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Soldier's dad raises funds for helmets

By Christopher Behnan
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Rick Briggs has not only the safety of U.S. troops on his mind, but that of his son, Michigan Army National Guard Spc. Jeremy Briggs.

Rick Briggs recently started the Michigan chapter of Operation Helmet — a nonprofit organization that provides American troops in Iraq and Afghanistan with foam padding and other helmet equipment.

Spc. Jeremy Briggs, a 1998 Brighton High School graduate, is training at Camp Grayling, and will be deployed to Iraq next month. Once there, he will be working convoy escorts in the thick of the Iraqi insurgency.

Rick Briggs' goal is to provide his son's unit, Owosso-based Michigan 144th Military Police Co., with 200 helmet upgrade kits before its July deployment overseas.

The Michigan chapter, based in Brighton, where Rick Briggs lives, received its first 10 kits Wednesday. The kits, funded entirely by donations, better protect soldiers' heads from improvised explosive device (IED) and others attacks, he said.

"What we're trying to do is get the support, specifically for the Michigan troops," said Rick Briggs, who heard about Operation Helmet during its recent national campaign, which is endorsed by pop singer Cher.

"We do get them very quickly once we have the funds. Literally, it's three to five days, (and) we have them," he added.

Once his son's unit is supplied with upgraded helmets, Rick Briggs plans to start a push to supply soldiers already deployed overseas with the kits.

Aiding him in his mission is his daughter, Brittney Briggs, a graduate of Colgate University in New York who wrote her senior thesis on post-traumatic stress disorder — a condition diagnosed for many war veterans.

Brittney Briggs plans to dedicate her career to military research, and is particularly interested in what she found to be a connection between an IED attack — a common tactic of Iraqi insurgents — and post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I was just blown away by the warfare," she said of her research. "It's something I'm passionate about and concerned about. (I) just want to get them home safe and without head injuries."

Rick Briggs, a former U.S. Air Force major, said his involvement with Project Helmet doesn't stem from a political bent.

Aside from safety concerns with government-issued military helmets, he said some soldiers are spending \$400 to \$500 to upgrade their own helmets.

"It really doesn't matter what side of the fence you're on with the war. This is about the troops," he said.

Sylvia Warner, spokeswoman for U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton, said Rogers hasn't taken a stance on Operation Helmet, but that the congressman has researched the sturdiness of military equipment both in Iraq and at military training facilities in Michigan.

Dr. Bob Meaders, founder of Operation Helmet, testified before Congress earlier this month on what he said is a need for safer military helmets in all branches of the military.

The organization has spent about \$7 million researching the helmet kits to make them resistant to IED and other attacks.
