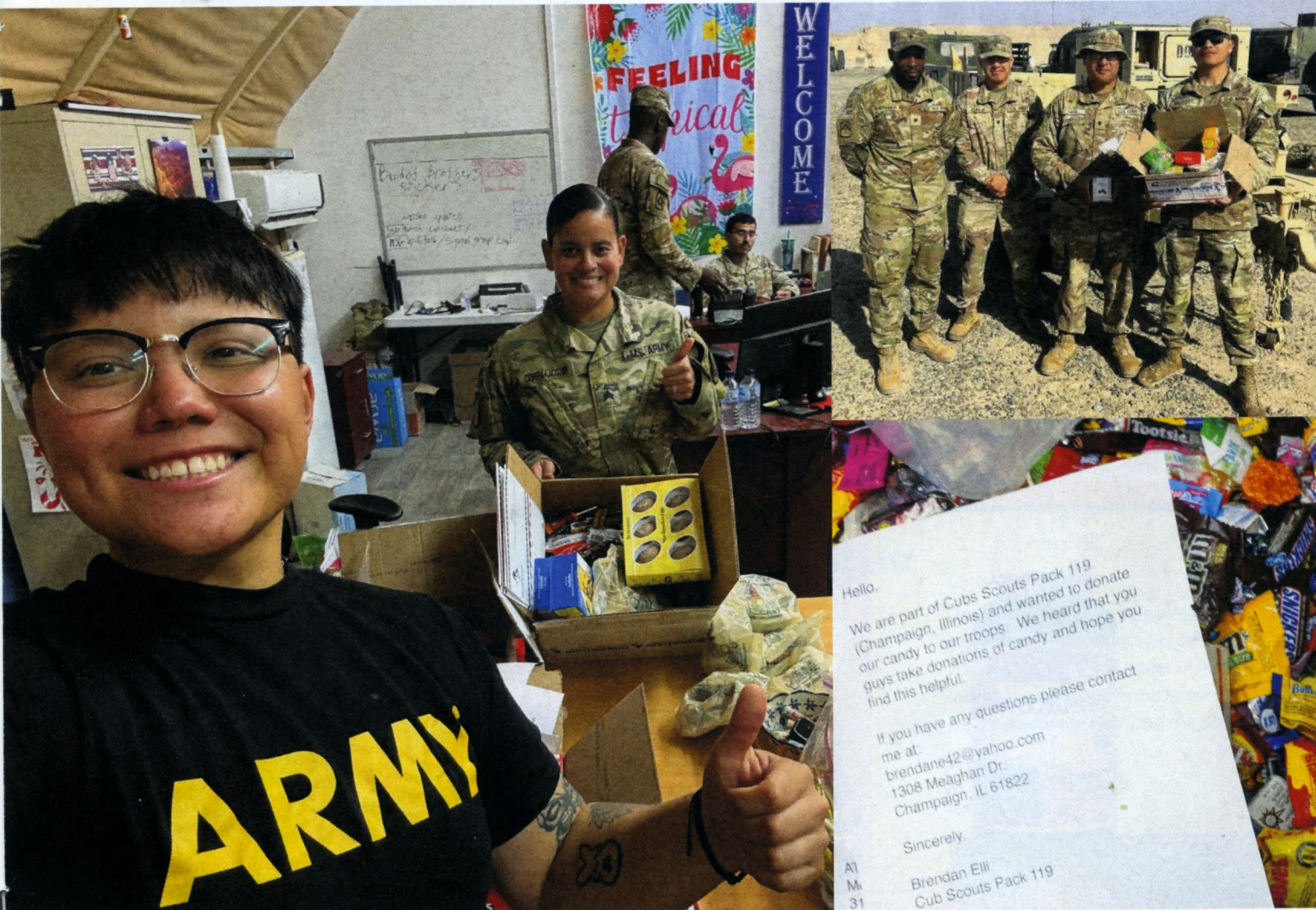


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Candy Is Dandy!

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By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ



Candy Is Dandy!

National nonprofit group Troopathon collects excess Halloween candy to provide a 'little taste of home' to deployed service members



Kids may think that Halloween is the best holiday ever, but parents—and dentists—often are concerned about the effects of extreme candy consumption. But there is a positive use for those extra sugary treats: an innovative "Halloween Candy Buy Back Program" sponsored by the national nonprofit organization Troopathon. Troopathon has been collecting surplus candy—some 30 tons every year—and sending special care packages to deployed troops across the globe.

"Troopathon was founded to provide heartfelt support to our deployed troops through care packages, a mission born from a desire to show our service members they're not forgotten," explains Scott Raab, Troopathon's operations director. "The Halloween Candy Buy Back Program, a cornerstone of our work, was sparked by Dr. Chris Kammer, a visionary dentist who launched it in 2005. Dr. Kammer saw an opportunity to reduce excess Halloween candy consumption among kids while sending those treats to troops overseas as a thank-you for their service. His first event was a hit, gaining media attention and inspiring dentists nationwide to join in.

"Troopathon partnered with Dr. Kammer to take this idea to the next level, handling the logistics of collecting and shipping the candy to troops in combat zones," Raab continues. "What started small has grown into a national phenomenon, with families, schools and businesses across the country sending us over 30 tons of candy each year – by the pallet – along with personal messages, hygiene items like toothbrushes, and care package requests for loved ones deployed in places where treats are a rare luxury. This program not only boosts troop morale but also connects communities to our military, fulfilling Dr. Kammer's vision of gratitude and giving back."

Raab himself knows how much these care packages can mean to deployed service members. "I come from a proud military family," he notes. "My grandfather, a World War II veteran, was a towering figure in my life – an anchor who inspired me to serve and do things right. His stories of duty and sacrifice fueled my decision to enlist in the U.S. Navy, where I served five years as an intelligence analyst."

Raab deployed with the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan strike group in 2006 aboard the U.S.S. Decatur (DDG-73), supporting maritime security operations in the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. "As a service-connected OEF/OIF veteran, I know firsthand the challenges of deployment and the lifeline that care packages provide," he recalls. "I still have the personal messages I received in my two care packages in my seabag upstairs at home right now. I read those letters hundreds of times and they are a constant reminder that I was never forgotten. That feeling is hard to describe and meant everything."

Troopathon was founded to provide emotional and tangible support to active-duty troops while deployed to combat areas



around the world, as well as to offer assistance and resources to military families and veterans in need. The group sends hand-packed and personally-addressed care packages filled with items requested by service members, including premium coffee, beef jerky, tea, snacks and hygiene items.

"We want to show our service members they're remembered and appreciated, and give families a simple, meaningful way to contribute," Raab points out. "But what makes the biggest impact is the personal messages from our donors and supporters. Those notes, often written by kids or families, show our troops they're cared about and remembered. As a proud Navy veteran, I love working every day to support our military community, ensuring every package we send meets the highest standards and carries that vital connection back home.

"Since 2018, our Halloween Candy Buy Back Program has collected 20 to 30 tons of candy each year, sending these treats to troops who rarely get such comforts in deployment," Raab adds. "Inspired by Dr. Kammer, we also aim to get excess candy 'off the streets,' helping kids cut down on sugar while enabling communities to support our military."

Anyone—families, schools and businesses—can participate by shipping candy, hygiene items like toothbrushes, or personal messages to Troopathon's Sacramento Operation Center at 3105 Fite Circle, Suite 108, Sacramento, CA 95827; or larger pallet-sized shipments to the Warehouse at 850 Gray Ave, Yuba City, CA 95991.


"Our army of volunteers sorts and packs these donations into care packages, ensuring every item and heartfelt note reaches our troops," Raab says. "Through social media outreach (@Troopathon, #HalloweenCandyBuyBack) and community events, we make it easy for everyone to join in, support as many military families as possible, and spread gratitude for our service members."

Troopathon receives 5,000 to 10,000 requests for care packages from military families year-round. "We're in a race against an ever-growing list of care package requests from military families," Raab points out. "We hope to fulfill every single request with hand-packed and personally-addressed care packages. The Halloween Candy Buy Back Program and the help of all the families, schools, and businesses across the country support us with plenty of candy to make each box a little sweeter. The requests never stop, and neither do we; our goal is to keep up with the demand, serving as many troops and families as our donors' generosity allows, to fuel our year-round mission."

As a 501(c)(3) charity, Troopathon is funded through tax-deductible donations from individuals nationwide. The group also partners with companies and other military service organizations who provide shipping or products for the care packages. Dentists, schools, and businesses often host drop-off events for a week or two after Halloween, sending Troopathon the collected candy

and other items, along with personal notes and letters.

Although the Halloween program is a big event, Troopathon accepts donations and sends care packages all year, fueled by the generosity of supporters. "Recurring donors who give monthly ensure we can send care packages to deployed service members every single day, keeping their spirits high no matter where they are," Raab remarks. "Others support us through IRA distributions once a year.

"Every act of support—big or small, from donating candy to crafting a heartfelt note—makes a difference for our military and their families," he adds. "We're deeply thankful for everyone who joins this mission, and we invite all who care about our troops to visit troopathon.org to donate, volunteer, or send a message of gratitude, helping us honor those who sign a blank check for our freedom." 

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