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KEWANEE
ILLINOIS



Galva/Kewanee troops see action in Baghdad

By DAVE CLARKE Of The Star Courier

BAGHDAD, Iraq -- It's been a nerve-racking week and uneasy Easter for the families of area soldiers stationed in Iraq.

Galva's National Guard Battery F, attached to the 1st Cavalry Division, arrived at North Camp Victory, a new U.S. Army base near the international airport a few miles southwest of Baghdad.

For obvious reasons of security, soldiers are prohibited from going into much detail about their activities, but from what has filtered back to family members via a quick phone call or e-mail it is apparent they've already seen some action, most recently in last week's uprising by the followers of militant cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Sgt. Ryan Peterson of LaFayette, saved the life of his partner, a member of the unit from Dixon, after their Humvee came under attack last week.

According to Leslie Peterson, her son, a gunner, compressed his partner's wound under one arm to stop the bleeding while continuing to return fire. According to National Guard spokesmen, the Dixon Guardsman, who suffered facial injuries, was flown to Germany for treatment before being sent home. Two other members of the unit who received minor injuries in the attack were back on duty the next day, according to spokesmen.

"The area they are in is as dangerous as we see on TV," Mrs. Peterson said. She said her son is being considered for a

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medal for saving the life of a fellow soldier while under enemy attack.

- Deanna Calhoun of Kewanee said she "had this really bad feeling" all day last Thursday. Her mother's instinct proved prophetic when the phone rang at 4:30 a.m. Friday and she heard the voice of her son. Spec. Paul Calhoun, on the other end of the line in Baghdad where it was 1:30 Friday afternoon. The Kewanee soldier was calling his mother to tell her he was all right after being involved in a running gun battle with a band of looters he and his fellow soldiers in F Battery's 3rd Platoon had encountered. During the high speed chase that ensued, Calhoun received what was apparently a hair-line fracture of his tailbone from the rough ride in the rear of the truck from which he was operating a machine gun. The "bad guys" were caught and Calhoun is back on duty after several day's rest, according to his mother. "It sounds like they are all doing fine, with no serious injuries," said Mrs. Calhoun. She said, however, that she does not watch news coverage of the unrest in Iraq, getting her information from exchanges with other family members who provide each other with support and bits of news from their loved ones.

- Staff Sgt. Martin Gibson, rear detachment officer stationed at the Galva Armory, has frequent contact with F Battery's commanding officer, Maj. Mike Kessel, and said he has reported the unit has taken charge of its assigned area in the city and is guarding it but, of course, cannot give the exact location.

SSG Gibson said the 120-man unit, comprised of components of the Galva, Kewanee and Dixon batteries of 1st Battalion, 202nd Air Defense Artillery, has settled into the new trailers recently built for troops arriving in the next rotation. He said one of the biggest problems is the fine, powdery sand that clogs everything from engines to artillery. "I served over there in the Gulf War and I told them before they left about the sand and I don't think they thought it was as bad as I said it was until they got to Iraq," said Gibson. He said, however, that the men know about maintenance and are diligent in their cleaning duties.

According to information in military facilities available on the Internet, each of the two-man rooms in the new trailers have a bed, lamp, table and closet for each soldier. Every two rooms shares a shower, sink and toilet. Gibson said Internet access should be installed in each room very soon which will enable more frequent communication between the soldiers

and loved ones back home.

- 1st Lt. Chris Doherty of Galva, a member of 1st Battalion 82nd Field Artillery, 1st Cavalry Division, was involved in one of the first and fiercest encounters of the week on Sunday, April 4, when he and other members of his unit went to the rescue of a patrol which had been ambushed in their Humvees in Sadr City, one of the poorest and most populated areas of Baghdad.

Soldiers in Bradley Fighting Vehicles, one under the command of 1st Lt. Doherty, and tanks fought for three hours trying to reach the 22 besieged American soldiers, according to an account by a TV reporter embedded with the Fort Hood-based 1st Cavalry.

"Chris' Bradley was first in line and they found themselves surrounded by barricades. They took RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) fire and were hit at least 19 times," according to word received by his family. Eight soldiers were killed and 50 wounded in the attack and rescue effort.

"Christopher would love to just hand out candy and sunglasses, but unfortunately, they are in a vicious battle for their lives," said his mother, Pam Doherty. In a call to his wife, Amanda, 1st Lt. Doherty, who has also been in Iraq only a couple of weeks, said it was "so strange how a group of people who were excited to see us turned violent in a matter of days."

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The logo for the Kewanee Star Courier, featuring the words "Star" and "Courier" in a serif font, with a small star icon above the "a" in "Star".

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