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Kewanee soldier wounded in action

By Ed Tibbetts

KEWANEE, Ill. — A Kewanee soldier who was injured in Iraq on Christmas Eve is recovering and may be back in the United States this weekend, his grandmother said Thursday.

Marcus Johnson, a 20-year-old gunner serving with the Illinois National Guard unit in Galva, was riding in a Humvee when a roadside bomb exploded, puncturing his lung. After being taken to a Baghdad hospital, Johnson was airlifted to Germany, where he has been recovering, his grandmother, Karen Ramsey of Kewanee, said Thursday.

"He sounded wonderful," Ramsey said, "It was so good to hear him."

Johnson has lived with his grandparents for the past five years. Ramsey said she was told he may be flown to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the Washington, D.C., area on Saturday.

Ramsey said she hopes to see him Sunday.

Johnson, two other soldiers and a civilian were riding in their vehicle when a roadside bomb camouflaged with straw or hay was detonated, Ramsey said. Johnson was taken to a Baghdad hospital at first, then went to Germany, where he has been on a respirator.

Initially, Ramsey said, she and her husband, Dan, were told the wounds were critical. "We were devastated," she said.

However, about 12 hours later, in the early hours of Christmas morning, she said they got a call telling them he had been stabilized and his injuries no longer were life-threatening.

"On Saturday, we were on pins and needles," she said. Since then, Johnson's condition has been upgraded and doctors believe he'll have a full recovery, she said.

Major Tim Franklin, a spokesman for the Illinois National Guard in Springfield, said Johnson's Humvee was armored. That has been a concern among soldiers and their families, including in Galva.

Johnson is a 2002 graduate of Kewanee Wethersfield High School and he plans to go to Western Illinois University in the fall to study law enforcement, Ramsey said. The Galva unit has been in Iraq since spring. It was deployed in the fall of 2003.

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