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Idaho Guard commander stresses importance of state's role in war

By ALLISON KING *Post Register* March 26, 2003 Publication: *Post Register (Idaho Falls, ID)* Page: a7 Word Count: 391

REXBURG - It's become a reality for mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, neighbors and employers.

Iraq may be far from Idaho, but it's not far from Idahoans' minds.

About 1.5 million American soldiers are setting up camp on Iraq's desert sands or are in preparation to, according to the Department of Defense. More than 600 of those soldiers are from Idaho.

Idaho Air National Guard and Idaho Army National Guard units are overseas working a variety of jobs, from humanitarian missions in Djibouti, a country on the eastern border of Ethiopia, to Operation Iraqi Freedom in Baghdad, Iraq.

"The Idaho National Guard has been involved in every world conflict since 1877," said Maj. Gen. John F. Kane, adjutant general of Idaho and commanding general of the Idaho National Guard, at a Kiwanis Club luncheon Tuesday. "We go where we're needed."

It started with the Boise-based 190th Fighter Squadron leaving to patrol Iraq's southern no-fly zone last year. Now its tour has been extended, and more troops from Boise, Driggs and Preston have been called to join them.

Units throughout the state are receiving more training and more gear, Kane said. Artillery units

in Rexburg and St. Anthony have been training with Paladins, a military artillery vehicle.

"Idaho is playing a very large role," said Lt. Col. Tim Marsano. "War affects us here."

The 938th Engineering Detachment out of Driggs is now in the Kuwaiti campaign, Kane said. The 24-member unit, comprised of soldiers from Twin Falls to Victor, just finished its training at Ft. Lewis, Wash.

Idaho still has about 4,400 more soldiers and reservists throughout the state in 62 National Guard units ready to fulfill the guard's "dual mission." The federal mission: Have combat-ready troops organized to meet the U.S. military and government's needs. The state mission: Have emergency-trained soldiers ready to defend Idaho against all elements, be they fires, floods or terror attacks.

Guardsmen are augmenting security at military installations, power plants, dams and government infrastructure (such as Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory and the FBI headquarters in Pocatello), Kane said.

"Our soldiers are engaged today as they have never been engaged before," he said. "But rest assured that the military of the United States is going to make this thing work."

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