



UNDERSTANDING
SACRIFICE

Activity: USO Camp Shows, Inc.



Guiding question:

How did the United States government attempt to raise soldiers' morale during World War II?

DEVELOPED BY KYLE JOHNSON

Grade Level(s): 6-8

Subject(s): Social Studies, Language Arts

Cemetery Connection: North Africa American Cemetery
Epinal American Cemetery

Fallen Hero Connection: Corporal Clinton W. Butefish
Lester I. Chapman



NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY

Overview

Through examining accounts by soldiers and war correspondents, as well as footage from USO Camps Shows, students will analyze the role of USO Camp Shows Inc. in the war effort and create a script for a student-produced USO Camp Show.


Historical Context

Created in 1941, the United Service Organizations, or USO, was tasked by President Franklin D. Roosevelt with keeping the morale high for troops serving in World War II. The USO provided both recreational and aid service to troops overseas and on the homefront. USO Camp Shows Inc., a division of the USO, was formed just six months after the creation of the USO. Hollywood actors and entertainers agreed to waive pay to perform for the troops. By 1942, USO Camp Shows Inc. was the largest booking agency in the world and carried out over 270,000 performances from 1941 to 1945, featuring entertainers such as Bob Hope, Judy Garland, Bing Cosby, Frank Sinatra, John Wayne, and Lucille Ball. Acts ranged from singing, dancing, and comedy, to wrestling matches and providing portraits for soldiers. Around 7,000 performers traveled overseas to entertain the troops during World War II.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Explain why entertainers traveled overseas into combat zones to perform for the troops;
- Analyze the role of USO Camp Shows Inc. performers on the war effort; and
- Produce a script for a USO Camp Shows Inc. performance.



"I teach an elective drama class where drama students engage in a unit on historical reenactment with a focus on historical research skills. It is my hope that this lesson can be used in drama or social studies classes to learn about the role of entertainers in World War II."

— Kyle Johnson

Johnson teaches at Seaman Middle School in Topeka, Kansas.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Primary Sources

Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*, 1943 (excerpt)

Photograph, Clinton W. Butefish's headstone, North Africa American Cemetery ★ American Battle Monuments Commission

Photograph, *Hal Block, Bob Hope, Barney Dean, General George S. Patton, Frances Langford, and Tony Romano in Sicily*, August 21, 1943

George S. Patton Papers, Library of Congress (BHP0113)

Photograph, Lester I. Chapman's headstone, Epinal American Cemetery ★ American Battle Monuments Commission

Strictly GI, 1943

Office of War Information

archive.org/details/StrictlyGI1943

Secondary Sources

Entertaining the Troops: American Entertainers in World War II

Robert Mugge Productions

robertmugge.com/troops/index.html

Eric Brandner, "USO Shows In Prose," *On Patrol*, October 15, 2015

United Service Organizations

Samantha Quigley, "Thanks for the Memories: Fred Astaire," *On Patrol*, December 17, 2015

United Service Organizations

Samantha Quigley, "Thanks for the Memories: Judy Garland," *On Patrol*, December 13, 2015

United Service Organizations

USO Wherever They Go

Department of Defense (30197)

archive.org/details/gov.dod.dimoc.30197

Materials

- USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Guide
- USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Rubric
- Computer with internet capability to access video clips
- Projector
- Speakers to listen to video clips

Lesson Preparation

- Make one copy of the USO Camp Show Inc. Production Guide packet for each student.
- Make copies of the USO Performers Handouts for each group of students.
- Divide class into three groups for Activity One.
- Set up classroom technology.
- Test all online resources before class.

Procedure

Activity One: USO Camp Shows, Inc. (45 minutes)

- Hand out the USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Guide. If able, project the photographs of the headstones of Clinton W. Butefish and Lester Chapman.
 - Ask the students to identify similarities and differences between the headstones. Ask students:
 - *What is the difference between Corporal Butefish's headstone listing his service branch and Chapman's headstone listing USO Camp Shows Inc.?*
 - *Why would a professional wrestler be buried in an American military cemetery?*
 - *Teacher Tip:* Lester I. Chapman was on a flight of USO performers flying from England to Paris which crashed on March 3, 1945. Five of the 16 people killed were professional wrestlers traveling to an upcoming show. The families of Chapman and another professional wrestler on the flight, Gaius W. Young, chose to have their sons interred in Epinal American Cemetery in France.
 - Record answers in the Production Guide, on the Headstone Comparison page.
- Show students the video clip *USO Wherever They Go*. Play the video from the start until the 9:45 mark.
 - Ask students to answer the guided questions in Production Guide.

- Divide the class into three groups and distribute one article to each group:
 - “USO Shows In Prose”
 - “Thanks for the Memories: Fred Astaire”
 - “Thanks for the Memories: Judy Garland”
- After reading the articles, each group should report about their assigned performer on the Cast List page of the USO Camp Show Inc. Production Guide.
 - Ask students, *How would having famous actors and entertainers raise the morale of soldiers?*
- Collect the USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Guide.

Activity Two: Role of the USO (45 minutes)

- Redistribute the USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Guide. Ask students to read the excerpt from Ernie Pyle’s *Brave Men* in the Production Guide, under the subtitle The Role of the USO.
 - Ask students, *Should the United States government have sent famous entertainers overseas to perform for soldiers?*
 - Ask students, *After reading about Bob Hope’s narrow escape and reading the article about the plane crash that resulted in the death of USO wrestlers, was raising morale enough justification to send performers near the front line?*
 - Record answers in the USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Guide and discuss as a class.
- Analyze the importance of keeping morale high for soldiers. Show the video clips *Strictly GI* and *Entertaining the Troops: American Entertainers* from the beginning to 11:08.
 - Direct students to observe the different ways the entertainers perform.
 - Direct students to describe each act that is shown in the video clips on the Performances page of the USO Camp Show Inc. Production Guide.

Assessment

- Assign the final piece of the lesson from the Production Guide, the USO Camp Shows Inc. Script Activity.
- Requirements:
 - Include parts for at least four performers with one acting as the show’s host;
 - Incorporate jokes appropriate for troops stationed overseas during World War II;
 - Include a cast comprised of historical figures from the World War II era; and
 - Create a script that is two to three pages in length.
- The Production Assessment Rubric can be used to score the script.

Methods for Extension

- After writing the script, students in a theatre or drama class can stage the production as an added activity. Students could also do more in depth research on USO Camp Shows Inc. performers to learn more about them, or if they are doing the performance option, to help them get into character.
- The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit abmc.gov/education and NHDSilentHeroes.org.
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in the role of women in World War II by exploring these related lesson plans:
 - [Congressional Debates Over the Women's Army Corps](#)
 - [Under their Wing: The Impact of Flight Nurses in the Pacific](#)

Adaptations

- Teachers can adapt for more advanced learners by searching different primary documents on Bob Hope. Students could find and use these sources in the creation of their script for their performance.
- Teachers can modify the lesson for students that are English Language Learners. Many of the reading activities can be shortened, with more emphasis placed on watching the video clips about USO Camp Shows Inc. Instead of writing the full script for the final assessment, students could create an outline of their production and then perform it for the class.

USO Camp Shows Inc. Production Guide

Headstone Comparison



What similarities and differences do you see in looking at these two headstones?

USO Wherever They Go Guided Questions

What does USO stand for?

Why was the USO created?

How did Hollywood contribute?

How many entertainers went overseas in the first two years of World War II?

Why were USO Camp Shows important to soldiers?

How did the size of audiences vary?

What were the conditions like for performances?

Cast List



Photograph, Hal Block, Bob Hope, Barney Dean, General George S. Patton, Frances Langford, and Tony Romano in Sicily, August 21, 1943. George S. Patton Papers, Library of Congress (BHP0113)

Describe the role that the following entertainers played in USO Camp Shows Inc.:

Bob Hope	
Fred Astaire	
Judy Garland	

How would having famous actors and entertainers raise the morale of soldiers?

The Role of the USO

"I ran across Bob Hope and his crew. In fact for a couple of days he did the highlights and shadows of one bombed Sicilian city in such hilarious conjunction that it looked as though I were becoming a member of the troupe. There were certain dissenters to the policy of sending American entertainers overseas to help brighten the lives of our soldiers. Now and then I heard some officer say, "After all, we're over here to fight, not to be entertained. Don't they know there's a war on?" But it was my experience that the most confirmed users of such phrases were usually a good many miles behind the lines. I was all for giving the troops a little touch of America through those movie stars, and I can testify that the boys enjoyed and appreciated it."

Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*, 1943

Should the United States government have sent famous entertainers overseas to perform for soldiers?

After reading about Bob Hope's narrow escape, was raising morale enough justification to send performers near the front line?

Performances

While watching the video clips *Strictly GI* and *Entertaining the Troops: American Entertainers*, observe the different ways in which the entertainers perform.

Timmy Rogers	
Bing Crosby	
James Cagney and Edward Arnold	

USO Camp Shows Inc. Script Activity

Overview: Students will use the description from the performances they have watched to create their own script for a USO Camp Shows Inc. Performance. Students should:

- Include parts for at least four performers with one acting as the show's host;
- Incorporate jokes appropriate for troops stationed overseas during World War II;
- Include a cast comprised of historical figures of the World War II era; and
- Create a script that is two to three pages in length.

Students will be evaluated using the following rubric:

USO Camp Show Inc. Production Rubric

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Historical Accuracy	The performance contains a historically accurate narrative and features at least three historical figures.	The performance contains a mostly historically accurate narrative and features at least two historical figures.	The performance contains a narrative with some inaccuracies and features at least one historical figure.	The performance contains a narrative with multiple inaccuracies and features no historical figures.
Script	The script is two to three pages and exceeded all required elements.	The script is two to three pages and contains all required elements.	The script is less than two pages and contains some of the required elements.	The script is less than two pages and is missing multiple required elements.
Grammar and Conventions	There are no errors.	There are three or fewer errors.	There are five or fewer errors.	There are more than five errors that impede understanding.

Eric Brandner, “USO Shows In Prose,” *On Patrol*, October 15, 2015, p. 1

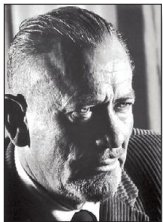
United Service Organizations



USO Shows In Prose

“An accordion is the largest piece of property the troupe carries. The evening dresses, crushed in suitcases, must be pressed and kept pretty. Spirits must be high. This is trouping the really hard way.”

Austerity at war is expected. But creature comforts—even in the farthest reaches of war zones—have advanced a little since John Steinbeck wrote those words on a ship off the English coast on June 24, 1943.



Steinbeck

Steinbeck made his name with his novels. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1940 for *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Nobel Prize in literature in 1962 for a career that included *Of Mice and Men*, *The Red Pony* and *East of Eden*. But roughly 18 months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Steinbeck set off on a starkly different literary adventure: that of war correspondent.

His early summer dispatch for the New York Herald Tribune about experiencing a USO show from the mess hall and deck of a military ship—and the different ways the American service men on that ship were experiencing the show—paint a clear, indelible picture of not only what those USO troupers did, but what their performances meant.

And his July 26, 1943, report brought the actions of one Bob Hope, the USO’s one-man morale machine, into clearer focus.

“When the time for recognition of service to the nation in wartime comes to be considered, Bob Hope should be high on the list. This man drives himself and is driven. It is impossible to see how he can do so much, can cover so much ground, can work so hard, and can be so effective. He works month after month at a pace that would kill most people.”

Nearly 75 years after the USO’s creation, Hope is still legendary, thanks to the USO shows he started performing during World War II at a time when international phone calls home were impossible and Internet access wasn’t even a concept.

Hope played his first massive show for troops at March Air Reserve Base in California on March 6, 1941, as a favor to his radio producer Albert Capstaff. According to *America in WWII Magazine*, Hope asked Capstaff why the troops couldn’t come to the studio. Capstaff—who really wanted Hope to play a show for his brother who was stationed at March—explained that there’d be hundreds of service members there.

Capstaff was right. The troops laughed. And Hope was hooked. After that, only nine of Hope’s 144 radio shows during World War II were broadcast from NBC studios.

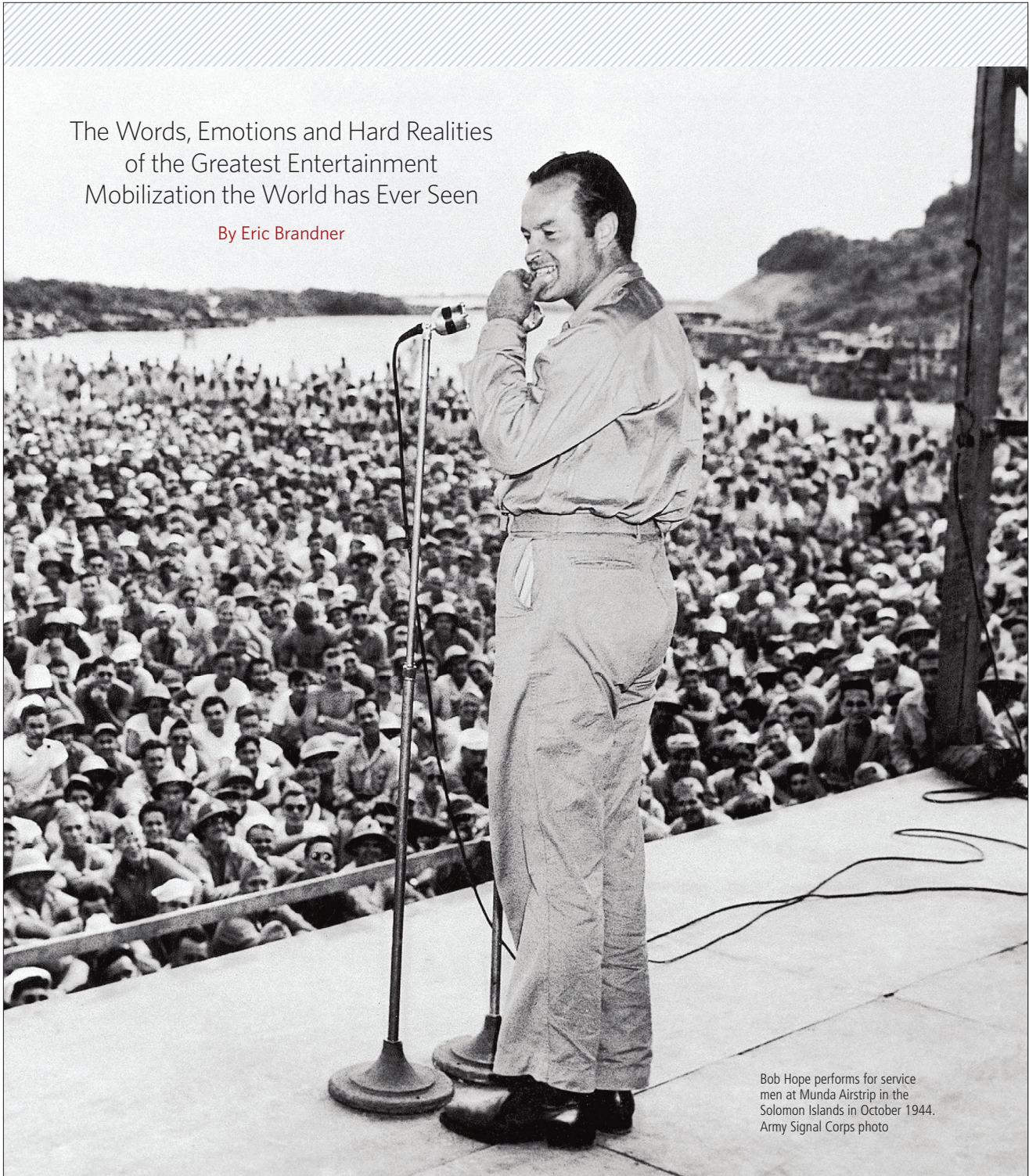


Eric Brandner, "USO Shows In Prose," *On Patrol*, October 15, 2015, p. 2

United Service Organizations

The Words, Emotions and Hard Realities
of the Greatest Entertainment
Mobilization the World has Ever Seen

By Eric Brandner



Bob Hope performs for service men at Munda Airstrip in the Solomon Islands in October 1944. Army Signal Corps photo

Eric Brandner, “USO Shows In Prose,” *On Patrol*, October 15, 2015, p. 3

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Mickey Rooney imitates some Hollywood actors for an audience of infantrymen in Germany in 1945. National Archives photo



German-born actress Marlene Dietrich sits with the troops in France in 1944. USO photo

“They know weeks in advance that he is coming. It would be rather a terrible thing if he did not show up. Perhaps that is some of his drive. He has made some kind of contract with himself and with the men that nobody, least of all Hope, could break. It is hard to overestimate the importance of this thing and the responsibility involved. ... It has been interesting to see how he has become a symbol.”

Comedy in wartime requires deftness. Hope’s USO shows usually employed the same tenor, though the scripts changed often so as to not duplicate the material the troops had heard on his previous week’s radio show. Still, Hope’s rise to icon status can be linked to both his prolific work rate and his unique ability to unite the service members he entertained through laughter, poking fun at universally loathed topics like boredom, homesickness and superior officers.

Hope and his band of entertainers and crew did their first extensive run of USO shows for American troops in the combat zones of North Africa and Italy in 1943. They had an incredibly close call during a tour stop in Palermo, Italy, where German bombers destroyed the docks and buildings in the area around their hotel.

“[Returning to the United States] was something of a letdown,” Hope said, according to the *America in WWII* story. “Hollywood was tinsel and make-believe and happy endings. Where we had been was mud and reality and horror.”

The close call didn’t deter him. Hope took a USO circuit out to the Pacific theater the following year.

“A small USO unit is aboard this troopship, girls and men who are going out to entertain troops wherever they may be sent. These are not the big names who go out with blasts of publicity and maintain their radio contracts. These are girls who can sing and dance and look pretty and men who can do magic and pantomimists and tellers of jokes. They have few properties and none of the tricks of light and color which dress up the theater. But there is something very gallant about them.”

Of course, Hope wasn’t the only entertainer putting smiles on muddy, forlorn American faces in two different theaters of war. In fact, the USO’s entertainment operation grew so big so fast that it spun off into its own nonprofit—USO Camp Shows, Inc.—in late 1941, just eight months after the USO was formed.

There were plenty of big names—Bing Crosby, Mickey Rooney, Judy Garland, Marlene Dietrich and dozens more stars. But there were roughly 7,000 other performers who weren’t coming home to fame and fortune when the war was over.

All together, they performed more than 425,000 USO shows around the world between 1941 and 1947.

Rarely were those shows described in more vivid detail than Steinbeck’s June 1943 *New York Herald Tribune* dispatch.

There was the pained smile and tense muscles of the female acrobat who tried in vain, over and over, to pull off a feat of balance on the listing ship.

There was a blues singer doing her best to overcome a busted speaker system, the quality of her voice eroding the louder she tried to sing. And there was the master of ceremonies whose jokes weren’t quite relating to the whole audience—even though the audience was more than willing to help him—until he finally struck gold with a line about military police. “Everybody likes a joke about MPs,” Steinbeck wrote.

All the performers were good enough to make it into the troupe. They were brave enough to make it across the ocean and onto that boat. They were likely even drawing a small wage for their efforts. And by the end of each performance—including a heavy dose of audience participation, coaxing and goodwill—they’d brought a piece of home to a place full of fear.

“The audience helps all it can because it wants the show to be good. And out of the little acts, which are not quite convincing, and the big audience which wants literally to be convinced, something whole and good comes, so that when it is over there has been a show.” ★

—Eric Brandner is the USO’s director of story development.

Samantha Quigley, “Thanks for the Memories: Fred Astaire,” *On Patrol*, December 17, 2015

United Service Organizations



[thanks for the memories]

VIRGINIA ★ SAMANTHA L. QUIGLEY

‘I Just Dance’

He conquered Vaudeville and Broadway with his sister, jumped on the bandwagon with Cyd Charisse, flew to Rio with Ginger Rogers, and thought Rita Hayworth couldn't be lovelier. He danced on walls, tables—even ceilings.

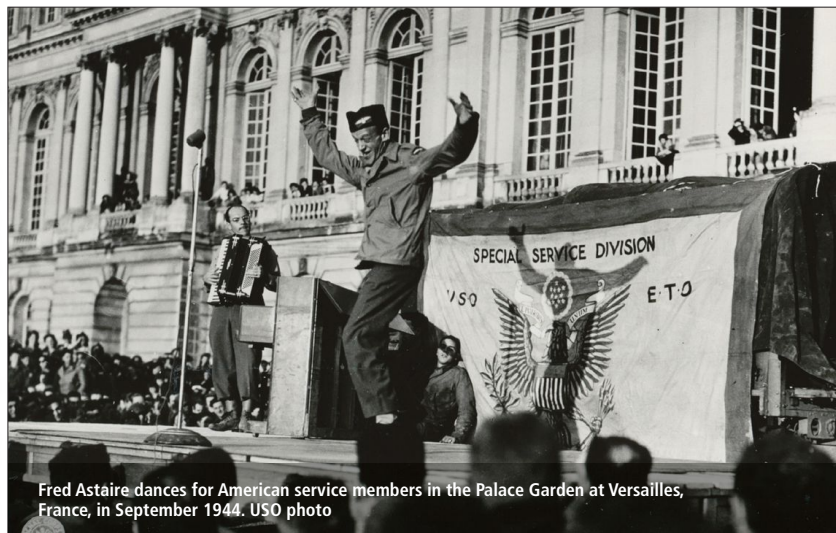
Fred Astaire's list of accomplishments is especially amazing considering a movie studio reportedly dismissed him early in his career with a footnote of “Can't act. Can't sing. Balding. Can dance a little,” after a screen test.

Even more remarkable is that for decades before and after his death on June 22, 1987, the dapper gentleman, born Frederick Emanuel Austerlitz, had the respect of industry professionals. Acclaimed choreographer George Balanchine declared him “the greatest dancer in the world.” Fellow dancer Gene Kelly went so far as to say, “The history of dance on film begins with Astaire.”

It wasn't always that way. As a young man, his sister, Adele, was decidedly the bigger talent. But when she retired from show business to marry in 1932, Astaire dug in and made a name for himself, appearing in nearly 50 films between 1933 and his death.

When the United States got involved in World War II, Astaire—whose age, combined with the fact he had children, exempted him from the draft—lent his support by entertaining at stateside military bases and participating in war bond rallies. This was all a prelude to his overseas USO tour that began in August 1944. After a stop in London, where he performed a few shows, including one with members of Glenn Miller's band, Astaire headed to France with crooner Bing Crosby.

His group performed in France, Belgium and the Netherlands—when they could find an audience. “The Army was traveling so fast we couldn't catch up to them at first,” he wrote in his autobiogra-



Fred Astaire dances for American service members in the Palace Garden at Versailles, France, in September 1944. USO photo

phy, *Steps in Time*.

They found a grateful audience of 5,000 at the Palace of Versailles. The stage overlooked the palace's famous gardens and fountains. The fountains, not in use at the time, provided seating for the GIs watching the show.

In his book, Astaire wrote that he always danced in his GI combat boots. “The fellows got a kick out of it,” he said.

When the group visited the Dutch town of Maastricht, it found the Palace Theater shuttered. The manager recognized Astaire and opened so the dancer and his cohorts could entertain a group of Army engineers. At night, the stage also served as the entertainers' sleeping quarters. Not even a German air raid could wake them.

On the way home to New York, he and Crosby extended their tour, entertaining troops aboard the *Queen Mary*. Once in New York, at the original USO headquarters, Astaire talked to reporters about the

troops he entertained in Europe.

“The way they go right back in there time and again to hit the Germans is something,” he said. “It's impossible to forget.

“They make wonderful audiences, too. After the show, they'd swarm around me and shout, ‘Gee whiz! You're the lucky guy who danced with the girls! How does it feel to hold Ginger Rogers and Rita Hayworth in your arms?’”

With his typical flair, he'd answer, “Fine, they're beautiful dancers!”

Astaire approached his craft with the same humility.

“I have no desire to prove anything by [dancing]. I never used it as an outlet or as a means of expressing myself. I just dance.”

Fred Astaire was 88 when he died. He's buried alongside his first wife, Phyllis, and his sister. His second wife, Robyn Smith Astaire, is 71. ★

—Samantha L. Quigley is the editor in chief of *On★Patrol*.

Samantha Quigley, “Thanks for the Memories: Judy Garland,” *On Patrol*, December 13, 2015

United Service Organizations

Pin up

[thanks for the memories]

VIRGINIA ★ SAMANTHA L. QUIGLEY

The Girl Next Door

The baby of the family, Frances Ethel Gumm was nearly 3 when she joined her older sisters on stage at her parents' Grand Rapids, Minnesota, movie theater in 1924. The trio sang a chorus of *Jingle Bells*. Not quite two years later, the family moved to California, where it bought and operated another theater.

By 1929, the sisters were part of the Meglin Kiddies dance troupe and were making their film debut in a short called *The Big Revue*. A number of film and Vaudeville appearances later, the Gumm sisters became the Garland sisters after their surname was met with laughter during introductions to audiences.

Soon after, Frances adopted a new first name and soon Judy Garland was synonymous with rainbows, ruby slippers and flying monkeys.

Judy Garland was born June 10, 1922, to Francis and Ethel Gumm. Before her untimely death on June 20, 1969, she had won the hearts of a nation—especially GIs serving during World War II. Many of them grew up with Garland, watching her in *The Wizard of Oz* and a series of films with Mickey Rooney.

“When Mickey and Judy Garland appeared together on the big screen, the audience felt good about themselves and their country at the same time,” author Terry Rowan wrote in his book, *World War II Goes to the Movies & Television Guide*.

Garland was the girl next door—and a pin up.

“I admit I am a little on the old-fashioned side. The home type I suspect,” she said during an interview that’s part of a compilation—*Judy Garland on Judy Garland: Interviews and Encounters*, edited by Randy L. Schmidt—that provides readers the closest thing to an autobiography.

The starlet was commenting on the fact she’d let her hair go back to its natural dark brown after lightening it for *The Wizard of Oz*, proclaiming she liked things natural.



Judy Garland autographs defense stamp albums for sailors A.L. Curlee and Ray E. Chatelain in Los Angeles in 1942. Office of War Information photo

Her looks and bearing reinforced the GIs idea of Garland as the girl next door, and they let her know it, even if some of the compliments seem a bit back-handed.

“You’re just like the girl next door at home,” and “Thank God, you haven’t gone glamorous,” are just two of the comments Schmidt included in his compilation.

The entry goes on to say, “Judy is hoping that the boys will like her latest pinup picture. It is a snapshot taken with a tiny brownie camera on her vacation. ... A typical picture the girl next door would take on her summer vacation.”

When she began performing for troops in 1941, she was one of the first. Her efforts took her to places like Fort Hancock, New York, in 1943 where she was photographed with Brigadier General Philip S. Gage, then-commander of New York City Harbor Defense. While her physical appearances were stateside, she made multiple appearances on radio programs like

Command Performance, lending her well-known voice to the goal of bringing home to the troops at the front. She also joined her co-star Rooney and dozens of other Hollywood stars to sell war bonds across the country.

In his Andrews Sisters biography, *Swing It!: The Andrews Sisters Story*, John Sforza noted that Garland enjoyed her work with the USO, putting her feeling into words for a 1942 Hollywood Reporter article.

“The immense thrill and gratification of doing what little I could to entertain came first ... the friendships made with the boys and the knowledge that we can never do enough for the soldiers who have left their homes and families to fight our battles.”

Garland wasn’t the traditional pin up, but she had the boys’ hearts from the first time she performed for them in 1941 until Johnny came marching home in 1945. ★
—Samantha L. Quigley is the editor in chief of *On Patrol* magazine.