

What to Bring?



U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Sean P. Lenahan

THE military issues much of what you will need while deployed to Afghanistan. But some service members say they needed a little something extra from home to make their deployment more enjoyable. What to know before you go:

"You wouldn't think of it when it's summertime and 140 degrees outside," said 5th Armored Training Support Brigade Executive Officer LTC Ward Marshall, who deployed to Afghanistan in 2006 and 2007, "but you need warm gloves, socks and stocking caps to wear in the winter, when all of a sudden it's freezing cold." These are items that are not typically issued, he said, and that can be difficult to get once you are in theater.

Another good-to-have item is an LCD or LED flashlight, said Marshall, who is currently stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas. "The batteries and bulb can last about 10-20 times longer than a normal flashlight. You can literally use it every day for a year's deployment and not have to replace either." This can be a real plus, especially if you're in the field a lot, or if you are stationed in a remote area where such items are hard to come by.

At the remote forward operating bases (FOBs), even a haircut can be hard to come by. The Police and Army training teams are issued barber kits, which most team members scoff at — until they get eight hours away from the nearest barber. Then a self taught soldier-barber comes in very handy, often with more "business" than they can handle.

One luxury item that's nice to have in Afghanistan is a laptop with a built-in camera, which makes communicating with friends and loved ones back home a little easier, if you have access to the Internet. Be sure to check with your insurance company about coverage — some offer coverage for electronics ... even from sand damage.

And speaking of electronics, digital cameras and today's mini video recorders are also handy. They sell these in theater, but they

tend to be very expensive and it's better to bring along something you know. Plus, you can load your music, photos, and movies before you get there as a way to pass the time during the lonely time off.

As far as friends and loved ones sending care packages, several soldiers spoke of the joy in receiving home-baked cookies or other food items that are specific to your home — such as barbecue sauce from a favorite local restaurant. Movies on disc are always nice, say service members, along with digital music or photos from home. Marshall suggests having friends and loved ones use a photo sharing site, such as Kodak or Snapfish, to upload digital photos to share. That cuts down on the time to download pics from email, and the service member can choose which ones to print.

Other little extras great to have include a month's worth of lip balm, sunscreen, toothpaste, shaving cream and razor blades. Yes, you will be able to get more once you arrive and you don't want to weigh down your ruck with excess items, but you really do not want to run out on the way to your destination.

Veteran soldiers caution against taking or asking for large items that must be carted around or even sent back from theater. But not to worry if you wish for the large items — service members who cannot bring televisions, mini refrigerators, space heaters and pieces of furniture home after their deployment will usually sell them to newcomers at bargain prices.

Phone cards are great, but some places have MWR phones that you can use to call home for free. Don't buy hundreds of dollars of these cards before you deploy — wait and see what they have. Plus, you can also see if you can use the Internet to make calls home for much less.

Pillows can be picked up at the large bases where you in process, as can blankets and sheets, just think about picking up these little extras before you leave the big bases — they can be next to impossible to get once you are in a remote location. **AF**