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KEWANEE
ILLINOIS

Ceremony Saturday for departing Guard unit

By TAMMY WILKINSON *Of The Star Courier*

GALVA -- Members of the Illinois Army National Guard unit in Galva are preparing to leave early Sunday morning for Fort Hood, Texas, where they will train before being deployed to Iraq next spring.

A mobilization ceremony for Battery F, 1st Battalion 202nd Air Defense Artillery of Galva, is scheduled at 10 a.m. Saturday on the Galva High School football field.

The public is encouraged to attend the event in support of the guard members.

Guest speaker for the formal event will be Brig. Gen. Randal Thomas, the 36th Adjutant General for Illinois.

Several officials from the Illinois Army National Guard and guard units from Kewanee and Dixon will also attend.

Galva Mayor Don Hagaman is to address the group and present a flag to the unit. The GHS band will also take part.

The Galva unit will march before a reviewing stand to be reviewed by Gen. Thomas.

The public will be seated in the grandstand for the ceremony.

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There is no admission fee and refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the program by the Family Readiness Network of Battery F, 202nd ADA.

The Galva Guard unit consists of 122 guardsmen -- 65 from the Galva Armory, 34 from Battery E, 202nd Air Defense Artillery headquartered in Dixon and 22 from the headquarters at the National Guard Armory in Kewanee.

One officer from Battery H of the 202nd Air Defense Artillery in North Riverside, Ill., will also be joining the group.

Battery F was alerted by the Army on July 26 that they could be participating in active federal service in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

In September, the local unit was administratively, logistically and medically screened for availability for deployment, also known as "Soldier Readiness Processing."

On Sept. 26, the Secretary of Defense approved the Army's request to mobilize Battery F, as part of the 39th Enhanced Support Brigade, which is a National Guard brigade headquartered in Little Rock, Ark.

The Galva unit was ordered to active duty effective Oct. 12. The 30th Infantry Brigade from North Carolina was also mobilized as of Oct. 1.

According to the Defense Department, both units can expect to be in the Iraqi theater for up to 12 months. The total length of mobilization is up to 18 months to allow time for equipping, training, mobilizing, leave and demobilizing activities.

Both mobilizations are part of the force rotation plan.

For the past three weeks, the Galva soldiers and their families have been briefed on their transition to active duty and the conditions they can expect to face while deployed.

Equipment has been readied and transported to the mobilization station at Fort Hood.

An advance party consisting of a dozen Galva soldiers left Tuesday to prepare the mobilization site for the arrival of the rest of the unit.

According to a spokesperson for the Galva unit, the soldiers have undergone physical fitness conditioning as well as training in their military duties.

The local unit expects to be staged in Kuwait, where all arriving soldiers are processed.

Commander Mike Kessel at the Galva armory had previously said the unit was expected to report to Baghdad in mid-March on a mission to provide protection of military forces such as guard and security procedures.

Military personnel said, however, the soldiers' duties at this point are flexible and could include a multitude of tasks.

The bulk of the Galva unit is expected to begin pulling out at 2 a. m. Sunday.

They will be transported by charter bus to O'Hare Airport in Chicago, where they will take a commercial flight to Fort Hood.

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