

Guidance for Coordinating and Shipping "Support the Troops" Projects!

KEY INGREDIENTS - The first thing to do is determine what your project is going to consist of, how it will need to be packaged, and who you would like to send it to. Some projects may consist of cards or letters that you want to send in individual envelopes to specific individual troops. Other projects may consist of a large amount of items shipped in large boxes to a general address to be divided among the general troop population once received. There could be other projects that are variations and combinations of the above. Basically, the three key ingredients are knowing what to send (or what they need), how to send it, and who to send it to.

WHERE IS IT GOING? - Projects typically will work better if you start in reverse by determining who you would like to receive the items you are collecting or preparing. Historically, sending items to a generic address down range will result in the package not arriving at all. It is important that you have a verified address and the individual, unit, or organization on the other side is aware and expecting the items you are sending. You may have deployed family members in your community that you have direct contact with already. You may have found and contacted deployed service members from various websites, such as www.anysoldier.com, or www.anymarine.com, etc, that have volunteered to receive these packages in advance. If you are like most of us, you just want to show your support and may not have any contacts at all. If that is the case, you can contact my office or the nearest military installation Army Community Service (ACS) Center near your location for assistance in finding contacts and mailing addresses.

WHAT IS IT? - Individuals and organizations that have contacted my office previously with "Support the Troops" projects have presented a broad and varied mix of project ideas, consisting of pre-paid calling cards, hand made cards, scarves, afghans, personal letters, playing cards, books, magazines, and a generous amount of snacks and personal hygiene items. In the end, it is the thought that counts but try and be creative, yet practical, when designing your project. Keep in mind that most service members have access to a post exchange down range that may already provide a lot of the generic items we are sending. The Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) at any installation offers gift cards and pre-paid calling cards for military troops and Families that can actually be purchased by anyone for that purpose. The websites listed above, and others, may provide generic or specific lists of items needed by our service members over there at any particular time so do some research before you begin. Again, your local ACS Center would be a good starting point if you need some assistance with your research efforts.

HOW TO GET IT THERE? - In military lingo, all letters and packages will be sent to an "APO" address, where the "APO" segment of the address, such as APO, AE 09009, would replace the normal city, state and zip code. For letters and cards, this would be the extent of any unique or special mailing requirements. Postage costs should be the same for APO mail, but check with the post office before you place any stamps on the cards or letters just to be sure. For large envelopes or boxes, the "to" and "from" addresses should be placed on one side of the package. There is an additional "customs" form required to be completed and attached to the package, called the "Customs Form 2976-A". The form can

be picked up at the Post Office or ordered from their website for free at "www.usps.gov", click on "Buy Stamps and Shop", then type in "Form 2976-A" in the search box.

The Form 2976-A requires the "to" and "from" addresses again plus additional information such as weight, description of contents, insurance, etc. Where it asks for "Detailed description of contents", we have previously used the following categories; hygiene items, cards/games, snacks, books, etc., along with rough quantities of each. You shouldn't have to list or count every pack of gum or toothbrush. If you are able, weigh the packages at home or at work on a bathroom scale or something similar. To calculate the postage costs, you can go to <http://ircalc.usps.gov/>, select US Domestic Mail, click "Package" or "Large Package", enter the weight of each box (one at a time), enter your Zip Code and the destination Zip Code (use 09316 for a general estimate if you don't actually have a mailing address). You can also call the post office and explain what you have and how much and they should be able to provide an estimated cost over the phone. Deciding whether to use Priority mail or Parcel Post is entirely up to you. Priority usually arrives a bit faster than Parcel but parcel could be substantially cheaper for larger projects.

ACS CENTER SUPPORT - If you are strong on support but short on funds for shipping, our local ACS Center has received limited contributions from individuals and organizations specifically for this purpose (All ACS Centers may not provide this service!). If you have everything completed and ready to go, let us know what your estimated shipping costs are and when you plan to ship, and we can meet you at the post office. If you are relying on our office to provide service member addresses also, you may have to bring the packages or boxes to our office where we will address and ship the items for you, due to potential privacy concerns. We are in the process of contacting all of our locally deployed service members for permission to distribute their personal mailing information for this purpose but have not yet completed this task. If that is the case, you should complete everything mentioned above except the actual "to" address before you arrive.

PROJECT INFO - You might want to insert a memo in each box or envelope to explain who you are and what your project is all about, with contact information, so the service member can reply and confirm receipt. Please provide this information to our office also as we try to keep a record of all of the support efforts in our community. If the project is coordinated through our office, I will try to provide all the details and status of the shipment as it happens until the mission is complete.

Hope this information helps you to coordinate and complete your project to support our troops. If you have any questions please feel free to contact my office. Thanks!

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