

Woman makes a soldier pen-pal

By Bill Casper
staff writer

Jan Taylor of Redford Township has made a new friend whom she has never seen or talked to. He's an American soldier stationed in Saudi Arabia with troops engaged in Operation Desert Shield.

They became friends through their letters, and now Taylor is encouraging others to write the GIs and send some things they need to make life in the desert a little more bearable and enjoyable — things like flypaper, toothpaste and cookies.

"I addressed my first letter to a soldier and Michael wrote back," Taylor said of U.S. Army chief warrant officer Michael McDonald. "We're friends now. We became friends through our letters."

LITTLE BY LITTLE, letter by letter, they are learning about each other and their families.

McDonald, based in Fort Hood, Tex., before being sent to Saudi Arabia, has a wife and two children, said Taylor, who has a husband and two children.

Taylor also is learning about life in the desert of Saudi Arabia since she began writing Operation Desert Shield in late September or late October.

"I asked what they needed and Michael asked for fly strips. He said the flies are terrible. He said they are plagued by flies that get in their mouth, eyes and nose for moisture."

Taylor bought a package of four fly strips at a Dearborn hardware and sent them to McDonald, but

that's all she could find. So she wrote to the Senoret Chemical Co. in Missouri, that was listed on the package she purchased, and ordered two dozen more packs, each containing four fly strips.

McDonald wrote that cookies also are always appreciated, especially for Christmas, Taylor said.

"I'll continue to send fly paper as long as they need it but I can't bake enough cookies. And I'm not a good cookie baker."

"I'll make sure Michael will get some cookies and he said he would give them to the mess sergeant to be distributed to all the soldiers," Taylor said. "My husband talked to someone at a bakery and we contacted Farmer Jack for help in getting some cookies. Farmer Jack may bake some cookies for me to send to the troops but I have to submit my proposal to the company for review."

"I thought maybe some ladies may want to do something to help the troops and don't know how to go about it. Michael told me not feel obligated to send anything."

"I just think it's a little thing we can do to make their lives more comfortable and enjoyable while they are over there, away from their families and living without some of the barest of necessities."

WRITING LETTERS is great, McDonald wrote Taylor.

"He tells me to say hi to all the men, not just him, in my letters. He lets other guys read my letters if they want to see them and I told him I didn't mind."

"People shouldn't be afraid or hesitant to write. They can write

about anything, like their families, what they do and where they go. Maybe someone will answer their letters and they will have pen pals."

"Michael said the guys would love to get mail from home and his battalion would love to be adopted," Taylor said. "I feel some of the soldiers are afraid that they won't be appreciated when they get back, like the Vietnam soldiers."

"I do appreciate my freedom and I appreciate them being there," she said. "And I think that if there's a war, some of them may not be back."

Taylor provided the following address for anyone who would like to write or send things to the soldiers of the 57th Battalion in Saudi Arabia: Operation Desert Shield; IHC, 57th Signal Bn, APO New York 09657.

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