



OPERATION TROOP APPRECIATION



SPRING 2013 NEWSLETTER



OFFICERS' CORNER

The officers and volunteers at OTA thank you for a wonderful 2012. What an incredible year it was! With your support, we granted wishes to over 17,000 troop members. And those troops are grateful.

This issue of the newsletter contains some very poignant letters and beautiful pictures that illustrate the impact our efforts have on the morale, health and well-being of our troops. We are excited to see what the New Year brings and plans are underway for some exciting activities, including a re-vamped OTA website and many events!

As we reflect on the past 8 1/2 years, we'd like to take this opportunity to say a special THANK YOU to our volunteers.

As a 100% volunteer non-profit, we run our charity with no paid staff. Our volunteers not only attend events and pack boxes for the troops, they execute fundraisers, marathons, 5K races, book sales and other creative activities to help fund our cause. And they also do administrative work and clean our donation drop off and packing space. They make

repairs, mop floors and contribute to every facet of our charity. You may not get to meet all our "OTA Super Troopers," but rest assured, they all work hard every day to keep our lights on and our troops' morale high.

In fact, OTA volunteers logged over 5,600 hours in 2012! We are truly blessed to have amazing, dedicated volunteers, who demonstrate what it means to be "Committed to our Courageous" every single day. And from the bottom of our hearts, we thank them all.

2013 is going to be another challenging year – we have the final push of troops in Afghanistan over the next year as well as increased deployments to other places in the world. Your support is needed as much now as ever, and we thank you for your generosity and commitment to our cause.



Left to right: Kristen Holloway Querriera (Founder and CEO), Monica Orluk (President), Amanda Thompson (Vice President)

BIG NUMBERS for OTA in 2012

Volunteers

60

Volunteer Hours

5,600

Units Served

250

Troops Served

17,000

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Soldier Feature Story:



OTA most often sends “wish list” items that contribute to our troops’ safety, mission-effectiveness, morale and well-being. We don’t often get opportunities to contribute to their education.

So we were thrilled to work on a special project with the Directors of Education at US Army bases in Afghanistan by providing test study guides. These study guides help the troops improve their chances for promotion, build skills to open up more military MOS (job) opportunities, or prepare for further education outside the military.

When it was all said and done, OTA sent 150 study guides to be used at all the Education Centers throughout Afghanistan. Over 1600 troops

have taken advantage of testing opportunities in Afghanistan since we sent the study guides, and thousands more will be able to better prepare for their tests and promotion opportunities in the upcoming months.

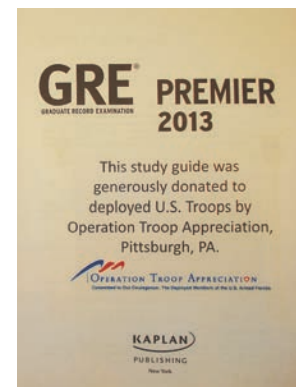
We wish them all success for the next phases of their lives!



Soldiers and Education Center Officers receive study guides from OTA



One of the Education Centers in Afghanistan



Education Centers put labels in the books to let the troops know that OTA supports them in their educational endeavors

FROM THE FRONT LINES

Of course, since no one receives paychecks here at OTA, our rewards come in the form of letters, photos and emails from our troops. I'm sure you'll enjoy these as much as we do!

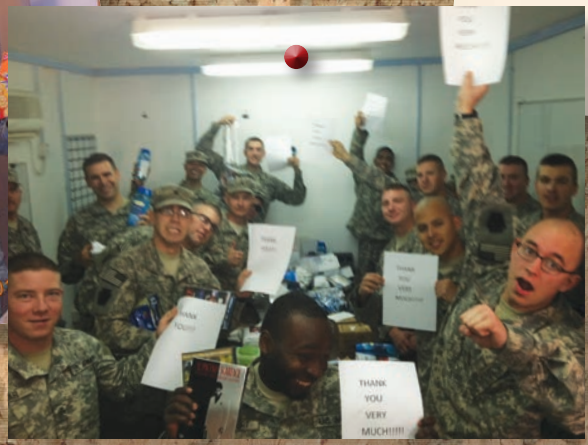


To everyone at Operation Troop Appreciation,
 Thank you so much for the wonderful care package you sent to my soldiers and me. you can never know just how lucky we feel to have people like you send us touches of home. The box you sent had something for everyone- we were very touched at your kindness and generosity.
 Thanks again
 LT Veronica Place
 God Bless



To PATRIOTIC Citizen,
 I Thank You for these generous gifts that you have given me. I appreciate the kindness and generosity that you have showed to me, and to all soldiers who have received gifts from you
 Thank You So very Much,
 PFC Nieves, Nicholas
 (US ARMY)

To: Ms. Holloway and everyone at OTA:
 I want to give my heartfelt thanks for your moral and material support. It makes a world of difference to us who are stuck out here, half a world away. I hope you and yours remain in good health back in the United States.
 Sincerely,
 SPC Frank A. Stockavicz
 3rd ID



Mrs. Krister Holloway,

Thank you so much for everything you do. These socks represent so much more than you just looking out for our little toes. This simple act shows so much love and care from your end, that it makes us want to push on, on our end. Every time I put your socks on I will remember that no matter how long the days get, there are people like you out there who really care about us.

I know this card is just a little thank you and I wish I could do more. Please be safe and continue to be the amazing person you are.

With all the thanks
in the world

PFC Quinn, Michael.



To whom it may concern,

I am a Special Forces Weapons NCO serving at a remote outstation in Eastern Afghanistan. We don't have a lot out here and we are severely undersupplied to boot. We got a helicopter resupply mission in a few days ago and were expecting a few soldiers and some parts for some equipment we have out here. So when we opened the pallet box you guys sent us we were all very excited. We divided it all up equally and distributed it among the men serving out here at this firebase.

I think I speak for everyone out here when I express my gratitude for your generous donation to us. Without the support of good people like you, our time over here could be made a lot worse than it has to be. We will be a lot cleaner, better rested and in less pain thanks to you guys!

In our line of work you come to expect suffering as a matter of course. To receive a gift of sheets so I no longer have to sleep in my filthy sleeping bag and socks so my feet don't get blistered up on patrol was awesome. We all really appreciate having people back home who still support us even this late in the conflict. I can assure you that with your support, we will continue to take the fight to the enemy right up until the last of us sets foot back on American soil!

Thank You!! SFC Adam, SF WPNS




Dear Amazing Person,
I just wanted you to know how good it feels to know there are people out like you that support what we do. A lot of people don't take into consideration just how nice it is just to be able to sleep on a pillow. Let alone have a nice pair of warm socks to have during this very cold time. The gift that you have given us means more than just an item. It's the heart felt part of it. You are in fact the reason we do what we do. I thank you again and God bless.
WITH SPEED & POWER
PFC DUSTIN J. TEETERS



MRS HOLLOWAY

Thank you so much for your support to all the guys over here. I am in Afghanistan at a Special Forces Camp. I have been in the military for several years. I was an A-TEAM Special Forces medic in Vietnam in 1969-70. The support for the soldiers in that conflict was very little - I have seen so much change in my years of service and I can assure you your support is really appreciated. I just want to thank you for your kind and generous support.

GOD BLESS YOU
LTC BUCK BENSON




HOLIDAY COLLECTIONS BENEFIT THOUSANDS OF TROOPS

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, Sailors, Airmen and Marines at Christmas.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a great support network of corporations, individuals, schools, churches, and families who sponsored OTA's troop units this past year, ensuring thousands of troops would receive their "wish list" items in time for Christmas. We thank everyone who donated funds and supplies so generously to bring holiday cheer to our troops so far away!

Although we don't have room to include everyone who contributed for the holidays, we are happy to list a few of the many generous groups who made Christmas so memorable for our troops.

Alcoa
 Anthony Arms and Accessories
 Arrowood at Southwestern
 Barnhart Funeral Home
 Bay Valley Foods
 Blackridge Garden Club
 Carnegie Mellon University
 Chartiers Valley School District
 Clara Barton Elementary School
 CONSOL Energy Inc.
 Empire Beauty Academy
 Family Video
 Fed Ex of Moon Township, PA
 Gill Hall School
 Greek Catholic Union Lodge #2
 Holy Angels Parish
 Howard Hanna of Moon Township, PA
 Jefferson Hills Library
 LIT Club

Magee-Women's Research Institute & Foundation
 Marine Corps League
 North Park Church
 Peoples Natural Gas
 PMA Group
 Richland Elementary School
 Rivers Casino
 Seton Hill University in Greensburg
 Shamrock Manor Women's Club
 South Allegheny Middle School
 St. Elias Byzantine Catholic Church
 St. John's Cathedral Byzantine Church
 Summit Chapel United Methodist Church
 Target
 The Catanese Group
 University of Pittsburgh Science and Technology
 West Liberty Elementary School
 Women's Club of Baldwin Borough



Pittsburgh's St Patrick's Day Parade – an OTA Tradition



Local troops and OTA volunteers marched for the ninth year in a row in the annual Pittsburgh St. Patrick's Day parade. Soldiers handed out candy to spectators on the parade route, and enjoyed hugs, handshakes and words of gratitude from everyone along the route.



OTA is "TOPS" Two Years in a Row!



We are honored to have been named a "Top Rated Charity" again in 2012 by GreatNonProfits.com!

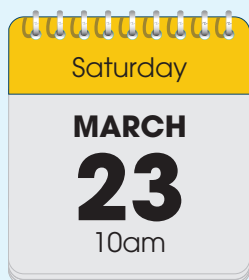
What's really special is that we received this distinction because many of you took the time to write a review about our organization. In fact, ALL of the reviews submitted for OTA gave us a 5-Star rating – the highest any charity can get!

Of the 1.1 million charities in the country, only 1,386 made the list of Top Rated Charities and OTA was #7 on the list! And while we're on the topic, OTA was also named one of the Top 5 charities to volunteer with in Pittsburgh. As you can imagine, we're pretty proud!

As if that weren't enough, OTA was also given the Valued Partner Seal by Guidestar (they gather and publicize information about nonprofit organizations), demonstrating our commitment to transparency.

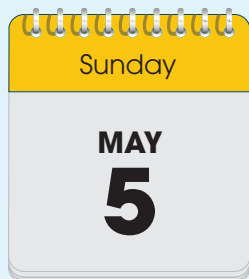
But even more significant is what these honors represent – that OTA is a well-managed, trustworthy charity that touches the lives of all our stakeholders: our troops, our donors, and our volunteers.

Mark your Calendar



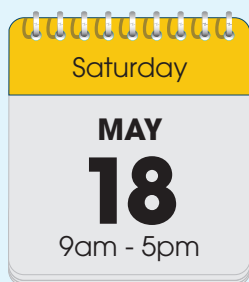
3rd Annual March for the Military North Boundary Park, Cranberry

Come support OTA at this third annual 5K race! Race fees are \$25. Register at www.smilemiles.com or email Race Organizer Karen Coennen for details and active duty military discount at ota5K@zoominternet.net.



Pittsburgh Marathon

Join the OTA Team! If you like to run, come run for OTA at the Pittsburgh marathon. We are putting a team together of marathoners, half-marathoners, and relay members. If interested in running for OTA, contact OTA Race Coordinator Tricia Staley at otapghmarathon@gmail.com.



Sam's Club Donation Drive West Mifflin

While you stock up on your Sam's Club supplies, you can help OTA stock up on much-needed items for the troops. OTA volunteers will be on hand to accept your donations.

MOAA Honors OTA

OTA is humbled to have received a beautiful Certificate of Appreciation from Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), the nation's largest and most influential association of

military officers. MOAA members retired Brigadier General Pete Bellisaro and retired Colonel Carmen DiGiacomo presented the honor to OTA officers Monica, Kristen and Amanda at OTA's annual Volunteer Update meeting in January.



A Very Special Veterans Day Tribute



On Veterans Day, November 11, OTA hosted "A Tribute to our Military" at Eleven restaurant in Pittsburgh's Strip District.

A wonderful six-course dinner with wine pairings was provided courtesy of the Big Burrito restaurant group with a pre-dinner Champagne reception hosted by CONSOL Energy.

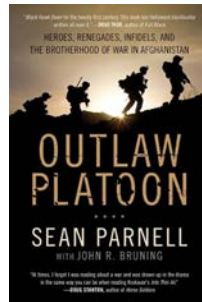
The evening began with the Presentation of the Colors performed by the Air Force ROTC Detachment 730, from the University of Pittsburgh and the National Anthem was performed by Bob Timney, U.S. Army Veteran. OTA was blessed to have Bill Hillgrove, the Voice of the Pitt Panthers and Pittsburgh Steelers, serve as the emcee for the evening.

Speakers included OTA Board Member and Army National Guard Staff Sergeant Matthew Claycomb who discussed his experience in Iraq. Sean Parnell, best-selling author of *Outlaw Platoon* served as the Keynote speaker to cap off the evening. He gave a moving tribute and memorial speech to those Americans who have been sacrificing for our country for centuries.



Author Sean Parnell

Amazon describes the book beautifully: "Acclaimed for its vivid, poignant, and honest recreation of sixteen brutal months of nearly continuous battle in the deadly Hindu Kush region, *Outlaw Platoon* is a Band of



Brothers or We Were Soldiers Once and Young for the early 21st century — an action-packed, highly emotional true story of enormous sacrifice and bravery."

Thank you to those who attended the event, and our generous sponsors who made this evening possible:

- CONSOL Energy
- Fiserv
- F/K industries
- ROOT Sports
- Enterprise Rent a Car (Campbells Run Road, Pittsburgh)
- Buffalo Valley Sportsmen Association
- People's Natural Gas
- The Three Rivers Leathernecks



OTA Founder and CEO Kristen Holloway with author Sean Parnell

"My Baby, She Wrote Me a Letter"

Did you know that every unit we help receives cards and letters that OTA collects from the public?

Many of you have signed a card for the troops at our Century III Mall location or at a fundraising event. We work hard to continually collect messages to include in our care packages.

Everyone can help! Young children, students, families, church groups, scout groups, work colleagues, leisure and hobby groups can all make card or letter writing a fun-filled activity!

Cards can be store-bought or hand-made. Or write your own personal letters. Just fill them with positive, uplifting messages from home. And feel free to include your email or mailing address so the troops can respond to you directly if they choose.

If you're in the area, drop them off at our space at Century III Mall in West Mifflin, PA or simply mail your completed cards and letters to Operation Troop Appreciation, PO Box 14550, Pittsburgh PA, 15234.



Corporate Sponsor Highlight: CONSOL Energy Inc.

A significant portion of our fund raising revenue comes from partnerships we have with companies across the country. But this holiday season, the biggest gift came from right in our back yard! CONSOL Energy chose OTA as the recipient of their *Season of Giving Program* and the employees more than answered the call.

CONSOL sponsored two units of troops deployed in Afghanistan, successfully raised enough money and items to take care of their sponsored units, and gave extra so there was plenty more for hundreds of other troops as well.

The employees of CONSOL Energy from all locations rallied around this project collecting 32 large cartons of supplies and raising \$5,650 in monetary donations – which CONSOL Energy matched with a Corporate donation.

The leadership and employees of CONSOL truly showed their giving spirit this holiday season. OTA and the troops they helped say THANK YOU!



OTA President, Monica Orluk presents Laural Ziembra, Director - Community Relations with a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of CONSOL Energy's Season of Giving project





How You Can Help

Please remember, there are troops deployed all over the world. Operation Troop Appreciation is always in need of donated items to fulfill our troops' "wish list" requests.

If you, your company, church, school or civic group are in the Pittsburgh area and would like to hold a collection or fundraising drive for OTA, please contact us.

Groups and individuals nationwide can also sponsor a unit as part of a fundraising effort.

Please contact Vice President Amanda Thompson for a list of needed items, collection guidelines, and sponsorship information at Amanda@OperationTroopAppreciation.org.

Connect with Us |  

Operation Troop Appreciation is an official cause on **Facebook** and **Twitter**. Follow us for announcements of upcoming events, notice of volunteer opportunities, pictures and postings from the troops we help.

Do you know someone who would like to get the OTA newsletter delivered via email? They can sign up in one easy step by providing their name and email address on our website at OperationTroopAppreciation.org. They'll get our newsletter conveniently delivered to their inbox.

We never sell or trade personal information to third parties.



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