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KRISTEN'S CORNER

Dear OTA Supporters and Volunteers,

The flurry of the holidays is over and we've started another year that promises to be full of great events, soldier stories and continued success for OTA. What a wonderful year 2007 was for our organization and our volunteers. As we look back on events that transpired over past months, we noticed something that I would like to share with you today.

We launched our "Adopt a Unit" program over a year ago and have realized tremendous success. The adoptions that have been carried out by schools and student groups – from kindergarten through college – have been phenomenal. Our young citizens have truly shown what it means to give – through hand-made cards and letters, from collection drives resulting in hundreds of cartons of items, and from donations that more often than not, exceeded their targeted goal. In some cases, our school adoptions doubled the amounts they set out to collect in support of our heroes! But that isn't the best part of this story. These students are helping our soldiers continue their education as well.

As you read the newsletter, you will see an article on page 6 about a current project that OTA is working on with a unit of soldiers in Iraq. Many of the donations I referred to above are going to be used to fund a

request to create a school environment for soldiers pursuing college degrees while deployed.

There is no better way for students to demonstrate support than by helping others learn in the process. We are extremely proud of our student "adopters," the teachers who help guide them and the parents who have worked hard to instill the gift of giving and selflessness in our children. It is truly an honor to work with these young people!

On behalf of the entire OTA Volunteer staff, congratulations to all who have contributed time, money and endless energy to our troops. I wish you the very best in the coming year and look forward to bringing you even more stories from our little corner of the world.



Sincerely,

Kristen Holloway
Founder and President

WE ARE COMMITTED TO OUR COURAGEOUS...

Operation Troop Appreciation (OTA) is dedicated to members of our Armed Forces serving and sacrificing for our country. By providing them with "wish list" items that contribute to their morale and aid in their missions, we present a united front to our deployed military by supporting them as individuals, for every one of them

- Memorializes our nation's past
- Sacrifices to maintain our nation's culture and freedoms
- Ensures the safety and freedom of our nation's future generations

Our mission is to build and sustain the morale of deployed troops, enabling them to complete their missions with the assurance that the American public supports and appreciates their selfless service and daily sacrifices.

FACES FROM THE FRONT

Meet some of the troops who have touched our lives. Their smiles are our biggest reward!



These Marines of 3/21 Kilo Company were thrilled with the board games and sports equipment OTA sent them.



These soldiers of Btry 5/2 SCR enjoyed the Under Armour t-shirts provided by OTA.



The soldiers of the 1015th Maintenance Company show off the Under Armour shirts OTA sent them.



OTA sent the soldiers of CJSOTF-A TF 71 not only their own requested "wish list" items, but also school supplies for this Civil Affairs unit to hand out to orphans in this Afghan village .



OTA was excited to provide not only for the soldiers of this K-9 unit of 1/3 ACR, but for their working dogs as well – Soldiers and pooches all received specially requested snacks, and the pups got some new rubber chew toys, too!



These soldiers of ARSIC-S, a South Carolina National Guard and maintenance unit, love playing with the baseball and football equipment OTA sent them. Our Point of Contact tells us playing sports has made them a more cohesive unit.



We had a blast with this project for the HHD TF Corsair in Afghanistan – providing warm clothes, Under Armour, electronics and some other surprises for this aviation unit's Christmas party. Billy the Bass was a big hit!



These troops of HHC 1st TSC were happy to get care packages from OTA, including snacks, hygiene supplies and entertainment items.

THOUSANDS OF TROOPS ADOPTED BY LOCAL GROUPS

We are pleased to share the success of our 2007 Holiday Adoption program. We were able to grant special Christmas wishes to 4,000 troop members because of the dedication and passion demonstrated by dozens of business communities, schools, churches, and private citizens. We thank everyone who adopted OTA units for the holidays. Here are just a few of their stories:



Channing Philpott and David Lundquist (pictured left) are seniors at Henderson High School near Philadelphia, PA. The boys chose OTA to be the beneficiary of their Senior Class Project assignment and adopted a unit of deployed troops in Iraq. As players on the school football team, they held a raffle and silent auction at their sports banquet to raise the funds for their unit. Former Philadelphia Eagles coach, Dick Vermeil, autographed a football for the event and many students signed Christmas cards for their adopted soldiers. Although their goal was to raise \$375, Channing and David raised \$1,508. OTA gives these young men an A+ for the wonderful job they did on this special adoption.



The **International Association of Administrative Professionals (IAAP)** is a not-for-profit association with approximately 40,000 members and affiliates and nearly 600 chapters worldwide. The Pittsburgh Chapter (pictured left) worked hard this year to demonstrate support for the troops by adopting four different units (approximately 500 soldiers) and collecting the “wish list” items for each unit. Collecting more than needed for their adopted units, they donated the remaining items and funds to OTA for distribution to other units. This effort helped many lonely deployed soldiers enjoy some reminders of home over the holidays.



Lieutenant Dominic Squillace contacted OTA asking how he and the sheriffs of Delaware County could help support the troops. Embarking on a collection drive, the **Delaware County Sheriff's Association** raised funds and collected items that helped three different units deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. From microwaves to coffee makers, this group went far above and beyond the call of duty to demonstrate support for their fellow heroes.



We reported in the Summer Newsletter about **Brandywine Area Community Choir (BACC)** of Chester County, PA, presenting performances last spring to benefit OTA. They sang five concerts and raised more than \$7500 for OTA!

The choir (pictured left) sang two more public concerts in the fall and raised another \$2500. They also sang a concert for the patients at the Coatesville Veterans Hospital, and we understand that the choir members themselves were the ones inspired by the response from our veterans!

And the choir is not yet finished – they have been requested to present three more concerts this spring for OTA. Way to go, BACC!

CDs are available of this group's moving religious/patriotic presentation for \$10.00. All proceeds go to OTA, so if you are interested, drop us an email at info@operationtroopappreciation.org and we'll see that you get one.

Richland Elementary School (Gibsonia, PA) participated in the Adopt A Unit program for the second year in a row, raising \$2,100 for Company A of the 138th Artillery Division, a medical unit serving in Iraq. This wonderful donation provided much needed Nomex gloves and blankets to these very deserving soldiers.

CDS Administrators, a Pittsburgh company adopted the ARSIC, a National Guard unit from South Carolina and collected twice their targeted donation amount, helping a second unit as a result. These soldiers, shown on page 2, sure enjoyed the sports equipment and Under Armour t-shirts made possible by CDS!

TROOPS BENEFIT FROM VETERAN'S DAY 5K RACE



All ages came out to support the second annual 5K Veterans Day Race on November 11, 2007.

Nearly 300 participants ran or walked at the second annual Operation Troop Appreciation Veterans Day 5K Race. Many runners logged competitive times, including the overall winner (Doug Basinski at 17:22) and the Men's Master's Division winner (Herb Cratty: 17:27). The fastest of runners pushed each other to do well on a scenic course through the Hampton Community Park.

Recreational runners enjoyed the race equally well. Many of these runners hadn't competed since last Veterans Day, but still felt rewarded by the many race amenities.

A Color Guard contingent from CMU NROTC presented the colors to the assembled runners on the starting line; runners joined the St. Mary's Children's Choir in the singing of the National Anthem.

More music entertained the runners along the course with patriotic medleys performed by the Choir, an a capella rendition of God Bless American performed by St. Teresa soloist Katie Colosimo, and the stirring sounds of military marches performed by Charles Gledich, an authentically clad Bagpiper.

The race provided a very special meaning for one young family. Lisa Ference walked with her two sons, John, 9, and Chris, 6. The boys wore camouflage jackets reminiscent of service apparel; Lisa carried a picture of the boys' Dad, Lt. Col. John Ference Sr., who is currently on duty in Iraq. The Ference family personified the purpose of the event, which is to support the efforts of those who sacrifice so much for our security.



Members of Pitt Air Force Cadets (above), CMU's ROTC, and the members of Pitt Law School Veterans group provided a dramatic influence.

Race proceeds provided much needed amenities for our troops: foot care products for a platoon of infantry soldiers slogging through the swamps of Iraq; unscratched Ballistics Glasses, warm Under Armour shirts to combat the harsh Afghan cold, Fire Retardant Gloves to protect the hands of remote Air Force crews and phone cards for others to call home for Christmas.

The second annual Operation Troop Appreciation Veterans Day 5K Race was a great success in so many ways that organizers are already working on next year's race. OTA extends a sincere Thank You to race organizer Alice McLaughlin and her army of dedicated volunteers who ensured the success of this event!

NEWS FROM OUR TROOPS IN IRAQ



Are you one of the many Americans who has been asking, **"Where is the good news about the progress in Iraq?"**

One patriot is dedicated to bringing home the good news from the War on Terror. Bob Calvert is the host of a fast growing internet radio talk show called **Talking with Heroes**. The program is about helping, honoring, and supporting our men and women in the

military and their families. His goal is to give our military personnel a voice to share their mostly untold stories about the work they are doing worldwide in duty to our country.

The program shares first-hand accounts straight from personal interviews with our nation's Armed Forces. Interviews, news and updates are available 24/7 at www.TalkingWithHeroes.com



In addition to striving for personal achievement, runners received great prizes at the post race party.



The competitive racers, recreational runners, puppy walkers and stroller-pushers all enjoyed themselves during the race.



The Ference family with race coordinator Alice McLaughlin.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

Every week we receive letters and emails from our troops, letting us know how much OTA's gifts and support mean to them. Here are some of their messages...

"Thank-you very much for your support! Without the help of organizations such as yours, our duties would be a lot tougher and lonelier. We are bombarded every day with such negativism against why we are here and what we are doing. It is such a joy just knowing someone cares about us, the Soldiers just doing our "jobs."

We have received the box of Wiley Xs and the box of snacks and toiletries. Thank you very much. It's thoughts and deeds like this that help Soldiers keep faith in the American people. Tell every one how much we appreciate their efforts." ~ *SFC M. B, Army*

Thank you thank you for the Christmas cards and letters you sent. We have several NATO officers (British, Dutch, Canadian, Danish, Romanian and Turkish) also working on the base and they were floored by the outpouring of support American soldiers receive from the American public and organizations like yours. They receive no such support from their citizenry which is an awful shame. I distributed some cards to the foreign officers. The message of support is very much appreciated." ~ *LTC G. G., Air Force*

"Thank you very much for the package. It's a wonderful reminder of home and is a great morale boost. God bless." ~ *Sgt. M. I., Army*

"I would like to thank you for the packages. I passed out the food and games and the Under Armour. From our troops, we really thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We think that you guys are the real heroes." ~ *Sgt. M. L., USMC*

"Thank you for your support. It's an honor to serve our great country. In the last year, our FOB has improved dramatically because of organizations like yours. Thank you so much! ~ *Sgt. K. B., Army*

"Thank you for your thoughtful care package. We appreciate you spoiling our dogs (and our soldiers!). Thank you so much!" ~ *Sgt. T. A., Army*

"My soldiers and I want to thank you for your support and for being our heroes at home, 'cause the truth is your support makes our jobs much easier in many ways. It makes us realize we are truly appreciated and loved when we need it the most. From the bottom of our hearts, we want to thank you for your support." ~ *Sgt., L.R, Army*

"I can not express to you enough my gratitude for the Christmas decorations, cards and letters you sent. They were a tremendous hit, well received and very much appreciated. The cards are hanging up all over the base and your kind letter is hanging for all to read by our coffee bar." ~ *Msgt. G. T., Air Force*

"All too often we on the front lines hear negative stories as to what is going on back home. I appreciate the fact that you believe in us and what we do. These men I serve with really believe in what we do. Keep them in your prayers always; they are the ones that daily defend the freedom you enjoy. They do this because they believe in you." ~ *GySgt J. A., USMC*

"Thanks for taking such good care of our platoon. You have been very generous. Your care packages are the best! Thank you!" ~ *Sgt. B.T., USMC*

"Just want to write you and thank you and all your supporters who took the time to send our unit packages. We are happy that you back home support our endeavors!" ~ *CW2, S. T., Army*

"I would like to say thank you for all you do. We all know the holidays can be a bit depressing when we're away from our families. The cards, letters and gifts that OTA sent us make the days brighter." ~ *HM1, R. W., Navy*

"Thank you so much for the board games. We will be enjoying them often. I felt like a kid again when they came in the mail. I have a Marine who loves the Cranium game, she was very excited to see it. They came just in time for the holidays. Thank you for thinking of us." ~ *SGT, W. T., USMC*

"I would like to thank you for the care packages you sent my unit. Your support demonstrates there are patriotic people out there that care for the American Soldier. I'm proud to serve this great country of ours. All the Way... Airborne." ~ *2LT J. A., Army*

"Thank you for your generous support for my platoon during our deployment. The flashlights, sunglasses, care packages and t-shirts have made life in Iraq a little more bearable." ~ *Sgt. K. W., Army*

TROOPS WIN BIG WITH OTA MONTE CARLO NIGHT EVENT!

OTA held its first Charity Monte Carlo/Night at the Races Event November 10, 2007. It was an evening full of fun that helped OTA care for many soldiers over the Christmas Holidays. A good time was had by all and OTA Volunteers worked hard throughout the night as patrons enjoyed a delicious dinner and fun games.

Special thanks to the OTA Volunteer Event Committee who worked so hard to make this event a success: Frank Caputo, Lynn Caputo, Karen Maxwell, Erica Newport and Debbie Perdott.

Right: Kristen Holloway and Monica Orluk present a flag to Frank Caputo, OTA Event Coordinator. The flag flew over a Combat Support Hospital in Iraq and was given to OTA by soldiers who received gifts from OTA.



WE'RE OPEN FOR BUSINESS!



Now you can show off your support of OTA and our troops with genuine OTA gear! OTA now has a number of logo items available for purchase on-line. Enjoy your morning coffee in an OTA mug, adorn your desk with an OTA calendar mouse-pad, or add a golf shirt to your wardrobe. From personalized baby bibs to garden flags, there's something for everyone. Visit the OTA website and click on the link to the on-line store, hosted by Lorenz Gifts, and start collecting your OTA gear today!



STUDENTS HELPING SOLDIERS

Recently, OTA received a special request from Specialist Erica Sides of the 501st Military Police Company in Iraq. Forty soldiers in her unit are in the process of completing their college degree programs during deployment, but they were falling behind trying to juggle their military duties with studies. Without proper study aids and classroom tools, they had been unable to complete assignments and conduct research for their studies. Spc. Sides contacted OTA and explained that computers and multi-media equipment would help the soldiers stay on track with their studies.

At the same time, OTA was working with students interested in helping the troops over the holiday season. Some of these students such as the **Gill Hall Elementary School** in Jefferson Hills, PA, raised over \$1,000 for these student troops! High school students **Channing Philpott and David Lundquist** (p. 3) also made a significant contribution towards this project.

As a result, OTA was able to send the soldier students of the 501st Military Police Company two television sets, two DVD players, four laptops, a laser printer and four webcams to build their very own class room! Our friends at **Computer Literates** in Allison Park, PA, helped OTA secure the computer equipment which is en route to Iraq right now!

How exciting to see our students helping soldiers achieve their academic goals! We will have an update on this project, along with pictures of the new education room, in the next issue of the newsletter. But in the meantime, read the letter to the right to understand the impact on these soldiers.

I want to thank you for what you have done to help me accomplish my mission to boost my unit's morale.

One thing that Soldiers were constantly talking to me about (since I help them put their promotion packets together) was college. Soldiers were frustrated because it was difficult for them to continue taking online courses. We do not have a lot of access to the internet.

Then I got to thinking about how nice it would be for the Soldiers to have a place of their own that they could study and relax. I sat down and thought of the different things that we would need to make us feel a little more at home. With guidance from my supervisors and input from other soldiers, we decided to build a room that would be used for the sole purpose of education and relaxation.

Without OTA, what was done could not have been accomplished. Everything they sent had a huge impact on our company. Our unit morale is so much higher now.

It amazed me at what can be done by working together. I came up with an idea, it grew and was organized by the help of my supervisor, my 1SG and my fellow Soldiers. It was made possible by Operation Troop Appreciation.

Thank you for what you have done for us.

*With Much Respect,
SPC Sides, Erika*

VOLUNTEER RUNS IN MARINE CORPS MARATHON TO HELP OTA

By Jodi Tye

On October 28th 2007 my dream of running and completing a marathon became a reality. It was a very special day for me for many reasons. The biggest reason was in being able to use my running as a way to give back to our troops who have and continue to give so much for us.

I have been a runner for many years and many of those years running was my identity, my outlet, and my "me" time. I had planned and trained for running my first marathon years earlier, with hopes of running well and qualifying for the Boston marathon. However due to a series of misfortunate events, over-training leading to injury, followed by an accident, I thought my hopes of ever running a marathon were over.

In the summer of 2005 my oldest son of 4 boys, Sean, set out for Parris Island for Marine boot camp. Sean graduated August 5th, and watching him march across the parade deck, I was never more proud of him and that will be a day I will never forget.



Jodi Tye and her son Sean McHugh on the day of his graduation from Marine boot camp

Sean joining the Marines has been very inspirational to me. It opened my eyes to all our brave young men and women who sacrifice daily to serve our country. Sean also inspired and encouraged me

to run again. While he was away training at OCS (Officer Training School), I hit the trails running and whenever I felt discouraged or uncomfortable, not only would I think of Sean and what he must be going through, but I also thought and prayed for all of our troops and what they were enduring. Suddenly my own discomfort was not so bad.

After helping out at few OTA fundraising events and meeting Kristen and seeing her passion for the troops, I was inspired to do more.

PROGRESS TO DATE

With your generosity, we can continue to insure our troops feel the love and support we send them from home. You may make a secure on-line donation, or send contributions to us at:

Operation Troop Appreciation
PO Box 14550
Pittsburgh, PA 15234
www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org

So when I received a Marine Parent newsletter one day announcing the Marine Corps Marathon, I decided then and there, "This is it!" I was excited because this time my attempt to run in a marathon meant so much more! This time it would not be about me and how good a runner I was. This time it was a way for me to say, "Thank you!" to our troops and to my son.

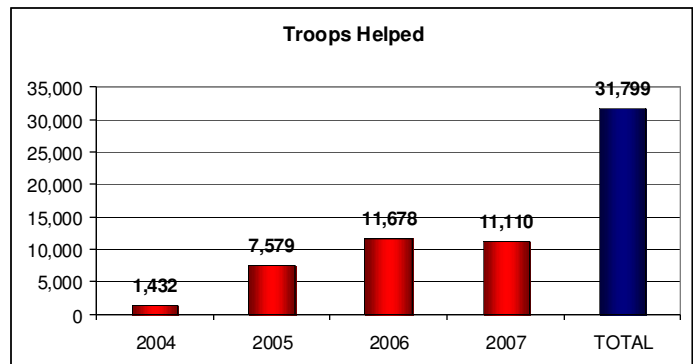


Jodi and her sister Maria Doerr ran the Marathon together.

I put together pledge letters that explained what a wonderful organization OTA was and that I was running on its behalf. I mailed these letters to friends, family and anyone I had ever said "Hi!" to. I wanted so badly for this fundraiser to be successful for OTA and prayed daily for positive responses. Well, God is so good as almost daily I would receive generous pledges along with encouraging words for our troops. I was able to raise \$4,000 for OTA and am truly amazed and encouraged by everyone who donated.

I am also excited to say I completed the marathon and was blessed by having my older sister beside me running the entire way. We both were so amazed at everyone there. From the Marines who worked this entire event who were so helpful, polite and there serving others to make everyone's experience safe and memorable, to the many runners wearing T-shirts with pictures of their fallen loved ones, our Heroes. There were people running who were all shapes and sizes, and everyone cheering and encouraging each other along the way. It was truly a beautiful sight!

I could not have asked for a more rewarding experience and thank God for His perfect timing in having this be my first marathon. I thank God too for blessing me with the ability to run and to have used it in helping Operation Troop Appreciation be a blessing to our brave and not-forgotten troops!



MORE SUCCESS STORIES

Since our last newsletter update, 4,500 more deployed troops received “wish list” items from OTA, bringing the total number of troops who have benefited from OTA to over 31,000! Here is a snapshot of some of these units, what they are doing, and what OTA provided.

<u>Branch</u>	<u>Mission</u>	<u>Wish List</u>
Army	These soldiers move the entire task force around the battlefield via air, and serve in Afghanistan. They are from Ft. Bragg, NC.	DVDs, phone cards, writing supplies, Under Armour t-shirts
Army	A reserve unit from PA, these soldiers work at an airbase in Iraq moving troops in and out of the base for missions.	George Foreman grill, snacks and Christmas cookies
Marines	These helicopter operators from Miramar, CA serve in Iraq providing support and logistics to troops in their area of operation.	Under Armour shirts, hygiene items, snacks
Hospital	These troops from Ft. Campbell, KY care for wounded warriors in military hospitals in Iraq.	Entertainment items, hygiene supplies, snacks for wounded soldiers
Navy	This navy medical team, from Pensacola, FL, is responsible for establishing an Afghani hospital.	Board games, DVDs, books, magazines
Army	Confidential per OPSEC. These troops were living in unheated tents in Iraq and requested converters to run electricity and heat into their living quarters.	1000 and 2000 watt voltage converters
Marines	This active duty unit of Marine provides logistical support for the Marine Corps throughout Iraq.	Sports equipment, PS2 video console, hygiene and personal items
Air Force	These airmen perform military police duties in Iraq. They are from various US air bases.	Bed sheets



SPECIAL THANKS

Many businesses have been very generous with their time, talent and contributions. We would like to especially thank the following for their continued support and generosity so freely given on behalf of our troops. Please show them your appreciation for their support of OTA with your patronage.

Bado's Pizza Grill & Ale House in Mt. Lebanon, PA, conducted a holiday collection drive for OTA of some of our soldiers' most requested items. OTA thanks owners Vicki and Frank Badolato, and their very generous customers for helping to make Christmas and the holidays brighter for our troops.

Rich Bruns of the **Mt. Lebanon Hometown Mail Center** has been a consistent and generous supporter of OTA for quite awhile. Rich has set up a collection box for patrons to deposit needed items for our troops, and over the past year has enabled OTA to send dozens of boxes of entertainment and personal items for our troops. If you would like to drop off some items for our troops, please visit the Mt. Lebanon Hometown Mail Center at 461 Cochran Road. And please consider using this mail center for your shipping needs!

CleanTown USA Carwash in Allison Park, PA, conducted their third annual Veteran's Day fundraiser for OTA. Cleantown USA donated \$1 for every car that came through the carwash on Veteran's Day. Many thanks to Leigh Ann Schreiber and the management of Cleantown for their continued support of our veterans and our troops.

Alexander's Gym in Creighton, PA held a special spinning class to raise funds for their “adopted” soldier unit. Each spinner donated \$5 to partake in a special spinning class led by trainers Sue Guiciardi and Jim Boyer. The gym raised over \$500 for their adopted unit, and also signed a special *Thank You* banner for the troops as well.