

  
**OPERATION TROOP APPRECIATION**  
March 2006 Newsletter

**Kristen's Corner**

Dear Friends and Volunteers,

On March 22, 2006, OTA received the highest honor and award any organization can receive – the **Presidential Volunteer Service Award**.

President Bush personally presented me this award in Wheeling, WV. He thanked me for OTA's support of our troops and encouraged us to keep working in support of our American heroes.

To the soldiers who have allowed us the unique opportunity to provide for you, **THANK YOU** for your incredible service to our country and your daily sacrifices. You continually inspire us.

As I told President Bush when accepting the award, I am extremely proud to accept this honor on behalf of all the OTA volunteers who have made our organization so successful.

Thank you to each one of you for the never-ending support, help, guidance, and encouragement you have freely given over the past 20 months! It is because of all of you that OTA received this honor and has become so successful, providing "wish list" items to more than 10,000 troops.

Thank you, everyone, for making this possible! Now let's go work on our next 10,000 troops!

Sincerely,  
Kristen Holloway, President OTA



President Bush stands with OTA President Kristen Holloway after giving her the Presidential Volunteer Service Award lapel pin.

**Calling all golfers!**  
**Memorial Charity Golf Outing**



OTA is holding a very special Charity Event, in memory of fallen hero Lieutenant Colonel Michael McLaughlin of the 1-107th Field Artillery National Guard. LTC McLaughlin was from Mercer, PA and died in combat on January 5, 2006 in Ramadi, Iraq.

**The Charity Golf Outing will be held on Saturday, May 6, at Oak View Golf Club in Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania.**

A shot-gun start at 1:00 pm will be followed by an awards banquet. There are a number of ways you can participate in this great event:

**Golf Participant**

We welcome you to join us as a participant. The fee to golf is \$125, which includes green fees and cart, boxed lunch and banquet dinner. Scramble play with shot-gun start at 1:00 pm will be followed by an awards banquet. The banquet festivities include dinner, awards, a sports memorabilia silent auction conducted by First & Goal Sports, as well as, raffle and door prize drawings. Individual golfers and foursomes are welcome.

**Sponsor**

As a sponsor, you have the opportunity to promote yourself or your company to a group of people who are very loyal to its sponsors, and to the many area professionals who participate at the Outing itself.

Download registration and sponsor forms on our website ([www.OperationTroopAppreciation.com](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.com)), or contact us at 412-759-0696 for more information.

**We'll see you on the greens!**





## St. Patrick's Day Parade 2006



For the second year in a row, OTA and local soldiers from the 107th Field Artillery Unit marched together in the St. Patrick's Day parade on March 11th.

The day was warm and the sun shone brightly as we made our way down the parade route. A huge crowd was on hand to celebrate the second largest St. Patrick's Day parade in the country. Parade watchers applauded and cheered loudly as the soldiers walked by. Many came out to the street to greet the troops, shake their hands and pose for pictures.

Thank you to all the volunteers and soldiers who came out to march with OTA!



OTA volunteers and returning soldiers gather to march in the 2006 St. Patrick's Day Parade in Pittsburgh, PA.



## Troop Project Update

The first quarter of 2006 was very busy for OTA, in fact, we reached a very important milestone in February: **More than 10,000 troops have benefited from OTA!** Now, that's something to be proud of!

So far in 2006, we've sent "wish list" gifts including Under Armour® t-shirts and socks, DVDs, phone cards, board games, boot laces, musical instruments, fleece blankets, and hot soups and chowders.

We strive to make our soldiers' wishes come true! We work with all branches of the military, and provide for active duty, National Guard and US Reserve units from all over the country.



## In their own words...

We'd like to share with you some touching words we received from soldiers who recently benefited from OTA. We work hard to make sure our deployed troops feel the support and encouragement we send from so many miles away. It's nice to know we are making a difference in their lives. They explain what OTA means to them in their own words....

*"Although it has been several weeks since your generous gifts arrived, they are still talking about them and will enjoy them for a VERY long time. I want to thank you again for the awesome gifts. I know you have been doing this for a while but you just can't imagine how much you touched our lives and how much we appreciate what you all do. I want you to know why your organization is different.*

*You listened. Yes, simple but so VERY important. You listened to what we needed and reacted. You listened to what the troops NEED OR WANTED. That is awesome! The things you sent are used every day continuously. The MPS players are taken on every convoy and are seen in the gym. Everyone is asking where they came from and we are the envy of the base. You have touched not only my heart, but my troops' also."*

*~ Chief Master Sergeant P. Kaplan, Headquarters Company, 1 BCT 101st Airborne*

*"When I opened the door to my little trailer hut I was astonished by the mountain of boxes in front of me, and there are many happy Joes thanks to [you]. I know how "Operation Troop Appreciation" got its name. It is amazing how they knew what we needed and have trouble getting or aren't able to get. We all can't tell you how you made us feel. When you are cold, tired, wet, hungry, and a little down something like this happened and re-charged us. You have no idea what it did to boost us up! Wow! The stuff you guys sent is great and I can share it with a few that don't get anything. This was so amazing! "*

*~ Private C. Mitchell, A Co, 3-187 3BCT, 101st Airborne*

## Kidapalooza



OTA volunteers joined Pennsylvania National Guard soldiers at Pittsburgh's annual Kidapalooza Family Festival on February 25, 2006. Families stopped by to write notes and kids colored pictures for deployed troops.

Kidapalooza benefits the Pittsburgh Children's Hospital and is sponsored by CBS radio.



## A Very Special Soldier Story



We had the opportunity to work with some very deserving soldiers in Iraq. A unit of 180 infantry soldiers of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne had a tragic fire on their Forward Operating Base in Yusufiyah, Iraq in the early morning of February 5, 2006.

The soldiers awoke to screams and ran out of their barracks quickly to move the vehicles, ammunition and explosives away from the flames. Most of them had run out to fight the fire in only their PT uniforms (shorts, tee shirt and running shoes). As a result, most everything – weapons, protective equipment, personal belongings and keepsakes from home – were destroyed in the fire when they were unable to return to their barracks.

To add insult to injury, while they watched everything burn, the inferno served as a giant signal to all the insurgents in the area, and soon the soldiers started taking mortar fire, a particularly dangerous situation since many soldiers had lost their protective gear in the fire. Thankfully, they didn't incur any casualties.

To help them rebuild, OTA sent all 180 soldiers in this unit Under Armour ® t-shirts and letters of encouragement. We also discovered that some of the soldiers had lost their acoustic guitars and OTA replaced these treasures as well.

Despite this tragedy, the soldiers have amazed us with their positive outlook, and their continued devotion to their missions. God bless them, and all our deployed troops!

## Bi-partisan Support of Our Troops



OTA volunteer Peggy Graeser gives Congresswoman Melissa Hart a box of letters to distribute to deployed troops.

On a recent trip to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Germany to visit soldiers in the field and wounded soldiers in military hospitals, a bi-partisan group of senators and congressmen and women spent time meeting troops and seeing first-hand how they are progressing.

Pennsylvania Congresswoman Melissa Hart was part of this group and kindly offered to take letters to troops on behalf of OTA. OTA volunteers prepared 800 letters and Ms. Hart hand-carried them to four countries and distributed them to Soldiers and Marines during her week-long trip.

Thank you to Congresswoman Hart for the kindness and compassion you show our American heroes, and for helping OTA reach out to even more troops!

## Hard Rock Café Concert Benefits OTA



In May 2005, OTA sent the 800 soldiers of the 463<sup>rd</sup> Combat Engineer Battalion enough instruments to front an entire rock and roll band.

Every night, soldiers at Camp Anaconda (Iraq) played in pick-up bands and jammed with guitars, bass, keyboards, drums, sound and mixing equipment. It was a terrific relief from their daily missions and soldiers came from all over the base to enjoy the music. Senior chaplains from other units attended worship services there to hear the praise band. Nothing like a little music to mix with the prayer!

As we reported in our last newsletter, the 463<sup>rd</sup> is now home, and they are planning a special event to help OTA.

OTA's POC (point-of-contact), Captain Anthony Caldarelli is a member of "Blues Eyed Blonde," a renowned blues band in Pittsburgh. They have graciously organized a benefit concert for OTA at the Hard Rock Café in Station Square, downtown Pittsburgh.

### **All ticket sale proceeds benefit OTA.**

The show starts at 8:00 p.m. on April 30, 2006. Tickets are \$10 and available on OTA's website or by calling us at 412-759-0696. Tickets are going fast, so reserve yours now!

[www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org)

### **We'll see you at the Hard Rock!**

230 W. Station Square Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

### Supporting OTA

Since we are a non-governmental agency, OTA can only do its work for deployed soldiers with donations from generous individuals and businesses. Please tell your friends, family, and employer about us and make a donation if you can.

We also accept new or gently used DVDs, video games and unused phone cards. Donated items and tax-deductible checks can be sent to:



Operation Troop Appreciation  
PO Box 14550  
Pittsburgh, PA 15234



Or make a donation securely on-line at:

[www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org)