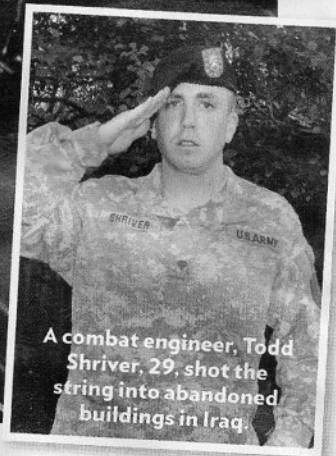


Army reps appreciate the efforts of Shriver (outside of the warehouse), but can't say how many soldiers are using Silly String.



A combat engineer, Todd Shriver, 29, shot the string into abandoned buildings in Iraq.



A Toy For The Troops

When her soldier son explained how Silly String could help discover bomb trip wires, Marcelle Shriver launched a campaign to ship 100,000 cans to the GIs in Iraq

Army Specialist Todd Shriver had been stationed in Iraq for a month when he called home last November with a strange request. "He wanted some Silly String in his care package," recalls his mother, Marcelle Shriver. "I thought, 'Are you having parties over there already?'" Her son explained that the party store staple—light, flexible plastic shot from an aerosol can—can help soldiers detect bomb trip wires without setting off the explosive. "I was just amazed," says Shriver. "I said, 'If you need it, you'll get it.'"

Determined to send enough cans to supply her son's entire unit, Shriver posted a notice in her church bulletin asking for donations. "I thought we'd get a few hundred cans," says the 58-year-old office manager, who lives in Stratford, N.J., with her hus-

band, Ron, 60, a former infantryman who served in Vietnam. But after the story made its way to a local radio station—then a national newswire—"it took on a life of its own." All told, she collected 100,000 cans.

But after initial success sending a small shipment with a Navy plane, Shriver hit a wall, and getting the rest to Iraq seemed impossible. "I couldn't get anybody to take them," says Shriver. The compressed air in Silly String cans made them hazardous to ship by mail. And the Army did not want "to gum up our regular supply channels" used for equipment, said spokesman Maj. Brad Leighton. "We appreciate the generosity of the American people, [but] we just had to say no."

With the cartons of cans sitting in a friend's warehouse, Shriver spent

months contacting shipping companies and private airlines. Then logistics expert Thom Campbell stepped in. "We owed it to her and the troops to try to help," says Campbell, cofounder of the North Brunswick, N.J.-based Capacity LLC, who arranged for the shipment. Watching him pick up the boxes Oct. 15, Shriver was "very emotional," says her daughter Jenni Smith, 35. And though the shipment may not make it to Iraq before Todd's scheduled return this November, "I'm just happy and relieved to know it is finally going where it is supposed to be going," says Shriver. "It could save a life—and if they want to use it as a stress reliever to boot, I don't care!"

By Charlotte Triggs. Sean Scully
in Philadelphia