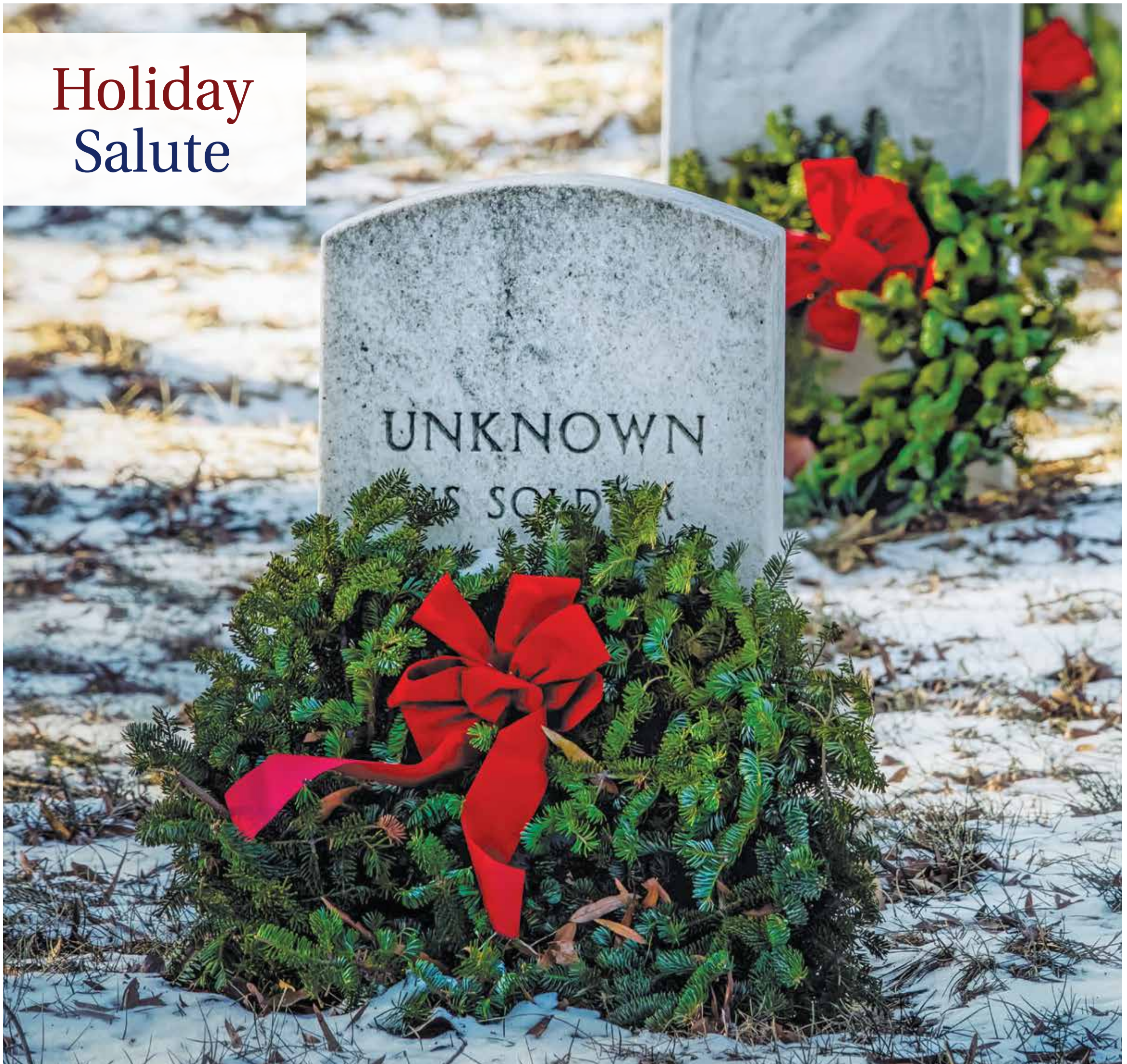


Holiday Salute



Write to a Service Member

If you don't have a family member or loved one in the military but still want to show your support, consider sending an active service member a letter this holiday.

Organizations like Operation Gratitude make it easy to connect with troops fighting for their country and give your thanks. This season, express your gratitude for their sacrifices that takes them away from their families during the holidays.

Most groups accept and distribute letters throughout the year, but the holiday season can be especially difficult for American troops. As they face uncertain situations in unfamiliar territories, your words of thanks can motivate them to remain positive and continue the strive for greatness. Here are some facts to consider when contributing a personalized letter to a great cause like Operation Gratitude.

ADDRESS THE SERVICE MEMBER

The organization accepts letters for a variety of military personnel who are in different stages of their career. When addressing your service member, be sure to specify their role, which can vary between:



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- **Deployed:** Serving in a foreign country.

- **Veteran:** One who unselfishly served our country in the past.

- **Recruit graduate:** Service member at the beginning of their career who made a promise to serve for at least four years.

- **Caregiver:** Medical profes-

sional in charge of aiding injured troops.

- **First responder:** Highly trained experts expected to tend to emergencies.

- **Wounded warriors:** Service member who was injured during the time they served.

Consider drafting a letter to a few or all these categories as they all play a significant role

in today's military.

WRITING TIPS

The organization urges contributors to omit the date or year within the letter. They also ask that discussions regarding politics are limited. Instead, place your focus on telling the service member about yourself. You should

talk about your family, hobbies or a favorite pet.

Converse on routine topics like sporting events, movies or delicious food. Don't forget to thank them for their unselfish service and list your first name and address. Many soldiers like to respond to a letter in their downtime, potentially creating a lifelong pen pal.

Show your Patriotism

Express your patriotic feelings at home by displaying an American flag in your yard. This act of patriotism is an efficient way to show your support for the country and for the men and women who are sworn to protect it.

Before investing in an Old Glory banner, you should know the rules and regulations about waving it properly. According to the United States Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Flag Code was initiated on June 14, 1923. The bill is meant to protect the flag's honor and ensure that citizens treat it with respect. Here are a few tips to help you correctly respect the banner while showing your support for the troops this holiday season.



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OUTDOOR DISPLAY

The United States flag should be on display from sunrise to sunset on buildings or outdoor staffs. If you choose to keep the banner raised during the darkness, it should remain visible by illuminating it with high-quality lighting.

When displaying Old Glory on a staff or stationary pole, ensure it is at the peak unless flags are ordered to be half-staff. If you decide to hang it against your home or another

building, it should always be flat, with the blue field of stars facing north or east, depending on the direction of the street.

Make certain that outdoor flags are considered all-weather. They are more durable during inclement conditions and are more resistant to facing tears or fading.

WHEN IS HALF-STAFF APPROPRIATE?

On most days, the American

flag should be proudly displayed at the peak of a pole. However, there are certain occasions when it is necessary to hoist it only to half-staff.

- **Memorial Day:** The flag should be half-staff from sunrise until noon; and

- **By order:** Elected officials can deem that half-staff is appropriate after the death of an official or during a national emergency.

In May, flags on national

monuments and federal buildings were ordered to fly at half-staff in memory of those lost to COVID-19.

RETIRING A TATTERED FLAG

When your flag begins deteriorating, it is necessary to destroy it respectfully. Under the Federal Flag Code, the ceremony involves:

- It should be folded in the traditional method.

- Ignite an intense fire capable of completely burning the banner.

- People may salute the flag, recite the Pledge of Allegiance and hold a brief period of silence as it burns.

- Once consumed, the fire should be safely extinguished.

Reach out to your local VFW to hold a prominent flag burning ceremony that involves your community.

Send a Video

If you can't be with your service member this holiday, arrange a get together with their favorite people and document it on camera.

Wholesome messages from their friends and loved ones can easily be emailed and provide a familiarity from home. What may seem like a small gesture on your part can be a significant keepsake that they watch when things get tough.

Before arranging a gathering, give your invitees ample time to work the event into their schedule. Remember that holidays are usually busy for everyone, so notice is important. You should also be clear about your intentions of sending the video to the service member in your life. Ask your guests to prepare a speech or recite a few sentences about how important the military is to themselves and the country. Each person could even record their part remotely.

Check out these tips to ensure that the video is a welcome distraction and motivational tool.

WHO SHOULD YOU INVITE?

When considering a list of attendees to your event, try to think of the most influential people in the service member's life. This stage should be



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completed before any other step, because you may need extra time to contact out-of-town friends or family.

Talk to those closest to them and find out the names of childhood friends, distant cousins and role models. Fortunately, social media makes reaching out to people across the globe easily accessible. Once you have an idea about how many guests will

show up, you can begin choose an accommodating venue and make catering plans.

CAPTURE CANDID MOMENTS

Ensure your camera's battery is full, as you will want to capture the heartwarming moments of a gathering in a service member's honor. Find a quiet room where guests can

record themselves speaking about their appreciation and compile the files into one digital package.

You should also consider purchasing disposable cameras and placing them throughout the gathering. When developing the film, find out if an expert can copy the photos on a thumb drive to load them into an email. It's also a good idea to send physical copies

so they can display them in their residence.

SAY YOUR PIECE

At the end of your email, record your own kind words and discuss the steps you took to plan the event. Your gratitude and hard work to host a one-of-a-kind gathering will make your service member more appreciative of your efforts.



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Give Back to Service Members

While most see the holidays as a time to celebrate the season with their family, American troops often find themselves far from home.

Fortunately, there are multiple ways to send your gratitude for the sacrifices of service members and their families. Get in the seasonal spirit by contributing with these wholesome actions, as suggested by the organization Soldier's Angels.

DONATE HOLIDAY STOCKINGS

You can usually find organizations that are committed to distributing filled stockings to

veterans and active-duty service members throughout the country.

Look for a holiday community partner in your community or research charities online who accept donations. Many times, these groups rely on financial assistance for the stockings, gifts to fill inside and letters or cards.

If you're lucky enough to have access to a local facility, ask about donating your time by assisting with shipping,

distribution and packaging. You should also spread the word of your endeavor with family and friends to inspire them to participate.

ADOPT A MILITARY FAMILY

If you know a military family who is celebrating the holiday without their service member, money is likely tight and those at home feel stress and loneliness. Do your best to help make the Christmas

spirit jollier by assisting with the financial burdens.

A few ideas include purchasing prepaid gift cards that can be spent on necessities like groceries, gasoline or household essentials. While receiving presents is not the reason for the season, children will appreciate a gift under the tree. Ask their parents about interests or hobbies and try to incorporate a few small tokens of appreciation into your holiday shopping list.

Remember that a young child is likely distraught when spending the holidays with-

out their military mom or dad. A gift from a positive adult role model can help ease their distress during a difficult time.

VOLUNTEER AT A VA HOSPITAL

Ask your local VA hospital if there are positions available for volunteers. Around the holidays, they may need help organizing events, activities and spend time with patients. You may find opportunities by checking job boards or emailing the human resource director about your desire to donate your time.

Send Updates from Home

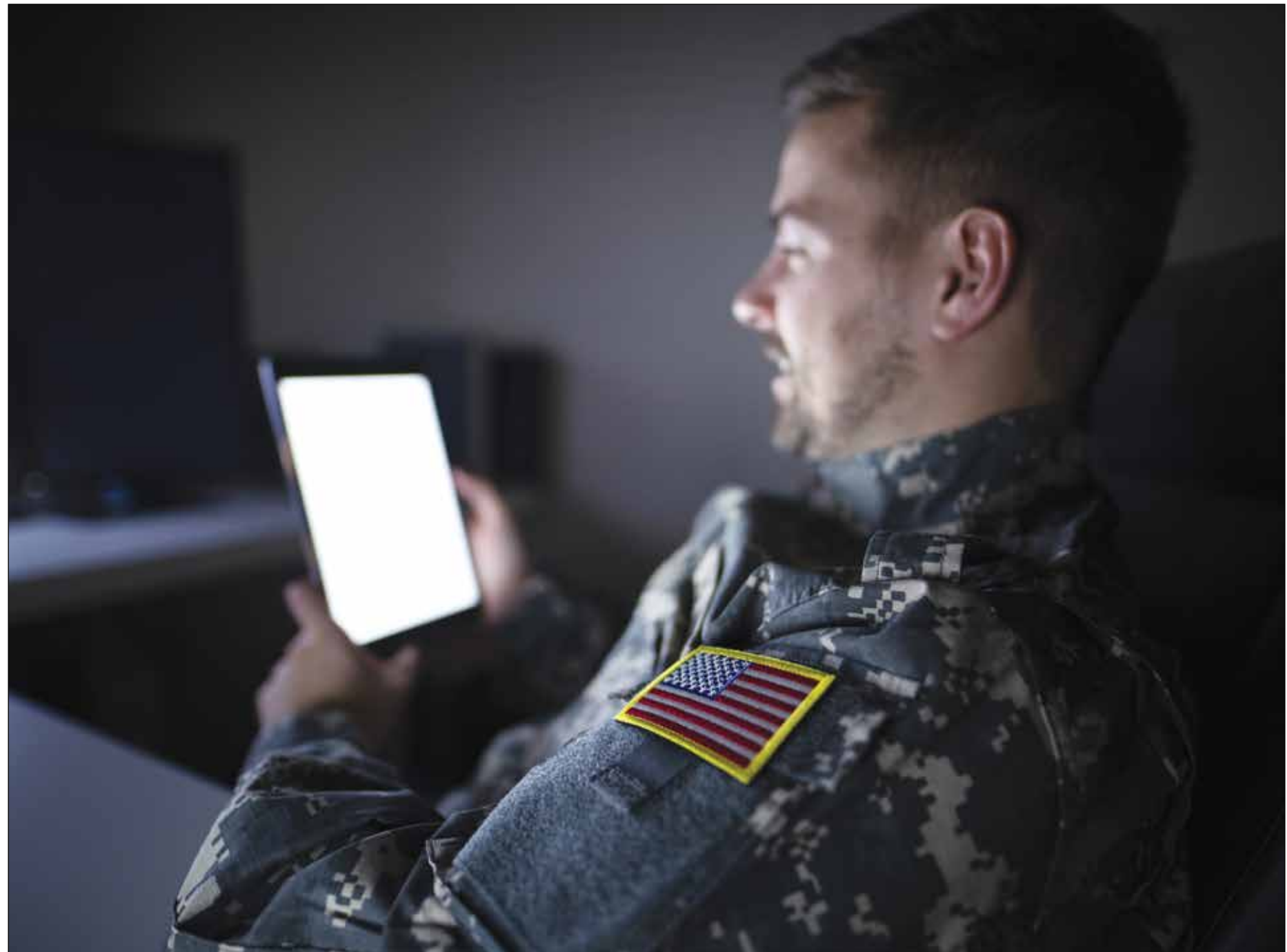
A service member's deployment can be lengthy, meaning that their town may become unrecognizable before they arrive home. Keep them updated with newspaper headlines regarding breaking news in the area and images of new businesses that have moved in.

Photographs and stories about a familiar setting can help cure homesickness. It's also a positive way to provide a perspective of what they can expect when they settle back into life at home.

In addition to sending news regarding their hometown, consider buying their favorite non-perishable treats that are only available locally. Items like beef jerky, hot sauce and snack cakes will provide them with a taste of home. When shipping, make sure all containers are tight and items are far from their expiration dates as overseas mail can be lengthy.

SHOW THEM THE LIGHTS

During the holidays, many families gather to travel their communities and catch spectacular light shows. For deployed soldiers, missing



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out on experiencing the event with their loved ones can be heartbreaking. For this year's visit to see the lights, consider bringing a camera to capture the festivity on film. If you have children, make sure to catch their joyous expressions as they become absorbed in the experience. Ask them to say a special

message for their deployed parent while they enjoy the holiday tradition.

SEND NEWS STORIES

As breaking news develops in your community, local journalists capture the events on paper. Think about compiling a variety of newspaper clippings if you plan to send a

care package to your soldier. Events should include new business developments, neighborhood activism and other local stories. Avoid missing a remarkable story and support your regional newspaper by subscribing. This ensures that each edition is conveniently delivered to your home.

SEND PHOTOS

Document a service member's favorite outdoor places as the area transitions into the holidays. If they frequent a local hiking trail, fishing spot or park, film yourself traveling the area and capturing the moment. Include yourself in the photo to give them a wholesome reminder of home.

Visit a War Memorial

During the holidays, reflect on those who gave the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedom of Americans.

Across the country, there are multiple monuments and memorials you can visit to honor fallen service members. If you're unfamiliar with the available war memorials to visit, here are some options to consider.

USS ARIZONA, HONOLULU, HAWAII

On Dec. 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor faced a devastating attack. The USS Arizona suffered several direct hits during the World War II bombing that killed an estimated 1,177 crewman on board. The ship serves as the final resting place for the sailors who lost their lives during the ambush.

In 1962, Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy declared the wreck a national shrine. Today, the memorial includes a shrine that lists the names of those lost on a marble wall.

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

Considered the most prominent United States military cemetery in the country, the memorial sits on the former estate of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee. It's a final resting place for more than 400,000 military members and



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eligible dependents. When visiting, pay tribute to the famous Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which was declared in 1921. You can also witness the graves of former presidents William Howard Taft and John F. Kennedy.

National Memorial Arch, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
Valley Forge was the

Continental Army's winter encampment during the winter of 1777-78. There, more than 2,500 soldiers would lose their lives from disease, starvation and exposure to the elements. However, this area also served as the place where Gen. George Washington began turning the tide during a low point in American forc-

es. Today, you can visit the arch dedicated to the officers and private soldiers of the Continental Army.

LIBERTY WORLD WAR I MEMORIAL, KANSAS CITY

Now part of the National World War Museum and Memorial, the Liberty Memorial was opened in 1926.

The museum tells the story of the Great War and global events from 1914 through the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The tower and museum buildings are crafted in an Egyptian Revival style and feature artistic reliefs and a 217-foot tower topped with a flame effect of light and steam.

Ways for Kids to Show Support

It can be difficult for young children to accept why their mom or dad is away serving the country.

Depending on the child's age, they may not fully understand why their loved one is away from home or when they will be returning.

There are still plenty of ways to show support, even for a young child. While you already teach them to be proud of the sacrifice from U.S. troops, you can also educate them with easy ways to show their support.

Check out these tips from the National Guard Association of Texas so that kids can express their gratitude.

- When you see a person in a military uniform, thank them for their service.
- Keep a journal about their daily activities and send the notes to a deployed service member.
- Call the local radio station and request patriotic theme songs in honor of our troops.
- Talk to peers and teachers at school about organizing a military appreciation day.
- Ask local businesses for donations that will be distributed to overseas service members.



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- Discuss developing a charity drive to collect goods from neighbors, friends and family.
- Send a thank-you note to a deployed service member.
- Form a community support team for local military families.
- Encourage children of

deployed service members to partake in activities or family outings.

- Volunteer time to military families by doing outdoor chores like mowing the lawn, pulling weeds or raking leaves.
- Assist in planning a home-

coming party in anticipation of a service member's return.

- Create a jokebook to share with service members.
- Request special prayers for service members at a church service and share the message with the troops.
- Teaching children early

about the importance of the American military can provide them with a lifelong lesson of compassion and support.

Share your stories on social media or with reporters at your local newspaper. You never know who you may inspire.