

The Tifton Gazette

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Cheering soldiers

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TIFTON — Sometimes life as a soldier can be lonely, thousands of miles from home with little of the amenities we take for granted. However, now people across America can send a piece of home to any soldier, anywhere.

The Web site www.anysoldier.com allows people across America to send letters or packages to troops throughout the world, including those stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some soldiers do not receive much mail while overseas. The idea behind AnySoldier.com is to make sure that every troop gets letters and packages from home. Although the name implies Army or Army National Guard soldiers, people can correspond with members of any of the service branches.

"Go to the Web site, pick a soldier and send it," said Nelson Malcom of Tifton. He and his wife, Jennifer, have been sending letters and packages for months since he happened upon the site by accident.

"It grabbed me by the heart and it'll make you almost cry," he said. "What choked me up is it was soldiers who had no family or very little."

Since then, Malcom has sent packages or letters to eight different soldiers all from Georgia, stationed in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He includes items such as toothbrushes, magazines, powdered drink mixes and snack foods in his packages. He has received responses back from all of the troops. They then usually make requests and he does his best to satisfy them.

He said the most heart-wrenching request he received was from one soldier who asked that Malcom send him children's books. He sent the soldier his daughter Madison's "Goodnight Moon" books. The soldier then video-taped himself reading them and sent the recordings to his own young child at home.

A more lighthearted story is that Malcom sent a package containing six water guns.

"They wrote in there what a great water gun fight they had," Malcom said.

Other items which can be put into a package include DVDs, compact discs and non-perishable microwave items such as popcorn. Some of the few amenities available to service men and women are microwaves, computers with DVD players and water. Those items can be sent in a flat-rate box from the post office which costs less than \$7 and then the weight of the package does not matter. Malcom said he packs his



Nelson Malcom of Tifton puts together a package to send to a female soldier overseas. Malcom got the idea from a Web site, anysoldier.com, which gives the public a list of soldiers who would like mail.

Dusty Vassey/The Tifton Gazette

boxes as full as he can and then slips in a short letter.

However, he stressed that simple letters in stamped envelopes are just as effective and wanted as the packages.

"The letters really mean a ton, just write a letter," he said.

The process is simple. Get the address of a soldier based on name, service branch, location, sex, or home state and copy down their address. Fill it out on the package or envelope just like any other and send it.

"It's as simple as sending to an address in Sylvester," Malcom said.

The site contains thousands of names of soldiers who want packages but they can even be addressed to "any soldier" or "any female soldier" to be sent to a random service person.

The Web site was started in Aug. 2003 by Army Sgt. Brian Horn who wanted to help the troops in his unit. The popularity of the idea led to an expansion of coverage including first the whole Army and then the entire armed services in 2004.

To contact reporter Dusty Vassey, call 382-4321, ext. 208.