



Holiday
SALUTE

A Simple Thank You

It's really easy to find ways to show your appreciation for friends and family members in the military.

You can join an organization that sends care packages or plan a surprise party for a returning service member.

But a simple, sincere thank-you can go a long way, too. It helps members of the military to know that their efforts are not going unrecognized, especially since being away from their friends and family members for long periods of time can be an emotionally stressful experience.

WRITE A LETTER

Think about all the things your friend or family member has sacrificed to protect your freedom. How does it make you feel? Proud? Happy? Both?

One of the best ways to convey this is by putting it in words. Send your special military member a hand-written note or collection of notes this holiday season.

You also can involve other members of the family in pulling off a special note salute. Have everyone who knows the military member write a sentence or two about how they're feeling. Send them all together for a meaningful gift.

MAKE A VIDEO

Think of a wedding video in which various friends and members of the family send the special couple good wishes. You can apply the same method to creating a video for your special service member.

Start with friends and family members, but then branch out to others who are willing to participate. Co-workers, past teachers and past bosses are all great sources to add to your video.

Give your sources a few weeks to prepare what they will say on the video. Ask them to share any stories and be as long-winded as they like. You can always go back and edit the video before showing it.



First Holiday Deployment

Is this your first holiday season being away from a friend or family member in the military? It can be a trying experience for even the strongest of families.

There is the emotional and psychological disconnect that deployment can create, as well as the consequences felt by children.

Maintaining a routine is key to making it through the deployment, and preparing what that routine will look like can be just as crucial.

HOUSEHOLD REQUIREMENTS

If one person in your household typically takes responsibility for important finances or grocery shopping, make sure you adequately prepare the other for the role.

This will likely be an already stressful time. Try to make things easy by running through where all passwords are stored for billing accounts or what kinds of brands to avoid buying at the store. These may seem like minuscule issues, but routine means everything during a deployment.

PLAN FOR COMMUNICATION

One of the toughest things about deployment is the uncertainty of when you will be able to connect over the phone or Internet. Even though there may be some



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changes in the schedule from time to time, it is important to have a general plan set.

Choose a time that works best for talking over the phone and a schedule of how often you will be able to talk. If letters and emails are easier, let

each other know if routines change so an unanswered email or text doesn't cause major concern or worry.

COPE WITH STRESS

For both the soldier and the

ones left behind, a deployment can cause emotional challenges. If you're having trouble adjusting to this transition, consider reaching out to those around you for support.

There are support groups

you can join, as well, which will help you meet people struggling with the same issues. Professional counseling also can be a great way of identifying and dealing with the most challenging matters at hand.

Tips for An In-Person Salute

If possible, the greatest way to give your military friend or family member a holiday salute is to travel to them.

Flying over the holidays seems to cost more and more every year. The average domestic airfare for the weeks of Thanksgiving and Christmas is \$383, according to travel site Expedia.

On peak travel days around the holidays, airlines generally charge more in order to make up for the lack of business travelers on those days. And higher rates can be cost-prohibitive for a family on a set vacation budget, especially around the holidays. But there are certain steps you can take to make sure your wallet isn't hit too hard.

If you find an affordable fare early in your search, your best bet may be to scoop it up.

BE FLEXIBLE

If your schedule allows, why not add a few days to your trip? Doing so can help you save money before or after peak travel days. It is during these off times that airlines will offer big discounts on their tickets and lodging packages with local hotels.

Also consider flying on holidays, such as Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day or the early morning of New Year's Day — all slower travel days in major airports.

CONNECTING FLIGHTS

Not always the best option because of the threat of being stuck in an icy location, booking a flight that includes one stop can save you some serious money. If flying nonstop isn't crucial to you and your schedule, you could



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save more than \$100 with this strategy.

Again, major airport delays can cause a holiday headache, so be sure to plan ahead. Analyze upcoming forecasts for the cities you'll be in and make your decision based on what kind of weather looks to be in the area.

SHOP AROUND

There are a number of ways to shop for great flight rates this holiday season. You can check in with your local travel agency, check your local newspaper for ads on discounted tickets or

use an online portal to source and secure a great deal.

The key is keeping your eyes open and not settling for expensive tickets too early in your search. Patience will likely pay off if you're open to adjusting your plan as your search dictates.

Trees for Troops

What better way to brighten a day than to send a real Christmas tree? Last year, Trees for Troops provided them to more than 18,000 military families and troops across the world.

The organization has delivered nearly 200,000 trees since its 2005 inception and uses FedEx to deliver to more than 60 military bases in the United States and overseas.

Every year, volunteers help organize, box and load thousands of trees that are shipped to United States armed forces members in all branches of the military and their families.

Members of the National Christmas Tree Association and many state and regional Christmas tree associations take on this project as a way to show their appreciation for those who serve in our military. The organization provides free, farm-grown trees that are of the highest quality.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

At the beginning of December, the annual Trees for Troops Weekend takes place across the country. Community members can donate funds or visit the 30 farms and retail locations in the United States that host FedEx trailers during the special time period. Consider making it a family event to get involved in this effort and teach even the youngest members of your family how important it is to show our gratitude.

HELP NEEDED YEAR-ROUND

Trees for Troops is part of the Christmas SPIRIT Foundation, a nonprofit group that relies on donations from the public to successfully deliver this large amount of trees.

You can support Trees for Troops through your tax-deductible donation or by becoming a sponsor. Check out www.christmastspiritfoundation.org for more information on the Trees for Troops program and to find out ways you can help keep the program running.

The Christmas SPIRIT Foundation was awarded the Best in America seal of excellence by the Independent Charities of America. In 2012, Trees for Troops was honored at the White House as a top-20 national finalist in the Joining Forces Community Challenge, which was started by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden.



Military Family Appreciation

Members of the military deserve our utmost respect and reverence throughout the year — not just at the holidays. The same goes for their families.

Each year the president signs a proclamation declaring November Military Family Month.

This annual acknowledgment marks the beginning of a month-long celebration of the military family, which sacrifices so much to help ensure our overall safety and freedom.

It is a fitting recognition in the heart of the holiday season. The Department of Defense and the nation come together every November to show their appreciation in many ways. And it's never too late to join in or make your own celebration to convey your gratitude.

NATIONAL OBSERVANCES

Throughout November, military families serving around the world are honored through a variety of observances. They are recognized for their commitment and the many actions they take to strengthen our country as a whole.

Some of the leadership from active, guard and reserve military sectors are supported by the Department of Defense and its internal branches to plan and administer special programming



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across the community.

FUN EVENTS

Community leaders, business owners and military bases come together every year to make November a month to remember for members of the military.

From community dinners

to family fun nights, you can likely find many organizations in your area opening their doors for military families. Check with your favorite local restaurant or downtown shop to see if there are any military month events planned there.

You can either offer your time or financial support to make sure the event is fitting of a true military family cele-

bration. You also can call or email your local armory or military base to find out if volunteers are needed for any upcoming events.

MAKE YOUR OWN CELEBRATION

If there isn't an event set up in your area, work with your

local military organization to launch one. Contact a local union hall or VFW to ask about renting space for your event.

You also can build relationships with local business owners by asking for donations.

Military families will be honored by your efforts to make the holiday season special for them.

Military Care Packages

One of the best ways to send out a holiday salute to your friends or family members in the military is through a thoughtful care package.

Maybe you have a loved one serving overseas. Maybe you're part of a holiday care package giving organization. Either way, if you're new to sending one, there are some requirements you should be aware of to make sure it gets there safely.

You should be selective about exactly which items you plan on sending overseas. There are customs issues and security regulations that must be considered by when it comes to shipping packages to members of the military.

WHAT TO SEND

If you could send anything at all to your favorite service member, what would it be? Something personalized, such as a photo collection or letters? How about their favorite homemade foods?

All of these items are OK to ship and will offer your military member a special connection to memories of home. These memories can help push them through the difficult times of a deployment.

WHAT NOT TO SEND

Even though any item you send would surely be appreciated, there are some things to



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avoid including in your holiday care package.

Anything breakable probably should be saved for when they return home. Picture your package on its route to your service member — shipped from truck to truck

before heading off on an international flight, and then being shipped from truck to truck again. Fragile items are not cut out for this route. Keep things simple by including only unbreakable items in your care package.

HOW TO SEND IT

One of the most challenging aspects of shipping a military care package can be filling out the customs forms required for compliant shipment.

If you're using an organiza-

tion that specializes in sending military care packages, it too may have specific requirements for shipment. The key is checking in with your local post office and care package organization to find out the details.

A Momentous Achievement

On Dec. 25, 1776, General George Washington led a defining moment in United States history as he directed 2,400 Continental soldiers across the icy Delaware River river, battling sleet, snow and bitter cold.

According to the Mount Vernon Estate, the most popular historic estate in the United States, it was Washington's commitment to crossing the Delaware that foreshadowed the many hardships the Continental Army would face during its eventual victory in the American Revolution.

THE PLAN

On Christmas morning, weather conditions were reportedly in a state of deep decline, worsening as the day went on into freezing cold temperatures.

Washington reportedly kept almost all the details of the crossing a secret, telling not even his own soldiers about their upcoming efforts.

The plan was a nighttime crossing of the river to be followed by a 10-mile march to Trenton, N.J. This would allow the soldiers to execute a surprise attack on the Hessian garrison shortly before dawn.

Along with the 2,400 men led by Washington, another two divisions of 3,000 men and artillery failed to reach the meeting point at the scheduled time.

THE IMPORTANCE

In line with Washington's plan, the freezing cold group of soldiers made it across the river



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

and made their way to Trenton.

It was in Trenton that Washington and his troops secured the Continental Army's

first major military victory of the war. What made the victory even more enjoyable for the army was how they were able

to overcome several months of monumental defeats at the hands of the Hessians.

From crossing the river to

pulling off the strategic overtaking, Washington was able to restore faith in the Continental Army.