

Cops called to Iraq

■ 3 Champaign officers serve in Urbana Guard unit

By PAUL WOOD

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CHAMPAIGN — Police Officer Mike Pyburn put in his 10 years with the National Guard. He served in Germany after Sept. 11 and was free to move on with his life. But he has re-upped and will spend the next 18 months on reconnaissance duty, some or all of it in Iraq.

Part of the reason he signed on was a patriotism he developed growing up on the now-closed Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul. But the biggest part is his loyalty to the guys in his platoon, he said Wednesday.

Pyburn isn't the only Champaign officer in Urbana's National Guard unit, which found out just after Thanksgiving that it was headed to the Middle East. Tim Atteberry and Mike Alvis also are going.

Iraq news:

■ Three more Iraqis killed in car bombing, mortar barrage, A-3.

They'll all be leaving soon after the first of the year.

Officer Alvis is a sergeant first class. He has spent 10 years on the police force after growing up in southern Illinois.

He has a wife, Debbie, and three children who range in age from 5 to 13.

A Desert Storm veteran, Alvis hates to be away from his family for a year and a half.

"There's always a possibility we'll get home sooner," he says.

In the first Gulf War, Alvis, 36, served with the First Infantry Division, the Big Red One.

"It was interesting. I was 22 years old, and suddenly I was not only responsible for myself but a team leader," he said.

Since 1998, Alvis has been in a reconnaissance unit, and Pyburn will be in the platoon he heads up.

"Any time you heard guns fired in anger, it's an advantage," Alvis says.

Operation Iraqi Freedom is an urban war, so Alvis and Pyburn will get additional training in Stalingrad-type fighting at Fort Stewart in Georgia. Pyburn expects to spend 100 days continuously training there, away from girlfriend Lauren Toby, a doctoral student in international nutrition.

"She spent a year in Antarctica, so she's good with it," Pyburn said.

Neither officer knows how they'll be replaced at the department for so long.

"Everybody's been really supportive," Pyburn said.

"They'll have to deal," Alvis said.



Robert K. O'Daniel/The News-Gazette

Champaign police Officer Mike Pyburn, a member of the Urbana National Guard unit, will spend the next 18 months on reconnaissance duty, some or all of it in Iraq. Tim Atteberry and Mike Alvis also will be on leave from their police duties to serve in the Middle East.



Champaign police Officer Mike Alvis shows Cub Scouts from Pack 121, Den 2, SWAT equipment in this 2002 photo. Alvis, a member of the National Guard, has been called to duty in Iraq.

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Officers

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This will be Alvis' fifth deployment overseas.

"My wife knows what she needs to do when I'm gone, what resources are available," he said.

One thing he's looking forward to is frequent e-mail contact with his family. "Over there for Desert Storm, we relied a lot on telephones. Getting to one was sporadic at best," Alvis said.

Alvis said he's a patriotic kind of guy who doesn't want to debate the pros and cons of American soldiers in Iraq.

"I think like a soldier. Soldiers are instruments of policy, not makers of policy," he said.

Pyburn, 27, said he's somewhat concerned about safety issues when he and a five-member unit patrol "some big city" in Iraq. But he believes his third-shift patrols along with Alvis have heightened his skills in identifying danger.

With those night patrols, he said, "you really learn to notice a lot more things than the average person does," he said.
