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Home > News > Page One

Thursday, Dec 13, 2007

Page One [RSS](#)

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Ten-hut! You WILL send packages to soldiers the right way!

By NICK CUMBERLAND
SUN HERALD

GULFPORT --In recent days, several callers to the Sun Herald's Sound Off line have inquired about how they can send thank-you cards and packages to soldiers for the Christmas holidays.

But simply sending packages addressed to "Any Soldier" will not get them to the desired destination.

Correspondence addressed in that manner will either be returned to the sender or thrown away. This Department of Defense policy was adopted in 2003 to increase security and prevent terrorists from attacking service men and women. Mail must be addressed to a specific soldier.

The Associated Press recently reported that last season, "Despite the rule, officials said as many as 450,000 pieces of mail addressed to no one in particular managed to reach Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington. But they were returned or, if they had no return address, were thrown out altogether, because the hospital lacked the manpower to open and screen all the mail."

Another Sound Off caller suggested a program sponsored by the American Red Cross, which recognized the need and has set up an address to handle such packages.

"These individual cards will be distributed to the wards by the Red Cross. Remember, no cards will be accepted by the mail rooms if they are addressed to 'A Recovering American Soldier,' 'Any Soldier,' 'Any Sailor' or 'Any Marine.' You must have a specific name and address on the card," the Sound Off caller wrote.

People interested in sending cards and letters of thanks to wounded soldiers being

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treated at Walter Reed Medical Center may send them, from now until Dec. 27, to "We Support You During Your Recovery!" c/o American Red Cross; P.O. Box 419, Savage, MD 20763-0419, or American Red Cross c/o Bethesda Naval Hospital, 8901 Wisconsin Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20814. For more information on the program, call The American Red Cross at Walter Reed Medical Center at 202-782-6362.

For people interested in sending a Christmas package or letter of encouragement to a soldier overseas, visit anysoldier.com.

The Web site was started by Sgt. Brian Horn of LaPlata, Md., in August 2003 and has soldiers from every branch of the armed forces who volunteer their time overseas to pass out packages from people who may not know someone fighting overseas, but still want to show appreciation.

People interested in sending packages overseas can click on the tabs on the top of the Web site labeled "Where to Send," "What to Send," and "How to Send" for all regulations and instructions on how to send packages.

The "Where to Send" link gives people a list of registered volunteers, which includes their branch of service and their rank, who accept the packages to pass out to the soldiers.

It can take from five to 14 days for overseas packages to arrive, so you still may be able to get packages to soldiers overseas in time for Christmas.

Although the Web site has sponsors who have packages for sale on the Web site, you can send whatever you choose within the guidelines set forth by the Department of Defense.

Original Sound Off

Would you please put an address in the paper so we can send Christmas cards to the boys overseas?

How to send packages

"We Support You During Your Recovery!" c/o American Red Cross

P.O. Box 419, Savage, MD 20763-0419 .

For more information on the program, call The American Red Cross at Walter Reed Medical Center at 202-782-6362.

Or to send overseas packages, check out anysoldier.com



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