

# Don't forget those who serve

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Staff Writer



I remember when I was in Iraq last summer, and our platoon received mail and care packages from a few grade schools, churches, and social organizations. I received a letter from a kid, whose name unfortunately escapes me. The letter, along with my box of joy containing oatmeal, chips, and candy, was burned in the burn pit by an overzealous Marine on police-call. The kid liked cheese. That's all I learned about him, since that was all he told me about himself, except that he was in the fifth grade, and his teacher thought it would be a good idea to write to the "soldiers." I couldn't hold his use of that

dirty little word against him, I am sure he did not know the difference between "soldiers" and United States Marines.

The boy didn't write about his friends at school, siblings, or parents; he wrote about me, my comrades in arms, and all of the servicemen and servicewomen "in country." He wrote that his teacher said that the troops needed as much support as they could get, and the boy felt that it was his duty as an American to tell me that he was proud of me and all people serving their country, and that we were all "heroes."

To me, this prolific letter, written in crayon, from a very patriotic and obviously well-raised and educated child, meant a lot. Maybe public schools aren't savage dens of violence, ignorance, and poor test scores. It was a little gesture, which the kid probably will not remember when he goes to middle school, high school, or thereafter, when he might join the service, choose to find a job, or enroll in college.

The prodigal boy may not remember his letter to me, but I will always remember. We were in country about four months, doing the same routine day in and day out, and our lives were, well, "sub par." Lance Corporal "Talibani" - who was, and remains, the quintessential definition of the false stereotype of the "corrupt Arab"

- was "stolen" from our platoon and attached as a translator for "certain" military units, was all over Iraq. He said, unequivocally, that our platoon's position (the "Driftwood") was by far the worst located and least comfortable that he had seen anywhere in Iraq.

That did not matter. We continued to fortify, patrol, run raids, help with rebuilding and reconstruction, and better our own surroundings, bit by bit. We were doing our jobs. We always found time for smoking and joking, but sometimes the "bum deal" that fate dishes out, slowly wears you down and chips away at your morale. You get speeches and encouragement from all sides, but you can't help but think "what if I was not here." You go through your daily routine or cycle of days, and you live for the next day. Sometimes, an event or object or whatever, will break your routine, and your train of thought.

Then some letter, written in crayon, is thrown at you, full speed, by your squad leader at mail call. It's short and to the point. You read it: "I like cheese." You chuckle, and then you read on, and you remember why you serve - for our future. For me, this letter in crayon was more valuable for my morale than any speech by any official or political opinion leader.

On deployment, you know your friends and family are thinking about you, since you get letters and care packages from them. When you have some complete stranger send you a letter, it means something different, but it is just as important.

While civilians and semi-civilians (non-deployed Reservists and Guardsmen) enjoy regular routines and time with family and friends, there are those who don't have that

luxury, who are seeing friends injured and killed. That's something to think about. Maybe, when you have some "down time," you can take some initiative and do something for them, since they join the service and do their jobs to protect their families, friends, and you. It doesn't matter what your political party is, the troops in harm's way are fighting for each other and their country, not politics. They support you...you should reciprocate.

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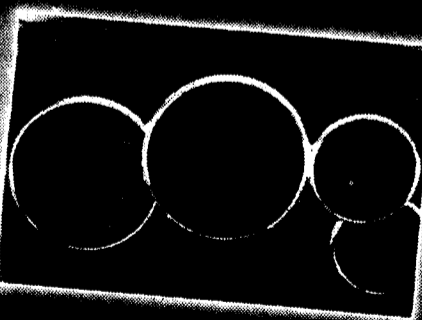
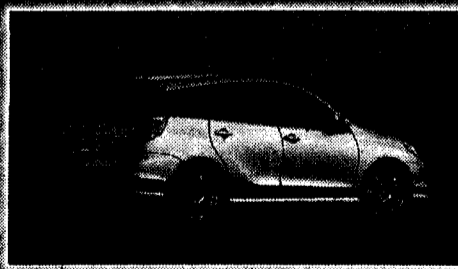
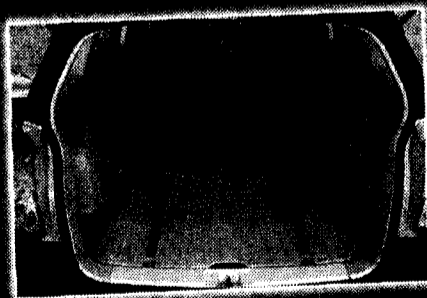
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