THE AMERICAN LEGION

OPERATION OUTREACH

A Post Guide to Marketing The American Legion Support Services to Military Members and their Families

700 N. Pennsylvania St. • Indianapolis, IN 46204 • (317) 630-1200

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American Legion members joined friends and family in Oklahoma to welcome home troops from their training and to encourage them as they prepare to deploy overseas.
photo– Brandi Simons

INTRODUCTION

As the Global War on Terror (GWOT) continues, America's citizen soldiers – members of the National Guard and Reserves – are being called up and deployed to join their active duty counterparts in record numbers. Besides serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, our nation's military service personnel are today serving in over 130 countries around the world, where terrorism threatens regional and global stability.

The call up of National Guard and Reservists from all branches of the armed forces to battle terrorism is the largest since World War II. Every city and town have had citizens called to federal service and deployed – some more than once – to the other side of the globe to take up arms against terrorists. Many leave behind families to cope with separation stress and the responsibility of keeping the home running as smoothly as possible until their loved one returns.

Fortunately, there is a proven support structure, in addition to that of the armed forces, they can count on to provide the help and understanding needed to survive the experience of long deployments.

As the nation's largest wartime veterans organization, members of The American Legion family have "been there, done that." Legionnaires understand sacrifice and they know well the hardships that accompany military service. Many were mentored and helped through the separations by Legionnaires and their families who had endured and survived similar experiences in wars past. They were able to receive assistance from a local American Legion post. Whether it be temporary financial assistance, help to fix a leaking faucet, or just a friend to be there for comfort, the men and women of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion stand ready to assist our nation's newest veterans and their families engaged in the Global War on Terror.

It's our turn to mentor and help them.

BACKGROUND

Your post is the heart and soul of The American Legion. No one is in a better position to evaluate and respond to the needs of U.S. military service personnel and their families in your area than you and your post members.

Every post can make a difference in the lives of today's veterans and their families by having a Troop Support Services (TS2) Team ready to respond to their needs. The next step is ensuring that military commanders, troops and their families, and members of the Guard and Reserves in your community KNOW that your post is there for them, the services you can provide, and contact information.

photo– Brandi Simons

THE MISSION

Operation Outreach is a national effort of The American Legion at all levels. The national commander and staff will be briefing Department of Defense officials at the Pentagon about the kinds of services that Legionnaires can provide to support active duty, National Guard and Reserve personnel and their families.

Department Commanders in every state will brief The Adjutant Generals **(TAGS)** and state-level senior military and civilian leadership.

District and county commanders will be coordinating regional awareness efforts.

Your mission, in addition to assisting your local military veterans and their families, will be to contact the commander at a local military base, National Guard armory or Reserve center in your community. Arrange a meeting with him or her to explain the support services your post can provide, show the enclosed DVD that explains the programs, and offer to brief all the troops during a convenient drill period or other suitable occasion.

This guide will provide you with the DVD and the support tools you will need to accomplish a successful **Operation Outreach.**

FIRST CONTACT

Once you have scheduled an appointment with your local military commander, bring along the DVD. If you have a portable DVD player, use that. Otherwise, ask him or her if there is a DVD player in the office where the presentation will be made. Show the video and explain that your post, unit and squadron (if applicable) are ready to help at any time. Explain that you would be delighted to show the video at an upcoming drill or formation to all the troops and be available to answer any questions. Bring along sample handouts that you would bring in quantity to the presentation to show the commander.

Remember, the briefing is about support and service, NOT membership. Many troops will want to sign up later when they understand the benefits of becoming a Legionnaire. This event is to let them know that your post will be there for them…before they deploy, for their families during their deployment, and for all of them when they return. In effect, the services of your post's Legion family become a "force multiplier" of support for the commander in ensuring the welfare and morale of the men and women in the command. Remember, DoD instructions prohibit the solicitation of membership by any group on military reservations, posts, bases and training centers.

Service first; membership will follow.

THE EVENT

Ideally, your meeting with the commander will result in a thirty-minute window to address the troops during a drill or other assembly. This will allow time for introductions, showing of the DVD and a question and answer period following. Frequently, young service members have little or no knowledge about The American Legion, the services offered, nor do they know that they are themselves – veterans. Consider this briefing an important educational experience for them.

Appendix (1) contains a suggested script for the presentation, and the DVD is on the front cover of this booklet. The remarks should be adapted as needed to reflect the specific direct support that your post will be able to provide on a continuing basis.

The DVD explains why The American Legion provides Troop Support Services (TS2), describes the Family Support Network, includes testimonials by families helped by Legion posts and senior military officials, touches on Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA), promotes the TS2 pamphlet, and

provides an overview of The American Legion. It concludes by thanking each member for his or her service to America.

Be sure to respond to those service members that ask about joining that you will be happy to talk with them "off line," or outside of the official briefing to remain within DoD policy. You may find that a number of them will be ready to join but be sure to check with the commander (before the presentation) to ensure full compliance with policy.

HANDOUT MATERIALS

The primary handout should be The American Legion TS2 pocket resource directory for U.S. troops and their families available from the National Headquarters Internal Affairs Division in Indianapolis. Be sure to order enough copies to ensure that every service member receives one. Keep copies available at the post to provide to walk-in veterans or service personnel not in attendance at your briefing. Be sure to affix a label or pre-stamp your post's address and contact information on the back prior to the briefing.

Other suitable pamphlets to have available:

- Family Support Network – Stock #24-010
- Temporary Financial Assistance – Stock #24-008
- Women Veterans – Stock #70-001

Be sure to have ready in your vehicle a sufficient supply of "Why You Should Belong," Stock 30-009 (2007).

Another great presentation tool for use outside of military installations is the Michael Peterson DVD, "It's Who We Are," available from the National Americanism Division. It can be ordered from www.legion.org - Click on "Michael Peterson's DVD."

Ordering Information:

Handout materials may be ordered from:

The American Legion National Headquarters
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1200

CHECKLIST OF MILESTONES

- Upon receipt of this booklet, commit to forming a post TS2 team if your post does not already have one.
- Brief Auxiliary President and Squadron Commander on TS2 team participation; obtain participation commitment. Identify types of service support.
- Call military commander of base, armory or reserve center. Schedule an appointment.
- Order handouts from national headquarters.
- Prepare for briefing of troops, if scheduled, after meeting with commander. Bring Auxiliary president and PR chairman, if available, to assist in the briefing. Adjust the script to highlight the specific services that your post can offer.
- Ensure a DVD player and large monitor or video projector will be available to show the troops.
- Brief your district/county commander prior to the troop briefing. He or she may wish to join you.
- Ask your PR chairman or other designated individual to take photos of the briefing (if approved by the facility commander). Use in your post newsletter and website to energize your membership. Send copies to department and national headquarters.
- Send a letter to the editor about your post's TS2 team support of local area service personnel and citizen soldiers.
- Send in the feedback card on the last page of this booklet to the National Public Relations Commission office.
- Render support to these veterans and their families as needed.

TALKING POINTS FOR BRIEFING MILITARY COMMANDER

- The American Legion can serve as a force multiplier in assisting with morale and welfare support of the unit.
- Through the Family Support Network, the post can provide direct support to families. We've been in their shoes.
- There is no cost – it's comradeship.
- The Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) program can provide cash grants to assist minor children of military veterans with basic need expenses such as shelter, food, utilities or clothing. Our post will process applications.
- The American Legion's Legacy Scholarship Fund is there for the children of service personnel who died on active duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001.
- The American Legion "Heroes to Hometowns" program works with DoD in providing seamless transitions to severely wounded service personnel.
- Our post would welcome the opportunity to brief and thank these outstanding Americans.

TALKING POINTS FOR BRIEFING TROOPS

- When The American Legion was established in 1919, at the end of the "War to End All Wars," our founders had a singular purpose in mind: To support our fellow service members and their families as they returned home.
- The American Legion runs the "Heroes to Hometowns" program for wounded warriors returning home, provides scholarships for children of comrades who died in uniform on and after 9-11, lobbies for a better Dept. of Veterans Affairs and higher pay and benefits for all members of the military.
- We know what you're going through. We know what you need. We've been there and some of us in The American Legion are currently on active duty.
- As you face deployment overseas, or separation from your families because of a call to active duty, we know that you'll encounter problems and issues that may require some help.
- We want you to consider us your partners on the home front, standing by to help wherever we can. We're here in your community ready to help your family while you're away, welcome you home when you return, and, if necessary, support you and your family if anything happens.
- Through the Family Support Network, TFA, the Heroes to Hometowns program and in numerous other ways, our post is here to help you and your family.
- Just calls us. The number is: _____ .

MEDIA OUTREACH

There will undoubtedly be service members who won't be able to attend on the day of the scheduled briefing. Likewise, unless your presentation will be made to the service members and their families, their spouses will not have had the chance to see the video themselves and learn first hand of your post's support abilities.

A letter to the editor of your local newspaper can alert the paper and the general public about your post's TS2 efforts in support of troops in the community, whether it be the entire unit, or individuals in the ready reserve who may be activated by their respective service. A suggested letter follows. Adapt it to include contact information and the scope of support your post offers.

Consider also calling local radio talk shows to get the word out about your post's troop support effort. That would be a good time to invite public support of The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund and to seek community volunteers that would be resources on your TS2 team. For example, a local plumber might volunteer to be on your resource call list to assist a military family with a broken water pipe should an emergency occur when the service member is deployed. Bear in mind, every time non-member veterans hear about your post doing good things for fellow veterans, they have one more reason to consider joining The American Legion team at your post.

Share the video with your local cable television system and encourage them to use it to help get the word out to military families. Also, provide copies to news reporters that cover the military/veterans beat as well as television station news directors. Since the DVD is an American Legion production, please feel free to reproduce and distribute as many copies as needed. Be prepared to work with a reporter in doing a story with your post to help get the word out about your post's troop support initiatives.

Suggested Letter to the Editor – 170 Words

Dear Editor:

Recently, members of American Legion Post XXX had the honor of addressing the men and women of the XXXXXX National Guard – Reserve Unit during a training meeting here in (CITY). Our mission was to brief them on the various services of support offered to them by our post.

As a wartime veteran, I can tell you these are the finest, dedicated, most professional patriots to serve our nation yet. More importantly, they are our friends, neighbors, and relatives.

Our post organized a Troop Support Service (TS2) Team to assist them and their families while on deployment. From fixing a leaky faucet to mowing a lawn, we will be there for them as they go in harm's way for us. If you would like to volunteer to serve on the team as a professional resource in the event a soldier's family has an emergency while he or she is deployed, please contact American Legion Post XXX at (tel. number).

To each of member of the (Unit name/number), "Thank you for serving."

(Name)

Commander

American Legion Post XXX

(City)

(Telephone Number)

(Note – localize for impact but try not to exceed 250 words)

MEMBERSHIP FOLLOW UP

Operation Outreach is not a membership drive. It is simply the right thing to do. As always, it's service first, membership second. If we do right by the military and veterans in our community, they will join.

As noted previously, DoD policy frowns on any organization actively soliciting membership on government reservations. However, many commanders approve of membership in The American Legion and are members themselves. The key is to accept new member applications outside of official presentations. After learning of the benefits and advocacy of The American Legion, many young service members will want to sign up.

Remember, there are two message points for anyone serving in uniform today:

1. You are a veteran NOW. You don't have to wait until you hang up your uniform to proudly use the title.
2. If you have served at least one day of active duty on Title 10 orders as a Reservist or National Guardsman, you are eligible to join the nation's largest veterans organization, The American Legion.

photo– Brandi Simons

CONCLUSION

Operation Outreach is being conducted by your fellow Legionnaires across the country. From the Pentagon to the smallest town, the goal is to make every member of our nation's armed forces – and their families – aware of The American Legion, what we do and how we can help them get through the difficult process of deploying and defending our national interests.

Every post is encouraged to make this project its top priority for the first half of 2008. After all, it's what The American Legion is all about. It's what we do. It's who we are.

Veterans helping veterans…For God and country.

photo– Brandi Simons

APPENDIX

SUGGESTED REMARKS AT BRIEFING TO TROOPS

The following suggested remarks are provided for your consideration in presenting the DVD to military personnel. Please feel free to use as much or as little of this text as you are comfortable with during delivery in your own style. We suggest you print them out in #18 or larger typeface and double space for ease in reading at a podium. You can download this entire text from The American Legion website at www.legion.org/whatsnew.

Thank you for that kind introduction.

First, I want to thank (Name of commanding officer, executive officer and senior NCO) for the opportunity to talk with you today.

Let me introduce several fellow veterans who are with me (Introduce names and titles).

We're here for several reasons:

First, as wartime veterans of past conflicts, we want to thank each of you for your outstanding service to America. You are – without a doubt – the very best of all who have worn the uniform of our nation. We are very proud of you.

We also want to thank your families for the great support they give you – and our country – as you sacrifice precious time with them to ensure that all of our children and fellow citizens remain free. We understand the hardships that go with military service. We know the pressures that deployments put on your family back here at home.

As the expression goes – "We've been there, done that."

Secondly, we want you to know that The American Legion is here for you and your families.

For many of us, when we were young and actually fit into our uniforms, Legionnaires from past wars were there for us. They were our support base. When we were gone, they were there to fix the leaky faucets, jump-start our cars and even help out when money got tight. Their wives… members of The American Legion Auxiliary… comforted our wives when we were gone and gave them whatever help they could.

We will always be grateful for that.

And today, The American Legion family – that is, Legionnaires, the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion through the members of Post XXX here in (City) is standing by for you. We pledge to continue to be here for you and your family while you are away, and just as importantly, when you return. We are here for you. We are here for your comrades. We are here for your families.

Our toll free Family Support Network line – 1-800-504-4098 - is on the pamphlet. Or you can call the post direct at XXX XXXX (*use a number that will always be answered by a post officer*).

Let me show you a brief video that highlights how we can help.

(Show video)

What you've seen in the video are some of the programs that are now in place helping your fellow veterans – and yes, although on active duty, you are a veteran.

Last year, The American Legion Family Support Network provided direct assistance to over 2,200 military families. Temporary Financial Assistance (which are direct grants) helped 1,200 veterans' children by granting more than a half million dollars to get them through tough times.

The TS2 pamphlets you have describe these programs in detail so please take them with you and keep them handy. They were designed to fit into you BDU pockets.

Additionally, at Post XXXX we invite you to (*describe events, open houses, invitations to post, service officer assistance, etc. – support your post is ready to uniquely provide*).

Once again, thank you for your service to America. We hope you will consider us your comrades in arms and Post XXX as your support base here in (City).

Again, we appreciate your time. We'd be happy to take your questions.

# # #

"We have a proud legacy of service to all veterans and their families. It is our responsibility to add to that legacy. Our troops are returning to our communities everyday, and we need to be there for them — right out front. They need us."

Marty Conatser
National Commander
The American Legion

CONGRATULATIONS

Now that your post has initiated Operation Outreach in your community, please fill in the information below, cut (or tear) off this page, and fold it so that the self-addressed information on the back can be processed by the United States Postal Service. Then tape the folded card shut and drop in the mail. Your post may be featured in an issue of DISPATCH.

Post/Unit/Squadron Name and Number

Commander/President Printed Name

Signature

Street Address

City, State, ZIP

Does your post have a TS2 Team ready to provide support to local service members?

Did you meet with the local military commander? Was he or she supportive?

Was a presentation made to the troops? Date and number of troops addressed?

Was the presentation received favorably?

Did any service members join your post?

Did your post receive any media coverage or pickup of a letter to the editor?

Were you pleased with the results of Operation Outreach? Comments?

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IN THE
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FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 428 INDIANAPOLIS, IN

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

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To mail:

- Remove back cover.
- Fold at dotted line.
- Tape shut (do not staple).
- Drop in mail.

Stock# 58-004 Artwork# 32PR0108