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Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Kicks Off Annual Eight-Day, Seven-Country USO Spring Troop Visit and Brings Warmth to Troops Early

Chuck Pagano, Andrew Luck, Dwayne Allen, David DeCastro, Diana DeGarmo, Ace Young, Dennis Haysbert, Miss America 2015 Kira Kazantsev, Phillip Phillips and Wee Man join Admiral James Winnefeld in Extending America's Thanks

ARLINGTON, VA (Mar. 4, 2015) – Nothing marks the end of a blistering, cold winter quite like the annual **USO Spring Troop Visit** led by the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff **Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr.** The eight-day, seven country USO tour is designed to appeal to troops of all ages and bring a much needed touch of home to those serving abroad. This year's variety-style USO tour is a fusion of music, comedy and heartfelt messages of support featuring Indianapolis Colts head coach **Chuck Pagano**, quarterback **Andrew Luck** and tight end **Dwayne Allen**; Pittsburgh Steelers guard **David DeCastro**; "American Idol" alumni **Diana DeGarmo** and **Ace Young**; American film, stage and television actor **Dennis Haysbert**; Miss America 2015 **Kira Kazantsev**; platinum recording artist and season 11 "American Idol" winner **Phillip Phillips**; as well as motion picture and television personality Jason "Wee Man" Acuna. ***USO photo link below with images added daily***

DETAILS:

- The tour will visit various countries in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia Pacific, as well as an aircraft carrier at sea.
- Three days into the moment-filled USO tour, the group has visited two military bases and created #USOMoments for more than 1,300 troops and military families. Among the locations visited so far are Ramstein Air Force Base (Germany) and U.S. Naval Support Activities Naples (Italy). Throughout the week, the group will travel to five more countries, perform countless more shows and visit many more installations.
- This trip marks the sixth USO tour for Haysbert; fourth for DeGarmo, third for Winnefeld and Young; second for Acuna; and first USO experience for Pagano, Luck, Allen, DeCastro, Kazantsev and Phillips.
- **PAGANO** became head coach of the Indianapolis Colts in January 2012 and is ranked the 16th best head coach in the NFL by Rotoworld - with 33 wins, 11 losses and two consecutive AFC South titles.
- Born in Washington, DC **LUCK** has led the Colts to three playoff appearances, including two division titles in 2013 and 2014. He also led the team to the second largest playoff comeback in NFL history during the 2013-2014 NFL playoffs.

- **ALLEN** played college football for Clemson University before being selected by the Colts during the 2012 NFL Draft. Born and raised in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Allen capped off his 2014 season with eight touchdowns and 29 receptions.
- Selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the first round of the 2012 NFL Draft, **DECASTRO** has been a key member of the team's offensive line, having started 34-of-35 games played in his career. A native of Washington state and a graduate of Stanford University, DeCastro was a college teammate of fellow USO tour participant, Indianapolis Colts QB Andrew Luck.
- **DEGARMO** first rose to stardom in "The Young & The Restless." She continued winning over audiences in 2004, rising to runner-up during season three of "American Idol." Now wed to long-time companion Ace Young, who she married in March 2014, the couple currently star in the national tour "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat."
- A Grammy-nominated songwriter, **YOUNG** has accomplished a lot since his stint on season five of "American Idol." Among his songwriting accomplishments include Chris Daughtry's "It's Not Over" and Janet Leon's "Let Go." When not writing songs or in the studio making music Young can be found acting, having appeared in Fox's "Bones" as well as Broadway's "Grease" and "HAIR."
- **HAYSBERT** began his acting in 1979 and has gone on to star in more than 30 major motion pictures, theater productions and television shows. Recognized most for his portrayal of 'President David Palmer' in the hit television series "24" and as 'Sergeant Major Jonas Blane' in "The Unit," Haysbert's film credits include "Kung Fu Panda 2," "Jarhead," "Love & Basketball," "Random Hearts," "Waiting to Exhale," and "Heat," among many others.
- Crowned Miss America 2015 in September 2014, **KAZANTSEV** is the third consecutive winner from New York. Born in California to Russian parents, she is a graduate of Hofstra University in New York City and has plans to obtain a juris doctorate and a master's degree in business administration.
- **PHILLIPS** is a platinum recording artist who released his sophomore album "Behind The Light" last May. The album includes all songs that were either written or co-written by Phillips including his lead single "Raging Fire," which debuted in the Billboard Hot 100. "Behind The Light" is the follow-up to 2012's "The World from the Side of the Moon," a platinum plus-selling album that debuted at #4 on the Billboard Top 200 and featured the five-time platinum smash hit "Home." Throughout the last year, the 24-year-old Georgia native has toured the U.S. and the world, joining Matchbox Twenty and John Mayer on tour and sharing a stage with Bruce Springsteen at the 2013 Rock in Rio festival. The American Idol season 11 winner spent the summer on a co-headline tour with O.A.R. before setting out on a national headline tour this past fall.
- Best known for his appearances in "Jackass" series and films, **ACUNA** rose to fame in 1993 after he was prominently featured in the popular skateboard magazine "Big Brother." In addition to his on-screen antics, Acuna is a partner in the Chronic Tacos restaurant chain and owns the successful WeeMan's Chronic Tacos restaurant in Redondo Beach. He is a celebrity athlete for Monster Energy and a spokesperson for Von Zipper Sunglasses, and DVS shoes.

QUOTES:

Attributed to Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr.:

"This is my third opportunity to take a group of talented entertainers overseas on a USO trip, and just as Bob Hope did, each of these individuals, from sports stars to singers, American Idols both literally and figuratively, to bring a smile to the faces of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen serving around the world. The strength of the USO, with its vibrancy, character and values which it provides as it helps bring comfort to our men and women in uniform and their families. The USO

represents a certain certainty during uncertain times and provides unwavering commitment to service members and their families.

Attributed to Dwayne Allen:

"I am honored and amazed by the opportunity to visit troops around the world! I pray that by visiting and giving them a little bit of home while abroad we can also try to express our gratitude for their bravery and selflessness in protecting our great nation."

Attributed to Phillip Phillips:

"This trip has been nothing short of amazing so far. We've got to meet so many great men and women in uniform, and see so many interesting places. I can't thank Admiral Winnefeld and the USO enough for this life changing experience."

Attributed to Kira Kazantsev:

"I am so honored and humbled to be included in the USO Spring Troop Visit. As Miss America, I have an incredible opportunity to represent our great country and support our troops. Through this tour, I have the great privilege of being able to personally thank the men and woman of the military who are serving abroad. On behalf of the Miss America Organization, we are so grateful to the USO for everything they do and for allowing me to work alongside them. I hope this tour brings great joy to our service men and women overseas!"

MULTI-MEDIA:

USO Tour Photos: <http://bit.ly/1volbJr>

Joint Chiefs of Staff Photos and Articles: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vcics>

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