

## USO HISTORICAL TIMELINE

### Introduction

The USO strengthens America's military service members by keeping them connected to family, home and country, throughout their service to the nation. For 75 years, the USO, a private, nonprofit organization, has served the men and women in the U.S. military and their families – from the moment they join, through their transition back to their communities. During those years, the USO has become the vital bridge between Americans and their military service members.

Today's service members need the care, comfort, connection and support that can only be provided by an organization that is with them at every milepost of their military journey. The USO is *always by their side*, continuously adapting to the needs of our men and women in uniform and their families, so they can focus on their very important mission. The USO is a family of volunteers, sustained by the charitable contributions of millions of generous Americans. Our work is America's most powerful expression of gratitude to the men and women who secure our nation's freedoms.

As we celebrate 75 years of supporting our service members, we invite you to look back at some of our highlights.

### February 4, 1941: USO Founded

With America's military growing rapidly in response to the increasing threat proceeding America's entry into World War II, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt challenged six private organizations—the YMCA, YWCA, National Catholic Community Service, the National Jewish Welfare Board, the Traveler's Aid Association and the Salvation Army—to handle the on-leave recreation needs of members of the armed forces. These organizations pooled their resources and the United Service Organizations—which quickly became known as the USO—was incorporated in New York State on February 4, 1941.

### 1941: USO Partnered with the Coca-Cola Company

Coca-Cola had always been available to the military, but as the U.S. war machine grew in anticipation of the United States' entry into World War II, so did the need to provide American GIs everywhere with a touch of home. Coca-Cola was critical to that mission, but the company couldn't succeed alone. Thus began The Coca-Cola Company's 75-year relationship with the USO. The two entities worked together, making the ice-cold beverage available in every USO club and to GIs, wherever they were – from the front lines of the European theater to the Pacific jungles.

### October 30, 1941: USO Camp Shows, Inc. Established

USO Camp Shows brought live entertainment to American service members. From 1941 and 1947, more than 7,000 "soldiers in greasepaint" performed an incredible 428,521 USO shows. The USO show concept has endured and continues today as USO Entertainment.

### December 1947: USO Clubs and Facilities Close

Throughout World War II, the USO was the channel for community participation in the war effort. In December 1947, all USO clubs and facilities were closed and the organization was given an honorable discharge by President Harry S. Truman. By war's end, the USO could claim more than 1.5 million volunteers had worked on its behalf.

### **1951-1953: USO Reactivated for the Korean War**

At the beginning of the Korean War, the USO was called upon to again provide social, recreational and entertainment support for America's servicemen and women. The USO and the Defense Department entered into Memorandum of Understanding.

Once again, USO Camp Shows performed thousands of times for battle-weary service members. By 1953, not a single day passed without a USO show somewhere in Korea.

### **1964: Bob Hope's First USO Christmas Tour to Vietnam**

For the first time in its history, USO centers were located in combat zones with the opening of the USO center in Saigon, Vietnam. The 17 centers opened in Vietnam and six in Thailand served as many as a million service members a month.

Bob Hope took his USO Christmas show to Vietnam for the first time in 1964 starting a tradition that endured into the next decade. At the war's height, 40 percent of America's entire overseas forces were in Vietnam. Roughly 5,559 USO performances took place during the Vietnam years.

### **1967: NFL Partnered with the USO**

The NFL joined forces with the USO and became the first sports organization to send a group of players to Vietnam and other parts of the Far East. The first four players were Johnny Unitas, Frank Gifford, Willie Davis and Sam Huff – all future Hall of Famers.

### **1972: USO Clubs Closed in Vietnam as Peacetime Services Launched**

With the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the United Way of America and the Defense Department conducted a major review of USO programs and services, and concluded: "If there were no USO, another organization would have to be created... Isolation of the military from civilian influences is not, we believe, in the interest of this nation." Thus, the USO was launched into a new era of peacetime service.

### **1977: USO Headquarters Moved to Washington, D.C.**

The USO's international headquarters moved from New York to Washington, DC, in 1977, firmly establishing it as an international agency serving our nation's military members worldwide. On May 30, 1985, the USO headquarters building was dedicated as the "Bob Hope Building," in honor of comedian Bob Hope.

### **1987: USO Signed a New Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Defense**

In 1987, under the terms of a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Defense, the USO was recognized as the principal channel representing civilian concern for the U.S. Armed Forces worldwide. The agreement authorized the USO to play an active role in coordinating civilian volunteers and resources, as well as fostering the general public's interest in the welfare of our service members and their families stationed around the world.

### **1991: USO Opened Three Centers in Southwest Asia During the Persian Gulf War**

The United States was involved in a confrontation with Iraq that challenged American service members in new ways. Service members were deployed in the desert for at least six months at a time with little recreation or contact from home. The USO immediately responded by opening three centers in the Southwest Asia including centers in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

### **1993: USO Sent Entertainment to Service Members in Somalia**

Once again, the USO followed our servicemen and women when they were deployed to Somalia in 1993 for Operation Restore Hope.

### **1996: USO Established Centers in Hungary**

In 1996, U.S. forces took part in Operation Joint Endeavor and Operation Joint Guard to secure peace in the Balkans. The USO established centers in Hungary and entertained service members in the Bosnian theatre of operations.

### **2002: Operation Care Package Created by USO Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore**

Following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the Department of Defense suspended its practice of forwarding correspondence and personal care packages from the American public to “Any Service Member.” In its place, the USO of Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore created Operation USO Care Package to boost morale and provide a safe and secure way for the public to show their support. The packages only contained items donated by or purchased from manufacturers in bulk.

### **2003: USO Operation Phone Home™ Launched**

USO Operation Phone Home™ delivers prepaid international phone cards to deployed service members free of charge. The phone cards are distributed through USO centers overseas and, most often, are delivered directly to military units abroad. It is one of the most frequently requested services from our forward-deployed service members, and to date, the USO has provided more than 3.2 million free, prepaid international calling cards – connecting service members to their loved ones back home.

### **April 2005: The USO Opened the Pat Tillman Memorial USO Center in Afghanistan**

In April 2005, the USO opened the Pat Tillman Memorial USO Center at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The center was named for former Arizona Cardinals safety Pat Tillman, who put his career in the NFL on hold to join the Army after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and was later killed in action in Afghanistan. The NFL provided most of the funding for the facility, donating \$250,000 to the USO for construction of a recreational building for service members at Bagram Air Base.

### **December 2007: Actor Robin Williams Goes on the Chairman’s Holiday Tour**

Robin Williams was committed to making service members smile. The comic legend, who passed away in 2014, went on six USO tours between 2002 and 2013, including five overseas. Through his work with the USO, Williams visited troops in 12 countries, making three stops to both Iraq and Afghanistan.

“There’s nothing I enjoy more than traveling with the USO and giving back to our troops in whatever way I can,” Williams said during a 2007 USO tour led by then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen. “They work hard, sacrifice a lot and deserve to be treated like the heroes they are. The very least I can do is bring a smile to their faces.”

## **2008: The USO Opened USO Balad, Iraq**

The USO center in Balad, Iraq opened its doors, extending its services and programs to service members supporting Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

## **October 21, 2008: USO Center Opened at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center**

In 2008, the USO completed the construction of a 4,000 square-foot USO Warrior Center at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany to extend supportive services to a greater number of service men and women and their families. The USO Warrior Center was the first USO center dedicated to wounded, ill and injured service members.

## **June 2009: *The Colbert Report* Taped A Week's Worth of Shows In Iraq**

The USO named Stephen Colbert “Mr. USO” and sent him to Iraq for a week-long taping and airing of *The Colbert Report*. The tour was a smashing success, with service members able to enjoy the show in person, along with millions more viewers back home. A year later, *The Colbert Report* dedicated two special episodes as a salute to service members. “Been There: Won That: The Returnification of the American-Do Troopscape” features several of the same guests who appeared during the Iraq shows, including Gen. Ray Odierno, who – as you’ll recall – participated in one of the most talked about moments from the show—shaving Stephen Colbert’s head.

## **November 2009: USO Basra, Iraq Opened**

USO Basra was the third USO center to open in Iraq. In November 2009, USO COB Basra was the largest USO center in Southwest Asia –11,000 square feet – providing deployed service members a touch of home and connecting them to loved ones back home.

## **September 17, 2010: USO Center Opened in Kandahar, Afghanistan**

In 2010, the USO expanded its reach to service members in the region, opening five new centers in Iraq and Afghanistan. On September 17, the USO opened its eleventh center in Southwest Asia at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. The 8,200-square-foot facility continues to serve thousands of deployed service members at the airfield, as well as those traveling to and from forward operating bases in the region.

## **2011: Last USO Center in Iraq Closed**

In 2011, the USO closed its last center in Iraq in response to the withdrawal of U.S. combat service members from the country.

“We closed our last center in Iraq during the fourth quarter of 2011. We’ve taken the large majority of the resources that we were investing in Iraq and shifted those into Afghanistan. That’s one of the reasons that we’ve been able to support such a large growth in our presence in Afghanistan – most through our centers, but also through a program called ‘USO2GO,’ where we actually ship pallet loads.” – Sloan Gibson, then-USO President and CEO

## **November 14, 2011: USO Wishbook Launched**

The USO Wishbook is the USO’s online alternative-giving catalog, which offers donors a way to support the USO by purchasing symbolic gifts for friends and loved ones that help America’s service members

and their families. It is modeled after successful sites like Heifer International. The USO Wishbook can be found at [www.usowishbook.org](http://www.usowishbook.org).

#### **February 13, 2012: USO Awarded the National Medal of Arts**

“The USO is honored for contributions to lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families through the arts. With thousands of entertainers volunteering their time and talents over the years and around the globe, the USO continues the tradition begun by Bob Hope of bringing iconic American artists to entertain the troops who are protecting America's freedom and culture at home and abroad.” –The National Endowment for the Arts

#### **February 5, 2013: USO Warrior and Family Center Opened at Fort Belvoir**

The more than 20,000-square-foot building on Fort Belvoir, VA, is the largest USO center ever built and supports wounded, ill and injured service members, their family members and caregivers. Positioned in the shadow of Fort Belvoir Community Hospital and the Fort Belvoir Warrior Transition Unit barracks, service members recovering from war wounds and injuries have access to state-of-the-art, ADA-compliant spaces to relax, have fun and learn away from the grind of the hospital.

#### **August 2013: USO Expanded Its Reach to Australia**

The USO established a day room lounge with gaming consoles, TVs, furniture and wireless internet for Marines on six-month training rotations in Darwin on Australia's northern coast.

#### **April 1, 2014: USO Warrior and Family Center Opened at Naval Support Activity Bethesda**

Located on the campus of Naval Support Activity Bethesda, MD, home of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, the USO Warrior and Family Center at Bethesda is strategically located adjacent to the wounded warrior barracks, known as Tranquility Hall, making it more convenient for wounded, ill and injured service members and their families to get support during their recovery process. At more than 16,000 square feet, the building features dozens of spaces and hundreds of programs and services that support service members and military families.

#### **October 2014: Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families Entertained Its 500,000th Military Family Member**

It's always a sunny day on Sesame Street. But Elmo, Cookie Monster and the Muppets had an extra special reason to sing and dance with all their friends: The Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families, the longest running annual USO tour, entertained its 500,000th military family member in October. Since 2008, this tour has delivered memorable moments to military children and their parents through more than 1,000 shows at 149 military bases in 33 states and 11 countries.

#### **May 2015: USO Announced First-Ever Bilingual PSA**

The USO debuts its first-ever bilingual public service announcement (PSA) to thank the millions of service members and military families stationed around the world. The 30-second USO PSA, entitled “¡Gracias!,” premiered in celebration of Military Appreciation Month and ran throughout the year on select television, radio and digital outlets. “¡Gracias!” is the USO's first celebrity endorsed bilingual PSA and featured some of today's hottest Sony Music Latin artists.

### **May 11, 2015: USO Established the USO Transition 360 Alliance**

The USO announced the USO Transition 360 Alliance, an initiative to help military personnel and their families successfully transition back into civilian life after their service ends. The USO Transition 360 Alliance partners include the Comfort Crew for Military Kids, Hire Heroes USA, RP/6 and Stronger Families.

### **June 2015: USO Opened First Staffed Center in Africa at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti**

After last year's announcement that the U.S. would spend \$1 billion over the next 20 years to enlarge the base in Djibouti, the USO decided it was time to open a permanent canteen to bring a touch of home to service members stationed there.

### **November 12, 2015: USO and RP/6 Opened First Co-branded Location**

The USO and RP/6 cut the ribbon on their co-branded location near Fort Campbell, KY. Envisioned as a one-stop shop for military transition, it's the first of five co-branded centers opening in the coming months. Together, through the USO Transition 360 Alliance, we're connecting transitioning service members and their families with the resources they need as they move into the civilian world.