

Greetings Sons of The American Legion,

The Fall NEC has come and gone and your VAR commission is hard at work promoting 10 programs this year. As the year goes by different members of the commission will write about their programs. Be it the assigned one or the program they are close to. This months report will be on the United Service Organization (USO). When I was Detachment Commander in 2006-2007 the Illinois USO was my project for the year so it just seemed natural to take it to the next level. Next month commission member Pat will be writing about the Creative Arts Festival.

The USO (united service organizations) was founded 67 years ago in 1941. In response to a challenge by President Roosevelt, he asked 6 private organizations to handle on-leave morale needs for our Armed Forces. These organizations are the YMCA, YWCA, Salvation Army, Travelers Aid Association, National Jewish Welfare Board, & the National Catholic Community Service. The USO is a private, non-profit organization that is congressionally chartered. The USO relies on public & corporate sponsors for funding.

The mission of the USO has ways been to support U.S. Troops and their families with morale, welfare, & recreational services by giving them a "touch of home".

During WWII the USO had 3000 centers worldwide, today there are 130 centers & 10 mobile canteens (huge motor homes). The centers are in towns, bases and airports providing: location orientation, INTERNET & e mail; libraries, reading rooms, housing assistance, crisis counseling, support groups, game rooms, & nursery facilities. Mobile USO's reach troops in remote & unstable locations.

Some of their special programs are: Operation Care Package: \$25 buys a care package with a phone card, toiletries, sunscreen, Cd's. Operation Phone Home: donate \$\$ to purchase phone cards. Operation Enduring Care: Lounge areas at Hospitals; Duffel bags w/ clothing, toiletries, etc. for troops from the battlefields; DVD players, movies. & Cd's; Emergency financial assistance for service members & families to help w/traveling expenses for emergency situations; & the USO has partnered w/ Road 2 Recovery to help improve wellness of wounded troops through Spinning & outdoor cycling activities. Gifts from the Home front: purchase gift certificates for the B.X. or the commissary. United through Reading: troops are videoed reading a child's book and the DVD and book are sent to their child.

And we all know about the USO tours, from the stars of yesterday (Bob Hope) to today's stars (Drew Carey, Wayne Newton). Celebrities entertain our troops all over the world.

Time line: On December 31, 1947 all of the USO facilities closed & President Truman gave the USO an Honorable Discharge.

January 1951 the USO is reactivated for the Korean War under a memorandum of understanding between the President & the Department of Defense.

1962-1963 the Hannah survey reaffirms the need for a peace time USO.

September 1963 the USO opens a facility in Saigon, Vietnam the 1st time the USO has a facility in a combat zone.

December 1964 Bob Hope's 1st Christmas show in Vietnam

December 20th 1979 President Carter signs the USO's newly granted Congressional Charter.

May 30th 1985 Bob Hope USO Center & World Wide Headquarters opens in Washington, D.C.

1991- USO establishes the Desert Storm Family Support Fund, to provide direct financial assistance to military families affected by Desert Storm/Shield.

June 2003-Project Salute, the USO's 1st large scale entertainment tour to the Persian Gulf.

2003-USO opens in Kuwait

March 2005-USO opens in Afghanistan

February 4th 2006-USO's 65th Anniversary

"Together Making a Difference"

Bruno "T" Williamson
National V.A. & R Chairman