



News Release

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USO TOUR BRINGS A TOUCH OF HOME TO THE TROOPS

CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C. – A Charleston-based C-17 and aircrew transported an entourage of stars, who took their message of support and holiday wishes to military personnel stationed in Bosnia and Italy as part of a 2001 United Services Organization tour.

Entertainer Wayne Newton, who is also the Chairman of the celebrity circle of the USO, said the performers had numerous objectives, but the most important was to “bring a touch of home to the military personnel.”

The celebrities kicked off the five-day event with a three-hour performance at Eagle Air Base, in Tuzla, Bosnia, where they entertained more than 1,000 troops during two shows, Nov. 14 and 15.

“I’ve been on three USO trips and this was the best,” said Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Jim Finch.

The mission was accomplished because the show made people feel better, proud to be in the military and happier because they were remembered, he said.

The performers and the aircrew stayed two nights in Hungary, while shuttling to and from Bosnia both nights.

“It was grueling,” Newton said. “We were getting at most, six hours of sleep then we were on a moving plane or bus, working or signing autographs.”

The group left Hungary for Aviano AB, Italy, Nov. 16, where a performance was held that night.

Nov. 17, the tour took them to Capodachino, Italy, where they entertained troops assigned to Naval Support Activities Naples and Headquarters Allied Forces Southern Command.

“We loved it,” said Navy IT2 Deanna Whitt, who attended the Naples show with her husband Army Staff Sgt. Chad Whitt. “Especially since the families could be here.”

The tour ended in Vincentia with a crowd of mostly Army paratroopers.

“It’s been fantastic,” said actress Bo Derek, who is planning a trip to the Persian Gulf in January. “The best part was meeting all the service members. It was a reminder of the sacrifices they’re making. It felt so cold and lonely, especially in Bosnia.”

Miss USA Kandace Kruger said that she has attended many notable events, such as the MTV and Country Music Awards, but this has been the highlight of her reign.

“I’m not just saying that, it truly has,” she said. “I will cherish these memories forever.” The aircrew was left with their own memories to cherish.

“Watching the entertainers interact with the crew members throughout the whole trip was memorable,” said Lt. Col. Matt Heuer, C-17 mission commander. “They were friendly, helpful and above all, they always looked out for us. They were concerned with our well being by making sure our rooms were o.k. and that we were being taken care of.”

(For more information, contact Capt. Beth Szucs at 963-5537 or Staff Sgt. Pamela Smith at 963-5589)