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Ronnie Polaneczky | Sweet-toothed mission raises GIs' morale

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FOR TWO years, Tiffany Wilson has spent thousands of dollars of her own money supporting troops in Iraq. Last week, she realized she's done nothing at all for soldiers at home.

"Just because they're not at war," Tiffany said, "doesn't mean they don't deserve attention."

And attention, to Tiffany, equals cookies - enough to rot the teeth of every GI stationed at every military base in the tri-state area - which she plans to deliver on Christmas Eve.

She's calling her mission "Operation CookieCall," which I'll get to in a minute. But first, I've got to tell you more about Tiffany, who would be one of my favorite people in the world even if her nickname weren't "TiffTiff."

I wrote about the naturally empathic Tiffany in 2004, after she'd sent an e-mail to the Web addresses of 200 military ships and platoons, offering moral support. She closed her note with the enticing words, "If there's anything you need, I'll try to get it for you." Her in-box was bombarded with hundreds of e-mails from troops who poured out their fear and loneliness. She felt well-equipped to respond with words of comfort because, she said, "I'm a nurturer."

But she was unprepared for soldiers' requests for things like underwear and socks to replace the ones they lost in a hangar fire. And for blankets, X-ray machines, medical monitors and, yes, handcuffs.

She felt helpless. There she was, a single mom who lived in a Southwest Philly rowhouse with her mother and son, with no resources to help our soldiers safely police the streets of Kirkuk.

So she responded the only way she knew how: with crafts.

Candy-adorned valentines in February, mini Christmas stockings in December, holiday-themed confections and notes other times of the year were received by grateful troops who told me how much Tiffany's efforts boosted mail-call morale.

And she hasn't stopped since.

"I feel compelled to help," Tiffany said this week, describing the calls she still receives at 4 a.m. from soldiers who don't want to worry their families but know that Tiffany will bravely hear their stories of horror and offer words of hope.

"They strap machine guns on their back every day," she said. "I'll hang in there for them as long as they hang in there for me." Don't you love this woman?

But Tiffany says that soldiers stationed stateside deserve her devotion, too, especially during the holidays, when they're as lonely for home as their comrades are in Iraq. So she plans to deliver cookies on Christmas Eve to each one of them stationed at bases nearby.

She's enlisted some co-workers at Aramark, where she works, to bake with her, and friends and family members. But she'll need more than home-kitchen help if she's to fulfill her mission of providing "a cookie for every soldier."

She needs commercial bakeries to get behind her mission. Classrooms to adopt her cause. Offices and churches to hold bake-offs to benefit Operation CookieCall because, as she says, "Every cookie helps."

She also needs the use of someone's van or truck on Christmas Eve, as well as additional drivers so she won't have to spend the whole day hauling products to Ft. Dix, Maguire, Dover and elsewhere. "Not that I won't make five trips if I have to," she said.

Obviously, Tiffany's goal is dang near impossible, which is why I admire her: She doesn't let absurd odds hold her back.

Besides, it's Christmastime, season of miracles. If reindeer can fly, maybe Tiffany's idea can, too. Wanna help? Contact Tiffany at OperCookieCall05@aol.com.

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