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(Illustration by Monica Seaberry)

Web Sites Offer Americans Means to E-Mail Messages of Support to Troops

BY DRU SEFTON
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"You are in our prayers. Stay strong. Pray hard. Fight well. Come home."

That message, signed "Dawndra," is typical of the notes left for American troops on several Web sites where visitors are voicing their support.

Some sites are sponsored by the military; others are maintained by citizens who simply felt a need to reach out to the soldiers.

The sentiments are deeply appreciated by the military, said Air Force Lt. Col. Larry Cox at the coalition press information center in Kuwait City.

"Any expression of support these folks can digest or be exposed to is very good," Cox said. "Sometimes that is their only form of communication, with the possible exception of members of their immediate family."

Cox said most troops have "some degree of Internet access," depending on how far afield they are. On ships they may be able to use a computer fairly regularly. Downrange, "the farther out you go, the more shared the access is. It winds up being a kind of community center in a tent," with soldiers waiting to use one PC.

One of the sites those soldiers may access is anyservicemember.org, run by Army veteran Jack Coffey from his home in suburban Atlanta.

Being a vet, Coffey knows to review each post to determine that no critical information -- such as troop location -- is passed along.

And he's had to delete only two overtly offensive items. "The lunatic fringe,

with whatever their Pet Rock agenda might be," as he said.

Coffey said he's noticed an increase in traffic to the site in the last few weeks. He gets more than 1,000 hits a day.

Scott Ott, who runs scrappleface.com, averages around 7,500 hits a day on his self-described "timely news satire Web log." Several weeks ago a reader suggested a page for military messages. As of March 19 Ott had received 629 notes.

"Just ordinary people who pray and write to soldiers overseas and who want the best for them," said Ott, of State College, Pa., who admits having been "choked up to the point of tears" over the sincerity of some messages.

Here are details about several of the sites:

-- <http://anyservicemember.org> (Click on "Home" in lower right corner.) -- Send a message to members of the Marines, Navy, Army, Air Force or Coast Guard. Site run by a veteran.

-- <http://anyservicemember.navy.mil> -- Joint effort of advice columnist Dear Abby, the Department of Defense and Department of the Navy. (Abby's traditional letter-writing campaign was discontinued after Sept. 11 for security reasons.)

-- <http://www.emailourmilitary.com> -- A volunteer site to "provide encouragement, motivation and moral support" to the military. Register online to send messages.

-- <http://www.salts.navy.mil/main/troops> -- Send notes to sailors and Marines aboard ships. A service of the Naval Inventory Control Point, which provides Navy program and supply support.

-- <http://www.army.mil./usar/expresssupporthere.html> -- Electronic message board for Army reservists to view; send notes to specific or anonymous troops. Sponsored by the Army Reserve.

-- <http://www.scrappleface.com> (Click on "Encourage Our Troops" at right.) -- Leave messages for troops to view on a personal Web log.

-- <http://www.estripes.com> -- Scroll down to "Messages of Support" on left side of page to leave messages at Stars & Stripes, the daily newspaper delivered to troops overseas. Notes run in the paper as well as on its Web site.

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