



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### **Base offers alternatives to mass donation campaigns**

**CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.** - The 437<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing, in following with Air Force guidance, is discouraging community members from collecting donations, such as cookies, books or care packages, to be sent to people deployed in support of ongoing military operations.

In October 2001, military policy suspended the letter writing/parcel sending programs known as "Operation Dear Abby" and "Any Servicemember." These could have created an avenue for terrorists to target deployed servicemembers.

"The generosity of the well-intentioned individuals who participate in these programs is much appreciated," said Capt. Linda Pepin, 437<sup>th</sup> Airlift Wing Public Affairs chief. "However, with the DoD-wide suspension of the "any servicemember" mail programs, we don't have a system that can get the goods to our deployed people within current guidelines."

The problem with moving donated goods on military aircraft is that they take up valuable space used to transport military members and their equipment to overseas locations.

There are, however, other ways for the community to show its support for military members. The Department of Defense released a number of suggestions.

Some DoD recommendations are:

- Do a good deed on behalf of servicemembers.
- Visit a VA hospital or nursing home
- Volunteer in the local community to help make up for servicemembers who normally would volunteer but are now deployed or otherwise too busy with their duties

The DoD also supports an Internet alternative to letter writing, [www.operationdearabby.net](http://www.operationdearabby.net). Military members can log on to the site to view the letters posted by the public.

The Web site [www.defendamerica.gov](http://www.defendamerica.gov) allows people to sign an online thank-you card to military members. So far, more than 3.3 million people have signed. The site also includes a number of links explaining how community members can help.

Any groups that have already collected donations of goods are encouraged to donate them to a worthy cause, such as a homeless shelter, nursing home, soup kitchen, battered spouse shelter or USO center at a major airport. Letters and cards can be forwarded to Veterans' Hospitals or nursing homes.

**(For more information, contact Staff Sgt. Melanie Streeter at 963-5589 or Staff Sgt. Jason Smith at 963-5537.)**