

## **USO History Timeline**

*Updated Feb. 2021*

### **1941 – USO is Founded**

The USO was formed in 1941 in response to a request from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who determined it would be best if private organizations handled the on-leave recreation needs of the rapidly growing U.S. Armed Forces. Roosevelt's call to action led six civilian agencies – the Salvation Army, Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, National Catholic Community Services, National Travelers Aid Association and the National Jewish Welfare Board – to coordinate their civilian war efforts and resources to form the United Service Organizations (USO).

### **1941 – USO Partners with the Coca-Cola Company**

As the U.S. war machine grew in anticipation of the United States' entry into World War II, so too did the need to provide service members with a touch of home. Coca-Cola and the USO worked together to make the ice-cold beverage available at every USO location from Europe to the Pacific.

### **1941 – USO Camp Shows, Inc. Established**

With America's entry into World War II, USO Camp Shows expanded to bring live entertainment to American troops fighting overseas. From 1941-1947, more than 7,000 entertainers performed an incredible 428,521 USO shows.

### **1942 – Mobile USO**

The first Mobile USO units were sent to serve military men on maneuvers and at remote locations.

### **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, after the end of the war, all USO clubs and facilities were closed and the organization was given an honorable discharge by President Harry S. Truman.

### **1949 – USO Reactivated**

Prior to the Korean War, President Harry S. Truman called upon the USO once again to provide social, recreational and entertainment support for America's service men and women.

### **1963 – First USO in Saigon, Vietnam Opens**

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

### **1964 – Bob Hope's first USO Christmas Tour to Vietnam**

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

### **1967 – NFL Partners 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.

### **1984 – USO Delivers for Deployed Service Members**

As the 1980s unfolded, the scene of international tension shifted to the Middle East, where the USO directed its efforts on behalf of U.S. service personnel stationed in the eastern Mediterranean.

### **1987 – USO Signs a New Memorandum of Understanding with the DoD**

In 1987, under the terms of a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Defense (DoD), the USO was recognized as the principal channel representing civilian concern for the U.S. Armed Forces worldwide.

### **1988 – USO Naples Bombing**

A car bomb explodes outside the USO Fleet Center in Naples, Italy, killing five people and destroying the center.

### **1991 – USO Opens Three Centers in the Middle East During the Gulf War**

The 1990s found the United States involved in a confrontation with Iraq and the USO immediately responded by opening three centers in the Middle East, including centers in Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, to keep service members connected to family, home and country.

### **1993 – USO Sends Entertainment to Somalia**

The USO followed our service men and women once again when they were deployed to Somalia in 1993 for Operation Restore Hope.

### **1996 – USO Establishes 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 troops in the Bosnian theatre of operations.

### **2002 – Operation USO Care Package is Created by USO of Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore**

Following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, 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 created Operation USO Care Package to boost morale and provide a safe and secure way for the public to show their support.

### **2002-2003 – USO Operation Phone Home® is Launched**

USO Operation Phone Home® delivers prepaid international phone cards to deployed troops free of charge. The phone cards are distributed through USO centers overseas and are often delivered directly to military units abroad.

### **2005 – USO Opens Pat Tillman Memorial USO**

In April 2005, the USO opened the Pat Tillman Memorial USO Center at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. The center is named for former Arizona Cardinals safety Pat Tillman, who put his career in the National Football League (NFL) on hold to join the Army after the Sept. 11, 2001 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.

### **2006 – USO Mobile Program Launched**

In 2006, the USO launched its modern USO Mobile program. Acting as USO centers on wheels, Mobile USO vehicles travel to support service members who far from a traditional brick-and-mortar USO center such as in remote training areas, on isolated bases or when responding to national emergencies, like natural disasters.

These state-of-the-art vehicles offer almost all the same support of a traditional brick-and-mortar USO center with air conditioning, free Wi-Fi, entertainment, snacks and – most importantly – a place to relax and recharge after a long day of hard work.

### **2008 – USO Opens Center in Iraq**

The USO center in Balad, Iraq, opened its doors, extending its services and programs to deployed U.S. troops fighting in Iraq.

### **2008 – USO Center Opens at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center**

In 2008, the USO completed construction of a 4,000 square-foot USO Warrior Center at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, which was the first USO center dedicated to wounded, ill and injured troops.

### **2008 – USO Launches USO2GO Program**

In 2008, the USO launched the USO2GO program. Sent to remote locations where a traditional, brick-and-mortar USO center might not be logistically possible, USO2GO kits were designed to bring a touch of home to anywhere in the world, like in forward-deployed areas or during natural disasters. These customizable kits can completely transform a remote outpost into a place to gather and relax with games, sports equipment, chairs and personal care items. USO2GO continues to be the program most requested directly from the field and helps our deployed service members relax and recharge.

### **2009 – USO Footprint Expands in Combat Zones**

To support hundreds of thousands of troops deployed to Southwest Asia, the USO opened four centers in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kuwait and Qatar, including centers in Kabul, Afghanistan, Basra, Iraq and Baghdad.

### **2010 – USO Kandahar Opens in Afghanistan**

On September 17, the USO opened its 11th center in Southwest Asia at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan. The 8,200-square-foot facility served thousands of deployed troops at the airfield, as well as those traveling to and from forward operating bases in the region.

### **2012 – USO Awarded the National Medal of Arts**

The USO was selected by the National Endowment for the Arts for its contributions to lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families through the arts.

### **2013 – USO Warrior and Family Center at Fort Belvoir Opens**

The 20,000-plus-square-foot building on Fort Belvoir, Virginia, is the largest USO center ever built and ensures that recovering service members and their families have access to state-of-the-art, ADA compliant spaces to relax and have fun away from the grind of the hospital.

### **2013 – USO Expands Its Reach to Australia**

The USO established a lounge with video game consoles, TVs, furniture and wireless internet for Marines on six-month training rotations in Darwin, Australia.

### **2014 – USO Warrior and Family Center Opens at Naval Support Activity Bethesda**

The USO Warrior and Family Center at Bethesda, Maryland, 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.

### **2015 – USO Opens First Staffed Center in Africa**

After a 2014 announcement that the U.S. would spend \$1 billion over the next 20 years to expand Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, the USO opened a permanent location on base to bring a touch of home to service members stationed on the Horn of Africa.

### **2015 – USO Expands its Mission to Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS)**

The USO opened several new centers inside MEPS locations around the United States to support future service members and their families as they enter military service. These locations provide comfort for recruits and their families during the entrance process and introduces them to the USO and the programs it offers.

### **2017 – USO Pathfinder® is Launched**

In 2017, the USO launched the USO Pathfinder® Transition Program, offering active duty, Reserve, National Guard and military spouses access to professional development services throughout the duration of the service member's career, as well as when they transition out of the military and settle into their civilian communities.

### **2017 – USO Launches Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program**

In honor of the legendary entertainer Bob Hope and his commitment to keeping service members connected to home, the USO partnered with the Bob Hope Legacy in 2017 to create the Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program.

Offered at USO locations all around the globe, the Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program provides military families with virtual, on-demand story time offerings. Service members can walk into participating USO locations, record themselves reading their child's favorite story and have that recording and the book shipped home. Similarly, to help offset the challenges many children face as part of a military family, military kids can record themselves reading a book and send the recording to their deployed family member.

The Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program honors Bob Hope's memory by keeping military families connected and ensures that even when thousands of miles away on the front lines, service members can still be there for a bedtime story.

### **2019 – USO Coffee Connection Live is Launched**

In 2019, the USO expanded upon its USO Coffee Connections program with USO Coffee Connection Live, which was created in response to requests from military spouses who did not have easy access to a USO location, but were interested in participating in USO spouse programming. This virtual event is an hour long "coffee chat" between a USO military spouse and an influential guest, in which they discuss topics that are relevant and trending within the military spouse community. These USO Coffee Connection Live events foster connections among military spouses around the world, while also offering them resources that can help alleviate some of the challenges of military life.

Offering USO Coffee Connection Live in a virtual format furthered the USO's support of military spouses, expanding our reach even to those far from a brick-and-mortar USO location.

### **2020 – USO Responds to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In March 2020, the United States was struck by the COVID-19 virus. As the pandemic spread across the country and the globe, the U.S. military stepped up to respond – and the USO pivoted to support them. Many USO programs that were normally offered in-person at USO locations were reformatted to be delivered virtually or from a distance. From drive-thru and socially distant high school graduation celebrations, to livestreamed cooking classes, to Bob Hope Legacy Reading Program reading rooms built in the back of pickup trucks, USO teams moved quickly to ensure our service members and military families remained supported throughout 2020 and beyond.

### **March 2020 – USO Launches Military Virtual Programming (MVP)**

As COVID-19 spread, the world came to a halt and so too did the USO's iconic entertainment tours – until the USO launched USO Military Virtual Programming (MVP).

Pivoting quickly to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, USO MVP events brought celebrities straight to the phone and computer screens of our nation's military communities. Although traditional USO shows and meet-and-greets were impossible due to health and safety restrictions, these USO MVP events allowed service members and military family members to interact one-on-one with everyone from Chris Evans to Martha Stewart. Throughout 2020, there were 96 USO MVP events, with more than 31,402 attendees from all around the globe.

#### **November 2020 – USO Reaches Milestone of 3 Million Care Packs Delivered**

Although the USO has been delivering care packages of all kinds since World War II, the organization formally launched the Operation USO Care Package program in 2003. The program was later renamed the USO Care Package program. This program created a standardized USO Care Package, which has been delivered to troops all around the globe for the past 17 years.

This year, on Nov. 11, 2020, the USO officially delivered the 3 millionth USO Care Package of this kind to a service member deployed to East Africa. Even through the COVID-19 pandemic, the mission continued.