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EDITORIAL

For our Christmas soldiers

Monday, December 25, 2006

CHRISTMAS is here, for better or worse, and there's no more time to wish that it could be anything more than it is right now. The tree is trimmed, or it's not; the gifts were loved, or they were not; the family is getting along, or it's not. There's no more time for perfection. All we have now is time for reflection.

We hope you'll take a moment to reflect today on our soldiers, who are serving their country right now and who may not have the opportunity to open gifts or gaze at a Christmas tree. Certainly they've been in the thoughts of many Americans year-round: Who doesn't know an elementary-school class sending cards and good wishes to a unit? We support our troops on bumper stickers and blogs; we send them our prayers, and the contents of our pocketbooks, on a regular basis (the Web site www.anysoldier.com, which links civilians who want to send care packages to active servicemen, says it has helped about 140,145 servicemen since 2003).

This speaks to our individual generosity and our understanding of the tremendous sacrifices these troops have made for us. Once a soldier joins the military, he forfeits the right to choose the battles he will fight in and the causes he will live or die for. That's why the most important gift we can offer our troops is careful deliberation of the battles we choose for them.

Kevin Tillman, who served as an Army Ranger with his brother Pat before the latter was killed in Afghanistan, wrote in these pages earlier this year that: "In a democracy, the policy of the leaders is the policy of the people." That was a rather eloquent way of stating

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that every day that Iraq burns, every day our politicians continue to squabble over why we went there in the first place and what we can do there now, American citizens are accountable, too.

In a way, perhaps our soldiers' most important Christmas gift arrived early this year, on election day. It wasn't so much that Americans voted to oust one party in favor of another. It was our collective concern that something has gone dreadfully wrong with a wars this country has chosen to prosecute. It was our determination to value the lives of our soldiers -- and the Iraqi people, who didn't have the luxury of choosing this war -- enough to demand accountability and answers. That's the spirit our soldiers can truly benefit from, as they face ominous rumblings from the White House about the mission, the size and the duration of this war.

And it's the spirit we'll need to continue on in, through this holiday season and possibly even the next. This Christmas, we offer our soldiers the gifts of our support, our gratitude, and our pledge to ask hard questions of those who would send them into battle. There will be a Christmas soon when our gift will be fulfillment of a pledge to bring them home.

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