



Hank  
Melton

# Iraq vet finally meets care-package network

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*Rockford Register Star*

When Army reservist Hank Melton, a Rockford construction worker, got called up for active duty in Iraq last year, he left behind friends he didn't even know at the time.

Melton got to know these friends — all of whom work

at Bacon's Information Inc., a downtown Rockford media research company — by way of regular correspondence during his 12 months of duty in Iraq.

The gang at Bacon's had adopted Melton as a way of showing support for his service in uniform.

On Monday, the 47-year-old Melton and his wife, Vicky, finally met the Bacon's bunch at their offices. He thanked them, not just for the messages of support but the care packages as well.

And, of course, they thanked him. **Please see 7A**

Vicky  
“ This is way more than I expected. Please keep it going for those guys who are still there. ”

— Staff Sgt. Hank Melton,  
Received care packages from Bacon's Information Inc. while serving in Iraq



Jon Giffin/Rockford Register Star

Staff Sgt. Hank Melton and his wife, Vicky, laugh Monday at the MRE's (meals ready to eat) that Priscilla Hanan (not pictured) and Jamie Young (right) gave the couple at a homecoming celebration at Bacon's Information Inc. in Rockford.

# Soldier gets to give his thanks

An Army reservist finally meets the folks who sent him care packages in Iraq.

By **CORINA CURRY**  
*Rockford Register Star*

ROCKFORD — Up until Monday, Bacon's Information Inc. was little more than a return address on the care

packages and letters that Army reservist Hank Melton received in Iraq.

But on Monday afternoon, the 47-year-old staff sergeant and his wife, Vicky, finally got

to meet the men and women who "adopted" Melton as part of a companywide effort to support U.S. troops in the war.

A red, white and blue banner emblazoned with the words "Welcome Home" guided the Rockford couple up the unfamiliar stairway at the downtown media research

firm. Vicky struggled up the stairs with a tray of Italian salad for the potluck lunch being held in their honor.

"I think it's them," a woman said excitedly as she waited at the top of the steps. "I hear shuffling."

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# Army reservist gets to give thanks for care packages

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When the Meltons reached the top of the stairs, they had big smiles despite not knowing a face in the crowd.

"I've heard all about you," Vicky Melton said as Priscilla Hanan of Roscoe approached the couple with open arms.

"You guys have been so wonderful. I can't thank you enough," Hank Melton added as he quickly started matching names with faces. Crockpots brimming with home-cooked specialties, fresh breads, salads and desserts over-

flowed on tables nearby, and employees presented Melton with an engraved desk clock.

"This is way more than I expected," an overwhelmed Melton said.

The men and women of Bacon's learned of Melton through a friend, wrote him and invited him to join their care-package effort — they would collect items and ship individual packages to Melton, and Melton would keep one and share the rest. The squad leader was happy to play Santa Claus. The packages, which arrived for Christmas

and Valentine's Day — contained candy, newspapers, canned goods, snack foods and toiletries.

"There are some guys out there who don't get anything," said Melton, who was stationed in Iraq for one year, coming home in June. "It's special to get a package over there. But to get so many at one time? That's really special."

Employees at Bacon's said the care-package drive boosted morale back home, too.

"You could tell people started to get into it," said Jamie Young of Rockton. "Some people who were quiet and more introvert-

ed were coming up and talking to people, saying, 'Do you think it would be good to bring in this for the soldiers' packages?' We voted, and we're going to do it again this Christmas."

Jen Larson, a Bacon's employee who was active in collection, said the effort helped her understand more about the war and the sacrifices being made.

"It would kind of surprise you when someone would give you a huge thank you for a \$1 bottle of mouthwash," Larson said.

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