

[<<Back](#)

Galva, IL - John David reports
Galva-based reservists preparing to come home

By John David

Reservists in the 202nd Air Defense Artillery Unit based in Galva will be packing their bags soon and returning to the United States. After nearly 16 months of dealing with injuries and dangerous situations in Operation Iraqi Freedom, 120 soldiers are about to find out that there's really no place like home.

Military officials expect the reservists back in Galva between March 21-26. That's where a welcome home ceremony will be scheduled at the Galva Armory when the date and time is finalized.

Wayne Abbott is keeping up with news from Iraq over the internet. The Galva man reads e-mails for personal accounts. He corresponds with his grandson, Noland Thomson, a reservist who is preparing for a happy homecoming in Henry County next month.

"Even though there have been injuries over there, they get to come home home," Abbott said. "Families will be very relieved."

Last Veterans Day, Kelly Thomson got a surprise call from her husband before a two-week visit in Galva. But this time, he's coming back for good.

"I'm just glad that he'll be here," she said. "It will be face-to-face instead of webcams, phone calls and letters."

Kelly Thomson's relief is being repeated over and over for families in the 202nd. After being away for more than a year, leading convoys, checkpoints and searches, it's nearly time to come home.

A time to remember the service and sacrifice at the Galva Armory. It will be a salute to 120 reservists from many communities who served in Iraq. And for some, a sigh of relief.

"Not having to worry what's happening to them over there," said Ssg. Martin Gibson. "They'll be here. It will be real."

Real like the roses Thomson sent Kelly for Valentine's Day. It will be a chance to renew a relationship and just be a family.

"He's coming home in one piece," she said. "I'm grateful, very grateful."

And maybe grateful even earlier than expected. Noland tells Kelly that he'll be home by March 12. Whenever the date, it will be a reunion that they'll always remember.

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