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Saturday, December 16, 2006

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## Soldiers' care package missing

Web-posted Dec 16, 2006

By NATALIE LOMBARDO  
Of The Oakland Press

INDEPENDENCE TWP. - A Christmas package destined for a tactical Army unit in west Iraq is missing, leaving a handful of soldiers without necessities and treats for the holidays.

About 48 packages were sent in early December by the Independence Township-based Campbell-Richmond American Legion Post 63 and its auxiliary unit. They weighed a total of 1,147 pounds and contained wrapped shoe boxes and stockings chock-full of nonperishable food and sweets, personal hygiene items, phone cards, gadgets and stationery.

But last week, the Legion post received a shred of one of the boxes with the return address on it, and a note from the U.S. post office at 5799 Ortonville Road in Independence Township, indicating one box was "separated" during handling.

Legion member Shannon Wawruck suspects the box was deliberately slashed and the contents were taken. She regrets they didn't insure the boxes with the U.S. post office.

"It disappeared through the mailing system. This means there's availability for theft - they rifled through our packages for the troops," she said.

The missing package had contents that would have benefited about six soldiers.

Auxiliary President Shirley Lynch said: "There was everything you can imagine in there. I'm ashamed people have to go through such lengths when there're other means to obtain these products without stealing them."

Mike Bernacchi, University of Detroit Mercy professor of marketing, said Michigan's struggling economy compounded by the president's disapproval rating contribute to theft, especially during the holidays.

"In desperate times, desperate people do desperate things; whether it's car jacking or mail

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being pilfered," Bernacchi said. "It's horrific and unexplainable to the parents and loved ones of service folks, and the service folks fighting for our country."

The items were collected by the Clarkston Brandon Community Credit Union, the Clarkston High School History Club and a Clarkston Community Schools preschool class. The legion packaged, sorted and sent them at a postage cost of nearly \$700.

The majority of the packages already have been received by the 165-member Unit 454, Wawruck noted. Sgt. Jordan Tubbs is a member of Post 63 and heads the unit.

Lynch's son, a chief master sergeant at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, is slated to go to Kuwait after Christmas. Though the post can't track which package is missing for replacement, Lynch has a Christmas wish for the troops.

"Stay safe and be happy."

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