot of people that we are in as good as shape as we are.

Second, I am thankful for the men in my command. These are some of the greatest men around. They never hesitate to do the job that needs to be done and never question what I ask them to do, even though, sometimes it may seem kind of off the wall, their trust in me is humbling. They and I have seen that most of our non-doctrinal approaches have succeeded extremely well. Sometimes you have to think like the bad guy to get the bad guy.

Relax and enjoy your holidays. The "Boys from Illinois" have your back.

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