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AAA's to Ziplocs:

What soldiers want for the holidays

By Robert K. Elder

Tribune staff reporter
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Capt. Bill Roberts has a suggestion for those assembling military care packages for the holidays: Send chocolate.

"During the winter months, chocolate is a big hit. We've been getting stockpiles . . .," says Roberts, a Detroit native and National Guard public affairs officer stationed in Baghdad.

With temperatures in Iraq now cooling into the 70s, chocolate has a better chance of surviving the trip, as do candles and lip balm, other "stocking stuffer" favorites.

What else do men and women stationed overseas want in care packages? Batteries, DVDs, computer games and travel-size skin care products, to name a few (see below for a more complete list).

But mostly, servicemen and women want "touches from home," says Geoff Gephart, United Service Organizations (USO) of Illinois' development director.

"Holiday cards from back home are very important," Gephart says. "If we could find a way to get Lou Malnati's ovens over there, to get them pizza and hot dogs from home, we would."

Creating a homelike atmosphere helps lift holiday spirits, Roberts says.

"My family is actually sending an inflatable snowman that we're going to set up on top of our building in the International Zone (formerly the Green Zone)," he says. "Those kinds of things are always nice reminders that people back home are thinking of us."

Unlike years past, the military will not accept boxes sent to "Any Soldier" -- well-wishers must send care packages to a specific soldier, or buy packages through one of the programs cleared by the Department of Defense. Visit the follow sites for more information.

[www.AmericaSupportsYou.mil](#)

[www.Anysoldier.com](#)

[www.USO.org](#)

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Here is a list of items requested by soldiers, from lists given to the USO of Illinois:

Anti-itch cream, international calling cards, small Band-Aids, AA and AAA batteries, beef jerky, non-aerosol bug spray, disposable cameras, eye drops, fabric softener, small bottles of Febreze, foot powder, hand lotion (16 ounces or less), small plastic jars of jellies and/or peanut butter, laundry detergent tablets, mints, moleskin and blister pads, mouthwash strips, pain relievers, pudding cups, puzzle books (Sudoku and crossword puzzles), raisins, shaving cream, antacids, vitamin C, Ziploc "Easy Zipper" bags.

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