

# KC-10 crew flies flag of hope

**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM** — A KC-10 Extender crew carried a special message of hope and peace on a flight over Iraq in December.

As part of the project “Hands on America,” the crew displayed from their boom window an 86-by-76-inch American flag hand-crafted by Iowa school students. In doing so, the crew became part of a larger effort to honor the victims of Sept. 11, 2001, their families and the continuing war on terrorism.

“Our hearts are large, and our voices loud. We want New York and America to hear our message,” said **Tracy Paxton**, a teacher from Rivermont Collegiate School.

That message is conveyed through the flag’s stars and stripes. Made up of dozens of red handprints, the stripes reflect the involvement of every Rivermont student from 3-year-old preschoolers to high-school seniors. The stars bear symbols of hope, peace and love in 10 different languages.

This flag began its journey with former New York City Mayor **Rudolph Giuliani**. He passed the flag to New York Fire Department Engine Co. 55, one of the first fire stations to respond to the twin towers terrorist attack. The firefighters said they displayed it proudly on the first anniversary of Sept. 11.

Since then, the flag has flown in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Kansas, California and Texas. After a year of traveling the United States, the students decided it was time to show their hand-crafted emblem of endurance to Iraq.

That’s where the KC-10 crew came in.

The mother of Staff Sgt. **C.D. Schmied**, the flight engineer, heard on television the students were seeking suggestions to help decide the flag’s next destination. She told them about her son’s mission and suggested the flag fly with him aboard the plane.

“At least 30 e-mails came in with well wishes and suggestions ranging from hanging it in each state capitol

to hanging it in large airports and military hospitals,” Ms. Paxton wrote to Sergeant Schmied and the crew, “but your mother’s idea stood out.

“We want you to know how honored we are that you and your family are helping us spread our message of hope and peace,” she wrote. “In our

by Airman 1st Class Brandi Branch

minds, you are flying it for the victims and families of 9-11 as well as the victims and families of this war. By doing so, you too will become a part of this project, and your message will be seen and heard as well.”

— *Airman 1st Class Brandi Branch*  
*380th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs*



**Staff Sgt. C.D. Schmied (clockwise from bottom left), Airman 1st Class Dustin Sharpmack, 1st Lt. Trace Dotson and Capt. Troy Panon display a handmade American flag** that they flew in their KC-10 Extender over Iraq. It was designed and created by Iowa school students as part of a “Hands on America” project. Students pressed painted hands on fabric (inset) to form red stripes for the flag.