



Helping troops overseas, one golf ball at a time



Published: Tuesday, 24 Dec 2013 | 8:57 AM ET

By: [Jane Wells](#) | CNBC Reporter

While it seems like war has ended after a dozen years, the truth is, we still have thousands of troops overseas in harm's way.

Some haven't forgotten. Here are two men trying to make the holiday less stressful—and a lot more fun—for troops who cannot be home with family.

First, there's [Bunkers in Baghdad](#). Joe Hanna, a sports entertainment attorney from Buffalo, N.Y., started the charity after learning that troops in Iraq were creating makeshift driving ranges and golf courses to relieve stress. He thought, "Why not send them balls and clubs?"



Source: Bunkers in Bagdad

His first shipment went out five years ago. Since then, Bunkers in Baghdad has sent 4.5 million new and used golf balls, plus 100,000 new and used clubs to Iraq and Afghanistan. Sponsors include [Callaway](#) and Arnold Palmer Enterprises. He told me that certain regions require extra equipment—like nets in Afghanistan. "It's very mountainous."

The charity's website includes notes from soldiers and Marines, like: "You are making our week much better and we really appreciate you sending the equipment so quickly. Our (Colonel) spent a few hours repairing our driving range platform yesterday and it's actually safe to hit from."

(Read more: [Nonprofit steps up for US troops who lack basics](#))

Hanna never served in the military. He's just a guy who wanted to do something nice for those defending our country.

Even though troops are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, "We're busier than ever," he said.

Hanna has started shipping clubs and balls to the VA and other facilities like Fisher House where wounded warriors are recovering.

Then there's Vance Albitz, a second baseman for the Memphis Redbirds, a farm club for the St. Louis Cardinals. Albitz started [Gloves 4 Troops](#) last year, collecting baseball gloves and balls and shipping them to troops. On his website, there's a countdown clock to spring training.

(Read more: [Barry Switzer's plan to take over college football](#))

Much like Hanna, Albitz started the charity after reading about what troops missed from home. "I read an article last year about a soldier who was asked what he wanted people to send him," Albitz told me. "He specifically asked for a couple baseball gloves and a ball so he and his buddy could play catch. I thought that I would be very capable of providing that for him and more."

Nearly 2,500 balls and gloves later, he's still at it.

Albitz said it costs about \$20 to ship a box of four donated gloves and four balls. Large donations have come in from Mizuno, Rawlings and Wilson.

At first Albitz thought Gloves 4 Troops would be a local project. "I didn't think it was going to get so much support," he said. It's grown so much he's now going through the process of becoming a non-profit so donations will be tax deductible.

(Read more: [Get the biggest bang for your donation bucks](#).)

The ballplayer would like to expand Gloves 4 Troops to eventually include other equipment for other sports (though it appears Hanna has golf covered).

"The one thing I have learned from this venture is that there are lots of U.S. troops stationed throughout the world," Albitz said. "Though many are coming home from Afghanistan, there are still a lot of soldiers I can send gloves to."

The most amazing thing that's happened since he started sending baseballs and gloves overseas? "They played in the snow within minutes of getting the gloves," he said.

Turns out, it's quite satisfying serving those who serve. It's also amazing how many people want to donate, and how grateful the gifts are received. "A lot of people—especially the baseball community—support our military," said Albitz. "I am proud to call myself an American."

—By *CNBC's Jane Wells*; Follow her on Twitter: [@janewells](#).