

A taste of home : Brownie Troop 1129 sends cookies to soldiers in Iraq

By LESLIE HUNT, Staff Writer

Thanks to Brownie Troop 1129, the soldiers in the 3rd battalion, 2nd Marine Division stationed in a danger zone in Iraq will have a familiar treat in their hands to remind them of home and of their fallen comrade Eric Herzberg, killed in the line of duty on Oct. 21.

Last month, 99 boxes of cookies were donated to the troop's "Gift of Caring" program, designated for Mr. Herzberg's Marine unit prior to his death.

The troop of second-graders from Folger McKinsey Elementary School is lead by Bernadette Martin, Mr. Herzberg's aunt, of Stewart's Landing and Kathy Nolte of Fair Oaks.

"We are still going to send them to Eric's unit in his honor," said Mrs. Martin. "Those brave men had to keep on going despite the loss of one of their own. From what I understand, they haven't been to a "green zone" (safe zone) in weeks."

"We wanted to give them a 'taste of home' and what better way than Girl Scout Cookies." The troop sent 56 boxes over last year.

Mrs. Martin said the donation started out as a "thank you" to Mr. Herzberg and the other Marines for their dedication to our country. "They have all volunteered to serve during a time when they had no doubt that they would be sent into harm's way," she said.

"After Eric's death last month, it became even more important to our family to say 'thank you' to Eric's comrades and to pay a tribute to them," said Mrs. Martin.

There are several military families in her troop and other families who have had members who are veterans.

"Everyone agreed that it was even more important to send the cookies now," she said.

The parents of the girls in troop are supportive of the endeavor. "I think anything they do to support the troops is wonderful. They need all the home they can get over there," said parent Steve Allwein.

"The cookies won't last but the sentiment will," said Karen Reynolds.

Last Memorial Day, Mrs. Martin's daughter Mary, 7, and fellow troop members Anna Nolte and Madeleine Horrell placed flags at the Maryland Veterans Cemetery in Crownsville, with other local girl and boy scout troops.

"We had discussed service for our country and how many of those individuals buried there had sacrificed their lives fighting for us," said Mrs. Martin. "This has made it all the more real."

"Those brave men had to pick themselves up and continue their work after Eric's death, despite their feelings. So it is both a remembrance of Eric and a tribute to the men and women of 32 Kilo Company for their incredible service to this country," said Mrs. Martin, adding that the cookies, sent on Monday will boost morale.

Besides the cookies, the entire second-grade class at Folger is writing letters to the battalion.

Mrs. Martin and her husband Jack were Eric's godparents. "Eric was a wonderful person and it was fun to watch him grow up, " she said. "We loved him dearly."

There was a true sense of family among the cousins too. Mrs. Martin remembers fondly Mr. Herzberg's sense of humor and willingness to play with Mary and her son Brendan.

He and his brother Matt came to Mary's birthday parties, played the games and treated her "like a princess" she said.

Mr. Herzberg was hoping to meet his cousin Mary's troop, but he went directly from boot camp to infantry school.

"He went off to boot camp confident and returned even more self-assured. Most amazing of all was to see him when he finished Infantry School and came home last July for a visit before being sent to Iraq."

"He was happy, proud and seemed in charge of his world. He was ready to do his job for our country, and that is exactly what he did. He was so proud to be a United States Marine. They helped him become a man, and the United States Marine Corps has been faithful to him as well."

"They have honored him at each and every opportunity since his death and they have been such a comfort to Eric's mom (Mrs. Martin's sister)," said Mrs. Martin.

She added that he really matured while working with Sgt. Hill at the Marine recruiting office in Glen Burnie."

"The Marines have handled all of the administrative chores personally and tenderly. When a Marine says "Semper Paratus" they really mean it."

Mrs. Martin is hoping that the troop will adopt the 32 Kilo Company and send them the "Gift of Caring" cookies every year in Mr. Herzberg's honor.

"And to say thank you to the United States Marine Corps for everything they did for my nephew," said Mrs. Martin.

- No Jumps-