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Letters from Home

AnySoldier.com can be used to lift spirits of military personnel abroad

By Roxann Moore
Staff Reporter

If the simple act of putting pen to paper would lift the heart of a best friend, would you do it?

Would you do it for a stranger? What if that stranger was a member of the United States military serving somewhere in the world and rarely, if ever, received any other letter?

Maybe you are saying yes, but don't know how or where to send a letter or care package. You question what they need or if you have anything in common.

All of these questions can be answered with a visit to AnySoldier.com; a non-profit Web site designed to link individuals with members of the military around the globe.

The only cost is the price of a stamp and a moment of your time.

Marty and Sue Horn began the site after talking with their son, Army Sgt. Brian Horn.

Marty Horn, a former Army Military Police officer, said his son had parachuted into Northern Iraq at the start of the Iraqi war. Supplies were limited and the couple networked with others to help the soldiers.



Wave photo by Ted Mathias

Veteran Dawn Drzewicki stands next to memorial plaques honoring fellow soldiers at the VFW Post 7234 in Ocean View. She said her time spent in Korea was easier to bear with letters from family and friends.

Over time, Sgt. Horn told his parents of soldiers who never received care packages, letters or even a card from home. Hearing this Marty and Sue got to work.

Marty designed the Web site, posting it online in August 2003; he keeps it current. AnySoldier.com was granted non-profit status, 501c3, a year later.

Since the site's inception, it has grown tremendously.

"We're just about to hit 70 million visitors," Marty said, adding it has surpassed his expectations.

He said the purpose is simple: Get citizens to write to any and all branches of the military service to lift the spirits of those so far from home and all that's familiar.

Marty worked to make the site as user friendly as possible and included a Frequently Asked Questions section. He does not require anyone to register.

"There is no middle man," he said. "We don't do the registration garbage."

Marty does ask people to check before sending anything to a particular unit or person. He said there are transfers and casualties.

As for what can be sent, each group usually lists items that would make their lives more pleasant. Items such as movies, books, magazines and snacks.

However, military personnel are given strict instructions to use caution and never eat any homemade goodies. They are thrown away for safety's sake.

Still, the letters, cards, newspaper articles and latest sports reports are welcomed by the service members. They crave slices of Americana in a strange place, Marty said.

This site is endorsed by U.S. Congressman C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger (D-MD), who is an honorary board member.

"Any Soldier is a great group," said Heather Molino, press secretary for Ruppertsberger. She said the site is filling a need for service members.

Dawn Drzewicki knows there is nothing greater than a letter from home.

Drzewicki was raised in Roxana on land owned by her family for generations. She joined the service and was deployed to Korea serving in the Demilitarization Zone until 1984. Drzewicki was a door gunner on a helicopter transporting classified documents.

"It was very strange at first," she said. "And a letter from home was a welcomed gift."

She received two to three letters a week from family and friends. She said her mother would clip the latest news from the paper and send it to her.

"I played on the Indian River basketball team," Drzewicki said. "It was some semblance of home."

As Drzewicki spoke of these treasured nuggets of home she recalled the time mail call took place -- 4 p.m. every day. On the days she didn't receive mail, she was disappointed.

"It would be almost devastating in peacetime or war to never receive mail," she said. "I had somebody to write me."

She said she was there on many occasions when a person did not receive mail with everyone else.

"It was heartbreaking," Drzewicki said.

Her mom would bake her cookies. When they arrived, despite her mother's best efforts, the cookies were always stale.

"But you ate them anyway," she added with a laugh.

These were all pieces of home. They kept Drzewicki connected with the people and places she loved and missed. The spicier letters came from her friends who kept her up on all the gossip.

"They gave you the dirt your parents wouldn't know," she said.

When her son-in-law was deployed overseas, Drzewicki made it her mission to write him.

She said she kept him up on area happenings knowing the importance of a letter, a quick note or a card.

She said this is a tradition passed from one generation to the next.

"We know what it's like, so we do it," she said, explaining those who have served know a simple letter is uplifting.

"You put your life on the line, but there's an honor to that," she said. "Writing them a letter helps support your country and warms a soldier's heart."

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