

A “THANK YOU” TO READERS FROM GEORGIA GENERAL RODEHEAVER

Here is a message especially for you from Brig. Gen. Stewart Rodeheaver, commanding general of Georgia's 48th Brigade Combat Team in Iraq:

“Hello from Baghdad, Iraq. Dick Yarbrough was kind enough to ask you to write the soldiers of the 48th Brigade. You responded with true Southern style and caring. We received hundreds of cards, letters, signs, banners, hand-painted pictures and many other items. We distributed these to soldiers all across the 48th Brigade, and we tried to answer as many as possible, just to let you know how much your letters meant to us. When you are away from your families, and especially when you are in a war zone, holidays are very tough, but you and your cards helped make this holiday season a lot easier for my soldiers. Thanks to each of you, for your great support.

“The letters could not have arrived at a better time. We hear that some people think we shouldn't be here. You could not tell that by the letters we received from students, Sunday school classes, assisted-living centers, police departments and groups and individuals all across the state. You told us to maintain the fight, to come home safe, and thanks for protecting America. What a wonderful gift you sent to us, and what a powerful message you projected to our soldiers.

“I handed many of the letters out to soldiers and gave others to my staff to hand out. I have seen soldiers laugh out loud at some of the comments, and I have seen them swallow hard to stop the tears that welled up inside of them. I have heard them express amazement at the boxes upon boxes of cards we received from people whom we had never met, but who cared enough about us to take the time to write to us. I have seen them write letters and cards in answer to the ones they received, and put cards from their new friends up on their doors, or carry them in their pockets because it gave them a link to ‘home’ that they needed.

“Your cards and letters helped add a little extra ‘hope’ to our Christmas packages. We hope that we are helping the people of Iraq, we hope that we are protecting the citizens of the U.S. and of Georgia, and we hope that because of the sacrifices my soldiers have made, the world is a little better off.

“A soldier's life is pretty simple. You have a mission to conduct, an objective to reach, the necessities of life to get you by, and every now and then you have something ‘extra’ that adds to your comfort or that just adds joy to your day. As I walked though the company areas a couple of nights before Christmas, I saw one office door that had cards from you taped over the entire door. I saw two soldiers decorating one of the small trees that had been sent to us. They had put several lights and a few ornaments on the tree, and were finishing it off by making hooks out of paper clips and taping them to cards sent to us by children from a second-grade class and hanging the cards on the tree. I asked the sergeant why he was putting cards on the tree when he had so many already on the door. He said, ‘These are from children, who are probably not old enough to really know what is going on with the war. Each of the messages is different, but in each one, somewhere in the message, the child says to our soldiers, ‘I love you.’ He added, “They may look like pieces of construction paper to everyone else, but to me they are as shining as any tinsel I have ever seen.”

“Thank you for providing the tinsel and shining moments for our Christmas season this year.

“Regards to you all, BG Stewart Rodeheaver”