



# Holiday Salute

# Year-End Giving

Americans donate more than \$2.5 billion annually to more than 40,000 military-related charities every year, Charity Navigator says.

Charity Navigator is a free site that gives you access to data and tools to guide your charitable giving. Here are some military and veterans organizations it gives a gold star to.

## **DAV (DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS) CHARITABLE SERVICE TRUST**

Charity Navigator gives this group four stars and a top score of 100 out of 100. Based in Kentucky, this organization supports physical and psychological rehabilitation programs that provide direct service to ill, injured or wounded veterans. These programs typically include providing food, shelter and other necessary items to homeless or at-risk veterans; accessibility or mobility items for veterans with vision or hearing impairments; therapeutic activities; physical and psychological activities for rehabilitation; and other services.

## **GARY SINISE FOUNDATION**

Based in Los Angeles, the actor's foundation gets a 98.23 out of 100 and four stars from



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Charity Navigator. Its outreach efforts support active duty military, first responders and their loved ones. The foundation has nine key programs to show support for these groups through entertainment, family support and acts of appreciation.

## **K9S FOR WARRIORS**

This Florida-based group scores a 97.27 out of 100 and gets four stars. It is the nation's largest provider of service dogs

to disabled American veterans, focusing on mitigating symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, military sex trauma and preventing military suicide. The organization provides a certified service dog, equipment, training, seminars, legal instruction, veterinary care, housing, meals and wrap-around services at no cost to the servicemember. About 90% of their service dogs come from shelters or

owner surrenders.

## **SEMPER FI & AMERICA'S FUND**

The Quantico, Virginia-based group gets 97.28 out of 100 and four stars. It supports all branches of injured servicemembers, veterans and military families through direct financial assistance, programming for injured service members and families, education support and career assistance, and health and wellness ser-

vices and resources.

## **SPIRIT OF AMERICA**

Another Virginia-based group, Spirit of America, gets a 95.57 out of 100 and four stars from Charity Navigator. It works with troops and diplomats to save and improve lives, promote values shared by Americans and America's allies, strengthen relationships with those allies, and demonstrate that the U.S. is a friend of those who seek to live a better life.



# Military Care Packages

The holidays are a great time for sharing blessings with military members deployed overseas by sending a military care package.

While it can be tempting to shove all kinds of things in there that a deployed service-member might find helpful, there are ways to make sure you're sending things that really help.

## CHOOSING THE BOX

Try using a USPS Priority Mail shipping box. Bonus, they're free from your local post office. You can also order a free Military Care Kit from the USPS that contains special boxes. It comes with two Priority Mail APO/FPO flat-rate boxes, two Priority Mail Medium flat-rate boxes, Priority Mail tape and address labels, and customs forms. You can order them by calling (800) 610-8734.

Now that you've got a box, be sure you don't overstuff it. Boxes that are too full can pop open during shipping and not make it to their final destination.

## ITEMS TO PACK

Choose travel-sized items when you can, and enclose them in zip-top storage bags that the servicemember can use to keep their items dry and sand-free. Here are some useful items to pack for cold weather:



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- Disposable hand and foot warmers.
- Long underwear.
- Fingerless gloves.
- Stocking caps.
- Chocolates.
- Hot beverage mixes.
- For those serving in hotter climates, try:
  - Powdered drink mixes or water flavorings.
  - Bandannas.
  - Wash cloths.

- Wipe rags
- Handy wipes or baby wipes.
- Sunscreen.
- Welcome all year and in any climate:
  - Handwritten letters or children's drawings.
  - Photos.
  - Jokes.
  - Scrapbooks filled with mementos from home.
  - The Sunday comics from

- your local newspaper.
- Writing paper.
- Pens and pencils.
- Envelopes.
- Coffee and creamer.
- Snacks and energy bars.
- Tuna fish kits.
- Sardines.
- Non-perishable beef jerky.
- USDA beef summer sausage.
- Breath mints.
- Canned cheese, chips and

- salsa.
- Dips.
- Nuts.
- Microwave popcorn.
- Dried fruit.
- Pudding and fruit cups.
- Single-serve cereals.
- Ramen noodles.
- Soup mix.
- Girl Scout cookies.
- Hot sauce.
- Travel versions of chess, checkers, dice and other games.
- Headphones and ear buds.
- Magazines and puzzle books.
- Vapo-Rub.
- Cough drops.
- Eye drops and nose spray.
- Hairbrushes.
- Hand lotion.
- Foot powder and fungal cream.
- Shampoo.
- Sunscreen.
- Moleskin and blister packs.
- Boot socks in black, green, brown and tan.
- Sunglasses.
- Baseball caps.
- Nitrile gloves.
- T-shirts in black, brown and tan.
- Plastic utensils.
- Beanie babies.
- Travel pillow.
- Twin-sized sheets.
- Can opener.
- Lens cleaning cloths.
- Phone cards from AAFES.
- Small American flags.
- Batteries, AA, AAA, D, C and 9-volt.
- Duct tape.
- Flashlights.
- Fans.
- Fly strips.



# Honor a Loved One's Memory

Holidays are particularly difficult for those mourning someone lost while serving their country.

There are services available to help you get through these tough days. Remember, there is no wrong way to grieve. Your grief will depend on your personality, life experiences and your own coping styles.

## ACTIVE GRIEF

The Department of Veterans Affairs says that there are four tasks of grief that help someone become an active participant in their grieving process.

Accepting the reality of your loss means to break through the denial to understand that a death has occurred and is permanent. Next, move on to mourning that death. Distracting yourself from the pain may make you feel better, but eventually it will return unless you can heal. It will take time, but work on adjusting to the reality in which your loved one is missing. Reach out for support when you need it and be patient with yourself as you form a new identity that is not intertwined with your loved one.

## GETTING SUPPORT

There are many support groups available for those mourning military losses.



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There are bereavement camps for adults and children alike, online support tools such as webinars and other educational materials, and the military community around you may also offer counseling and other services. Building a network of solid support will be critical to your healing process.

## WAYS TO HONOR THEIR MEMORY

How you choose to meaningfully honor your loved one's memory depends on you, your grief and your support network. Here are some other stories of honoring loss that may help.

At Fort Drum, a Gold Star

family helps create special Christmas trees around the post decorated with ornaments featuring a fallen soldier from the fort's 10th Mountain Division. "It brings a sense of closure," Ashleigh Carlin, whose brother, Michael, was killed by an IED in 2007 told Spectrum News 1.

"It's a part of the healing process. It's a part of the grief process. It helps your soul, really.

At home, consider adding ornaments with your lost loved one to the tree, if you're ready. Or consider helping out with a similar activity as Carlin's. You may be surprised at how healing it can be.



# Military Gift Guide

Military members and their families can seem hard to buy for. There are myriad rules about what servicemembers can receive, and supporting families that move often can be tricky, too.

Never fear, we've compiled the ultimate military gift guide for veterans, servicemembers and their families.

## GIFTS FOR DEPLOYMENTS

- Headlamp, preferably one that's adjustable in angle, light color and brightness. Water-resistant is a bonus, too.
- Travel organizer that's easy to clean and tough to withstand wear and tear.
- A good multitool that's geared toward outdoor survival and emergency preparedness.
- A good pair of sunglasses that are impact resistant and have high definition optics.
- A rugged water bottle that's insulated.
- Portable power banks with plenty of tough cords for all their devices.
- Earbuds, especially if they're noise-canceling.

## GIFTS FOR VETERANS

- Challenge coins and a challenge coin holder.
- Coffee, especially if it's from a company that supports



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veterans causes, such as Black Rifle Coffee, Ranger Coffee or GI Joe Coffee.

- A tactical stocking or beer koozie.
- A custom phone case, wallet or flask with their branch of service.
- A T-shirt subscription service, such as the one offered by The Valhalla Project, which uses proceeds to deliver plaques to the families of fallen service members.

• A display case for medals, patches, ribbons and other service mementos.

## GIFTS FOR FAMILIES

- A Hug-A-Hero is a great gift for young children missing someone deployed away from home. The site also offers dog tags, baby lovies and pet pillows.
- A USO Wishbook lets you purchase gifts for servicemembers to celebrate special occasions.

Visit [usowishbook.uso.org](http://usowishbook.uso.org).

- Portraits of Love is a group that sets up photo shoots for servicemembers' families across the country to send memorable photos both to servicemembers deployed abroad and families at home. Even if you can't get in touch with this group, setting up an appointment with a local photographer is a great idea.
- Trees for Troops provides

free, farm-grown Christmas trees to servicemembers and families in all branches of the military.

- Gift cards are a great idea, especially for the base Exchange.
- Meal delivery services, restaurant gift cards and grocery gift cards.
- Photo albums, for families to keep and for deployed servicemembers to take with them.



# Supporting Military Families

The holidays can be a difficult time for military families, especially if they've got a loved one deployed.

Here are some programs that help support military families during the holiday season.

## **FAMILY CENTER SUPPORT**

The family centers at many military installations offer assistance during the holidays, including taking in donations for families in need. Reach out to the family readiness group, chaplain or Morale, Welfare and Recreation Office at your local military installation to see how you can help.

## **PAY AWAY THE LAYAWAY**

This group surprises families by paying off their layaway balances that include gifts, clothes and other necessities for their children. They select both civilian and military families across the country and pay off their balances to help make the holidays a little easier.

## **OPERATION HELP A HERO: OPERATION CHRISTMAS SPIRIT**

This group supports military families, single service-members and unit morale events during the holiday season. You can adopt a family, host an angel tree, collect gift cards, donate online at [operationhelpahero.org](http://operationhelpahero.org), host a toy drive and more.

## **SPIRIT OF SHARING**

Spirit of Sharing is a southern California group dedicated to helping military families during the holiday season. Traditionally, the group focuses on families with children and families that have been or are being deployed abroad. Each family gets groceries and gifts, including clothing, educational materials and toys. Throughout the year, the group also provides emergency assistance for families. Learn how you can help spread the joy at [spiritof-sharing.org/how-to-help](http://spiritof-sharing.org/how-to-help).

## **OPERATION HOMEFRONT**

This group helps military families thrive, not just get by. It provides financial and housing assistance, caregiver support services, and family services. It says that 88% of its expenditures go directly towards delivering programs and services to military families. It's provided more than 140,000 meals to military and veteran families, housed 700 families in permanent homes and given \$33 million in relief to more than 40,000 requests. It hosts holiday meals for military families as well as a holiday toy drive that's helped more than 200,000 military children. You can help collect or distribute toys in your area; visit [operationhomefront.org/holiday-toy-drive](http://operationhomefront.org/holiday-toy-drive) to learn more.





# Military Holiday Traditions

Serving in the military isn't all tanks and guns. It has its own holiday traditions, too.

Keep reading to learn about what our servicemen and women do to help spread joy around the country.

## NORAD TRACKS SANTA

Every Christmas Eve, millions of children track Santa's journey through the North American Aerospace Defense Command's Santa Tracker. NORAD, traditionally tasked with protecting the skies over North America, is uniquely suited for this mission, which it faithfully executed since 1955.

"Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, NORAD defends North America by tracking airplanes, missiles, space launches and anything else that flies in or around the North American continent," said Air Force Gen. Glen D. VanHerck, NORAD's commander.

NORAD's 47 radar installations across Alaska and Canada pick up Santa as soon as he departs from the North Pole. It also tracks him by using U.S. Air Force and Canadian Air Force fighter jets. The jets escort him safely through North American airspace.

## YULETIDE JUMPS

The vaunted 82nd Airborne



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Division gives back to its North Carolina community by hosting All American Presents from Paratroopers every year. Paratroopers who donate a toy get a raffle ticket for a chance to earn foreign jump wings during a two-day airborne operation. In 2020, the event collected more than 1,500 toys for the Children's Home

Society of North Carolina, Fort Bragg USO, Armed Services YMCA, the Cumberland County Sheriff's Department and the Fayetteville Urban Ministry.

## TOYS FOR TOTS

Every year, nearly 40,000 Marines, Marine Corps League members, veterans and volun-

teers help the Toys for Tots effort, which collects new, unwrapped toys to distribute to children at Christmas. The program began in 1947 when Marine Corps Reserve Maj. Bill Hendricks' wife, Diane, made dolls for her husband to take to an agency that delivered toys to children. When Bill couldn't find one, Diane

told him to start it himself. That year, Hendricks' reserve unit collected and distributed 5,000 toys in the Los Angeles area. The Marine Corps commandant ordered it to be a national program the next year. Now, Toys for Tots distributes an average of 18 million toys to 7 million children every year.





EMANUEL LEUTZE/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

# Military Actions at Christmas

While Christmas is traditionally a time of peace and joy, it's also the anniversary of several military actions.

Celebrate these troops' hardship and sacrifice as you sit around the tree this year.

## **1776: WASHINGTON CROSSES THE DELAWARE**

Late on Christmas night, Gen. George Washington marshaled his troops to cross the icy Delaware River into Trenton, New Jersey, in the Battle of Trenton.

The win raised the frozen Continental Army's spirits and revived the hope of American colonists, who were beginning to fear for their battle

for independence.

## **1864: THE FIRST BATTLE OF FORT FISHER**

Christmas 1864, the Union attacked a Confederate stronghold at Fort Fisher in North Carolina. They tried to blow up the fort's walls adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean with an explosives-packed warship, but that failed. On Christmas Eve, they bombarded the fort with heavy gunfire. By Christmas morning, Union commanders attempted to prepare an area for a troop landing, but that didn't work, either. The fort didn't fall until

January 1865, three months before the Civil War ended.

## **1868: CONFEDERATE PARDON**

President Andrew Johnson extended a full pardon and amnesty to Confederate soldiers and sympathizers who "directly or indirectly, participated in the late insurrection or rebellion." The Civil War had ended more than three years earlier.

## **1896: STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER**

John Philip Sousa, a former director of the U.S. Marine Band, wrote "Stars and Stripes Forever" on Christmas Day 1896 while crossing the Atlantic on his way home. It became American's national march in 1897.

## **1972: OPERATION LINEBACKER II**

The Christmas season of 1972 found American troops in the middle of the biggest bombing mission in military history as it strafed North Vietnamese forces in Operation Linebacker II. This operation consisted of 11 successive days of raids by B-52 Stratofortress bombers, dropping 15,000 tons of bombs in 729 sorties.

The U.S. Department of Defense says the raids destroyed or damaged 1,600 structures, 500 rail targets, 10 airfields and 80% of North Vietnam's electricity-generating capability. From U.S. forces, 15 B-52s were destroyed, killing 35 men and leading to the capture of nearly 40 more.