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Care packages give troops a holiday boost

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By **Alan Gomez**, USA TODAY

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As holiday shoppers scurried from mall to mall this weekend in the final rush before Christmas, Alison Mansfield spent most of her time at home packing boxes and boxes of socks.

The 12-year-old from Fort Wayne, Ind., has spent the past two years collecting cards, toiletries and other items to ship to U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This year, she is focusing on warm socks for soldiers patrolling the cold, wet mountains of Afghanistan. In the month since she started her latest campaign, she has rounded up more than 4,500 pairs.

"I learned that it's really important to help others. They make a lot of sacrifices for us, and you should give back to those who help you," says Alison, who will continue collecting socks through Sunday.

Alison is one of thousands of relatives, friends and strangers who have been sending care packages to troops serving on the front lines. The practice hits a peak this time of year, as churches, schools, businesses and individuals hurry to send gifts to soldiers who can't be home for the holidays.

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In November and December of last year, more than 20 million pounds of items were shipped to military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to Army Lt. Col. Kevin Arata. By January and February, that total had dropped to 16 million.

For the most part, the items requested by soldiers are the most basic — toothpaste, soap, toilet paper, hoods, scarves, snacks and drink mixes.

Army First Lt. Brad Israel is a heavy weapons platoon leader in Afghanistan. His platoon is establishing a new forward operating base in the Paktika province of eastern Afghanistan, and he says the difficulty in creating supply lines is eased by care packages.

"When we first moved here, we only had enough fuel to run the generator for (four) hours a day, had no running water, and barely enough hygiene



Enlarge By Laura J. Gardner, Fort Wayne Journal

Seventh grader Alison Mansfield, from Fort Wayne, Ind., heard that U.S. troops in the mountains of Afghanistan were short on socks. She started collecting them after Veteran's Day and has nearly 4,000 pairs of socks and more than \$4,000 to send troops this holiday.



Enlarge By Judi Bottoni, AP

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Lockheed Martin employees bundle 10,000 packages filled with such items as toilet paper, lip balm, snacks, gum and drink mix and phone cards for troops either deploying or in Iraq or Afghanistan, in New Orleans.

products, toilet paper, etc., to provide for each man," Israel, of Mobile, Ala., wrote in an e-mail. "The outpouring from all across the States is truly humbling and does more for morale than we are capable of here on the ground."

Thanks in part to websites such as anysoldier.com, soldiers can list the items their units need, and people in the USA can send the packages to them.

That's how a Marine unit in Afghanistan receives up to 15 packages a week from a woman in San Diego who sends foot powder, protein bars and wool caps.

"Trust me, when compared to military issue, hers are much better," Navy Hospital Corpsman Robert Owens, who is embedded with the Marines, wrote in an e-mail. Owens, of Columbia, La., said the outpouring has been almost overwhelming, enough to give some packages to a neighboring Marine unit and even to members of the Afghan National Army.

"They were incredibly happy and very shocked at how so many unknown Americans simply gave all of that stuff to us," Owens wrote. "Somehow, at least with our guys, it just seems nicer when it comes from a total stranger with a well wishing card inside. It really is like Christmas when we get these boxes."

Despite the outpouring, some believe it would be better to space out those holiday packages.

"Everybody gets on the holiday bandwagon, and I understand that," says Marty Horn, a 20-year Army military policeman who started anysoldier.com when his son was serving in Iraq. "But it creates a huge mountain of mail, then the other 10 months there's much, much less. It would be better to spread it out."

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[AlphaSleuth.com](#) wrote: 29m ago

Any kind of care package for the troops is a good thing, whether you are for or against the current Administration. Our website hopes to produce a few hundred puzzle books by March 1st, based on donations. It's a small token of appreciation

 for defending our freedom!

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[jimseitz](#) wrote: 2h 3m ago

Wow. What sympathetic and concerned comments. At least some people in this country can look beyond their own frustration with the fact that their particular view on the war is not being realized and have some compassion for the guys that are there. Bring 'em home or let 'em die. What a pathetic attitude.

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[susanjojo](#) wrote: 3h 1m ago

OH. Charlie, yes. Let's give the happy holiday. BTW, Do you wanna try interracial dating? Would you like to share this Christmas with others? The niche interracial dating site--interracialconnect.com will give u surprise.

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[CharliChanBluDog](#) wrote: 3h 35m ago

Funny How Neo Con's THINK dying in Iraq is Good for America - 3,900 black body bags is certainly not patriotic!! And I am NOT a Liberal - but I guess you Bush Lickers have to label people who are of good conscientious - those who are for the Right to Life - as Liberals! What is the matter does your conscience bother you--- Has nothing to do with defeat Moron!!

You probably would bomb abortion clinics but you have no problem having poor children die from no health care, nutrition and education - but I guess that is more patriotic!!

Simply another ignorant flag waving hypocrite!!! Where is this the victory in so many deaths!!!

Isn't it great to be so smug - hiding away in New Mexico - while others die for you pride and false patriotism!!

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[newmexicocraig](#) wrote: 4h 2m ago

Let's give the troops a real holiday boost - support them as they carry out their mission!

(Funny how liberals think that 'supporting our troops' always means hoping for their defeat.)

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CharliChanBluDog wrote: 4h 47m ago

Let's give the Troops a Real Holiday Boost - Bring them Home!

Thank YOU and God Bless You - One and All!

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