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STARS AND STRIPES.

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[print article](#) | [e-mail to a friend](#)**Care packages are always appreciated, but sometimes they can be hit or miss**

Soldiers offer tips for friends, family trying to send the right items

By [Teri Weaver](#), Stars and Stripes

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CAMP LIBERTY, Baghdad — Lt. Taysha Deaton held up what she said was the worst care package item she'd received in her eight months in the Middle East.

“What do you think this is?” the public affairs officer for the 256th Brigade Combat Team asked, holding a clear tube of what looked to be a popular name-brand hygienic lubricant.

“It's toothpaste,” she said, unveiling the tube's name: Security Personal Care. “Would you put that on your teeth? It's wrong. It's so wrong.”

The “gift” came in a package from a well-meaning, distant family member who didn't quite hit the mark. Deaton, 25, from Lake Charles, La., would rather have the Fruity Pebbles and Special K breakfast bars her mother sends in bulk supply.

Care packages in wartime are heaven-sent and no soldier doubts the good intentions and generosity of people who donate. Even the most meager packages make soldiers feel a little closer to home.



Teri Weaver / S&S

2nd Lt. Japheth Johnson, 25, of New Orleans, shows off a care package from his girlfriend. She sent him a box of Doritos, candy and other snacks, which he offered to his friends as soon as he opened the box. “She sends way too much,” he said, though definitely not complaining.

“In my experience, anything is good,” said 2nd Lt. Japheth Johnson, 25, of New Orleans and also a member of the Louisiana National Guard. “Just to open a letter,” he said, means the world.

Still, complaints are as much a part of war as homesickness and boredom, and some soldiers honestly — but carefully — say there’s a difference between a smart care package and one that has more good intentions than good supplies.

So, please, many say: Take it easy on the baby wipes. Ditto on the hand sanitizer. No more little bottles of shampoo swiped from hotels. Just how many tubes of toothpaste does one man need?

“I’ve got 20 tubes in my room,” said 1st Lt. Jon Clark, 30, of Manhattan and the New York National Guard’s 101st Calvary.

At Baghdad’s Camp Independence, troops have piles of woodworking magazines. “I’m like, I don’t even own a hammer,” said Lt. Mark St. Romain, 23, of Baton Rouge, La., and the Louisiana National Guard.

What soldiers need depends on where they are deployed. At the bigger camps with large post exchanges and mess halls, lip balm and shampoo are in good supply. Smaller camps, however, have little more than cigarettes, soda and Skoal for sale.

To make their wishes known, many soldiers use [AnySoldier.com](http://www.AnySoldier.com). The Web site lets troops say what they need or want, and anyone around the world can log in, adopt a wish list, and send a care package directly to that person.

Last week, the requests ranged from movies and magazines to feminine hygiene products.

Even when there are piles of leftovers, nothing goes to waste. Troops pack up the unneeded candy, toiletries and Beanie Babies and pass them out to Iraqi families. Some units give the surplus to Iraqi soldiers who patrol with the Americans.

“I’ve got a good mother,” said Spc. Eugene Dolan, a 23-year-old New York



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A stockpile of Chock Full O' Nuts coffee sits in the headquarters office for 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry at Camp Liberty in Baghdad. The coffee came after one soldier wrote home about the soldiers' office coffee fund.

Guard member serving with the 256th Brigade.

Dolan's mother shops at a local Italian grocer and sends packets of sauces: marinara, pesto, steak. And don't get Dolan, of Albertson, N.Y., started on salad dressings.

"Balsamic vinegar with white wine ...," he starts, shaking his head as he recites the ingredients. In late May, he was down to only two bottles.

But sometimes even a simple request to a close friend can get a little out of hand.

Staff Sgt. Frank Fernandez, 48, of Napanoch, N.Y. and the 101st Calvary, gets an urge for dip every once in a while, and he asked a buddy back home to send some of his favorite. "I ended up getting 100 cans," he said.

No one, however, said he or she wanted the packages to stop.

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