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## Eighth-graders adopt Army unit of Michigan soldiers

By Diana Dillaber Murray  
Journal Register News Service

Eighth-graders in Robin Ziebert's language arts class at Anderson Middle School got a closer look at what it is like for a soldier at war than classes in the past have.

As they covered the Vietnam War, their discussions led to comparing that with the Iraq War and finally the difficulties a soldier might face while on duty in another country.

So, with encouragement and help from their teacher, whose philosophy is to "arouse a feeling for good action," the class adopted the 144th Military Police Co. 1st Platoon. It is an Army unit of 25 men and five women who are training police in Iraq, Ziebert said.

"I chose them because they were from Michigan, had a number of pictures (on the Web) and seemed very devoted to providing things to the Iraq children, especially Beanie Babies," Ziebert said.

The political positions of students, their families and the teacher on the Iraq War were not an issue because they focused only on the fact that the soldiers are there and need to know people care, she said.

Students in all five of her eighth-grade classes this year participated.

"I didn't keep track of who brought what (items for the troop) but it seemed pretty universal," Ziebert said. "Of the 127 who wrote letters, only two asked that theirs not be sent." The students were assigned to write letters, but sending them was not a requirement, she said.



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First, the students collected Beanie Babies so the soldiers could pass them on to the youngsters they met in Iraq. The tiny stuffed animals had to be donated out of collections built when the teens were much younger. After the students collected 360 of the little stuffed animals, they decided to send other items for the soldiers and the children.

"We had things like Frisbees, cards and basketballs," Ziebert said. "There was a huge amount of toiletry and snack items. The middle of my room was a mountain of such. We sent off nine large care packages before spring break, and more than 20 boxes worth since the break."

Information and photos about the unit were found on Anysoldier.com, and Cpl. Nicholas J. Izeydorek became their contact. On Wednesday, the Web site had a message posted saying he had not responded to efforts to contact him in 50 days.

But before that, Izeydorek painted a picture of danger and concern for the children of Iraq in his notes posted on the Web site.

In a March note on the site, Izeydorek said, "I want to say thank you for all your support! It means so much to all the soldiers, terps (interpreters), children and the people of Iraq and me!"

"I appreciated everyone's thoughts, prayers and support that they give us. It keeps us safe! That's why I would like to apologize for not responding sooner, but my team was hit by an RPG attack which went right through my truck, but we are all alive. My driver and I have recovered and have been back doing missions. My gunner is working inside the wire until he recovers 100 percent. It's getting hot here in Mosul, Iraq, and so that means the activity is picking up.

"I have passed out all the supplies, candy and everything else. ... Everything has found a home and been put to good use."

"I will be sending everyone thank you pictures of what's going on. ... With the whole incident and running double missions I don't have much time for getting stuff done, but I will be sending them out so Thank you for being patient.

"Troops can still use Surefire flashlights, police gloves, Under Armour shirts, DVDs, snacks and anything else you would like to send."

"Children of Iraq would love candy, toys and for sure soccer balls. They love soccer! It's getting to the next generations that will make this country strong so hopefully we can reach enough of them and they can grow knowing what's right for their country."

In April, Izeydorek posted a few photos of members of the troop giving children their gifts, with a caption underneath.

"It is truly amazing how a letter, toy or something that someone hasn't had, like Pringles, for example, will bring a smile to their faces. It's a great feeling to see that. Especially, the children that have to live out in the city day in and day out. Bringing a smile to their faces just brings hope of a brighter future. Well I want to say Thank You and God Bless!," said Izeydorek in his last message.

At one point, Anderson held an assembly so Ziebert could tell all Anderson students about the project. The band played patriotic songs, eighth-grader Darnne Killeron sang the national anthem, and Vice Principal Jim Cowdry talked about his grandfathers and father serving in the armed forces. Two children, Brittany Craft and Eric Mozel, talked about their father's military duty. The assembly was recorded to be sent to the troops.

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