



NEWS In the News

Red Cross Continues the Century-Long Tradition of Serving those Who Serve

Written by [Katie Lawson](#), Staff Writer, [Redcross.org](#)

For more than a century, the American Red Cross has provided services to members of the United States military and their families—a tradition started by the organization's founder Clara Barton during the Civil War.

Barton recognized the need to provide assistance to soldiers amid the confusion of war, bringing them food, clothing and other supplies. Reading to soldiers and writing to their families to inform them of their loved one's status, Barton was nicknamed "Angel of the Battlefield." Several years later, in 1881, she founded the American Red Cross.

Today, at military installations across the country and throughout the world, Red Cross workers remain dedicated to providing core programs and services to the military community while local Red Cross chapters service the needs of military family members.

Programs for Soldiers and Military Personnel

The Red Cross Armed Forces Emergency Services (AFES) Emergency Communication Services program keeps military personnel in touch with their families and loved ones relaying important news such as the death of a loved one, serious illness or the birth of a child. These urgent messages are delivered through a worldwide network of Red Cross volunteers and employees to members of the armed forces anywhere in the world including ships at sea, isolated military units and embassies.

Commanders are not required to have verification from the Red Cross but many have come to rely on it when making their decision to grant emergency leave. Red Cross messages are factual, neutral and validated with the most current and correct information available.

"There are a lot of soldiers who do not use technology and count on the Red Cross for official emergency communication," says Army 1st Sgt. Brent Jurgensen. "We would contact the Red Cross, and they would get us the information needed to make a decision that would best serve the soldier and Army."

While Red Cross workers are not part of the military and remain neutral, AFES staff is often deployed to military installations to support Armed Forces units in the field. In the friendly atmosphere of communication and support centers, soldiers receive gifts from home and are able to share personal and family concerns in a safe and confidential environment. Talking with Red Cross workers provides an outlet for military personnel who may not be able to voice their concerns elsewhere. Comfort items provided by the Red Cross for the soldiers include games, playing cards, CDs, toiletries, coffee and snacks.



Long time Red Cross volunteer Linda Gentzyel speaks with a soldier about emergency financial assistance in Fort Lewis, Wash. (Photo Credit: American Red Cross)

A program called "Get to Know Us Before You Need Us" is offered to all active duty soldiers but is largely geared toward the National Guard and Reserve Units. Many members of these community-based units are unaware of the services available to them until they are mobilized or deployed. The "Get to Know Us Before You Need Us" program briefs military personnel and their families prior to deployment, teaching them how to use the valuable services offered by the Red Cross. Knowing in advance that communication links, counseling and financial assistance will be available if needed, brings peace of mind to military members and to the families from whom they are separated.

"The Red Cross has been the focal point for the community to show support and devotion to the soldiers of Fort Hood," said Linda Bruckart, a registered Army nurse at Fort Hood, Texas. "Units need Red Cross services that play a critical role in relaying vital emergency communication and the community service of caring.

Programs for Families

In addition to the services provided specifically for those in uniform, the Red Cross also offers countless volunteer opportunities to members of military families. Volunteer programs on military installations and hospitals provide specific opportunities for community service, education, job skills and personal development. Volunteers are important assets to the installation command and to the medical facility.

In medical facilities, volunteers can be placed in all aspects of hospital and clinic programs including physical therapy, emergency room, gynecology, pediatrics, dermatology and radiology. Volunteers often choose their own area of interest or may just be placed in an area where they are needed the most. Volunteers act as greeters, hospital guides, wheel chair escorts, patient chaperones and pharmacy aides. By applying skills learned and recording their volunteer hours, it is not uncommon for these individuals to obtain paid positions when they are no longer volunteering.

Gary Michael Facteau, a volunteer for four years at Womack Army Medical Center in North Carolina was extremely rewarded by his experience with the Red Cross. During his time as a volunteer, he worked in specialized fields such as radiology, diagnostics, MRI and nuclear medicine. Unsure of his field of interest for three years, Facteau eventually took part in intensive training to become a nuclear medicine technician.

"I have every intention to use all the experience I have gained during my time here as a volunteer, also I would like to thank the Red Cross for giving me a lifetime of experience and opportunity," Facteau said.

An increasingly successful initiative for both the Army and the Red Cross is the Dental Assistant Program (DENTAC). Military professionals provide rapid training and hands-on experience to qualified individuals in various dental clinics. After successfully completing training and meeting state accreditation requirements, volunteers can seek military or civilian employment. This Red Cross sponsored program gives volunteers invaluable professional experience that they are likely to use later on in life.



Debra Hanowell and her dog Lucy visit with a patient at Womack Medical Center at Fort Bragg, NC. The Pet Therapy program provides an opportunity for patients to enjoy the company of loving companions during their recovery.

(Photo Credit: American Red Cross)

Often referred to as Pet Therapy or Human-Animal Bonding, another program allows patients in military hospitals and clinics to visit with animals, mostly dogs, during their recovery process as animals have been known to help tremendously in the healing process. After passing a certification test, Red Cross volunteer dogs and their owners visit wounded soldiers, retirees, family members and pediatric patients.

The young soldiers simply appreciate the company and antics of the dogs, older patients enjoy talking about dogs they've owned over the years, and pediatrics patients...well, kids and dogs are a 'no-brainer'," said Valerie Smith, who has been volunteering with her two shelties for the past five years at Womack Army Medical Center.

There are other programs offered in addition to these. Red Cross babysitting classes that provide interested young adults with the information and teach the skills necessary to provide safe and responsible care for children. Health and safety instructors often teach Red Cross CPR and first aid classes. Red Cross volunteer caseworkers provide information, referrals and access to emergency financial assistance for active duty members and their families as well. These funds may be used for funeral expenses, food or even room and board. Youth volunteer programs are also in place to introduce career possibilities and provide valuable job experience.

The American Red Cross and all branches of the United States military continue to celebrate this effective partnership together. With well over

100 years of success in aiding service men and women around the country and the world, the Red Cross programs and volunteers are an immeasurable asset to service members. The Red Cross remains committed to helping the dedicated men and women of the United States Armed Forces for years to come.