



A MOMENT WITH MO

Winter 2009



The start of a new year is always a great time for reflection. Looking back, the past year brought OTA many firsts, much success and the promise of even bigger things to come with the New Year.

As we embark on our fifth year, Kristen and I cannot help but be humbled by the many blessings that have been bestowed on our organization. These blessings come in the form of great people who tirelessly devote their time and energy to our cause. They come in the form of donations – be it monetary or much requested items for the troops that arrive on our doorstep daily – and most often, during our biggest time of need. Our blessings also come in the form of the brave members of the United States Armed Forces who continue to serve selflessly and who work so hard to ensure that our freedoms remain intact.

We are especially proud that despite the economic landscape, OTA helped over 15,000 soldiers in 2008- that's 4,400 more soldiers than 2007, bringing our total soldiers helped to over 47,000. We were able to do more with less, and continued to ensure 98 cents of every dollar spent went directly to our troops.

From mine detectors, to ballistics glasses, to fire proof gloves, sports equipment, and morale building items to basic necessities and care packages, we made a difference in so many of our brave soldiers' lives.

But none of this would have been possible without all of you who have helped us in the past and who continue to support our endeavors as we continue our work.

During this past year, we welcomed home loved ones from war and now prepare to say farewell to our close friends with the PA National Guard who are on their way to serving a tour of duty in Iraq.

We celebrated a wedding and received recognition from the President of the United States. We held wonderful "packing parties" shipping hundreds of cartons overseas. We met with every level of our military from high ranking officers to privates, and every rank in between. In all, we've had a banner year!

We thank you all for the support and endless dedication to our brave troops. We had our best year ever because of you and we are truly blessed to be the recipients of your kindness and generosity. May God bless you, our country and our brave troops!

Monica Orluk, Vice 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 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 Marines from unit HMLA-369 in Camp Pendleton provide air support in Iraq. OTA sent them Under Armour shirts, movies and hygiene items.



This platoon of Marines who train and advise the Iraqi army received care packages with needed supplies from OTA.



OTA sent the soldiers of this MiTT (Military Transition Team – trains the Iraqi Army) Nomex gloves, sports equipment ballistics glasses and phone cards.



These soldiers work with the Afghans to help them boost their economy. OTA sent them cold weather Under Armour to keep them warm in the harsh winter.



OTA sent books, music and movies to this Morale Center of the Counterinsurgency Center for Excellence. This group trains thousands of troops each year on proper tactics for combating terrorists in Iraq.



OTA sent these Marines healthy snacks and other needed items. These Marines provide communications in Iraq.

ADOPTIONS

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.

We are incredibly fortunate to have a great support network of groups of individuals, schools, churches, civic organizations, and companies who stepped up and adopted units this year, ensuring thousands of troops would receive their “wish list” items from OTA in time for Christmas.

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 just a few of these special stories.

SCHOOLS

Streams Elementary School in Oakdale, PA

The students of Streams Elementary school (*pictured right*) have participated in our “Silver for Soldiers” fundraisers several times over the years, and this year was no exception. These children poured their hearts and souls into their fund drive, raising \$2600. But they didn’t stop there! They also expressed their creativity and compassion by making dozens of Christmas cards for their adopted troops that OTA sent over in care packages for the holidays. An A+ effort indeed!



Eden Hall Upper Elementary and Richland Elementary Schools in Gibsonia, PA



Eden Hall is home to the 4th grade Outreach Club where the students made posters and banners and decorated the donation box where students in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades deposited collected toiletries. Many of the 41 club members also tapped into neighbors, family and friends for donations.

In conjunction with Eden, their sister school Richland Elementary, comprised of grades K-3, completed a “Silver for Soldiers” fundraising drive and collected almost \$1800! These students also collected snack items for our troops. All in all, the two schools collected several hundred pounds of supplies requested by our troops, and we are so proud of these children for their dedication to their Adopted Soldiers.

Quaker Valley Middle School in Sewickley, PA



When 7th grader Ben Cooper contacted OTA about adopting a unit for his school to support, little did we know how much energy, enthusiasm and talent this young man would exhibit in his project! He corresponded with OTA frequently to keep us updated on the goals and interim results of his fundraising project, and set up a strict timeline to keep his fellow students focused.

Not only was Ben able to lead his school in raising \$750 for his adopted unit of PA National Guard Soldiers from Pittsburgh to receive Nomex gloves, GPS systems, and communications radios, but he also compounded this effort with hand-made Christmas cards from his fellow students. Ben exhibited terrific leadership skills and we are proud to have him in our army of volunteers!

CHURCHES



Holy Rosary Church in Muse, PA

When Mary Duffy called OTA asking for a unit to adopt on behalf of her parish, she had no idea how successful that campaign would be. The parishioner’s of Holy Rosary raised \$1600 along with holiday cards for their adopted unit of Marines.

Christ Lutheran Church in Murrysville, PA

Imagine our surprise when Kris Meade, a representative from the Christ Lutheran Church pulled up with a van packed full of donated items for the troops! Box after box was unloaded, full of snacks and toiletries that were sent to our troops overseas. Monetary donations were also included as part of this special gift.

Ruthfred Lutheran Church in Bethel Park, PA

We are grateful to the generous parishioners of Ruthfred Lutheran, who adopted a unit of troops, and raised \$1000 for their unit’s “wish list.” Proceeds from this adoption were used to provide cold weather clothing to a unit of Sailors suffering from the cold in Afghanistan, and ballistics glasses to a unit of soldiers serving in Iraq.

BUSINESSES

GRL Solutions in Highlands Ranch, CO



One of OTA's several out-of-state "adopters," GRL Solutions, is a consulting firm near Denver that helps organizations focus on the fundamentals of performance. Indeed, their founding partner, Mike Abrashoff, is a former Navy Captain of the *USS Benfold* and best-selling author of leadership and organizational breakthroughs. GRL did a superb job of putting their business expertise to use in this project; we were thrilled, and their adopted unit even more so, by GRL's project that raised \$1500 for their soldiers!



The Catanese Group in Johnstown, PA

The Catanese Group has been a loyal supporter of our troops through OTA for several years with their holiday adoptions. This auditing, accounting, tax, and consulting management advisory services company adopted another unit this year, raising over \$1000 for their soldiers in Iraq, and even got another firm involved in their project.

The Fiserv Lending Solutions in Lake Mary, FL



Having adopted two units totaling 60 soldiers (1-26 Infantry Mortar Co. and C-Co. 2-2 Infantry – *pictured right*), two groups within Fiserv collected much needed items and monetary donations.



The company also sent a special Christmas shipment to both units over the holidays that included holiday treats, Christmas decorations and special gifts for every soldier. Now that's demonstrating troop support! Thanks to Fiserv employee Nancy Pelky for coordinating this effort.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Statelick Troop Party in Kittaning, PA

Every year, Andrea Edwards' family hosts a huge barbecue and picnic for friends and family at their home in Kittaning, PA. This year, they introduced a twist, asking their guests to bring one item from OTA's list of needed items for the troops. The response was staggering, and we stood flabbergasted as Andrea delivered box after box after box of much needed hygiene, snack and entertainment items. We send a big THANK YOU to the Edwards Family and their guests for demonstrating such overwhelming support for the troops!

CELL PHONES FOR SOLDIERS



Got an old cell phone? Did you know that **your old cell phone** can provide a deployed service member a **60 minute phone card** to call loved ones back home?

The **Cell Phones for Soldiers** (CPFS) program was started in April 2004 by 13-year-old Brittany Bergquist and her 12-year-old brother Robbie of Norwell, Massachusetts, with \$21 of their own money. Since then, the registered 501c3 non-profit organization has raised almost \$2 million in donations and distributed more than 500,000 prepaid calling cards to soldiers serving overseas by recycling old cell phones.

The phones are recycled by ReCellular, who pays Cell Phones for Soldiers for each donated phone – enough to provide an hour of talk time to soldiers abroad.

You can send your old phones free of charge to be recycled into CPFS phone cards. It's quick, easy and free! Go to www.CellPhonesForSoldiers.com for more information and to download **free shipping labels**.



Americans will replace almost 150 million cell phones this year.

Imagine how many phone cards that could provide our troops!

Why not send your old phones to Cell Phones for Soldiers?

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

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

"I really get lost for the right words when someone reaches out to my men like you all have. I know *Thank You* are only two words but I want your whole staff to know those two words come from my heart. Sleep well knowing that God and the HHC 1/112th will be guarding over you all." ~ *L.D.*

"We couldn't believe all the stuff you sent us. OTA is a fantastic organization!

The kindness of strangers is so refreshing. It really warms my heart to know that there are people like you out there, willing to help people so far away that you don't even know.

Please tell your volunteers *thank you so much* and they are amazing people to do this for us.

Your boxes definitely made a difference today. Care packages make our deployment a lot easier. You and your volunteers are a big part of what keeps us going. The items we received today will definitely go to good use and the kindness that came from them will go even farther. Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart!" ~ *Private First Class G.C.*

"Thanks for the golf items! We have already set up a small driving range behind the Headquarters. It's always nice to be able to step out and hit a few golf balls between mission briefs or other tasks. Even a couple golf balls a day makes a difference!" ~ *Lieutenant Colonel W.S.*

"My unit received the wonderful package of Under Armor pullovers from OTA and it was such a welcome sight! They brought huge smiles to everyone's face. It is very cold here right now and they are being worn daily. Thank you so much to the OTA staff and sponsors for your thoughtfulness and dedication. It means a lot knowing that folks back home remember us and care so much." ~ *Captain J.W.*

"Thanks so much for the care packages. And a BIG THANK YOU for all that you are doing for us. At home we probably would not be as excited to receive the items but here, these are "luxury" items for us. *Thanks* seems so small compared to what you do and how much we appreciate all that you do for us. I wish I were poetic enough to tell you and show you just what your acts of kindness do for us mentally. May God bless you and all your volunteers and supporters." ~ *Major N.C.*

"I have received your packages and would like to thank you so very much for supporting us over here. My fellow soldiers and I can't begin to explain how grateful we are to have people at home like you that take the time and effort to help us get through our deployment.

Thank you so much for everything you have done for us and the other service members you have helped in their deployments. It is Americans like you that make it all worth it." ~ *Specialist E.H.*

"All I can say is "Wow!" There are a lot of people who care about us! The boxes arrived and all that are left is boxes, empty ones. Everyone had hands everywhere! The soldiers were very happy for everything. I can't thank you guys enough. These care packages were greatly appreciated." ~ *Sergeant J.G.*

"You are amazing! We have received footballs, baseball bats, golf balls and so many more items. Amongst my troops & others your support has brought smiles to their faces. The footballs have spurred a notion to begin a local flag football tournament here locally. I want to thank you and your fellow supporters for the selfless actions you all have demonstrated. To be honest the response was not expected, I am lost for words." ~ *Staff Sergeant Q.S.*

"We have received the items and have put everything to good use.

The microwave has already been very well received with the folks here. We have enjoyed warm and peaceful meals. A very big deal – some days this really means a lot.

I do not know that I am adequately conveying the level of gratitude we have for the things your group has sent. I do not know if there are words to express that level. These things may seem small from your end but they mean a great deal here. Live well." ~ *Sergeant M.B.*

THE HUMANITARIAN MISSION

Our troops work very closely with the local populations of Iraq and Afghanistan, helping them rebuild schools, hospitals, and infrastructure. We often get requests for school supplies, clothing and stuffed animals for our troops to give the local villagers, as these neighbors turn into friends.

The following story is from Air Force Captain Randy Mester, whose unit OTA recently supported. Cpt. Mester's humanitarian missions are just as important as his military duties. This is just one example of how our military is improving the lives of the local population and caring for them like family...

She was playing in her neighborhood just like any normal five year old would do. But on this day, a man in a pickup truck had somewhere to be and he needed to be there now. We don't know whether he saw the girl or not, but he definitely didn't want to stop after he hit her.

A stranger came upon her and picked up her mangled, lifeless body. He put her in his car and drove to a place where he knew people would care for her and help her -- the American hospital on the air base nearby. Nobody knew who this girl was or where her family could be found.

As the American doctors fought to save her life, a call went out to the local Afghan police department. They knew there was a family somewhere that was wondering where their precious little girl wandered off to. The doctors were able to put her skull back together and couldn't find any serious internal injuries. They took care of this girl, sitting with her and comforting her day and night. They were her family for now and they showed her the love that they would have shown their own.

Two days after her surgery, the police found the girl's parents. When they came to the hospital to see her, the relief was obvious. Their little baby was beat up pretty badly but she was alive, safe, and well-cared for. When I went to visit four days after the accident, I found her in a wheelchair. She wore a pink helmet to protect her fractured skull that now had staples holding it together. She could open both of her bruised eyes for the first time in days. I knelt down next to her and told her she was beautiful. I handed her a little bunny with a pink ribbon which she held in her good hand.

When I asked her father how old she was, he responded through an interpreter that she was five years old. My first thought was of my five-year-old daughter at home and how much I missed her. I took out the picture of Brooke, showed it to her, and told her that they were the same age. She held the picture for a few minutes staring at my daughter. I don't know what was going through her mind, but mine was reeling. What if this was my daughter banged up and bruised? Would it take two days before they found me to tell me she was alright?

The father looked like the loving father you would hope to find by the side of this little girl. He shook my hand with BOTH hands...a sign of deep friendship and respect in this culture. He continually helped his daughter hold the stuffed bunny and held her hand while she colored in her new coloring book. He could have stayed home and let his wife stay at the hospital, but he chose to be with his daughter during her entire ordeal. He is still by her side today and plans to go nowhere until she is released.

I plan to visit more children that come to our hospital. I met a teenage boy that had a hernia operation and another little girl that was very sick with an unknown illness. All of these kids from Afghanistan are being helped by people that some in their country call "enemies." Some people in the USA say we shouldn't be here because all we do is negative and destructive. [continued]



Captain Randy Mester, standing in the back, cares for a five-year old girl in the hospital where her life was saved after a hit-and run. Her father has not left her side.

The more I see the more I believe that we should be here. We are helping people that have been forgotten by their government. People that have known nothing but war and sadness. People that are, well, people!



Captain Randy Mester, left, celebrates Thanksgiving with his fellow airmen in Afghanistan. These airmen oversee operations on their base and in remote outposts throughout the country.

Almost every letter and e-mail that I get says something about a prayer being said for me and my family. There is power in prayer and I can feel that every day and appreciate it more than I can put into words. But I am going to ask that all of you pray for the people of Afghanistan and Iraq. Pray for those who hurt and those who are causing the hurt. They need it just as much, if not more, than I do.

Things may never be perfect here, maybe not even close. But it will definitely be better because of the doctors, the military, and the prayers. Never lose focus on what is really going on here. It's a war, yes, but it's also a process to help those who can't help themselves. We are teaching these people how to help themselves, but it takes time.

We have to be patient with the process and we have to have confidence in our leadership from the President down to the airman. Thank you from all of us here for all of the support you give us.

SPECIAL THANKS

Many businesses, civic groups and individuals 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 and support.

OTA is very grateful to the management at the **Mall of Robinson** and the generous shoppers who stopped by the OTA table to sign Christmas and holiday cards for our troops and decorate the "Soldiers' Wish Tree." For six weeks during the Christmas shopping season, shoppers contributed thousands of dollars to fulfill "wish lists" for our troops, and signed hundreds of Christmas cards that OTA sent in our care packages. This was our third year at Robinson Mall for this event and it was our most successful ever! Special thanks to Shema Krinsky, Stephanie Fuchs and Catherine Oligeri at the mall for coordinating this event.



We thank **Clearview Federal Credit Union** in Moon Township for hosting a spectacular Craft and Gift Show in support of OTA. Dozens of business owners came to sell jewelry, candles, framed art, baked goods, purses, numerous brand name items, and much more all in support of our troops. The craft show generated \$800 for OTA. Special thanks to Michelle Cunningham and Lisa Fitz at Clearview for spearheading this project!



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



Alexander's Gym in Creighton, PA, held yet another special spinning class (their sixth since 2006!) 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 \$700 for their adopted unit, and signed a special *Thank You* banner for the troops as well.



For the second year in a row, **Jodi Tye** has run the Marine Corps Marathon in support of OTA and in honor of her son Sean, a Marine who was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in the USMC on January 3, 2009. Again this year, Jodi asked friends, family, and neighbors to sponsor her run. Their generosity was overwhelming yet again, as Jodi raised \$2000 for OTA! Way to go Jodi!



THIRD ANNUAL OTA VETERAN'S DAY RACE



Nearly 300 runners came to the Third Annual OTA Veteran's Day Race in Hampton Township, PA.

Even before the race began, participants in the Third Annual OTA Veteran's Day Race were enthusiastic, their spirits lifted by prizes to be won, the dramatic patriotic decorations along the course, the generously filled goody bags, and the varied entertainment to be enjoyed throughout the day.

After the conclusion of the race, all participants enjoyed a hearty meal featuring hot dogs, apple pie, bagels, fruit and hot drinks at the complimentary All-American Buffet.

All participants shared a common purpose, which was to raise funds for OTA's "wish list" projects in support of our deployed troops.

On that brisk clear Sunday morning in November, many varied purposes brought more than 300 people together.

- ★ Nearly 300 runners were attracted by the high caliber of competition which included some well known racers from Pittsburgh's running community.
- ★ Friends and family members of local veterans groups attended to show their support and to participate in some of the ceremonial moments of the festivities.
- ★ Representatives of several branches of the military, including the cadets of the Slippery Rock ROTC, came to express their support of their brothers-in-arms.
- ★ Dozens of spectators attended, accompanying their running pals and knowing they would be well entertained during the day by crowd favorites such as the St. Mary's Children's Choir, the well-known barbershop quartet "Three Rivers 4," and the antics of Miss Meg, the Patriotic Clown.

The race start was heralded by the stirring sound of Charlie Gleddich's bagpipe music as an honor guard comprised of local veterans presented the colors to the 300 runners gathered at the starting line. The color guard of American Legion veterans was accompanied by Dave Graver, an Army Veteran driving an authentic World War II Army Jeep. And volunteers, the children from the St. Mary's Choir, the Three Rivers 4 barbershop quarter singers, and the assembled runners joined together in singing a stirring rendition of the National Anthem.

Every participant added depth to the camaraderie enjoyed. And the unity of purpose was especially well-defined by a couple of participants.

- ★ Lt. Colonel John Ferrence was among the runners to support the efforts of OTA this year. Last year while he was in Iraq, his wife and sons ran, carrying his picture during the race in honor of his service.
- ★ One of those still deployed is a young Marine Lieutenant. His wife ran in his honor, pushing their infant son in a running-stroller.

The opportunity to honor and support our men and women in uniform is the purpose that has motivated the Veterans Day Race organizers and sponsors to create such a wonderful day for our community.

We are grateful to all the area businesses, families and individuals who contributed their time, talent and treasure to this wonderful annual event, particularly Race Coordinator Alice McLaughlin. We hope to see our old friends, and many new ones at this year's race, which is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, November 8, 2009.



The "Most Junior" Runner: Two month old Michael Boyle came out for his first OTA Veterans Day race.

His father, Marine Lieutenant Chuck Boyle, is currently serving in Iraq, deployed one day after his son was born.



The "Most Senior" Runner: Retired Presbyterian Reverend Arthur Joachim is a WWII veteran.

In 1943, he left his high-school prom to head directly to the recruiting office where he enlisted in the Navy.

At 83 years old, Arthur began running 27 years ago and has run a total of 2,257 miles in long-distance races!

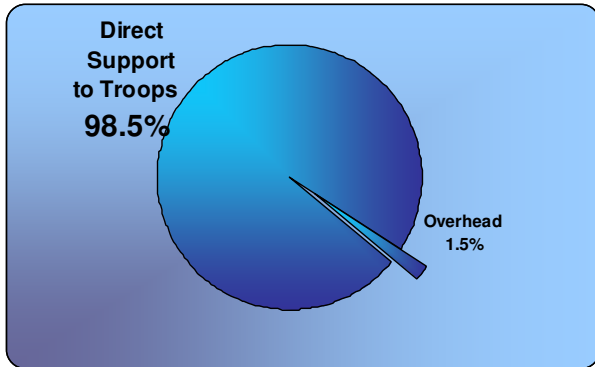
MORE SUCCESS STORIES...

Since our last newsletter update, **4,400 more deployed troops** comprising **65 units** received “wish list” items from OTA, bringing the total number of troops who have benefited from OTA to over 47,000!

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

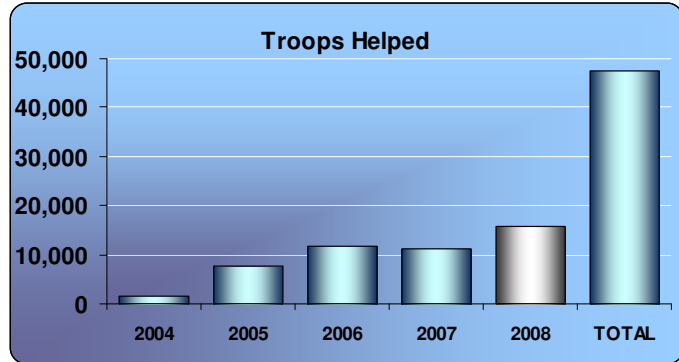
Branch	Mission	Wish List Fulfilled
Marines 	This engineering platoon helps rebuild areas in Iraq.	Nomex gloves, skull caps, strap cutters
Air Force 	Serving in Kuwait, these airmen provide munitions support for base defense, combat flights and convoys into Iraq and the Horn of Africa.	Snacks, board games, phone cards
Army 	These soldiers provide sustenance to a detainee prison in Iraq. They maintain positive control, prevent escapes and provide education to model detainees.	Tactical flashlights, phone cards
Navy 	These sailors from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, WA, work to deny the enemy the use of radio and radar communication in Afghanistan.	Cold weather facemasks and socks
Marines 	This Marine infantry Company trains the Iraqi police and performs security patrols. They are from Camp LeJeune, NC.	DVDs, pillows, hygiene items, reading material
Army 	These PA National guard soldiers provide base security and do patrols in Iraq.	Range finders, Rite in Rain books, GPS systems, radios, gloves, suspenders, belts
Navy 	These sailors from Whidbey Island provide air support in Afghanistan.	Board games, magazines, games
Army 	These Reservists from Colorado maintain the logistics that support combat troops in Iraq.	Craft kits – model airplanes and car sets, needlepoint
Air Force 	From various US Airforce bases, these airmen perform aircraft maintenance in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Joint Task Forces in the Horn of Africa.	Play Station 2 and games for their Morale Center
Army 	The soldiers of this infantry brigade help establish peace and security in Afghanistan. They are from Ft. Campbell, KY.	Gerber knives
Marines 	These Marines from Camp LeJeune transport troops and gear among bases in Iraq.	Under Armour, coffee supplies, blankets
Air Force 	From McGuire AFB, NJ, these airmen provide air transportation in Iraq.	Golf clubs and golf balls
Army 	The mission is confidential per OPSEC, but these soldiers serve in Afghanistan under dangerous conditions and in spartan accommodations.	Christmas decorations, hygiene items, video games, snacks

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 47,000 troops since our inception in July 2004.

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 ensure our troops feel the love and support we send them from home. **Every dollar matters!**

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

OTA is a 501c3 non-profit organization.
 Donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

GOLF – IT'S NOT JUST A GAME ANYMORE!

Our troops often ask for sporting goods in their "wish lists," including golf equipment. A great many of our troops have a love for the game of golf and have found it to be a perfect way to relax and unwind after patrols or during down time. Additionally, our injured veterans have found that golf provides successful rehabilitation as they recover from war-related injuries.

OTA has been fortunate to be the recipient of donated golf equipment from **Mark Martens, The Golf Shop Clubs & Repairs, Inc.** The Golf Shop has donated thousands of golf balls and dozens of sets of clubs to OTA so we can get them in the hands of our soldier-golfers.

Most recently, OTA was able to direct more of Mark's donated equipment to two other troop support organizations, "**Fore Our Soldiers**" and "**Tee It Up For The Troops**," both dedicated to giving deployed soldiers free golf equipment. "**Tee It Up For The Troops**" also donates golf equipment to injured soldiers to assist them with rehabilitation efforts.

Thanks to Mark and his efforts to provide refurbished equipment to our troops, many of our deployed soldiers have a way to enjoy a favorite past time, and our injured soldiers are recovering through the game of golf.

It won't be long before the snow has melted and we all prepare to hit the links this spring. Make sure you visit The Golf Shop for your golf repair and equipment needs. While you're there, thank Mark Martens for his kind and generous gifts to our troops!



The Golf Shop has donated thousands of clubs and balls to our deployed troops and recovering wounded veterans. It's located at 3323 Washington Rd., McMurray, PA 15317.

OTA AT THE AUSA CONFERENCE

Operation Troop Appreciation was honored to be a guest at the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) annual conference in Washington, DC. The conference was held in October and featured a number of forums and sessions dedicated to troop support and family readiness groups, in addition to military education and tactical classes.

OTA Vice President, Monica Orluk attended as the guest of The Military Family Network (MFN), a group that provides resources to our military and their families covering all subjects from enlistment through retirement.

The most significant event of the conference was an update on the Iraqi War Troop Surge, presented by General David Petraeus. This session detailed how the Army was able to successfully implement the troop surge over a 19-month period and secure areas of Iraq that had previously been under siege by terrorist groups.

Following the speech, General Petraeus greeted members of the audience and Monica was honored to be among those who were given the opportunity to meet and speak with him.

The conference presented OTA with the wonderful opportunity to connect to the troop support community, the vendors who help us provide items to our troops and many members of the military. Our hope is that this is the first of many visits to the AUSA conference and that we have the chance to expand our network of support in the future.



MFN's Darryl Shue and Luis Trevino with Monica.



General Petraeus greets OTA VP, Monica Orluk.

DEFIANCE FIGHT GEAR CHOOSES TO BENEFIT OTA

The **Defiance Fight Gear** (DFG) team has launched a campaign to show their support for those who are currently serving or have served in the United States Armed Forces.

Through the sale of a uniquely designed "Remember Our Fallen" t-shirt, Defiance Fight Gear has chosen to support active duty troops, fallen soldiers and military families. A donation of \$10 from the sale of each t-shirt is being donated to these organizations and OTA is fortunate to be one of them!

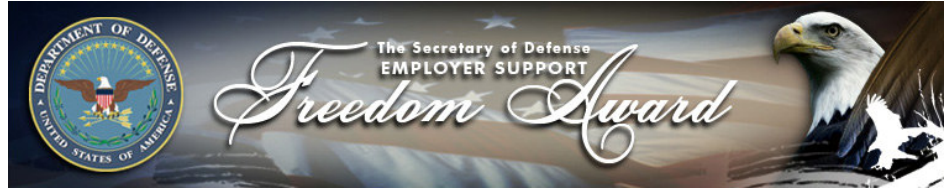
Businesses can become part of a permanent "Wall of Fame" on the Defiance Fight Gear website which will contain graphics of, and links to, any business or organization that purchases a minimum of twenty-five "Remember the Fallen" shirts for their members or staff. And companies who send a photo of their staff wearing the shirts will be included in a tribute slideshow on the DFG's website. What a great way to secure advertising!



Visit www.DefianceFightGear.com and click on the *Support The Troops* button for more information and to purchase your t-shirt today.

2009 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE EMPLOYER SUPPORT FREEDOM AWARD

Is your employer an exceptional supporter of its National Guard or Reserve employees?



Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), a Department of Defense agency, is seeking nominations of employers who support their military employees. Nominations for the 2009 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award are being accepted now through Jan. 21 at FreedomAward.mil.

National Guard and Reserve members and their families are eligible—and encouraged—to nominate their employers.

The Freedom Award was instituted in 1996 by ESGR to recognize exceptional support from the employer community. The award is the highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their outstanding support of their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

Almost one-half of the U.S. military is comprised of the National Guard and Reserve. The Department of Defense shares these citizen warriors with their civilian employers, many of whom provide significant support to their employees who serve in the National Guard and Reserve.

Past recipients of the award range from a small family-owned transportation business in Utah to large businesses, including Chrysler and Dominion Resources, to the City of Austin, Texas, a public sector employer. Past recipients have provided full salary, continuation of benefits, care packages and even family support to employees fulfilling their military obligation.

The 2009 recipients will be announced in the spring and honored on September 17, 2009, at the 14th annual Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Recipients of the 2008 award met with President George W. Bush and Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, and received their awards from Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, Dr. David Chu, at a ceremony attended by members of Congress and senior government and military officials.

THE OTA NEWSLETTER

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Until next time, may God bless America and the troops who defend her.