



## KRISTEN'S CORNER

Winter 2010



Another year has come and gone and 2009 marked a number of milestones for OTA. In a time when our country was faced with many challenges, we were able to succeed and take care of 9,300 deployed military members last year. Our success is due to the tremendous outpouring of support and generosity from our community. How truly blessed we are to be an outlet for those who want to demonstrate appreciation and support for our brave soldiers.

It's hard to believe that in 2010 we will celebrate our sixth anniversary, and we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the changes that took place within our organization over the past year. We expanded our board of directors and are now positioned to face the new year in the best way possible. As the war on terror continues, our focus remains to support those who are deployed and sacrificing for our freedom. We have also been fortunate to help those who return home and are in need of help and support, as well. Working with the Veterans Leadership Project on a few projects has opened our eyes to the growing need faced by our returning veterans and the special challenges they face.

We feel the deepest gratitude for our volunteers and supporters who work tirelessly to grant wishes to our soldiers and continue to give of themselves for the

sake of our soldiers. We are happy to bring to you stories of these great volunteers, community groups and individuals who demonstrate their on-going support for our organization.

This issue of the newsletter will share some of those stories with you. From teens to seniors, the community came out in force to help OTA. We were excited to welcome home the members of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team and we'll tell you about more of our own hometown heroes, members of the PA National Guard who are headed to Afghanistan. Some of these soldiers have been an integral part of OTA, helping us carry out our missions and we are proud to be able to help them now.

Finally, you'll get to read about the troops we help and hear, in their own words, the impact that our efforts have on improving morale and providing for their needs.

As we reflect on the past year, and prepare for the new, we would like to thank everyone who supports our efforts and helps to show our brave heroes that America loves and supports them.

Sincerely,

Kristen Holloway Querriera  
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 to raise their morale and to aid in the success and safety of their missions, we present a united front to our deployed military by supporting them as individuals. We do this because each and 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

Since the last newsletter edition, OTA has provided “wish list” items to **1,900 troops**, items ranging from **sports equipment, Under Armour® moisture-wicking shirts, phone cards, pillows, sheets, personal hygiene, and snack items**. Here are a few of the smiling faces and the “wish list” items they received from OTA!



**Unit:** Reserve soldiers from Grafton, WV

**Mission:** Train the Iraqi military police.

**“Wish list” items:** Protein mix (donated by Sean Marszalek of SDC Nutrition) and nutritional supplements



**Unit:** HSB 2-12 FAR from Ft. Hood, Texas

**Mission:** Train Iraqis to provide medical care, and provide humanitarian support to the local population

**“Wish list” items:** TV, video gaming console, cooking supplies



**Unit:** CJTF-82, Ft. Bragg, NC

**Mission:** Support task force personnel in Eastern Afghanistan

**“Wish list” items:** Christmas decorations, Gingerbread houses, sports equipment

**Unit:** 114<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, Nat. Guard Miss.

**Mission:** Train the Iraqi police

**“Wish list” items:** Under Armour® shirts, guitars



**Unit:** 747 Military Police Co., Mass. National Guard

**Mission:** Train the Iraqi police

**“Wish list” items:** Bed sheets, snacks, movies



**Unit:** PRT Nangahar, Georgia Army Reserve

**Mission:** Rebuild infrastructure in Afghanistan

**“Wish list” items:** Video games, DVDs, snacks



## SOLDIERS AMBUSHED IN AFGHANISTAN REMEMBERED

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On a tragic October day in Afghanistan, 64 soldiers of Bravo Troop, 3-61 Cavalry were ambushed on their remote combat outpost, COP Keating. During heavy fighting, they were forced to call an air strike on their own position during the October 3 attack by Taliban militants. After the battle, eight U.S. soldiers lay dead, 24 were wounded, and the 56 survivors were left with nothing more than the clothes on their backs and their weapons. They were relocated to safety at another base.

Soon after the attack, one of the soldiers e-mailed The American Legion, concerned that no one at home knew what they were doing in Afghanistan, and that no one really cared. The soldier's email was posted on The Burn Pit (a website and blog maintained by Legionnaires), the Legion's COP Keating Relief Fund was created, and a cry went out to help the survivors.

OTA was one of many groups that answered a plea to help. Within hours, OTA had sent replacement clothing, cold weather boot socks and other items to help these soldiers return to a sense a normalcy as quickly as possible.

These soldiers will never forget the day they lost eight of their brothers, and Americans will never forget the sacrifices all of our uniformed men and women make everyday. As a testament to the Legion's efforts, more than \$100,000 in funds and supplies were donated from various groups like OTA, as well as major US companies, to reach out to the soldiers who endured so much in this battle.



**The soldiers of 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, Bravo Troop, 3-69 Cavalry show the items received from efforts of the COP Keating Fund**

In a touching end to the story, the Command Sergeant Major (the highest ranking enlisted soldier of the 3-61 Cavalry battalion), sent this note to OTA.

*Thank you and All involved  
of Operation Troop Appreciation  
For the support to my Troops.  
May you All ENJOY a Great  
Holiday Season.*

*Csm Robert Wilson  
3-61 CAV*

While we can not give them that day back or take away their pain, we reach out in the only way we know how – with our prayers, our encouragement to finish the mission, and a small token to symbolize our lasting gratitude for all they endure to keep Americans safe and free.

*Rest in Peace Brave Warriors. You will never be forgotten.*

*SGT Justin Gallegos  
SPC Christopher Griffin  
SGT Joshua Hardt  
SGT Joshua Kirk  
SPC Stephan Mace  
SGT Vernon Martin  
SPC Michael Scusa  
PFC Kevin Thomson*

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

Every week we receive letters and emails from our troops. Here are some of our favorite recent messages...

Dear O.T.A. and Team,

I wanted to thank all of you for supporting us. It is a stress reliever to receive care packages from people who care about you. It is a taste of home when you send us food. It is a taste of love when you send us thank you cards. From the bottom of all of our hearts thank you. I'm proud to defend a country with outstanding people such as yourselves.

Thanks,  
 Spc. Smith, Anthony  
 U.S. Army M.P.

We are,  
 Thank you for your support. The men of 4/9 INF appreciated the packages we received. The moral of the unit has most definitely been boosted by your actions. We have been deployed since September - most of us this being the 2<sup>ND</sup> or 3<sup>RD</sup> deployment to Iraq. We had taken several pictures and posted them to our Facebook page.

you can access it by searching "HHC FRG"

Once again,  
 Thank you for your support.  
 - ISG Hernandez

"KEEP UP THE FIRE" and have the best of Christmas's!

Operation Troop Appreciation,

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!!  
 Your care package has made life bearable and put a smile on our faces. We couldn't serve if it weren't for your kindness and support.

Best Regards,  
 MAJ EDWARD "TED" CASSIN, USAF  
 ANP MEDICAL EMBEDDED TRAINING TEAM

Dear Operation Troop Appreciation Team -

Happy Holidays from the 910<sup>th</sup> QMCO - Joint Base Balad Iraq!

We were so thrilled to receive the under Armour shirts. Thank you for supporting us throughout this deployment. Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers. We have 78 days left in Iraq - YEAT!  
Home bound!

- 910<sup>th</sup> QMCO  
 LT Shawn Weber  
 SFC Curtis Campbell

THIS PICTURE AND CARD DON'T DO JUSTICE FOR THE APPRECIATION WE HAVE FOR YOU, YOUR ORGANIZATION, AND VOLUNTEERS. IT'S EASY TO GET BITTER AND FEEL FORGOTTEN OVER HERE, ESPECIALLY AS THE NEWS JUMPS TO THE NEXT STORY. WE TRULY ARE THANKFUL AND HAVE USED EVERY SINGLE ITEM YOU AND YOUR TEAM HAVE SENT. ON BEHALF OF MY COMPANY AND THE 4<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION, 9<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY REGIMENT, THANK YOU AND HAVE A HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON.

SINCERELY,  
 CPT JAMES CASSIN

## CHRISTMAS ADOPTION PROGRAM AND HOLIDAY DONATIONS

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OTA receives requests from soldiers throughout the entire year; however, the holiday season always proves to be our busiest time as we play Santa for thousands of soldiers at Christmas.

2009 proved to be a landmark year relative to the outpouring of support OTA received from the Greater Pittsburgh community, as well as from across the country. We are incredibly fortunate to have a great support network that stepped up and donated funds or adopted units this year, ensuring thousands of troops would receive their “wish list” items from OTA in time for the holidays.

We are grateful to the dozens of schools, churches, individuals, civic groups, and companies who adopted troop units this year to ensure our soldiers could enjoy a bit of holiday happiness from home. Here are some of the groups who supported the troops this holiday season, and a few of their special stories.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who made these wonderful gifts possible!

Christ's Lutheran Church: Murrysville PA  
 Bower Hill Church: Mt. Lebanon, PA  
 Carlow College - Tri Beta: Pittsburgh  
 Chubb & Son: Pittsburgh  
 CJ Thomas Screening Inc.: Monongahela, PA  
 CleanTown USA: Allison Park, PA  
 CV Engineering: Pittsburgh  
 First Niagara Bank: Pittsburgh  
 F/K Industries: Pittsburgh  
 Gilleece Services: Bethel Park, PA  
 Holy Angels Church (Holy Angels Teens): Pittsburgh  
 Hope United Methodist Church: White Oak, PA  
 Howard Hanna Real Estate: Moon Township, PA  
 Intergroup Communications: Pittsburgh  
 LGS Innovations: Westminster, CO  
 Avaya Federal Systems: Westminster, CO  
 Liberty Extended Day Program: Pittsburgh  
 Management Science Associates: Pittsburgh

Mark Miller Auto Body: Castle Shannon, PA  
 McElvany Printing: Pittsburgh  
 Milabel Motor: Manassas, VA  
 Monroe County Republican Women: Bloomington, IN  
 Office of Veterans Services, University of Pittsburgh  
 PA Learners Online: Pittsburgh  
 Peters Township and Canon McMillan High School Hockey  
 Pitt Law School, University of Pittsburgh  
 Pittsburgh Area Jitterbug Club  
 PPG IT Department: Pittsburgh  
 Richland Elementary School: Gibsonia, PA  
 St. Mary's of Guadalupe Youth Group: Kittanning, PA  
 St. Mary's of the Assumption Church: Allison Park, PA  
 Tetra Tech: Greentree, PA  
 The Catanese Group: Johnstown, PA  
 Thomson, Rhodes and Cowie PC: Pittsburgh  
 Trinity United Church of Christ: Pittsburgh  
 UPMC Health Plan: Pittsburgh  
 Winthrop Management: Pittsburgh

### Winthrop Management in Pittsburgh, PA



In lieu of sending gifts to tenants who occupy the flagship US Steel building they manage in downtown Pittsburgh, Winthrop Management decided to adopt 13 troop units in Iraq and Afghanistan with a \$5,207 donation. This contribution represents the largest adoption for the 2009 Holiday Season, and because of it, more than 300 Soldiers and Marines deployed to some of the most inhospitable locations received their Christmas “wish list” items – such as cold weather Under Armour® clothing, sports equipment, holster systems, blankets and other needed supplies.

### Mike Behme, Pittsburgh, PA

Did you ever wonder what happens to all the hats fans throw onto the ice after the Pittsburgh Penguins score a hat trick? When Mike Behme, an Eagle scout and straight-A high school freshman at West Allegheny High School, found out they were mostly thrown away, he came up with a better idea.

Starting a charity called **Hat Tricks 4 Humanity**, Mike began collecting these hats from the ice rink and donating them to local, national and international charities. Mike (pictured right with Kristen Holloway) has cleaned and refurbished 3,700 hats and recently donated several hundred to OTA to send to the troops. OTA is going to send Mike's hats to the 1/110th Infantry, a PA National Guard unit from Pittsburgh deploying to Afghanistan in February.





**Richland Elementary School, Gibsonia, PA**

For the fourth consecutive year, Richland Elementary school students demonstrated their support and encouragement of our troops and learned about currency in a special **Silver for Soldiers** project. Throughout November, the K-3 students brought in coins in a race to see which class could bring in the most money. The teachers used this as a golden opportunity to teach the students about counting money, and all the coins the children collected were donated to OTA – all \$1,536.41 of them! Outreach co-chair Joy Hall and Richland students presented OTA representative John Stagon with a check from their coin collection. An A+ effort indeed!



**Tetrattech in Greentree, PA**

Wanting to show their support for the troops through a local organization, the employees of Tetrattech embarked on a holiday fundraiser and collection drive for OTA. Through raffles and holiday donations, the employees donated over \$3,200 to OTA and contributed needed hygiene, personal care, snacks, sports items and movies. Denise Hughes, Mike Flory, Karin Evans and LeeAnn Sinagoga presented OTA President Kristen Holloway with a check at the end of their very successful project.



**ESPN Radio 1250 AM & My Way Storage**

When OTA received a phone call from Nanci Rich of **ESPN Radio**, we had no idea just how significant their wish to conduct a troop support drive would be. Through the months of November and December, the radio station set up collection drives at Pittsburgh sporting events and conducted on-air broadcasts to encourage people to give. And the effort paid off in spades!

With the help of **My Way Storage**, donated items were collected and stored in mobile storage units and then delivered to OTA. Personal care items, snacks and entertainment supplies were collected through these events and will go a long way towards helping our deployed troops. The radio station focused on the members of the 1/110th Infantry, PA National Guard soldiers deploying to Afghanistan.

Thank you to **Nanci Rich, Jack Bellas** and all the support crew at ESPN Radio who worked so hard to make this drive a success. And a special thank you to **Mr. Ed Sickmund of My Way Storage** who stored, sorted and delivered these much needed goods to our organization.



**OTA Board Members Bill Ault and Stacy Norman with Pittsburgh Steeler Deshea Townsend at an ESPN Radio live broadcast.**

**Holy Angels Church, Pittsburgh, PA**

Holy Angels parish has been a supporter of OTA for a number of years, and 2009 was no exception. When asked what type of topics they would like to address, the teen group overwhelmingly voted to include troop support in their program.

OTA volunteer, SSG Matthew Claycomb, visited the teen group in October and discussed the importance of troop support and his experience while deployed to Iraq. This visit kicked off a collection and donation drive that resulted in two truckloads of items as well as monetary donations to offset the cost of shipping. OTA packed and sent these items immediately to hundreds of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, allowing OTA to fulfill many wish-list requests in time for Christmas.



**SSG Claycomb and OTA VP Monica Orluk presented Holy Angels a flag that flew over a US Military base in Afghanistan.**

**First Niagara Bank**

New to the Pittsburgh area, First Niagara Bank made a big impact on OTA's mission this year. Led by Oxford Branch Assistant Manager, Karen Carson (pictured in center with bank associates), collection drives were conducted at branch offices resulting in monetary donations and much needed "wish list" items for the troops OTA serves. Thanks to all the employees and customers of First Niagara for showing great support for our brave heroes!



## LADIES AUXILIARY LIBRARY VFW POST 6664 RAISES \$27,000 FOR THE TROOPS!

For the past four years, fifteen women of the Library Ladies Auxiliary have spearheaded the VFW's adoption of OTA as their mission. We are grateful to these ladies for continually coming up with new and inventive ways to raise money and collect items for OTA's troop projects.

Over the years, the ladies have collected \$27,000 for OTA and hundreds of boxes of morale-boosting gifts. A few of their many activities include:



- ★ Community-focused collection drives at churches, schools, hospitals and retail stores
- ★ Card-signing events for private citizens to write encouraging notes to our troops
- ★ Bake Sales
- ★ Vocelli Pizza and Sarris Candy sales
- ★ Flea Markets
- ★ Bar Jar donations at the VFW, and many other events.

In addition, Chairperson **Kathie Gasior** speaks to Boy and Girl Scout Troops and schools to encourage children to help our troops with their special talents. Auxiliary ladies **Bonnie Wilson** and **Barbara Mead** are very creative in finding new ways to keep the donations coming in.

These ladies and the women they lead have a simple motto: **"No amount is too small!"** Indeed, it is the small donations that have added up quickly to \$27,000 in the last few years and they are working tirelessly to reach even more troops through their efforts.

We thank them for their dedicated and tangible demonstration of patriotism and encouragement for our military!

## 1/110TH PA NATIONAL GUARD DEPLOYS TO AFGHANISTAN

On January 6th, 230 members of the PA National Guard left Pittsburgh to complete their final leg of training before deploying to Afghanistan.

These soldiers will be attached to the 178th Field Artillery National Guard from South Carolina. This five-company battalion will be doing force security in Afghanistan.

Two of these five companies are from Pittsburgh (C Company and D Company, 110th Infantry). Both units are comprised of soldiers from the 107th Field Artillery and the 110th Infantry. These soldiers will be deployed and based on two Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in Afghanistan.

Training is expected to be complete in early February, at which time they will begin their deployment to Afghanistan.



Some of the men being deployed have been an integral part of OTA, volunteering countless hours to help support us logistically. We are very proud of them all and wish them success as they carry out their mission. They continue the proud heritage of the PA National Guard and we are honored to be able to help them. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

Many of the items we provide our troops are expensive (e.g., safety and tactical gear), so we have a great need for financial contributions.

Only with your generosity can we continue to insure our troops feel the love and support we send them from home. Every dollar matters!

You can make a secure on-line donation, or send contributions to:

**Operation Troop Appreciation**  
**PO Box 14550**  
**Pittsburgh, PA 15234**  
**[www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org)**

## SAVE THE DATE! 5TH ANNUAL OTA CHARITY GOLF OUTING



OTA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

It may be winter, but golf season is just around the corner and OTA is very excited to host our 5th annual golf outing for the troops!

The outing will be held on **June 12, 2010** at the **Hickory Heights Golf Club in Bridgeville, PA**. This year's outing should be the biggest and best we've held, so please save the date and join for this special event!

Activities for the day include a banquet and awards dinner, sports memorabilia auction, and door prize giveaways.

OTA VP Monica Orluk can provide registration and sponsorship information: [littlemo34@yahoo.com](mailto:littlemo34@yahoo.com). The OTA website ([OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://OperationTroopAppreciation.org)) will also soon have registration and sponsorship forms available.

## FOURTH ANNUAL VETERAN'S DAY 5K RACE

The fourth annual OTA Veterans Day 5K Race was a celebration of fitness, fun and patriotism!

Participants were regaled by a variety of entertainment throughout the day, and current and recently-returned military men and women were well represented among the race participants.

The field of runners was comprised of a broad array of ages and skill levels. While many participants walked, pushed strollers and walked their four-legged pals, there were many intensely competitive runners. A new course record was set during this year's race by 19 year-old Dan Blackman, from Towanda, PA, who completed the course in 16:31.

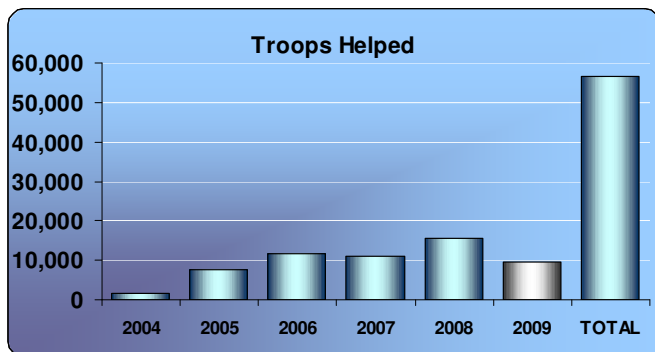
Runners had an opportunity to win competition prizes, and everyone went home with goody bags filled with fun treats.

But the very best prize was the one offered by Marilee Tudi, the mother of an Air Force Lieutenant who is currently stationed in Iraq. She acknowledged the value of participants' support and promised that her son, like so many other currently deployed troops, will continue their vigilance on our behalf.

Now that is a prize we can all treasure.

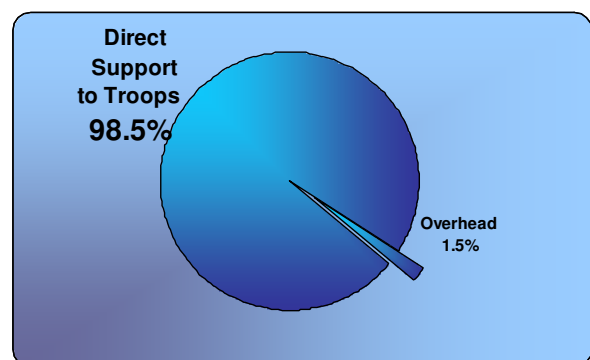


*On Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, nearly 300 runners and walkers gathered in the Hampton Community Park to take advantage of the unusually warm temperatures and sunny sky.*



*OTA has provided "wish list" items for more than 56,000 troops since our inception in July 2004.*

*We serve active duty, Reserves and National Guard Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, and Airmen serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and other theaters.*



*OTA is an all-volunteer organization with minimal overhead expenses. As a result, 98.5 cents of every dollar we spend directly supports our troops in the field.*

*Very few charities can boast this high efficiency rate.*