

Care Packages TO DEPLOYED SERVICE MEMBERS

ONE OF MY MANY JOYS serving as an LCMS military chaplain in the Army is the distribution of items from the many gift boxes that we receive while deployed. Often, however, our generous donors aren't fully aware of the conditions in which we serve, and items that are sent at considerable cost are discarded because there is no need for them or they have melted in the heat.

Currently, our U.S. military forces in the Middle East serve in a mature environment. We primarily are in a support mission for our coalition partners and are not primary war fighters. Rather, we support logistics and sustainment and provide training for the forces of the countries we are supporting.

Wi-Fi and connectivity are almost everywhere. Soldiers buy "pucks" to enable them to connect their cell phones via satellite. They phone or "facetime" family and friends on a daily basis. Mailing cards and letters home, therefore, has become a lost art—especially with younger service members.

Service members enjoy basically good balanced food prepared by a government contractor. Very few eat MREs (Meals, Ready to Eat). There is regular access to post exchange facilities. Nevertheless, our service members enjoy the many things that are sent in care packages.

No doubt those who send packages would like to know if the items sent actually arrive and are appreciated. Computer connectivity is commonplace, and it is easier to send a thank-you note electronically via email than it is to send a written response in the mail. Senders are encouraged to include a note in each box identifying the sender and providing an email address at which to respond.

There are many things that are sent that are appreciated and some things that are difficult to give away. Here is a simple list of what I have observed:



I. Items **difficult** to give away to service members:

- **Canned goods**
no way to cook contents, little desire to do so with hot food at dining facilities
- **Condiment packs**
ketchup, mustard, jelly, hot sauce, BBQ sauce, etc., are generally thrown away.
- **Toilet paper**
no need for it as facilities are properly stocked
- **Hotel shampoos and soaps**
these generally are thrown away as they are too small for regular use
- **Chocolate candy bars/gummy bears**
arrive in a "melted glob" and are inedible and discarded
- **5-Hour Energy/Energy shots or drinks**
these are not healthy in a high temperature environment
- **Outdated religious literature**
outdated religious literature, such as Portals of Prayer, are not desired
- **Phone cards**
not needed; Wi-Fi connectivity is everywhere as well as MWR "free phone calls" home
- **Old or outdated Halloween candy**
this arrives non-edible and is discarded
- **Comic books and "funny papers"**
most entertainment is on social media via Wi-Fi
- **Handmade cards**
these are appreciated by older service members, but are generally not sent by younger service personnel, as they connect almost daily with loved ones via Wi-Fi on their personal cell phones

II. Items **appreciated** by service members (these items, if individually wrapped, go quickly):

- Protein and granola bars are considered desirable.
- Individually-wrapped hard candies, Tootsie Pops, suckers, etc.
- Rice Krispies treats are always winners.
- Small cans of Pringles or small cracker packs (peanut butter, cheese, etc.).
- Nuts, small packages, all kinds are regularly sought after and are a hot commodity.
- Chewing gum, especially "breath enhancers" when you cannot always brush after a meal.
- Personal hygiene items: toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, bar soap, etc.