

STORY AND PHOTO BY TECH. SGT. PHYLLIS HANSON

SUPPORTING OUR TROOPS

MORE THAN A FADED MAGNET

Having deployed two times to Iraq, I know how it feels to leave family behind and head to unknown, downright dangerous places.

As I left on my last deployment, holding back tears as I said goodbye to my son, I thought, "Does he understand? He's just a little guy with a big smile and all the smarts in the world."

How could I explain why mommy had to go away? What if I didn't come home?

I explained to him that just days before he was born, America was attacked by enemies. I described to him how children who were not yet born would not ever be able to meet their fathers — for they had been killed. Some were hard at work and taken by surprise; some were our heroic firefighters or police officers who tried to help after the attack.

I tried to describe to him how people pulled together and how Americans began to

show pride for their country. Not long after the attacks, America and some of its allies across the world fought back. Flags waved, and "support our troops" magnets sold like hotcakes.

But after seven long years and two separate wars, the flags that once seemed to unfurl, flying freely from every house, are now sparse. The magnets are faded. What happened? Do we not need the support now more than ever? As time goes by and the country's debt gets higher, people struggle to make ends meet. In a way, I can see why people have become weary.

While writing the story on the United Service Organizations at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, I saw the greeters' smiling eyes as they waved with encouragement and pride. I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that people still really do care. Despite their own problems, they are still there for us military members, waving and thanking us.

The USO volunteers' support is what helps me get on those planes. It gives me a comfort in my heart. All the donations come from those who truly do support the troops.

If I deploy again, or if I'm just traveling at my leisure, it's comforting to know that the USO is there for me. Why wouldn't I accept their generosity and kindness?

Trudging through the airports can be frazzling at times, especially during peak travel seasons or when the weather takes a turn for the worst and you find yourself stranded. I always try to remember that for most places I go, the USO will be there for me and my family — happily offering shelter, a place to grab a snack to eat or a book for my son to read. The USO in Dallas is a fantastic place. I am sure the other facilities are as well.

Military members do sacrifice a lot. But, there are people back home and abroad doing what they can to let us know they still care. They come to greet the troops at all hours. They send care packages full of goodies. They take the time to shake our hands in the grocery store. Let us not forget to thank them for their support.

Note: The United Service Organizations is chartered by Congress as a nonprofit, charitable corporation. The USO is endorsed by the president and the Department of Defense. Each president has been the honorary chairman of the USO since its inception. It relies upon the support of the American people. For more information, go to www.uso.org.

Phyllis Hanson



Members of the Banshees Motorcycle Club drive away after making an \$11,000 donation to the United Service Organizations at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. The proceeds came from the club's "Mud Bug Boogie 6th Annual USO Crawfish Boil" in Arlington, Texas. Many organizations like this donate time and money to support the USO and servicemembers.

