



It will be a different Christmas for area soldiers serving in Iraq

By DAVE CLARKE *Regional Coordinator*

Christmas is two days away and for most of us that means down-to-the-wire shopping, last-minute plans for a big family gathering, or just trying to catch the holiday spirit.

Many families will be thinking and praying for loved ones serving in Iraq where Christmas will be just another day on the job for members of the U.S. military, including Airman 1st Class Jake Hernandez, 21, of Kewanee, who is stationed in Tallil with the 407th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron. Hernandez began a six-month tour Oct. 6.

Hernandez' "Christmas tree" will be a wooden post stuck into the ground in front of his tent with variously-shaped pieces of wood.

Each piece of wood is inscribed with the hometowns, states and distances from Iraq of several of the airmen and are tacked from bottom to top where a triangular board identifies their quarters as "The Swamp," similar to the sign tree seen in the TV series and movie, "M*A*S*H."

The 407th's sign post points to Chicago, Ill.; Glen Daniel, W. Va.; Pleasantville, Iowa; Fresno, Calif.; Crossville, Tenn.; and Kewanee, Ill., listed as 6,345 miles away.

Last year a poem started making the rounds on the Internet called "The Sands of Christmas." It was recently posted on the Galva/Kewanee Army Page website by Jim Doherty.

According to author Michael Marks, "Christmas tugs at the heart more so than any other time of the year and in 2003 I found myself watching the news and reflecting on the young men and women facing a very different (and dangerous) Christmas than those we know here at home. I wrote with the hope of sharing how much America appreciates the service that keeps us safe, and how much we pray for the safe homecoming of all who serve."

THE SANDS OF CHRISTMAS

By Michael Marks

I had no Christmas spirit when I breathed a weary sigh,

and looked across the table where the bills were piled too high.

The laundry wasn't finished and the car I had to fix,

My stocks were down another point, the Chargers lost by six.

And so with only minutes till my son got home from school

I gave up on the drudgery and grabbed a wooden stool.

The burdens that I carried were about all I could take,

and so I flipped the TV on to catch a little break.

I came upon a desert scene in shades of tan and rust,

No snowflakes hung upon the wind, just clouds of swirling dust.

And where the reindeer should have stood before a laden sleigh,

eight Humvees ran a column right behind an M1A.

A group of boys walked past the tank, not one was past his teens,

Their eyes were hard as polished flint, their faces drawn and lean.

They walked the street in armor with their rifles shouldered tight,

their dearest wish for Christmas, just to have a silent night.

Other soldiers gathered, hunkered down against the wind,

To share a scrap of mail and dreams of going home again.

There wasn't much at all to put their lonely hearts at ease,

They had no Christmas turkey, just a pack of MREs.

They didn't have a garland or a stocking I could see,

They didn't need an ornament -- they lacked a Christmas tree.

They didn't have a present even though it was tradition,

the only boxes I could see were labeled "ammunition."

I felt a little tug and found my son now by my side,

He asked me what it was I feared, and why it was I cried.

I swept him up into my arms and held him oh so near

and kissed him on the forehead as I whispered in his ear.

There's nothing wrong my little son, for safe we sleep tonight,
our heroes stand on foreign land to give us all the right,
to worry on the things in life that mean nothing at all,
instead of wondering if we will be the next to fall.
He looked at me as children do and said it's always right,
to thank the ones who help us and perhaps that we should write.
And so we pushed aside the bills and sat to draft a note,
to thank the many far from home, and this is what we wrote:
God bless you all and keep you safe, and speed your way back home.
Remember that we love you so, and that you're not alone.
The gift you give you share with all, a present every day,
You give the gift of liberty and that we can't repay.

Toulon family left homeless after fire

TOULON -- A rural Toulon family of four was homeless after a fire swept through the upstairs of their two-story home Tuesday morning.

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Accident near Kewanee Tuesday

Authorities from the Kewanee Police Department and the Henry County Sheriff's Office responded to the scene of a single-vehicle accident east of Kewanee Tuesday night. Gina Webb, 16, Kewanee, was driving south on Fisher Avenue when she failed to stop at the intersection with East Division Street. Webb's vehicle crossed over Division Street and hit an embankment and utility pole head-on. The utility pole snapped off as a result of the crash. Webb was taken to Kewanee Hospital by emergency personnel from the Kewanee Rescue Squad for injuries she sustained as a result of the incident. A passenger, Zeus Blair, no age available, also of Kewanee, was checked at the scene but refused any further medical treatment.

Police blotter

Accidents

From the Star Courier files at the Kewanee Public Library

10 years ago

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