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Kewanee soldier injured by roadside bomb

By Star Courier staff

A Kewanee soldier in the Galva National Guard unit was in a hospital in Germany today after the truck in which he was riding was hit by a bomb near Baghdad on Christmas Eve.

Marcus Johnson, a 2002 Wethersfield High School graduate, was the gunner in the truck and was behind the gun when the bomb exploded.

Maj. Michael Kessel, commanding officer of the Galva unit, detailed the incident in an e-mail to Dan and Karen Ramsey of Kewanee, Johnson's grandparents. Johnson is the son of Mark Johnson and Nancy Mederos.

"When the bomb went off, I remember the truck lifting off of the ground before slamming back down on all four blown tires," Kessel's e-mail said.

"The truck also immediately filled with smoke and dirt from the explosion," the e-mail said. "When we came to a stop, the driver side doors were jammed but fortunately I was able to get mine open."

Kessel wrote that Johnson and a civilian police adviser who was riding in the truck were both severely injured.

"Both of the severely injured men were out of the vehicle and being treated within a minute," the e-mail said.

Kessel wrote that at first, Johnson's injuries "did not look that bad." But when medics removed his vest,

they saw that shrapnel had entered his left lung.

The medics started an intravenous line, and a helicopter arrived within 10 minutes, Kessel wrote. The two men were flown to the 31st Combat Surgical Hospital in downtown Baghdad.

Kessel wrote that he flew to the hospital and was told that after undergoing surgery, "Marcus was doing much better than what they thought when he came in. All of his vital signs were good."

Johnson was flown out of Iraq Sunday night for a hospital in Germany. The flight had been grounded temporarily due to bad weather.

"The fact that they were not willing to fly in the bad weather indicates how good Marcus is doing," Kessel wrote.

"He is stable and hopefully if all goes well will be headed back to the States by year's end," Kessel told the Ramseys in a followup e-mail today.

"Marcus got the best possible care from the scene to the hospital," Kessel wrote.

"He is a great young man, a hero. He will fully recover, but will be missed here in the meantime."

Kessel also wrote that protective equipment kept the incident from being worse.

"While we had men hurt, looking at the vehicle, it could have been a lot worse had we not had all of the protective equipment," the e-mail said.

"So to rest everyone's mind, the equipment did provide protection."

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