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An Oregon Christmas tree arrives for troops in Baghdad

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By **Paige Parker, The Oregonian**

Today, an American plane will land in the Iraq desert.

On board will be three Oregon beauties — a Noble fir, a Scotch pine and Serbian spruce — addressed to the attention of a Capt. Chad Knowles, Oregon soldier.

It's a little piece of Christmas for Knowles, with the 1-82nd Calvary A Troop, part of the 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team. He's one of roughly 2,500 Oregon Army National Guards who deployed in May, and is halfway through a year-long mission.

Halfway through -- gone for Christmas, along with the soldiers in his command, 128 of them.

It's the second time 38-year-old Knowles, who has served in the Guard 12 years, has spent the holiday in Iraq. An 18-month deployment ended in November 2005.

Knowles doesn't ask for much, says his wife, Melynda Knowles. She has a heck of a time putting together his care packages.

But about two weeks ago he made a request.

"We got a phone call from Baghdad," says Kate Al-Sheikhly, office manager at Tigard's High Impact Technology, where Knowles has worked since 2005. "Chad was asking if it was possible to ship a Christmas tree for his troops."

There are plenty of fake trees in Iraq, says Melynda Knowles.

Not good enough. Not for Knowles.

His soldiers "are from Oregon," she says. "He wanted them to smell the tree, to feel it, to be as close to home as possible."

Happy to oblige, Al-Sheikhly said. A few phone calls later, and she had three trees. The spruce and pine are balled and burlapped and will kept inside in a pot. The cut Noble fir is a gift from Clackamas County Tree Marketing Association in Corbett. Al-Sheikhly arranged for free shipping, all the way to Camp Victory near Baghdad, through FedEx.

One tree is for Knowles and his men. The other will go to Maj. Micah Goettl, also of the 1-82nd, who works for High Impact Technology's sister company, Composite Materials R &D. The third tree the soldiers can give away, says Russ Monk, a founder of High Impact.

"A little piece of Oregon," Monk says, "goes a long way."

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