

## **Packing Tape, Postage and Melting Chocolate? Troops Get the Support They Want, Without All the Mess, With 'Gifts From the Homefront.'**

DALLAS, May 29 /PRNewswire/ -- As the military command charged with meeting the retail needs of more than 100,000 American troops deployed to Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF), the Army & Air Force Exchange Service's (AAFES') leadership has seen it all when it comes to setting up shop in a war zone.

"If you can go buy it in your corner store in America, there is a pretty good chance AAFES has shipped it to the desert," said AAFES' Senior Enlisted Advisor Chief Master Sgt. Bryan Eaton. "Our people have learned a lot of lessons most retailers have never even had to think about since AAFES hit the ground in April 2003."

Anyone planning on mailing a traditional care package to a Soldier, Airman, Sailor or Marine this summer can avoid some potentially messy situations by listening to the lessons AAFES has learned in the deserts of Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Sand and electronics don't mix, chips mailed in the same container as laundry detergent taste funny and chocolate melts really, really fast when the temperature is 120 degrees," said Eaton. "The trip from here to there can be an extremely rough one. As a result, many items don't look, or work, the same when they finally reach their destination half way around the world."

After more than four years serving troops throughout OEF/OIF, AAFES has refined its logistics operations to ensure that more than 50 BX/PXs in the contingency theater have a steady supply of portable music players, soft drinks and candy bars that troops can easily access.

"We want to deliver a close to stateside shopping experience to troops, regardless of where they are called to serve," said deployed AAFES Area Manager, Robert Little, from his Operations Center at Victory Base Camp near Baghdad. "More than 400 AAFES associates, who have voluntarily deployed to the contingency theater, work diligently to ensure anything we put on BX and PX shelves show very little signs of the long trek to Tikrit, Bagram or Mosul."

Any American can leverage AAFES' supply chain on behalf of deployed troops through the "Gifts from the Homefront" program. Started soon after programs that allowed the general public to send mail addressed to "Any Service Member" were cancelled due to security concerns and transportation constraints, AAFES' troop support campaign allows anyone to make a direct and tangible contribution to military morale with a gift certificate that can be redeemed for nearly anything that a specific service member wants.

"It's the foolproof care package," said Eaton. "Whether the service member who receives the gift certificate wants a Military Exchange phone card and a tuna 'lunch to go' or a new DVD and some batteries, the recipient gets support that is tailored to their need. The BX/PX gift certificates are easy and convenient and allow troops to shop for items that are already stocked and in theater."

"Gifts from the Homefront" can be sent to troops deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere overseas by logging on to <http://www.aafes.org/> or calling 877-770-4438. From there, "Gifts from the Homefront" are sent to individual service members (designated by the purchaser) or distributed to "any service member" through the Air Force Aid Society, American Red Cross, Coalition to Salute America's Heroes, Fisher House, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Operation Homefront, Operation Interdependence(R) or USO.

As of April 30, 85,204 "Gifts from the Homefront" gift certificates have been sent since the Department of Defense approved the exchange support campaign in March 2003. More than 23,000 of these have been delivered to service members and their families via AAFES' 8 charitable partners.

The Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) is a joint command of the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force, and is directed by a Board of Directors who is responsible to the Secretaries of the Army and the Air Force through the Service Chiefs of Staff. AAFES has the dual mission of providing authorized patrons with articles of merchandise and services and of generating non-appropriated fund earnings as a supplemental source of funding for military Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs. To find out more about AAFES' history and mission or to view recent press releases please visit our Web site at <http://www.aafes.com/pa/default.asp>.

AAFES MEDIA CONTACT: JUDD ANSTEY - [anstey@aafes.com](mailto:anstey@aafes.com)

Website: <http://www.aafes.com/>