

1945 July 30-August 5

Care Packages from Home

The Hallmark Channel recently advertised their Christmas in July movie marathon. It seems there is a presumed demand for seeing snow (of the fake variety), Christmas trees, colorfully-wrapped presents, and those heartwarming family holiday stories that Hallmark is known for, all while we swelter in the heat of summer, viewing our green lawns turning brown for lack of precipitation of the liquid, rather than frozen, variety. Or at least Hallmark hopes that is what we want to watch. Personally, pass.

Seventy-five years ago, residents of La Crosse County were getting a head start on Christmas in a very different way. The local Red Cross chapter set a quota of 10,800 Christmas packages to be assembled for servicemen and women overseas. The expectation was that the war with Japan would continue through the end of the year and longer. There would still be a lot of military personnel overseas during Christmas in 1945.



—Tribune Photo
Christmas Packing Starts in July for the Red Cross. Monday saw the opening of a gigantic work as La Crosse chapter set to work packing its quota of 10,800 individual boxes to be shipped in 150 waterproof containers of 72 boxes each. Gladys Standiford, Mrs. George Williams and Mrs. Edward Fleis were in a group of busy packers Monday afternoon. Each box contains a memo book, postcards, tobacco pouch, two cellophane bags of candy, two packages of cigarettes, gum, a comb, pencil, "Post" yarns, an atlas, and a few short mystery stories. The cartons in which the boxes are sent are lined with waterproof paper so they can be dumped overboard and floated to shore, the whole packing process done with the exactness of factory efficiency.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 July 31, page 4)

The American Red Cross performed a [wide variety of services](#) for armed forces personnel during World War II. Care packages for those overseas, including packages for prisoners of war, were one of its

important contributions to the welfare of military men and women. The Red Cross put together over 30 million "comfort kits" during World War II.¹ The Red Cross continues to provide comfort kits to American soldiers containing personal hygiene items and snacks.²

Besides the sheer number of packages that had to be put together, there was another reason for getting an early start on this project ---logistics. During the previous year, Christmas cards and packages for service personnel overseas had to be mailed between September 15 and October 15, 1944, to ensure delivery by Christmas. Packages were not to "exceed five pounds in weight or 15 inches in length, or 36 inches in length and girth combined."³

One Hundred Women Pack 10,800 Christmas Gifts Of Red Cross

A dozen chairmen are in charge of packaging of Christmas gifts being sent by the American Red Cross. Work is being done on the second floor of the post office where 10,800 individual boxes are being packed for servicemen in hospitals. The business of packing is being supervised by an assembly committee which prepares boxes for the packers. On this committee are Mmes. Ida Henratty, J. R. Johnson, J. S. Otten, A. E. Kelly, James Kelly, T. B. Wilcox, Walter Wittich, Arthur Soule, E. H. Chinancer, S. S. Tatham, I. H. Sheldon, Fred Kowalke and Joseph Gallagher. Misses Elizabeth Witherbee, Florence Shuman and Nora Johnson.

Folding the 10,800 boxes were Mmes. R. L. Bangsberg, Rose Boyle, L. M. Berthrong, Helen Bouffleur, George Bunge, Eva Dickinson, Ed Fleis, Joseph Gallagher, W. F. Goodrich, E. C. Higbee, George Knudsen, Henry Kinder, H. R. Leithold, A. L. Miller, R. G. Miner, Laura Nelson, Grace Paterson, H. W. Packman, P. A. Peterson, R. S. Lowe, F. A. Rasmussen, George Rennebohm, Carl Scheel, Agnes Sayles, George A. Williams, C. I. Anderson, Hazel Wallace, Misses Helen Weber, Helen and Frieda Zeisler and Nora Johnson.

Workers by days this week are Mrs. Fred Kowalke, chairman, Mmes. R. S. Low, F. A. Rasmussen, George Knudsen, Carl Scheel, H. W. Packman, Monday morning; Miss Harriette Kelly, chairman, Mmes. George Williams, Joseph Gallagher, Ed Fleis, Eva Dickinson, Misses Ethel Tower, Gladys Standiford, afternoon; Mrs. A. E. Kelly, chairman, Mmes. N. E. Barber, R. M. Mengell, Frank Finn, R. J. Cullen, Rose Simones, Misses Betty Bernatz, Rita Fanning, Tuesday morning; Mrs. Eldor Horstman, chairman, Mmes. W. C. Schowalter, Russell Heland, Casey Gregorich, G. W. Halverson, Robert Plusch, Walter Roth, afternoon; Mrs. A. M. Murphy, chairman, Mmes. Joseph Gohres, Ed Schams, L. J. Kaiser, John R. Horiham, Charges Shogar, Misses May Sexauer, Virginia Funk, Wednesday morning; Mrs. Rose Boyle, chairman, Mmes. Hartwick Oveson, Bertha Hirt, August Witt, E. Johnson, William Butterfield, L. Wiegand, afternoon; Mrs. Joseph Burns, chairman, Mmes. P. E. Hutson, William Dunn, Earl Frantz, Joseph Freisinger, George Bracken, B. W. Stefferud, Thursday morning; Mrs. R. S. Roettiger, chairman, afternoon; Mrs. Marcus Pratt, chairman, Mmes. F. Knutson, L. W. Pickert, C. M. Johnson, C. I. Anderson, H. H. Hunt, Miss Edith Pryor, Friday morning; Mrs. George Ruediger, chairman, Mmes. Arthur Tausche, M. B. Matteson, Charles Colman, Frank Funke, A. Albery, Ed Newberg, afternoon; Mrs. James Capicotto, chairman, Mmes. Elizabeth Hingen, Peter Sieber, Harold Thill, Alf Sorenson, Otto Blexrud, H. O. Anderson, Saturday morning.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 August 1, page 7)

As with so many other home front projects during the war, the women of La Crosse County provided a lot of the labor to get the job done.

The monetary value of everything in the Red Cross Christmas package was minuscule compared to the morale value of receiving a gift from home when one is far from home.

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Sources & Notes:

¹ "World War II and the American Red Cross," *American Red Cross*, accessed 2020 August 8, <https://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/National/history-wwii.pdf>, page 13.

² Brea DuBose, "American Red Cross provides over 2,000 comfort kits to rotating Soldiers," *United States Army*, 2019 October 29, https://www.army.mil/article/229116/american_red_cross_provides_over_2000_comfort_kits_to_rotating_soldiers.

³ "Christmas Cards, Packages Going Overseas Should Be Mailed Soon," *The Coshocton Tribune*, Coshocton, Ohio, 1944 August 20, page 1.