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Troops receive early Christmas present

Regional Support Command-North U.S. troops received an early Christmas present when Sgt. Maj. James Allen notified them that \$6,000 worth of 500-minute calling cards were being sent to servicemembers stationed at remote forward operating bases throughout the northern provinces of Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

The Collier County Chapter of the American Red Cross sent a total of \$7,500 phone cards to Camp Mike Spann earlier this month to be disbursed to troops in the region. The additional \$1,500 in cards was distributed to U.S. military mentors at Camp Mike Spann.

“As a sergeant major in the United States Army, I know how important it is for Soldiers to keep in contact with family members and friends back at home,” said Allen. “It alleviates a lot of stress that Soldiers build up from knowing that they aren’t able to contact key people in their lives.”

Americans are known throughout the world for their generosity which often extends to the most remote parts of the globe. In this case, the charitable gesture reached the Balk Province where U.S. Army 1st Lt. Kelvin Carter, assigned to the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan at Camp Spann, is preparing to return home after serving a nine-month tour as a medical mentor to the Afghan National Army 209th Corps.

"I'm not exactly sure who will read this," said Carter, "but just know that we Soldiers are appreciative of everything given to us. It's good to know that someone is thinking about us and our families and with the card, it's one less thing we have to worry about."

The donated calling cards can be used with personal cellular phones thereby alleviating the need for servicemembers to wait up to 30 minutes to use one of 20 public phones shared among nearly 3,000 troops at Camp Spann. Though troops with personal mobile phones can make stateside calls the service can prove to be a costly option, one that many servicemembers can't afford to choose often. Furthermore, some troops at remote FOBs do not have access to any public phones, rendering their choices limited.

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“The American Red Cross is doing its part in breaking the communication barrier for deployed troops,” said Allen. “It provides prepaid phone cards to our fighting forces so that contacting loved ones, or taking care of business back home, becomes much easier.”

With the majority of troops serving 12-month deployments, Carter acknowledges the positive impact that even the smallest gesture of kindness can make on his troops’ morale.

It's something about a package in the mail or a letter that will totally change a soldier's mood,” Carter said. “To be honest, hearing someone say ‘thanks for your service’ has become as common as God Bless America,” Carter said. “Not that that’s bad, it just means so much more when someone actually takes the extra step to show that they support you.”

Currently, 130,000 U.S. troops are deployed to Afghanistan to help rebuild the country’s economic and governmental infrastructure, as well as train Afghan National Security Forces to defend and preserve its sovereignty. With the magnitude of the task at hand, Allen notes that everyone will take something away from their service in this war-torn region and says that it may be the kind act from a stranger that is most remembered.

“Whether it is to learn how to be a better person or how to be a stronger person, we can remember that it is the little things that matters the most,” said Allen.

For more information, contact Sandra Arnold, director of the Region Command-North Public Affairs Advisory Team at Sandra.g.arnold@afghan.swa.army.mil.

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