

TEDDY BEARS and SOCCER BALLS

Written By: Harry Gribnitz

Our soldiers returning from Iraq have brought home many stories that were making the rounds. I would like to share two that are very appropriate during this season when we are thinking about Christmas and the gifts we will be giving and receiving.

A Blackhawk helicopter was hovering low, running a mission in the Sunni Triangle. Alone in a field there was an unkempt child about twelve years old. The boy, acting on everything his father has told him, looked up at the chopper with hatred in his eyes and rock in his cocked hand, ready to throw. But the gunner in the Blackhawk has something in his hand too, and he was a bit quicker. Whoosh! A soccer ball flew out of the door of the chopper. The boy stood in disbelief for a moment, and then collected himself enough to run after the ball. Once he retrieved it, he looked up and with a smile from ear to ear, and excitedly waved to the American soldiers in the Blackhawk. Another friend made; another member of the next generation converted.

Soldiers on patrol in the streets of Baghdad often encountered children frightened by the sight of the troops, Humvees and tanks. One of the soldiers did what any American soldier would do; he told people back in his hometown. Within weeks boxes of stuffed animals, soccer balls and candy came from America. Now when the soldiers were on patrol they would hand out candy, soccer balls or the children's favorite, stuffed animals, to the children of Iraq. Would this really make a difference?

A young lieutenant was riding in a humvee as he led a small patrol through the streets of a suburb of Baghdad. As they turned a corner, a little girl sat in the middle of the road. He ordered his driver to halt and waved at the little girl to move aside so the patrol could pass. While sitting on the ground in her tattered dress, she clutched something to her chest. She was steadfast and would not heed the officer's direction. Not wanting to frighten the little girl, he stepped out of his vehicle and slowly approached her location in the dusty road. As he got closer, he could see she was holding one of the teddy bears his unit had passed out in recent days. As he came within a single step, she still would not move. As he reached down to lift her in his arms, he saw a landmine protruding through the sand a couple of feet behind her. The same type of terror device had injured several soldiers from his company just a few days earlier. If the little girl had not been so persistent, they could have met a similar fate. The officer carefully lifted the girl into his arms and took her back to the safety of his vehicle.

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Lasting peace is not won by tanks, planes, bombs and guns alone. It can only be accomplished by young American men and women, one child at a time. Another friend is made. Another member of the next generation is converted.

Merry Christmas,

Harry Gribnitz

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PS: With the same Spirit of Giving inspired by Christmas and so well demonstrated by our young men and women in uniform, we will once again be making a donation to the Santa Claus Girls in the name of our friends, relatives, clients and business partners. If you would like to learn more, please call 222-5796 or go to www.santaclausgirls.org.