

Last Christmas the cards I sent out bearing the message of peace on earth didn't arrive before our troops had been ordered to invade Panama.

The only thing that kept my mind off my misjudgment was the news report saying the stash of narcotics found in General Noriega's quarters had turned out to be the General's supply of tamales. I never was sure, but I think the young soldier that found them was the same kid who used to wait on me at a Mexican food joint in San Antonio.

So this season I was more careful to pay attention to what's popular with the people. With the banks and savings and loans all but closed down, I figured Santa Claus was going to make a big comeback among the adult population.

The gift stores in San Angelo that carry greeting cards. I discovered were limited in the choices they offered. After turning down a few hot numbers like "You're a little Christmas elf that I'd like to have on my top shelf," I gave up and bought several boxes of blank fold over note cards.

For my friends in the city, I'm going to wish them big and bountiful garage sales and plenty of room to park at the malls next year; and for my compadres who are herders, I am going to hope that they don't have to feed into the spring and don't have anything but slow leaks in their pickup tires.

Using those messages, I can be sure that Mr. Bush and Mr. Baker won't be able to embarrass me by taking a counter stand. The next time I'm in San Antonio I am going by that grease and chili powder salon and ask the owner whatever happened to Lupe that waited on station 4.