



Operation Comfort Warriors: Meet the Challenge

By American Legion National Commander David K. Rehbein, American Legion Auxiliary National President Desiree´ A. Stoy, and Sons of the American Legion National Commander Tommie Cisna

We need your help. Most importantly they need you. They are our warriors, our guardians, our protectors. They are liberators, peacekeepers and nation-builders. They are our neighbors, friends and family members. They are the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. And now they are hurting.

The U.S. government does a good job providing for the essential needs of the men and women recovering from war injuries in hospitals like Walter Reed, Brooke Army Medical Center and Bethesda Naval Medical Center, just to name a few. But what about the so-called nonessentials, the items that don't show up as a budget-line on a government spreadsheet? Nonessential comfort items such as loose-fitting sweat suits that can cover a soldier's healing body without adding pressure to the burns he suffered during an RPG attack in Ramadi? Or an I-Pod to help drown out the tinnitus that has plagued the medic ever since she drove too close to a roadside bomb in Afghanistan?

In 2007, Past National Commander Paul Morin, Auxiliary National President JoAnn Cronin and SAL Commander Earl Ruttkofsky challenged The American Legion family to raise \$50,000 to purchase comfort items for our wounded warriors at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. Legion family members and other caring Americans responded in a big way.

In fact, Operation Landstuhl was so successful that we want to accomplish a similar endeavor at other military and VA medical centers. We are calling on you to once again help us meet our goal of raising \$50,000 by the holidays.

When the Red Cross notified The American Legion that zip-up sweatsuits were in short supply at Walter Reed, the Legion immediately ordered 100 sets. But it's just a drop in the bucket. We have been told there is an even greater need for items at Fort Hood and Fort Bragg. Consider that there are 67 other U.S. military inpatient facilities and 1,369 VA inpatient and outpatient centers, and you can grasp the enormous need. Their size and needs, however, are dwarfed by the obligation that America has to these heroes.

The American Legion family is calling this effort Operation Comfort Warriors. - Contributing is effortless. No trips to the post office or packaging of comfort items are needed. We will handle all of that. You can use your credit card to make an online donation at www.legion.org/ocw or you can mail a check to Operation Comfort Warriors, PO Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

Administrative and promotional costs for Operation Comfort Warriors will be paid by The American Legion, so you can be sure that your entire donation will go directly to the troops. Many centers are not equipped to store large quantities of care packages, so monetary donations are needed in order to purchase items that are truly needed.

Shortly after the bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut, Gen. P.X. Kelley visited a severely injured Marine in the hospital. Gen. Kelley said the young Marine had "more tubes going in and out of his body than I have ever seen in one body." The injured Marine could not see his Commandant very well. Gen. Kelley recalled, "He reached up and grabbed my four stars, just to make sure I was who I said I was. He held my hand with a firm grip. He was making signals, and we realized he wanted to tell me something. We put a pad of paper in his hand – and he wrote 'Semper Fi.'"

Semper Fi, or Semper Fidelis, is the Marine Corps motto meaning "Always Faithful." Well today's wounded warriors in all service branches remain faithful. Faithful to their country, their comrades in arms and their loved ones back home. Operation Comfort Warrior will never be able to compensate these heroes for their sacrifices. But it will show them that we care.

