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Tour of duty easier with hometown friends nearby

By Kelly Hessedal

ANNAWAN - Today 130 soldiers from the 202nd Air Defense Artillery Unit recovered after a big homecoming celebration.

Specialist Ryan Carlson says his year-long tour of duty was difficult at times, but it helped to have several hometown friends by his side. He's one of 12 soldiers who graduated from Annawan High School - all friends - who joined the 202nd together.

"We met a lot of new guys from Dixon and Kewanee grew into one big family and we helped each other every step of the way," Carlson said.

They spent time guarding Airport Road in the Green Zone, one of the most dangerous parts of Iraq

"Our main objective was protecting roadways keeping insurgents out," Carlson said.

Luckily everyone made it home, but one soldier, PFC Dustin Hill, recovers in Texas after he was injured when a bomb exploded near his convoy.

"He's doing really well - improving every day - he says he doesn't regret it at all - he says if he had to do it over he would we just want for him to get home," said Carlson.

He wishes his friend could see all the signs and decorations throughout town. The community has been behind each one of them - every step of the way - he's just thankful they made it home together.

"I'm just glad to go over there with group of guys I did," he said.

The city of Annawan is planning a big celebration for the troops in April - another will follow in Galva this summer.



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