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## **Matt Bangston: Going to the war on terror without the right gear**

**Matt Bangston**

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I saw a bumper sticker once that read something like this: "It will be a fine day when schools have too much money and the military has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber." As an Army Reservist, I got a good chuckle out of that. Funny thing is, that time has come.

This fall I will be deploying for a second time to Southwest Asia. I know what the Army will and won't give me as far as supplies. Therefore, I have a list of equipment I will be buying in order to stay alive and do my job effectively.

When I mentioned to my employer, Central Bank, that this list had grown to over \$500, I was told to draw up a "wish list" of equipment I would use in theater, and it would be "taken care of." I did as bank officials said, and \$1,400 later they wrote me a check so I can buy these items. Because of the generosity of Central Bank, because they thought it so wrong for me to buy so much of my own equipment, I can afford to buy the gear that will keep me safer on this deployment.

As an example of what the Army gives its soldiers, the vests issued to grenadiers to hold the 40 mm grenade rounds do not hold the grenades securely; in Iraq, after every movement we would search around the vehicle and the ground for all the grenades that fell out, most of which were rattling around on the floor.

So we taped them into the vests, which made them virtually useless in combat. But this is what the Army issued, and we didn't know enough ahead of time to buy better vests. As a grenadier for this deployment, I have bought my own vest with grenade pouches and magazine pouches that I know will work.

I also bought a medical bag called a Combat Lifesaver (CLS) bag. Army units are supposed to supply each CLS-certified soldier with a bag. Before, in Iraq, the only CLS bags my team had were ones my teammates bought; the unit just didn't have more bags to give.

My reserve unit also knows what the Army will and will not supply, so they too have drawn up a list of equipment they will need to buy on their own -- almost \$300,000 worth. The Spring Lake Park VFW, which has adopted us, will be holding fundraisers in order to purchase some of this equipment, such as GPS systems, ballistic eye protection and knee pads. These are basic items the Army will not be providing.

When we deployed to Iraq, we took green-painted vehicles and equipment because there was no more tan paint. As our commander wryly put it, "This isn't so bad. This way we can easily identify our vehicles from the other units' vehicles."

So, yes, we are about to hold some bake sales, not to buy bombers but to buy the basics we as soldiers need to be effective. Thanks to Central Bank, I have been able to afford some of

this equipment. Thank you, Mitch, Larry, Brenda and everyone else at Central Bank for caring enough to help out.

For anyone else who knows people heading to the global war on terror, find out what equipment they might need to buy, hold some bake sales or other fundraisers, and see if we can't give these guys the gear to keep them a little safer.

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