

A MOMENT WITH MO Spring 2009

For the 4th consecutive year, OTA has had the honor of marching with our troops in Pittsburgh's St. Patrick's Day Parade.



Monica Orluk Vice President

It is a wonderful day for our volunteers to meet and talk to some of the brave heroes we serve and for the city to thank our troops. And this year was no exception. In fact, we had our biggest military and volunteer turnout ever, as well as a visit by Uncle Sam!

Every year, we experience touching moments that stay in our hearts and

remind us of the sacrifice our military and their families endure to preserve our freedom.

A particularly moving experience occurred when I had the privilege of watching a mother, whose son was killed in Iraq, take time to hug and thank our soldiers for his service. These memories will stay with us forever, and epitomize the mission we follow every day through our work.

While the parade is one way to demonstrate support, OTA volunteers do so every day, not just on special holidays. Kristen and I are blessed to have such a great team alongside us.

On behalf of the entire "St. Patty's Day Contingency," thank you to the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee and the people of the City of Pittsburgh who attended the parade. We felt your love and our hearts were touched by the gratitude and honor you bestowed on our troops.



Members of the PA National Guard Recruiting Office, soldiers of D Company, 1/110th Infantry, and the 316th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) Army Reserve join OTA volunteers and Monty and Zeke of Y-108's morning crew to march in the 2009 St. Patrick's Parade.



All along the parade route, Pittsburghers greeted the troops with hugs, cheers and heartfelt thanks.



Sgt. Luke Van Camp with Sgt Brett Fry as Uncle Sam.

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 raise their morale and aid in the success and safety of 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 Soldiers of A Co, 2-112th Infantry in the 56th Stryker Brigade show off the new desert boots OTA sent their squad.



Some of the soldiers of Alpha Troop, 2-104 Cavalry display the Under Armour socks OTA sent them. OTA also provided a microwave and Under Armour t-shirts.



OTA sent the soldiers of A Company 2-112th Infantry (also of the 56th Stryker Brigade) Wiley X eye protective ballistics glasses.



These soldiers of E Co, 3-8 Cavalry clear the Iraqi roadways of explosive devices. OTA sent them a TV and video gaming equipment.

A SOLDIER GIVES BACK

LH Entertainment President Seth Zora knows first-hand what it is like to be deployed and far from family and friends.

As an Air Force Reservist, Seth has served six tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Wanting to give back to those who helped him while deployed, Seth's company, LH Entertainment, sponsored a special night of entertainment to help OTA.

On April 18 at Altar Bar, in Pittsburgh's Strip District, LH Entertainment put on a great fundraising benefit for OTA. Guests enjoyed a fine evening of entertainment with guest emcee, WTAE-TV's Kelly Frey, the comedic talents of "Bag Lady Sue" and DJ Showtime. Special guest speaker Senator John Pippy spoke of the importance of troop support, drawing from his experience as a deployed member of the PA National Guard. A silent auction was held and celebrity bartenders, the Pittsburgh Riverhounds, served the crowd well throughout the night.

LH Entertainment is an expert in entertainment and offers premier concierge service for companies and individuals, such as special occasion celebrations and corporate functions. Visit www.lhentertainment.net to learn more. OTA thanks Seth, his staff and the volunteers who made this event so special!



OTA SUPPORTS THE 56TH STRYKER BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

We have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of soldiers who live in our hometowns around Pittsburgh and across Pennsylvania, and we need your help! Indeed, we've already worked with hundreds of troops from this unit, and we want to do more.

The 28th Infantry Division, the nation's oldest division, has been called upon to aid in combat operations in Iraq, resulting in the deployment of many soldiers from across the state of Pennsylvania.

- ★ A proud part of the 28th Infantry Division of Pennsylvania's own National Guard, the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team (BCT) is the nation's **only reserve component Stryker** BCT in existence.
- ★ The prestigious 56th BCT is composed of **100% Pennsylvanians**. We are proud that our hometown heroes were selected to serve in this brigade
- ★ These Pennsylvania troops are playing a **historic role** during their deployment, and we want to show these men and women how much we support their service and sacrifice.

Here's how you can help! OTA is conducting a special **Adoption Program** to allow you to thank these brave soldiers of our home state. By making a donation today, you'll help OTA continue to grant wishes to the members of the 56th Stryker BCT throughout their deployment this year.

Adopt A Soldier – Make an individual donation for specific items our troops need. For example:

\$30 - A hot-weather moisture-wicking t-shirt

\$50 - High-powered flashlight

\$75 - Fire-retardant work gloves

\$100 - Sturdy desert boots

Adopt A <u>Unit</u> – Your civic group, church, friends or company raises money together to "grant wishes" for an entire unit of troops. Or you can make a personal contribution. For example:

\$250 - Sports & exercise equipment to keep healthy

\$500 - Multi-tool sets for a squad of 15

\$1000 - GPS systems for 5 team leaders

\$1500 - Eye protective ballistics glasses for a unit of 30

The need for support and appreciation from the home front has never been greater. With your help, OTA will bring a little bit of "home" to those who serve so far away by fulfilling their "wish lists" and giving them gifts that symbolize our support, appreciation and respect.

Will you make a contribution in honor of a Pennsylvania soldier by making a donation to OTA? You may also visit our website and make a secure on-line donation at OperationTroopAppreciation.org. Your support will make the days brighter for our American Heroes and these Pennsylvania Soldiers.

- ★The Stryker, an eight-wheeled allwheel-drive armored vehicle carries superior firepower.
- ★This *light and mobile* Stryker vehicle moves teams to the battlefield quickly and in relative security.



★★★ Did You Know? ★★★

- ★It maneuvers easily in close and urban terrain, providing protection on open ground on the battlefield.
- ★Stryker units are especially effective in urban areas, where vehicles can establish initial security positions near a building and dismount squads on a doorstep.



The Stryker is named in honor of two Medal of Honor recipients.

* Pfc. Stuart S. Stryker (left) received the award for his actions during World War II. His actions near Wesel, Germany, freed three American pilots being held prisoner, and captured more than 200 enemy soldiers.

* Spc. Robert F. Stryker (right) received the award for his actions during the Vietnam War, throwing himself on an enemy grenade to save the lives of six of his fellow soldiers during a fierce battle near Loc Ninh.

Both men were killed in action. They were not related.



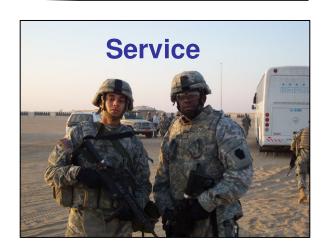


THE SOLDIERS OF THE 56TH STRYKER BRIGADE ON THE FRONT LINES















COMMUNITY PROJECTS SUPPORT THE TROOPS

OTA receives requests from soldiers for many different items, including snacks and personal care supplies. Fortunately, we have the support of individuals, schools, churches, civic organizations, and companies who conduct drives to help us collect the things our troops need. Here are just a few of these special stories.



National Flood Services, **Inc.** provides flood insurance policy administration services to insurance companies nationwide and is headquartered in Kalispell, Montana. OTA was contacted by Krista Koch of National Flood, because the employees wanted to adopt a unit and help make some wishes come true for our brave soldiers.

The response by the company was overwhelming and in all, they collected over 300 pounds of supplies! These items were sent to the 797th Ordinance Company (EOD) who received 16 boxes of snacks and morale boosting items and to A Company, 2-112 Infantry 56 Stryker Brigade Combat Team who received specifically requested gifts of jerky and slim jims.

These employees outdid themselves and provided a "flood" of support for our brave heroes overseas.



When Army Reservist, Major Rodney Johnson was deployed, his co-workers at **Bristol-Myers Squibb** wanted to show their support and did so in a big, big

way! Maj. Johnson submitted a wish-list request to OTA and his co-workers started working on helping him and other members of his unit, the 679th Military Police.

Sales associates from the mid-Atlantic region donated \$2000 to enable OTA to purchase the unit's wish list items and the company also donated over \$1,600 through its company match program to allow us to do even more for more troops!



Major Rodney Johnson



St. Winifred Church in Mt. Lebanon, PA, embarked on a special project for our troops during the holy Lenten season.

Parishioners collected items our troops often request of OTA, such as healthy snacks and personal care items difficult to come by in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For Holy Thursday, the church collected socks to commemorate the washing of the disciples' feet.

In all the church donated over 100 pounds of supplies, and the children of the church wrote letters and drew pictures for OTA to send to the troops.

These gifts from the church will be sent to the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, a unit made 100% of Pennsylvania National Guard troops.

OTA would like to thank **Cub Scout Pack 403 of Cranberry**, **PA**, for a recent project they conducted in support of the troops.

The scouts and their siblings made beautiful Valentine's Day cards for deployed troops, which OTA was proud to send to units in time for the special holiday.

The scouts and their families also donated supplies to OTA which were sent in care packages to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Way to go Scouts!





Join Us for the 4th Annual OTA Charity Golf Outing

Date: June 27

Place: Hickory Heights Golf Course in Bridgeville, PA (Pittsburgh's South

Hills)

Spring is here and it's time to dust off the clubs and head to the links!

Join us for the Fourth Annual OTA Charity Golf Outing **Saturday**, **June 27**, **at Hickory Heights in Bridgeville**, **PA**. Lunch will be served, and the shotgun start at 1:00 pm will be followed by an awards banquet. The banquet festivities include dinner, awards and prizes, silent auction, and door prize drawings.

Slots are open but filling fast – register now to guarantee your spot for this awesome event! We are actively seeking sponsors and donations of items to use as raffle and door prizes. If you can't join us to golf, consider sponsoring a member of our military! Your contribution of \$135 will allow a military member to enjoy the day's festivities for free!

TO GOLF: Registration is \$135 per person and includes greens and cart fees, lunch and a banquet dinner. You may register as an individual golfer, or as a team of 2 or more. Golfers who sign up by June 6 will also receive a free OTA golf shirt!







TO SPONSOR: As a sponsor, you have the opportunity to promote yourself or your company to the public and to the many area professionals who participate in the outing itself. Five levels of sponsorship are available:

Platinum Level: \$2,000 donation

- ★ You or your company name will be posted on a sign at a golf tee as the exclusive sponsor, and
- ★ Your name and company logo will be listed in our Charity Golf Program as a Platinum contributor, and
- ★ You will receive special recognition at the Awards Banquet and be listed on our Website.

Gold Level: \$1,000 donation

- ★ You or your company name will be included on a sign at a golf tee as a sponsor, and
- ★ Your name and company logo will be listed in our Charity Golf Program as a Gold contributor.

Silver Level: \$500 donation

- ★ You or your company name will be included on a sign at a golf tee as a sponsor, and
- ★ Your name will be listed in our Charity Golf Program as a Silver contributor.

Friend Level: \$100 donation or Patron Level: \$250 donation

★ You or your company name will be listed in our Charity Golf Program as a Friend or Patron.

REGISTRATION: For more information, to register to golf or become an event sponsor, please visit www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org and click on the event link on the home page.



HONOR FLIGHT NETWORK

WE CAN'T ALL BE HEROES. SOME OF US HAVE TO STAND ON THE CURB AND CLAP AS THEY GO BY." ~ WILL ROGERS



Memorial Day and D-Day are poignant days of remembrance in our country, as we honor the generations of men and women who fought to keep our country free during some of the darkest days of the twentieth century.

Now each of us has an opportunity to say **Thank You** in a real and tangible way as we celebrate Memorial Day and remember D-Day.

Honor Flight Network is a non-profit organization created solely to **honor America's veterans** for all their sacrifices.

They transport our heroes to Washington, D.C. to visit and reflect at their memorials. Top priority is given to the senior veterans – World War II survivors, along with those other veterans who may be terminally ill. **This is a free service to these veterans.**

Of all of the wars in recent memory, it was World War II that truly threatened our very existence as a nation—and as a culturally diverse, free society.

Now, with over one thousand World War II veterans dying each day, our time to express our thanks to these brave men and women is running out.

Your donation will help transport veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit THEIR memorials. World War II veterans waited patiently for over 60 years for a memorial that recognizes their service and accomplishments.

The World War II Memorial also recognizes the ultimate sacrifices of their friends who never made it home. They ALL deserve this one last opportunity to visit America's "Thank You."

In another 5-7 years almost all of our World War II veterans will be gone. This trip is their "last hurrah," the last time they will be recognized as the conquering victors that collectively and literally saved the world.

To this day Europe is free, the Pacific is free and America is free. This freedom came at a very high cost. We can never repay them for what they've done. An "Honor Flight" is simply a small token of our appreciation for everything they've done.

Throughout their Honor Flight Network trip, the World War II veterans are thanked, recognized and admired for their service. They come home personally knowing how much their country loves them and respects them.

Veterans will never forget this gratitude and adoration.

Please help write this final chapter of their lives.
"The Greatest Generation" deserves nothing
less. With Memorial Day fast approaching, please
consider making a contribution to Honor Flight
Network, and let our veterans know that we
appreciate their lifetime of dedication.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Honorflight.com and Honorflights.com are NOT associated with Honor Flight Network, Inc. (honorflight.org). The aforementioned sites are for companies that charge a fee for flights to visit the World War II Memorial. The flights and tours that **Honor Flight Network** provides World War II and terminally ill veterans are **absolutely FREE**.

(source: http://www.honorflight.org)

A VETERAN IS SOMEONE WHO, AT ONE POINT IN HIS LIFE WROTE A BLANK CHECK MADE PAYABLE TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FOR AN AMOUNT OF "UP TO AND INCLUDING MY LIFE." ~ ANONYMOUS



IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

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

Thank you so much for the care packages. We have received all three boxes, in good condition.

The microwavable food and snacks have provided us a touch of home. Beyond the many luxuries, they have served as a small reminder of the very reason we all proudly serve.

We truly appreciate the time and effort that you and your volunteers go through to make our lives and the lives of other soldiers better. Please let me know, if there is any way we can help you in the future. Until then, we continue to serve with pride, unwavering in our duty.

~ Major T. V.

I would like to take a moment to Thank You for all the support you have given to our Soldiers.

Getting shown appreciation and support from a total stranger is a very humbling experience.

Your gift was generous, the crocs [shoes] you sent to our Soldiers will be put to good use.

Thanks for brightening up a Soldier's day. And thanks again for supporting the Troops.

~Lieutenant Colonel F.L.

We have received the under armor socks and shirts and the Wiley X's [eye protection]. We really appreciate everything you and your organization are doing for us and other troopers.

Everyone here is really happy with everything that you have sent. The shirts work really great in the environment that we're working in and the socks are the best, due to them being so comfortable and warm. Thanks again for everything.

~ Sergeant M. V.

Wow, you sent us some awesome stuff!!

I can't tell you enough how happy this makes the guys. They try to play it cool, but you can see it in their eyes and the grin they try not to let get out of control, that inside they feel like a bunch of little boys on Christmas morning! It's really cool to watch.

Thank you for giving that to them.

~ Chaplain J. P.

The Marines are very appreciative for your caring support.

It is very humbling to know of people like the ones involved with OTA, because we are just doing our jobs. The time and resources that OTA have spent in supporting service members is unbelievable.

I am sure that the Marines, Sailors, Soldiers and Airmen that you guys have reached out to will never forget OTA's support and appreciation for our service to our country. Thank you very much and God bless all of you at OTA.

~ 2nd Lieutenant G.D.S

We did indeed receive the under armor t-shirts and the Wiley X eye protection, as well as all of the other items I asked for on our wish list.

I can't tell you thank you enough or how amazed I am that we received everything we asked for. Your organization is truly a blessing for us soldiers and our spirits will now forever be lifted knowing that there is such a strong support for what we do.

I can assure you that they loved it all, as they were ripping through the boxes like 5 year olds on Christmas morning. I seriously thank you so very much and hope that you pass that thanks on to any and all who have aided you in your endeavor to put this smile on our faces.

~ Sergeant M. M.



SPECIAL THANKS

The Pittsburgh Athletic Association demonstrated support for OTA at their annual Mercury Awards Dinner, which recognizes the efforts of the best high school football athletes in the area and highlights the contributions of professional athletes and college coaches who have Pittsburgh ties.

OTA volunteers were invited to participate in the awards dinner and banquet. This year, OTA brought some special guests, Cpt. William Ault and Staff Sergeant Aaron Layton of the PA National Guard. These soldiers provide invaluable assistance to OTA as volunteers and military advisors.

The PAA donated a portion of the night's proceeds to OTA as they have done for the past several years, and we thank them for their consistent support of our troops.



Captain William Ault, former Pitt football Coach Johnny Majors, and Staff Sergeant Aaron Layton.

ANIMAL FRIENDS AND OTA TEAM UP TO HELP A MILITARY CANINE



Sixty-two years ago, at the height of World War II, a small group of Pittsburgh citizens came together in an effort to find homes for soldiers' pets when they left to serve in the war.

After the war, still faced with the need for ongoing compassionate control of the pet overpopulation and placement problem, the group opened a shelter and incorporated. They took a name that clearly articulated their mission: to serve as friends to unwanted animals.

"Bagger" is recovering beautifully from his injuries and enjoys his care packages as much as the troops do!

Today, Animal Friends returns to its original mission as they partner with OTA to help our deployed military dogs. Our first joint project has just been completed and we are proud to have been able to help "Command Sergeant Major Bagger," a working dog deployed to Iraq.

Bagger was injured in the line of duty and his handler contacted Animal Friends seeking help in way of food, toys and treats for the animal. Through the Animal Friends "Chow Wagon" program, over 50 pounds of food, toys and treats were shipped to CSM Bagger, enough to keep him healthy and happy until he returns to the states in late June. We are happy to report that Bagger is doing well and is expected to fully recover from his injuries.

Our work with Animal Friends continues on May 24, 2009 at the annual Mutt Strut event on Pittsburgh's North Shore. OTA will be on hand to collect thank you cards for the troops and to share information about our organization. For more information on this great event, visit www.thinkingoutsidethecage.org and click on the calendar.



MORE SUCCESS STORIES...

Since our last newsletter update, **3,600 more deployed troops** comprising **82 units** received "wish list" items from OTA, bringing the total number of troops who have benefited from OTA to over 51,000!

Here is a snapshot of some of these units, what they are doing, and what OTA provided.

Branch	<u>Mission</u>	Wish List Fulfilled
Marines	From MCAS Cherry Point, these Marines provide aviation support in Iraq	Hygiene items, snacks, entertainment supplies
Army	This PA National Guard infantry unit of the 56 th Stryker Brigade from Pittsburgh performs mounted and dismounted patrols in urban and rural areas in Iraq.	Desert boots, shemaghs (head and face coverings to protect from the sand)
Army	These troops from Ft. Hood, TX, repair and recover humvees in Iraq.	Mechanics gloves
Navy	These Reserve Sailors from various states are embedded with the Afghan army to train and mentor them.	Cold weather Under Armour, socks
Army	These US soldiers from Schweinfurt, Germany train the Iraqi forces.	Boxing equipment, dodge balls, soccer balls, footballs
Marines	These Marine reservists from MN, ND, WI and NY provide convoy security in Iraq.	Xbox 360 games, drink mix, books, DVDs, baby wipes
Army	These Reserve troops from Tennessee work in detainee operations in Iraq.	Under Armour shirts, guitar
Air Force	These airmen provide basic military training classes to the Iraqi Air Force.	DVDs, hygiene items
Army	From Corpus Christi, TX, these troops provide life support (food, water, latrine service, tents, housing units, etc.) for a combat operating base.	Twin comforter sets
Air Force	These airmen from various US air force bases provide intelligence support to multi-national forces in Iraq.	Starbucks coffee
Army	From Ft. Riley, KS, this company of soldiers trains the Iraqi Army, performs convoys and security.	Poker sets, dart board, razors, vitamins, DVDs
Army	These soldiers from Ft Benning, GA, train and mentor the Iraqi police	Croquet set, snacks,



OTA WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER: LTC JOHN DOWLING



Lieutenant Colonel John Dowling joins the OTA Board.

We are pleased to introduce you to our newest board member, Lt. Col. John Dowling. John comes from the 316th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary) in Moon Township, PA, where he has served as the public affairs officer for the past 18 months, managing all aspects of community and media relations for the Army Reserve command that encompasses the 13-state Northeastern United States. John brings more than 24 years of experience in the Army Reserve to OTA, including two stateside active duty tours and a deployment to Bosnia.

As a civilian, John has worked in the communications career field in the Pittsburgh area for the past decade. He is currently the director/military liaison of the Combat Stress Intervention Program (CSIP) at Washington and Jefferson College. CSIP is a three-year Department of Defense research program to investigate combat stress related barriers to healthcare in Guard and Reserve troops in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Prior to this position, he advocated on behalf of veterans and their families as a managing editor for Victory Media Inc. (www.victorymediainc.com), a veteran-owned publishing company in Coraopolis, PA. A resident of Canonsburg, he is a graduate of West Virginia and Carnegie Mellon Universities.

Welcome to the OTA Family, Lt. Col Dowling!

MOTORCYCLES, METAL AND MAYHEM!

Date: June 4 – 7

Place: Westmoreland Country Fairgrounds in Greensburg, PA

OTA is honored to be the beneficiary of the biggest motorcycle rally and military support event to be held in Western PA this year. Motorcycles, Metal & Mayhem will be held June 4-7 at the Westmoreland Country Fairgrounds, Greensburg, PA.

Headlining this event are nationally known musicians "The Kentucky Headhunters", "Rebel Sons" and the comedic talents of "Bag Lady Sue" in addition to a number of other national and local bands.

In addition to a portion of the rally proceeds, special events are scheduled to specifically benefit OTA, including a charity auction, dunk tank, bikini bike wash and bike smash!

A very special tribute to our military will be held on Saturday, June 6th as we remember the anniversary of "D-Day" and celebrate all our brave heroes who have served and who serve today.



Bag Lady Sue, a nationally renown comedienne, is a huge troop supporter and will perform at the event.

Admission is \$30 and is a one-time fee that provides entry for all four days of the rally, so come for one or all days for one low price! For more information and to purchase tickets visit www.motorcyclesmetalandmayhem.com.



SAM'S CLUB AND AREA ROTARIES HOST "STUFF A BUS" DRIVES

OTA is proud to be the recipient of two great collection drives of supplies for our troops. These "Stuff a Bus" projects enable those in the Pittsburgh community to donate needed items for OTA.

We thank the folks at the Robinson Sam's Club, the Parkway Rotary and High School Interact club for making these events possible!

"Stuff a Bus" sites are:



Saturday, May 23	N. Fayette / Robinson Sam's Club
8 am to 4 pm	249 Summit Park Drive ◆ Pittsburgh, PA 15275
Wednesday, June 3	Parkway West Rotary's Steak and Ale at Robinson Township Park's Rotary Shelter



Items OTA is actively collecting at these sites include:

★ PRE-PACKAGED SNACKS ★

Nuts
Beef jerky
Granola bars
Cookies & crackers
Powdered drink mixes
Specialty ground coffee
Beef sticks & jerky
Tuna packets
Popcorn
Trail mix

★ ENTERTAINMENT ITEMS ★

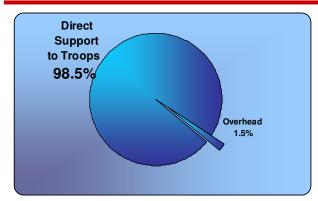
(new or gently used):

Board games
Playing cards and poker chips
Music CD's (CURRENT titles, or Classic Rock)
PlayStation 2 & 3, X Box 360 consoles and games
DVDs (TV series or current movies)
Hand held electronic games

★HYGIENE ITEMS ★

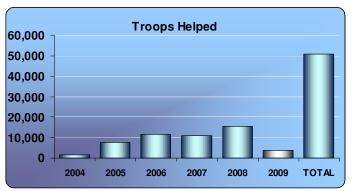
Chapstick
Shampoo
Dental floss
Shaving supplies
Baby wipes & hand wipes
Hand sanitizer
Shower gel
Deodorant
Sun block

PROGRESS TO DATE



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.

Very few charities can boast this high efficiency rate.



OTA has provided "wish list" items for more than 51,000 troops since our inception in July 2004.