

HOLIDAY LETTERS TO THE TROOPS: THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Need a Christmas gift idea? I have a suggestion. Write the citizen-soldiers of Georgia's 48th Brigade Combat Team. Tell them you are thinking about them at this special season, and thank them for the sacrifices they are making on our behalf. I can think of no better gift you could give than that.

When I was in Iraq, the soldiers told me that while they appreciated the cookies and candy and toiletries they have received, what they really want is to hear from those back home. Nothing — not even double-chocolate Oreos — beats a letter from home.

We owe our fellow Georgians that much — and more. They have suspended their careers, left their loved ones and taken up arms against an evil enemy. We have asked them to put a stop to the kind of terrorism that occurred in this country on Sept. 11, 2001, and will occur again if we aren't diligent. We have asked them to help democratize a Middle Eastern nation that has done nothing but brutalize its citizens for decades. Despite what you read in the national media, they are succeeding.

This group of schoolteachers, police officers, small-business owners and the like from throughout the state of Georgia is ferreting out terrorists and at the same time helping to build health clinics and sewage treatment plants, bringing electricity to the country, feeding and clothing the children and showing the Iraqi people there is a better way to live than under the constant threat of terrorism. The results are beginning to show. Seventy-five percent of the Iraqi citizens voted in the recent constitutional referendum — most casting a vote for the first time in their lives. Some walked 20 miles for the privilege. (If you have ever walked 20 miles to vote, please raise your hand.)

I heard the 48th's commanding general Stewart Rodeheaver speak at a Georgia Power Company luncheon the other day. When not leading the 4,800 members of his brigade, the general is a regional manager at Georgia Power. He is also at the tip-top of my list of Great Americans. Rodeheaver told the assemblage that his troops would love to hear from them — and the rest of us — and that he felt certain that we would get back a response from the soldiers. That would be icing on the cake.

The general had told me earlier that if you don't have the name of any individual soldiers, you can write in care of him and he will see that your letter gets to the troops. (If you want some names, check back through my recent dispatches from Iraq. You will find a lot of names from which to choose.) I told him I was sure I could get you to write, because you have no hesitation to write me when something I've said pleases or displeases you. I told the general that I may have the most proactive readers in the state, and I would set about to prove it this holiday season.

The address is:
Soldier's Name (or c/o Brig. Gen. Stewart Rodeheaver)
HHC, 48th BCT
Camp Adder
APO AE 09372

The post office tells me mail to the troops in Iraq takes the same postage as domestic mail.

Get your family to write. Your colleagues at the office. Your children's school. Your Sunday school. Your civic club. Your garden club. Your golf group. Your walking group.

I have already heard from Cindy Schumacher, a first-grade teacher in Woodstock, who has her class busy preparing letters. Same with Angie Hoyt, at Northside United Methodist Church in Atlanta, who is coordinating a letter-writing effort among the women of the church. Jennifer Holmes, a nursing student at Bainbridge College and president of the school's Tutor Club, is working on a project for female members of the 48th. That's a good start, but just a start.

Before you get caught up in the whirlwind of holiday shopping, take a moment and drop a note to our citizen-soldiers in Iraq. You will have given them a priceless gift, and unlike that useless battery-powered lettuce shredder and the butt-ugly tie, you won't have to return it on December 26. It's the gift that keeps on giving.