

How to Assemble and Ship Care Packages For Our Troops



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Figure 1: F co. 2-227th AVN REGT thanking AdoptaPlatoon for the care packages that they received (Blog Archive: F Co. 2-227th AVN REGT.)

Introduction



Figure 2: Service Members receiving their care packages (Care Packages for 829 Engr Co.JPG)

Many people in the United States know at least one person who is in the military or has family in the military. Independent of political viewpoint, supporting our Troops is something that we all, as Americans, should do. These brave men and women are risking their lives every day all over the world to protect the rights and freedoms that our country has provided us.

Care packages are sent to all branches of the Military Service. AdoptaPlatoon.org provides the opportunity to get involved in supporting the Troops that protect this country. At this point, you have already been given the contact information for your Service Member(s), as well as a list of some of the

things that they would like for you to send. This easy-to-use manual will provide step-by-step instructions on how to put together a care package, address it, and mail it to your Troops overseas.

What Are the Challenges of Sending Packages Overseas?

When it comes to filling the packages and writing the letters, there are a few restrictions as to what can and cannot be included. The hardest part about sending packages overseas is filling out the customs forms. This manual will go through each step of the customs forms for military addresses.

Although putting together packages and taking them to the post office can be time consuming, the feeling of satisfaction received from helping the Troops will make the whole process easier. The process can be made even more enjoyable if it is done with other people! Get a group of people together to help package all the items together in boxes, get a friend to help you take the packages to the post office, organize an event within a club or organization to write letters to a platoon. Even decorate the inside of the boxes in order to give an extra boost to the Troops when they open up the packages.



Figure 3: Packages being prepared to be sent to Marines stationed overseas

Permitted and Prohibited Items

There are several requirements for items that can be sent overseas to the Troops. More importantly, there is a strict list provided by the United States Postal Service of items that **CANNOT** be sent. **Prohibited items include:**

- **Obscene articles** (prints, paintings, cards, films, videotapes, etc).
- **Any matter depicting nude or seminude persons**, pornographic or sexual items, or non-authorized political materials.
- **Bulk quantities of religious materials contrary to the Islamic faith.**
Items for the personal use of the addressee are permissible.
- **Pork or pork by-products**

(APO/FPO/DPO Guidelines and Restrictions 1)

Some organizations, like AdoptaPlatoon, also have their own restrictions on items that can and cannot send. For example, AdoptaPlatoon adds aerosol cans and liquid hand sanitizers to the list of prohibited items. AdoptaPlatoon also does not recommend sending chocolate during the summer months as it can melt before it gets to the Troops.

Aside from those few items that cannot be sent, there are many items that **can** be included in the care packages. These items include food, hygiene items, morale boosters, and other necessities.

When sending food to the Troops, remember that all food needs to be prepackaged and unopened. It is best to send prepackaged foods such as canned foods, boxed snacks, and other easy-to-prepare and ready to eat foods. Do not send homemade baked goods since shipping times may be longer, and these foods may spoil.



Figure 4: Food items that are good to include are canned food, beef jerky, and sunflower seeds

When sending toiletries, be sure to send things for both the male and female Service Members in your platoon! Soap and shampoo, deodorant, baby wipes, foot powders, tooth paste/tooth brushes, feminine products, and other types of toiletries are always good items to send. Be sure to put items that may open or leak in Ziploc bags so that there will not be a mess if something opens!



Figure 5: Hygienic items that are good to include are shampoos, baby wipes, tooth brushes and tooth paste, and deodorant

When sending morale boosters, include games, letter writing supplies (paper, pens, and envelopes), sports balls, Frisbees, batteries, magazines, or anything else that Service Members can use to pass the time. If CDs are included in the packages, make sure a CD player is also included or know that they have a CD player. Also, if anything that is battery operated is sent in the packages, make sure the batteries to go with it are included as well. Around the holidays, items such as decorations, Christmas stockings, Halloween candy, and 4th of July red, white and blue decorations are always good things to send to make their holidays a little bit brighter. Stuffed animals are always good to send, as Service Members will sometimes give them out to children in their area. Phone cards so the Service Members can call home are also great items to include!



Figure 6: Morale boosting items such as games, sports equipment, letter writing materials, and magazines are always good things to include (How to Send Care Packages to Troops Overseas)

For AdoptaPlatoon's full list of care package ideas, see <http://www.adoptaplatoon.org/new/pdf/care.pdf>

How to Package Items

When packing up items to send to the Troops, there are a few things that are very important to remember:

NOTE: THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE IS THE ONLY COMPANY ALLOWED TO SEND PACKAGES TO SERVICE MEMBERS STATIONED OVERSEAS

(How to Fill out a Customs Declaration and Dispatch Note 2976-A)

1. Use USPS Priority APO/FPO/DPO boxes to ship items overseas.
 - For larger packages, **FREE** 12"x12"x5.5" boxes are available from USPS. These packages ship for \$12.20 online and \$12.95 at the post office to any APO/FPO/DPO address. They can be ordered in packs of 10 or 25 from USPS at the website: <http://tinyurl.com/APOFPO-Boxes>



Figure 7: 12"x12"x5" box for APO/FPO Addresses

- For smaller packages, **FREE** 11.625" X 15.125" envelopes are available from USPS. These envelopes ship for \$4.75 online and \$4.95 at the post office to any APO/FPO/DPO address. A minimum of 10 envelopes and a maximum of 800 envelopes can be ordered from USPS at the website below: <http://tinyurl.com/APOFPO-Envelopes>



Figure 8: 11.625"x15.125" envelopes for APO/FPO Addresses

2. Pack similar items together! Make sure to pack all food in one box, all toiletries in one box, and all other items in another box.

3. Secure all liquid items in Ziploc bags to ensure that they will not make a mess of the package if they open while shipping.
4. Wrap all breakable or fragile items in newspaper or bubble wrap to protect them during the shipping process. Also, fill the package as much as possible so that there is not as much room for shifting during shipping. Pack large items first and fill the gaps with small items.
5. Once the package is full, be sure to tape both the top and the bottom flaps with either priority or plain packing tape to make sure that the entire package and the contents are secure.

Customs Forms

Customs forms are a very important part of the package that will be sent to the Troops.

- Use a **PS 2976 Form** when the package meets **ALL** of the following requirements:
 - **ONLY** contains documents (ie letters, magazines, newspapers)
 - weigh less than 16 ounces
 - is less than $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick
 - valued at less than \$400
 - is **NOT** going to Iran, Syria, Cuba, North Korea, and Sudan
 - if sending to these locations, use the **PS 2976-A Form** (see below)
 - A Sample **PS 2976 Form** can be found at <http://about.usps.com/forms/ps2976.pdf>, and a filled out example can be seen below. A minimum of 10 and a maximum of 50 **PS 2976 Forms** can be ordered for **FREE** at <http://tinyurl.com/2976-CustomsForm>
- Use a **PS 2976-A Form** for all other packages.
 - A Sample **PS 2976-A Form** can be found at <http://about.usps.com/forms/ps2976a.pdf>, and a filled out example can be seen below. A minimum of 10 and a maximum of 50 **PS 2976-A Forms** can be ordered for **FREE** at <http://tinyurl.com/2976A-CustomsForm>

Because the items will be sent to a military address, it is very important to get all of the information correct on the form and to fill in all the appropriate areas. **PRINT ALL INFORMATION CLEARLY!** Below are some images that describe how to fill out the PS 2976 Form and PS 2976-A Form, respectively. The PS 2976-A form will be used for most care packages, and when in doubt, use the PS 2976-A form for any type of package.

Finally, on both forms it asks for the weight of the items in the box and the total weight of the box. If possible, weigh the items and fill out these sections of the form. If an accurate scale is not available, the box can be weighed at the post office, and the individual items can be estimated. The same goes for the cost of the items in the box. If the exact value of the items is unknown, estimate the cost as closely as possible!

PS 2976 Form

USE FOR DOCUMENT-ONLY PACKAGES!!!!

USPS® Customs Declaration – CN 22
IMPORTANT: The item/parcel may be opened officially. See Privacy Notice on reverse of Sender's Instructions page. Please print in English and press firmly; you are making multiple copies.

From:

Sender's Name

AdoptaPlatoon

Street Address

City, State Zipcode

To:

Soldier's Name (no Rank)

300th ABC HCC/CCC

Platoon/Unit

AP0 AE 0999-1234

PS Form 2976, December 2009 PSN 7530-01-000-9833 Do not duplicate without USPS approval. **1 - Scan Copy**

Figure 9: The PS 2976 Customs Form should be used for document-only packages (ie letters, magazines, newspapers) that are less than 16 ounces in weight, less than 3/4" thick, valued at less than \$400, and **NOT** going to Iran, Sudan, Cuba, North

PS 2976-A Form

United States Postal Service®
Customs Declaration and Dispatch Note – CP 72
IMPORTANT: This item may be opened officially. Please print in English, using blue or black ink, and press firmly; you are making multiple copies. See Privacy Notice and Indemnity Coverage on Customer Copy.

FROM: Sender's Last Name **First** **MI**

LAST NAME **FIRST NAME**

Business **ADOPTA PLATOON**

Address (Number, street, suite, apt., P.O. Box, etc. Residents of Puerto Rico include Urbanization Code preceded with URB)

STREET ADDRESS

City **State** **Zip Code**

CITY **TX** **ZIP CODE**

TO: Addressee's Last Name **First** **MI**

SOLDIER'S LAST NAME **FIRST NAME**

Business **300th ABC HCC/CCC**

Address (Number, street, suite, apt., P.O. Box, etc.)

PLATOON/UNIT

CAMP FREEDOM

Postcode **Country**

AP0 AE 0999-1234

1. Detailed Description of Contents (enter one item per line) **2. Qty.** **3. Lbs.** **Oz.** **4. Value (U.S. \$)**

PUT DETAILED **#** **#** **#** **#**

DESCRIPTIONS OF **#** **#** **#** **#**

ITEMS BEING **#** **#** **#** **#**

SENT HERE **#** **#** **#** **#**

5. Check One: ☒ Gift ☐ Returned Goods **6. Check One:** ☒ Airmail ☐ Surface

☐ Documents ☐ Commercial Sample ☐ Merchandise ☐ Other:

11. EEL/PPC **12. Restrictions** ☐ Quarantine ☐ Sanitary or Phytosanitary Inspection

13. I certify the particulars given in this customs declaration are correct. This item does not contain any dangerous article, or articles prohibited by legislation or by postal or customs regulations. I have met all applicable export filing requirements under the Foreign Trade Regulations. Sender's Signature and Date

SIGNATURE **Month** **Day** **Year**

11 **11** **11** **2** **0** **1** **1**

8. Total Gross Wt: (all items Lbs. & Ozs.) **9. Total Value US \$ (all items)**

10. If non-deliverable: ☐ Treat as Abandoned ☐ Return to Sender (see inst) ☐ Redirect to Address Below:

Chaplain
300th ABC HCC/CCC
Platoon/Unit
Camp Freedom
AP0 AE 0999-1234

14. Sender's Customs Reference (if any)

15. Importer's Reference - Optional (if any)

16. Importer's Telephone ☐ Fax ☐ Email ☐ (select one)

17. License No.

18. Certificate No.

19. Invoice No.

20. HS Tariff Number **21. Country of Origin of Goods**

PS Form 2976-A, May 2009 PSN: 7530-01-000-9834 Do not duplicate this form without USPS® approval. **1 - Manifesting/Scan Copy**

Figure 10: PS 2976-A Customs Forms should be used for all packages that lie outside the PS 2976 Customs Form requirements. **NOTE:** The address used on these forms is a sample address. The address for you use will be provided to you by AdoptaPlatoon.

Mailing Information

Addressing the packages is probably one of the most important parts of the process. When using the APO/FPO Boxes from USPS, there are already places for each part of the APO/FPO address on the box. These ready-made boxes will make it easier to address the packages. Below is an example of an addressed package.

Fill out the package address the same way it is filled out on the customs form. Make sure to put the return address on the same flap as the Service Member's address. Also, be sure to include "AdoptaPlatoon" if the package is going to an unknown Service Member, so that the he or she knows how got his/her address was given out.

The image shows a template for an APO/FPO address box. On the left, there are labels for the sender's information: "Sender's Name", "AdoptaPlatoon", "Your Street Address", and "City, State Zipcode". On the right, there are labels for the service member's information: "Service member full name:", "Rank or rating (optional):", "Military organization or unit:", and "APO/FPO (Air/Army Post Office™ or Fleet Post Office) with 9 digit ZIP Code:". The handwritten information is as follows: "SOLDIER'S NAME" for the full name, "300th ABC HCC/CCC" for the rank/organization, "Platoon / UNIT" for the unit, and "APO-AE-09999-1234" for the ZIP code. Below the ZIP code, there are labels for each part: "APO or FPO", "AA AE AP", "ZIP", and "FOUR".

Figure 11: Make sure to address the package the same way that the info is filled out on the customs forms. Also, be sure to include your return address and "AdoptaPlatoon" so they know how you got their address.

Taking the Package(s) to the Post Office

There are several things that are important to remember when bringing care packages to the post office:

1. Tape both the top and the bottom of the package shut. If necessary, there will be some at the post office to use for free.
2. Bring completed customs forms to the post office. The post office workers will need to attach them to the box.
 - Be sure to weigh the package and its contents before bringing it to the post office. If this is not possible, the employees at the post office can weigh the package.

At the post office, there are a couple of important considerations when sending the package(s). Although the following items cost a bit more, they will give a bit more confidence about sending the packages.

1. If items in the package are expensive or fragile, consider purchasing insurance on the package.
2. It is always nice to get delivery tracking and confirmation on the package. This way the shipment can be tracked as it is delivered to the Troops.

Closing

Sending care packages to Service Member is an easy way to show our men and women in uniform how much we appreciate their service. Every single package makes a difference. It helps them remember that they are not forgotten. Be sure to send letters, hygienic supplies, food, and morale boosters. Just remember: it is the simple things in life that make a difference. It is as easy as sending a package.

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