

COMMANDERS CELEBRATE,
HONOR MILITARY COMMUNITY
DURING WEEK 11'S SALUTE TO
SERVICE GAME

COMMANDERS GET SALUTE TO
SERVICE MONTH UNDERWAY WITH
VISIT TO WALTER REED NATIONAL
MILITARY MEDICAL CENTER



SALUTE TO SERVICE

COMMANDERS
SERVICE

SALUTE
MONTH

TO
RECAP





Commanders get Salute to Service month underway with visit to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

By Hannah Lichtenstein

The Washington Commanders got an early start in honoring Salute to Service month with a visit to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland on Monday, Oct. 30. For the second year in a row, a Commanders contingent spent time at the facility interacting with service members – active duty and retired – from around the country and every branch of the military.

“It was another special event this year with a great group of players spending time with patients, staff, and service members,” Washington Salute program lead Chris Bailey said. “Thank you to our friends at USAA for coordinating this year’s visit and for the amazing staff and leadership from Walter Reed who welcomed us back with open arms.”

In addition to a group of Commanders players, team dog Goldie, Command Force members and Major Tuddy were at the hospital for the afternoon. From conversations in the Military Advanced Training Center to

meet-and-greets and autograph signings, the experience at Walter Reed was both a fun and powerful one for all involved.

The Walter Reed visit started in the Military Advanced Training Center (MATC), the location of what Bailey and players described

as some of the afternoon’s “most memorable moments.”

The 31,000 square-foot facility houses more than 15 specialties and helps care for wounded warriors in transition. Here, those undergoing treatment got to hang out with players, breaking up the

sometimes-monotonous days. Megan, the mother of 13-year-old Ryan who is being treated for Ewings sarcoma, loved seeing the smile on her son’s face as he met with players during this first stop.

“He trades and sells rookies card, and I think he had [Daron] Payne’s rookie card,” she said. “He just got it signed by him so that will be the highlight of his day for sure.”

Employees at MATC were just as excited. For them, they appreciated that the visit would show a new part of the community a glimpse of the awesome, life-changing work that happens at Walter Reed.

“I live right here, and it’s really amazing how many people around Walter Reed aren’t familiar with what these guys go through and what we’re doing here, so I think for that reason it’s just great that Commanders are here today,” said Ellen Tazikas, an orthopedic surgery clinical research coordinator.

The impact of this facetime was not lost on the players. All of them were deeply engaged,



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asking thoughtful question and adding in some humor when possible in their interactions.

“It’s nice to be able to talk to and interact with the patients who are going through some battles right now and uplift their spirits a little bit,” Commanders’ kicker Joey Slye said.

The backend of the

Commanders’ visit was spent taking pictures, signing autographs and briefly chatting with those at Walter Reed in another part of the facility. E-5 sailor Alexa Carreon was beyond jazzed to talk with players of her favorite team, especially after just being at FedExField for the game against the Eagles less than 24 hours earlier.

“They could be tired after a gameday but they still came out here and that means a lot,” she said. “I love that they do

this... It boosts the morale and definitely gets people out to socialize and mingle.”

E3 Marine Dimitri Cheko, a former heavy equipment mechanic, was one of the first in the line for the meet-and-greet portion and was outspoken about the impact of the Commanders’ presence at the facility.

“It motivates to keep striving and not just stay depressed, because a lot of us do stay depressed,” he said. “It motivates us to keep a positive attitude and

keep moving forward. Our situation is not the end of the world.”

The afternoon was filled with memory-making and smiles. Salute to Service month is just getting underway, but the visit to Walter Reed is undoubtedly already one of the big highlights.

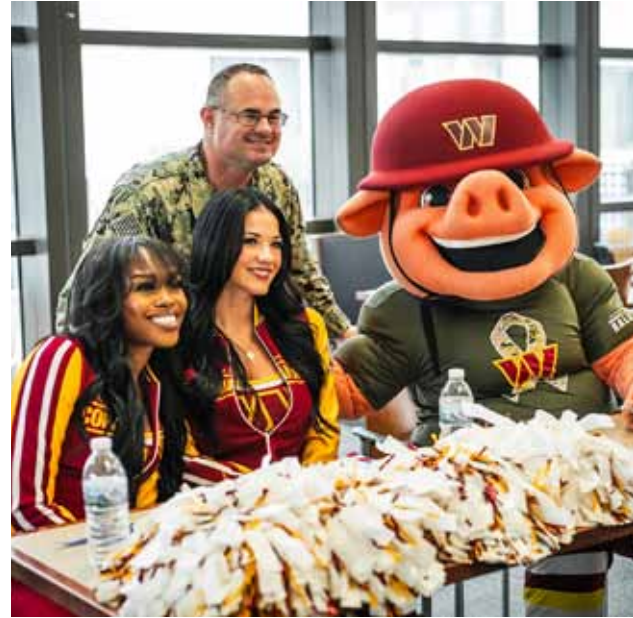
“Thank you to the team at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for hosting the Commanders today,” Bailey said. “We are already looking forward to next year!”



Walter Reed Photo Gallery



Walter Reed Photo Gallery



Washington Commanders' community package 'last pieces of home' for deployed service members at Pack4Troops event

By Kyra Plourde

The Washington Commanders joined the United Service Organization (USO) and Black Rifle Coffee Company to assemble 2,000 care packages for outgoing military personnel in a Pack4Troops event on Nov. 8.

"It's the last pieces of home these soldiers, airmen, or medics see before they go out," said Noah Neleski from the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group (MCECG). "So yeah, it's important. It's a small thing, but it goes a long way."

The work, which was part of the Commanders' Salute to Service month, was brought together by team president Jason Wright, the family of the team coaches, organization staff, marines from the Marine Corps Embassy Security Group (MCECG), the USO, and the Black Rifle Coffee Company.

Whether someone had a military connection or not, the value of this initiative stayed widely understood.

"There are military spouses here, but there are also people who have not served and aren't related to anyone that's served," Devon McTavish from the USO said. "But they're a part of the mission to help those who have given and sacrificed so much to defend our freedoms."

Coming together for Pack4Troops is one fraction of the more extensive work done by these organizations and the Commanders to support military personnel year-round.

"The USO serves those who serve, so we are in 250-plus locations around the world helping military personnel and their families," McTavish said. "And that's really what these packs are meant for, to be a little piece of home. We're not entirely sure where they'll end up, but they'll be across the Atlantic or the Pacific."

Despite being put together in the DMV area, these packages will end up worldwide. And each time,



they push to recreate the same thing: giving military personnel a piece of home to remind them that no matter where they go, their sacrifices don't go unnoticed.

"These packages make such a large difference," said Mike Garcia, a brand ambassador Black Rifle Coffee Company. "And as someone who has been deployed, I know how good it feels when those come in, and everyone's just ripping them open. It makes a world of difference."

The Washington Commanders understand the incredible value of this work, as does Chris Bailey, a 25-year veteran who's been nominated for the 2023 NFL Salute to Service award. Bailey's welcoming of different organizations to pair with the Commanders is an

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integral part of the team's work to give back to military personnel and their families.

"It's absolutely amazing," said Chris Holthus, a lead coordinator in the Pack4Troops planning. "I do these events all year round, and it's nice to see people give back to the military. It's a fantastic feeling to see everyone come together, and the Washington Commanders are wonderful in doing this."

The year-round Washington Salute program also pulls in service members stationed in the DMV area to connect with this work and others in the military community.

"We have an exciting group of young marines here," Neleski said. "As soon as we were asked to come out here, we were so excited. Working with local teams to provide this kind of support is important and something we care about being involved in as much as possible."

As decorated veterans, young marines, and Commanders community members all come together, they all have one thing in common: the shared desire to remind military personnel abroad that no matter where they are, they're deeply appreciated back home.



Pack 4 Troops Photo Gallery



Pack 4 Troops Photo Gallery





‘It feels more special’: Commanders celebrate, honor military community during Week 11’s Salute to Service game

By Hannah Lichtenstein

From the parking lots and concourses to the field and skies, FedExField was a sight to behold on Nov. 19 as the Commanders put a focus on celebrating the military community in its many forms.

“I can’t tell you how great it is to be standing up here on behalf of my family, my fellow owners and the Washington Commanders organization to be able to host and give back to all of you when you do so much for all of us every day,” said Managing Partner Josh Harris to dozens of military members in the USO Club tent before the Week 11 game.

Showing appreciation for the military community is a priority

for the Commanders throughout the year, but the Salute to Service game in particular provides an important opportunity to give this tenet extra attention. As the stadium sits in an area with such a rich military community and so many military institutions, the Commanders’ Salute game is always a powerful occasion, marked by hundreds of uniformed service members and recognitions paying tribute to active-duty members, veterans, military families and a number of service organizations.

This year, the Salute to Service game presented by Verizon delivered on that tradition. Highlights included an Air Force flyover, a halftime tribute featuring 180 service members representing each branch, Vietnam Medal of Honor recipients as honorary captains

and so much more.

The mission of the NFL’s Salute to Service initiative is to honor, empower and connect military members, and those values were at the forefront early on gameday. Activations for fans, which included a Salute to Service flag gate giveaway and photo opportunities with a US Army Blackhawk helicopter, centered the larger purpose of the game.

On the concourse, Verizon’s new 5G-powered interactive wall, which featured a Salute theme and photobooth where fans could showcase personalized cards with words of encouragement to service members and veterans, was a big hit.

“To be honest, I don’t feel like we really give the troops enough respect,” said 17-year-old Marcus

Ologunga Jr., who wrote a note at the wall. “They put their lives on the line to keep us safe, and we’re just sitting here relaxed, doing stuff that they would never do.”

For service members, veterans and their families, pregame festivities such as a VIP tailgate hosted by USAA were all about showering the guests of honor with admiration and offering a space for them to connect with one another.

“It feels great to be a part of and we feel appreciated...especially with the Commanders, it’s in the name, it’s got a bit of a military background, and it feels more special,” said Second Class Petty Officer Davin Deuel of the US Coast Guard.

A similar sentiment was

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shared over in the USO Club tent where Vietnam Medal of Honor recipients, leaders of the military, Commanders' ownership and others gathered.

"We love spending a crisp autumn afternoon doing something where we can share each other's company with liberty and the freedom that this service helps us protect," said General David Allvin, the chief of staff of the Air Force.

While eyes turned to football once 1 p.m. rolled around, various moments in the game were taken to spotlight the military community. One of the more somber and emotional recognitions of the afternoon took place in the first half when members of four families who've lost military loved ones assembled on the field.

At the game in partnership with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), these families were lifted by gestures that acknowledged their loved ones. In addition to the on-field moment spotlighting their stories, Commanders players wore the initials of the fallen heroes on their helmets during the game.

"It feels like it helps keep them alive," said Rickie Pruden, father of the late Staff Sergeant Craig Pruden who died in 2021.

Later on, a surprise-and-delight brought one veteran family to tears. The McKinney family, which includes former Marine mom Tiffany and dad Dwight as well as their four kids, thought they were just being recognized on-field for

their service but, instead, were gifted a new car by KIA.

"It was amazing...but I was kinda mad because I don't like people seeing me cry," Dwight McKinney said with a laugh.

Every moment during Salute to Service - whether it was this quick surprise, a brief speech or the couple-minute national anthem - was heavy with a sense that no amount of "thank

you" will ever be enough. This game, more than anything, is a reminder of the gratitude that should be given all the time.

"We have liberty, we have freedom, we have the ability to take care of our families and without all of you guaranteeing that, we would be in trouble," said Josh Harris. "I know what you do is hard, but we really appreciate it, and we're thinking about you every day."





**We salute those who serve!
Thank you!**



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