

Kristen's Corner

Dear OTA Friends,

On July 1, we celebrate a very important milestone... the Two Year Anniversary of OTA!

My, how long ago it seems that we were providing Under Armour® t-shirts and socks for our first military unit – the 420 soldiers of the 1/201st Field Artillery West Virginia National Guard.

Since then, more than 12,000 troops in over 100 deployed units throughout Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Qatar, the Horn of Africa, and New Orleans have received random acts of kindness and “wish list” gifts from OTA.

Our army of volunteers and supporters has grown from 8 to more than 1,000 in two years! Over that time, 95 cents of every donated dollar has gone directly to provide for our troops – a statistic that makes us very proud since it's one of the highest in the non-profit world!

How grateful I am to have met now Vice President Monica Orluk at a Fourth of July event in 2004, for she has been a better business partner and friend than I could have ever imagined on that day. Thank you Monica for your ceaseless passion, energy and always introducing yourself to people in airports!

Yes, we have come a long way, and it is cause to celebrate in a big way. And as long as we still have troops in harm's way, we still have a long way to go.

Come along with us, and let's see together where the next two years will lead us!

Sincerely,
Kristen Holloway, President OTA



Soldier Update from Iraq



As reported in our last newsletter, OTA had the opportunity to work with a very special group of 180 infantry soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division.

These soldiers lost their personal possessions to a tragic fire in February at their Forward Operating Base (FOB), Camp Yusufiyah. In addition to Under Armour® t-shirts for every soldier, OTA also sent acoustic guitars to help with stress relief between missions.

We recently learned that tragedy once again struck this FOB. On Friday, June 16, Spc. David J. Babineau, 25, was killed during an attack on a checkpoint and Pfc. Kristian Menchaca, 23, and Pfc. Thomas L. Tucker, 25, were captured and held by insurgents. Their bodies were found several days later and their brutal deaths have sparked outrage across the nation.

In typical military fashion, the soldiers left behind carry on their duties and wish only to complete their missions and return home to their families. Sgt. Justin Anderson, our point-of-contact for this unit, felt it important to let OTA's volunteers and sponsors know how much the support from back home meant to his soldiers who have been burdened with so much hardship in a few short months....

***“One of the guys is getting pretty good now [at playing the guitar], and he owes it all to you. Well, and to my awesome teaching of course!*”**

The Under Armour rocks, especially since we've been doing a few missions and occupying houses without A/C. Plus, after our checkpoint got attacked and we spent 7 days looking for our guys (as I'm sure you've seen on the news), it got pretty hot and they worked well. Thank you so much!”

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and brothers-in-arms of Pfc Menchaca, Pfc Tucker and Spc Babineau, soldiers from this FOB of 180 who lost their lives on June 20. May God hold and protect the souls of these American sons.





Left to right: 2nd Lieutenant Ryan Anderson, Sergeant Justin Anderson, SGT James Hellberg play the guitars OTA sent them.

Cross-Country Walk Supports OTA



Adam Goodrich and Christopher Tapp walk up to 20 miles each day under the weight of gear-laden backpacks and across uneven terrain. They face extreme weather conditions and unfamiliar faces. They also know it could be much worse.

Adam, 24, and Chris, 27, know their relative hardships pale in comparison to the conditions U.S. soldiers stationed in Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the world face on a daily basis. So the pair set out on a cross-country journey to raise money for OTA.

The 3,000 mile-plus journey started June 3 in Seattle and is scheduled to end this fall in the pair's hometown of Clearwater, Fla.

While their exact route is subject to daily changes, the two walkers plan to pass through Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia before returning to their home state.



Chris (left) and Adam start their 3,000 mile cross-country journey on Saturday, June 3 in Seattle, Washington.

Adam and Chris are also scheduled to visit with soldiers across the country who have recently returned from active duty.

The first of these meetings occurred with Corporal Clay Hull, a soldier OTA helped in July 2005, and who is now recovering from injuries sustained in an IED attack in Iraq. OTA arranged for the walkers to meet with Corporal Hull who lives in Yakima, WA., which happened to be along the walkers' route. Clay, Adam and Chris were able to meet and spend time together before the duo moved on.

"It's an honor to meet these men and women who sacrifice so much, and we're incredibly proud to represent Operation Troop Appreciation on this trek," said Adam. "OTA was the inspiration for our five-month journey, and we hope to raise awareness and funds, so OTA can continue to provide for our soldiers deployed around the world."

Follow their journey in their blog on OTA's website www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org.



Hoops for Heroes



Join Operation Troop Appreciation, The PA National Guard and Robert Morris University as we present "Hoops for Heroes."

The event is a "Free-Throw" competition where participants attempt to make the highest number of consecutive free throws on a standard ten-foot basketball hoop. Prizes will go to the top three scores.

The event will be held at Robert Morris University in Moon Township from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Monday, September 11, 2006.

Come out and enjoy this day with soldiers from the PA National Guard and throw a few hoops for charity!

OTA is actively seeking corporate and private sponsorships to make this event successful.

If you'd like to learn how to be a sponsor of this event, please call VP Monica Orluk at 412-759-0696 or Sgt. Michael Fisher at 412-841-6843.



Blues Eyed Blonde Rocks For The Troops!

The Hard Rock Café in Pittsburgh, PA marked the site for Blues Eyed Blonde's "Back from Iraq" concert, April 30, 2006.

Band guitarist, Anthony Caldarelli, a Captain with the 463rd Combat Engineers, recently returned home from a one year deployment to Iraq. While deployed, Tony's company received gifts from OTA, including musical equipment that the troops used for downtime jam sessions, worship services and to provide music lessons to other soldiers.

Overall, the evening was a major success! Thank you to Blues Eyed Blonde for rocking the house, NFL Quarterback Marc Bulger, Captain Tony Caldarelli and Blues Eyed Blonde band members for helping to promote the event!



Blues Eyed Blonde brought the house down with their amazing music. Members left to right are: Capt. Tony Caldarelli (guitar), drummer Bill Halle, lead singer Dee Dee Fisher, and bass player Scott Lambert.



St. Louis Rams Quarterback Marc Bulger, a Pittsburgh native, was on hand to sign autographs and meet with the soldiers and OTA supporters in attendance. He poses here with VP Monica Orluk (left) and President Kristen Holloway (right).

LTC Michael McLaughlin Memorial Golf Outing



Medals, certificates, commendations and pictures on display the day of the outing gave golfers and volunteers a glimpse into the accomplished military career of LTC McLaughlin.

On Saturday, May 6, 2006 The Oak View Golf Club in Slippery Rock, PA played host for a charity golf outing in memory of Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. McLaughlin. LTC McLaughlin was a member of the 1-107th Field Artillery Unit of the Pennsylvania National Guard. He lived in Mercer, PA and died from injuries sustained on January 6, 2006 in Ramadi, Iraq.

The day started cool and windy, but the golfers were ready as they took to the links at 1:00 p.m. While "The Swinging Studs" came in with the lowest score, all in attendance were winners, as the day was an overwhelming success for OTA.

An awards banquet afterwards was highlighted by a special presentation to LTC McLaughlin's wife and father by good friend, OTA volunteer, and retired Staff Sergeant from the 1-107th, Dave Hartsell. A silent auction and door prize give-aways rounded out the post dinner activities.

Golfers from as far away as Colorado came to support OTA and the McLaughlin family.

Special thanks go to event partners, Oak View Country Club and First & Goal Sports. First & Goal provided dozens of sports memorabilia items that were auctioned off at the awards banquet. Kudos to all the sponsors, golfers and volunteers who worked so hard to make this event a great success!

Thank you also to volunteers Stephanie Jones and her daughter Beth, Peggy and Bob Graeser, and Leigh Ann Schreiber for their help this day.



Golf fanatics Sgt. Brian Kaminski, Sgt. Michael Fisher, SSG Jeffrey Wiseman and CW3 Tom McNamara of the 107th Field Artillery tee off at the 2nd hole. These soldiers all served under LTC McLaughlin's fine leadership.

Camp Victory Gets a Big Load!

In June, the soldiers at Jack's Café at Camp Victory (at an undisclosed location in the Middle East) had some heavy lifting to do! Answering a request for miscellaneous items for hundreds of soldiers, OTA sent 10 boxes weighing almost 500 pounds to our contact at Camp Victory.

Jack's Café is a quiet place where troops can study, read, play games and just relax from their day to day duties. Camp Victory is a resting stop for most troops going into and out of theater, and Jack's Café subsists on donations of essential items which they then provide to troops at no cost.



OTA sent snacks, games, books, hygiene items, CDs, Under Armour®, writing supplies, socks, and first aid kits, among other things, for distribution among soldiers at Camp Victory. Here the troops receive a truckload of ten boxes from OTA.

Screaming Eagles US Troop Support Bike Run

The streets of Pittsburgh will be rumbling on September 10 when bikers from all over Western Pennsylvania converge to ride and show their support for deployed troops, during the Screaming Eagles US Troop Support Bike Run.

The motorcycle run begins at 11:30 am at Roma's Restaurant at 8350 Perry Highway in McCandless, PA (on Rt. 19 just north of downtown Pittsburgh). A pig roast, entertainment, and raffles will follow.

The cost to ride is \$20 (\$10 for passengers and other guests) and all proceeds benefit OTA. Come on out for a great day and show your support!

Visit our website for a link to more information and pre-registration www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org



Supporting OTA

Since we are a non-governmental agency, OTA can only fund its work for deployed troops with donations from generous individuals and businesses. Please tell your friends, family, and co-workers how important it is to support those who sacrifice for us everyday, and make a donation if you can.

We also accept new or gently used DVDs, CD, video games, and unused international 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

On behalf of our troops, we thank you for your kind support!