



HOLIDAY  
SALUTE

Support America's  
**Armed  
Forces**

# Military Christmas Traditions

**A**n undying commitment to their country. A resounding respect for the American flag and all it stands for. A truly selfless way of life dedicated to bettering the opportunities for those around them.

There are many reasons to be thankful for our servicemen and women this holiday season. And what is especially apparent this time of year is that many are far away from their friends and family members as they fulfill their honorable responsibilities within the military.

So how exactly is a military family supposed to start or carry on Christmas traditions when one of its main members is away? Hopefully there are still plenty of extended family members and friends in your area who will be more than happy to share their traditions with you. Here are some other ideas for making this holiday as special as possible, even in the absence of your loved one.

## **SPEAK, IF POSSIBLE**

Technology makes it possible for families who are spread out throughout the world to speak clearly with each other regularly. An online video conference or phone call can mean the world to a family member who is away for Christmas.

Let them know they are close to your heart and even send them a present or two to open while they're on the line with you.

## **HAVE CHRISTMAS EARLY OR LATE**

For deployed or stationed military members who may make it home around Christmastime, families may be able to slightly adjust their schedule to accommodate the length of the stay. A Christmas celebration in November or January is still better than no Christmas at all.

## **CHRISTMAS CARDS**

If your loved one is away this holiday season, why not start a tradition of Christmas cards? Speak with everyone who knows your military family member and have them draw their own card.

Your loved one will be blown away by the package full of customized cards and their messages of love, support and well wishes.





# Wreaths Across America

**I**n one of the most impressive, collaborative acts of military appreciation you will see during the holiday season, Wreaths Across America coordinates wreath-laying ceremonies throughout all 50 states and beyond every December.

The non-profit organization chooses a specified Saturday and relies upon the help of thousands of selfless volunteers to place wreaths at veteran gravesites at nearly 900 locations within the United States and abroad.

The group placed a record 142,000-plus wreaths last year at Arlington National Cemetery alone. Here are some other impressive numbers from the 2013 campaign:

- More than 25,000 volunteers participated.
- More than 1,000 local fundraising groups took part.
- All 50 states played a role in coordinating local wreath-laying ceremonies.
- 5,000 wreaths were donated in 1992, the first unofficial year of the program

## THE HISTORY

Morrill Worcester, owner of Worcester Wreath Company of Harrington, Maine, founded Wreaths Across America in 1992. He had a surplus of wreaths and decided to use them to honor veterans, according to the organization's website. The organization received official status in 2008.

With the help of U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine) and a host of local volunteers, arrangements were made for the wreaths to be placed in one of the older sections of Arlington National Cemetery. The project has rapidly progressed, thanks to social media and a U.S. citizenry committed to sharing some holiday appreciation for those who have served and made the ultimate sacrifice.

## GET INVOLVED

It is easy to individually honor the veterans in your local community by placing a wreath. You can coordinate a wreath-laying ceremony in your town or help raise funds for wreath sponsorships for Arlington.

Groups can also become involved by volunteering to assist with wreath-laying activities. Invite your friends and family during your holiday break to spend some time honoring our service men, women and families.





# Programs for Military Families

**W**hile you're putting together your list of gifts for the special people around you, don't forget the military families.

Spouses and children of those serving in the military are some of the most deserving during the holiday season, especially ones who will not be fortunate enough to spend time with their loved one at Christmas.

Military budgets can be stretched to the maximum without a lot left over for Christmas presents. That's where you can come in. To help thank military families for the sacrifices made year-round, many organizations have developed special Christmas programs.

These initiatives can be crucial in making the holidays a positive time for military, spouses and children alike.

Here are some programs and options available to military families in need and how people can assist:

## ADOPT-A-FAMILY

Numerous organizations offer adopt-a-family programs, which facilitate the easy sharing of military families' Christmas wish lists. You simply "adopt" a family and purchase items they request. These programs are extremely popular, so military families must submit an application months before Christmas to become eligible.

## FULL CIRCLE HOME

Full Circle Home gives deployed servicemen a chance to send a gift box to their wives back home. Gift boxes can contain pampering items, such as lotions, bubble baths and spa socks. They also include a personalized, handwritten note from the serviceman.

## HEROES AT HOME

This donation-based program is coordinated by Sears and allows military families to apply for a gift card to help with their holiday shopping.

Registration for the gift cards generally opens at the end of August and has had up to 20,000 applications, of which a select

amount is chosen to receive the cards depending on the amount of donations received.

## MILITARY INSTALLATION SUPPORT

If you're looking to donate your time or funds locally, the family

centers within military installations often offer assistance to military families in many forms. These may include buying children Christmas gifts or running errands.

Contact your local installation to find out how you can help or receive assistance.



# Holiday Mail for Heroes

The mail is among the best ways to connect with a military member who may be overseas this holiday season.



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Phone calls and social media have made it easier than ever to keep in touch with military members, but there is nothing quite like receiving a personalized, heartfelt piece of mail from a friend, family member or even a perfect stranger.

The American Red Cross “Holiday Mail for Heroes” program provides Americans with the opportunity to extend holiday greetings and thanks to

service members, veterans and their families around the world. The program first was started in 2007 when the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington took its idea of distributing holiday cards to the Red Cross.

The deadline is typically in early December, so be sure to complete your card ahead of time for a timely delivery.

To ensure cards reach their destination, the following guidelines apply:

- Ensure that all cards are signed.
- Use generic salutations such as “Dear Service Member.”
- Only cards are accepted.
- Do not include email or home addresses on the cards.
- Photos and any other inserts will be removed during the reviewing process.
- Please avoid glitter; it can aggravate health issues of ill and injured warriors.

- If you are mailing a large quantity of cards, please bundle them and place them in large mailing envelopes; flat-rate postal shipping boxes are also acceptable. All holiday greetings should be addressed and sent to:  
Holiday Mail for Heroes  
P.O. Box 5456  
Capitol Heights, MD 20791-5456



# The 1914 Christmas Truce

Some 100 years ago this Christmas, a highly significant and slightly odd occurrence took place on the battlefields of World War I. The 1914 Christmas Truce began on Christmas Eve along the British and German lines around Ypres, Belgium, according to The History Channel.

It marked a temporary halt to the fighting that had only begun five months prior. The truce lasted until New Year's Day in some areas.

It began at the first light of dawn on Christmas Day, when some German soldiers emerged from their trenches and approached the Allied lines calling out "Merry Christmas" in their native tongue, according to the global organization Veterans for Peace.

## ABOUT THE TRUCE

In many reports on the truce, it was the singing of carols and trading of gifts and food that served as the main aspects of the agreement. Servicemen also organized soccer games and shared general fraternizations during the brief break from hostilities.

As you can imagine during such a contentious war, The History Channel identified the high commands as both livid and concerned while the lower ranks celebrated in the trenches. The stance was not across the board; many generals took a relaxed approach to the truce, seeing it as an opportunity to rest their troops while also scouting out the enemy position.



## THE TRUCE TODAY

Veterans for Peace has coordinated with local chapters throughout the world to plan celebrations honoring the memorable moment in history. Reach out

to your local veterans group to find out if any events will be taking place in your area for Christmas.

The English Premier League, Europe's largest soccer organization, in 2013 announced its intentions to

build an all-weather field to mark the 100-year anniversary of the truce. The league has also been coordinating the Christmas Truce Tournament since 2011, bringing together under-12 teams from England,

Belgium, France and Germany.

The Premier League will also host a major international Christmas Truce Tournament in December to inaugurate the new field and mark the truce centenary.



# Toys for Tots

Every child deserves a toy at Christmastime. The United States Marine Corps works hard to make sure that is the case for as many children as possible.



Its Toys for Tots program collects new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year.

The toys are then distributed as Christmas gifts to less fortunate children in the community in which the campaign is conducted. The program, which the Secretary of Defense approved as an official activity of the Marines in 1995, is for all children, including military kids.

The Toys for Tots objectives are as simple as they are honorable:

- Help less fortunate children throughout the United States experience the joy of Christmas.
- Play an active role in the development of children.
- Unite all members of local communities in a common cause.
- Contribute to better communities in the future.

## ACTIVITIES

The principal Toys for Tots activity is the annual collection and distribution of toys, which is generally coordinated by the local reserve unit. In communities without a reserve unit, the campaign can be conducted by a detachment or an authorized group of veteran Marines.

And Toys for Tots is not strictly focused on Christmastime. Campaign coordinators also conduct annual events including golf tournaments, foot races, bicycle races and other voluntary events designed to garner support and donations for the program.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND HOW TO HELP

To date, the organization has distributed nearly 500 million toys to more than 200 million less fortunate children. It has also been named the Outstanding Nonprofit Organization of the Year by various high-profile federations and media organizations.

You can help this program by donating a toy at one of your local toy-drop locations or by hosting an event at your home. Visit [www.toysfortots.com/donate/toys](http://www.toysfortots.com/donate/toys) to access the organization's drop-down menu for locations and volunteer opportunities.



# Thank a Veteran

Veterans are proud people who rely on work ethic and commitment to push them through their missions, both within the military and in their post-military lives. But a simple, sincere thank you can go a long way, too.

It helps members of the military to know that their efforts are not going unrecognized, especially since being away from their friends and family members for long periods of time can be an emotionally stressful experience.

You may be at a loss in thinking of a way to thank them for their service. Luckily, numerous organizations make the military thank-you an easy gift to give this holiday season.

## HERE ARE A FEW:

- **Thank-A-Vet:** Get involved with Thank-A-Vet, a non-profit organization that raises funds, socks and goods for veterans and their families. The group hosts and attends events that honor veterans and their loved ones, providing volunteer services and “Cups of Camaraderie” through its Veteran Coffee Clubs programming.

- **Surprise a vet:** One organization offering unique veteran gifts is Brown Paper Ticket and its “Salutes” program, which allows you to donate event tickets that will get into the hands of a veteran in the city of your choice. Events of all types range in price from \$5 to \$100



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and include sporting events, comedy shows, dinners and comic-book conventions. Your contribution can help treat a veteran to a much

deserved night on the town

- **Charitable Events:** Even during the wintertime, many organizations coordinate 5K

walks or runs to help military personnel. Your entry fee can go toward helping veterans who may be down on their luck or even homeless.

Find such events online through your local veterans organizations and sprint toward the opportunity to help them with their cause.