

“Something for the Boys”:  
An Analysis of the  
Women of the USO Camp Shows, Inc.  
and their Performed Gender

by

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And Louise Buckley.

## Introduction

*While you've been reading about the big invasion carried out in North Africa by American and British task forces—both naval and military—perhaps you didn't realize that a smaller invasion of a very different kind was taking place right next to the front lines. It was carried out by a feminine task force—armed not with tanks and guns but with glamour, songs, dances and laughter. There was no defense against these girls. They came, they were seen, they conquered.*  
– Jack Buchanan, 1942 BBC Radio Broadcast<sup>1</sup>

On February 24, 1943, Jane Froman, popular songstress of the stage, screen, and radio, was on her way to London, England in a large Pan American Airways Clipper.<sup>2</sup> At this point in her career, Froman had become a national celebrity, starring in movies like *Keep Off the Grass* (1940) with Jimmy Durante, and had released her first smash record, "I Only Have Eyes For You." She had also made quite an impression on President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and was invited to perform at the White House on five occasions. With all of her bookings, she was making one thousand dollars weekly, which was quite impressive for a woman of the Depression era.

Her next slated performance was to entertain the US troops overseas with the United Service Organizations' (USO) entertainment department: the USO Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI).<sup>3</sup> With her celebrity status, it made perfect sense that she was to be among the first one hundred entertainers to be invited to perform for CSI.

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<sup>1</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation "Broadcast with USO-Camp Shows, Inc. Unit #2," in *Soldiers in*

<sup>2</sup> The following account of Jane Froman's life story was adapted from two sources, "A Patriotic Heroine's Long Ordeal" (115-119) from William B. Breuer's book, *The Air Raid Warden was a Spy: And Other Tales from Home-Front America in World War II* and Ilene Stone's book, *Jane Froman: Missouri's First Lady of Song*.

<sup>3</sup> USO Camp Shows Inc. (CSI) was a smaller organization within the umbrella organization: the United Service Organization (USO).

Within an hour of receiving the offer, she accepted it, fully knowing that this job would deprive her of many higher paid opportunities in show business; employment by CSI either meant earning a nominal salary or working in a volunteer position.

On February 21, 1943, Froman boarded the legendary seaplane, *The Yankee Clipper* along with six other USO entertainers, military officers, civilians, diplomats, and aircraft crew. Assigned the seat next to her on the aircraft was a USO entertainer by the name of Tamara Swan. As the plane neared Lisbon, Portugal, the two women switched places. This decision would change both of their lives forever.

As the plane approached Lisbon, the *Yankee Clipper* suddenly plunged into the freezing Tagus River. Froman wrote in her autobiography: “everything that I had worked for—money, jewels, possessions—everything I had come to believe in were to be wiped away with one swift, mad crash.”<sup>4</sup> With the force from the impact, Froman’s mink coat, blouse, shoes, and stockings were torn off. She broke her right arm and three ribs, suffered a compound fracture of her right leg, and nearly severed her left leg. The rest of her body was covered with cuts and bruises, and she had tiny bits of metal and wood embedded in her skin. Somehow, miraculously, her face was relatively unaffected. Swan was not so lucky. Swan, in Froman’s original seat, was killed instantly, along with everyone else in that part of the plane except Froman. She was one of fifteen survivors floating in the water, waiting for rescuers to arrive and pull her out to safety.

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ilene Stone, *Jane Froman: Missouri’s First Lady of Song* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/wesleyan/docDetail.action?docID=1004822>, 53.

While in the water, the copilot, John Curtis Burn, who also suffered from severe injuries such as a fractured spine and skull, managed to keep Froman's head above water by clinging to a piece of the wreckage. In the dark, freezing water, they carried on a casual conversation. Burn confessed to Froman that he had been a fan of hers for years, and had never expected to meet her amidst the wreckage of a plane crash.

Forty-five minutes later, a rescue team pulled them both out of the water and brought them to a Lisbon hospital. Froman recounts:

[I am] taken to a Lisbon hospital, which is unprepared to receive the injured and the dying.... I have no idea of the extent of my injuries, but at midnight they get to me. I sense that I am dying. They have stripped me of everything I possess, no identification, unable to communicate—in a foreign land where no one speaks the language and I don't understand a word. I have nothing left but what I have inside—shall we call it my soul. I am utterly alone. I struggle to hold on.<sup>5</sup>

Upon arrival, she was rushed to an operating room. Her last conscious plea was for the doctors not to amputate her leg. Luckily, they did not, and her leg remained intact as she stayed in the Lisbon hospital to recuperate.

To receive the best medical treatment available, Froman needed to return to the United States. Froman's condition, however, prevented her from flying on a Clipper plane. She needed to go by sea, where she could stretch her body. However, traveling by boat would be risky, for she could perish before arriving in New York, or the boat could be torpedoed by one of the German U-boats patrolling the seas between Europe and New York City. However, after dodging one torpedo,

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Stone, *Jane Froman: Missouri's First Lady of Song*, 54.

the *Serapa Pinto*, the small Portuguese freighter chartered to bring Froman home, pulled into New York Harbor in late April 1943. Finally, two months after the crash, Froman could receive treatment in her city of residence. Before being placed in an ambulance, Froman asked to be lowered to the ground so she could touch American soil for the first time in months.

Upon returning home, she underwent numerous operations to try to fix her mangled leg. Despite their arguable responsibility, neither the US government nor Pan American Airways would pay for her medical expenses, which had certainly piled up since the accident. Only six months after the crash, Froman went back to work in a Broadway show called *Artists and Models*, both to distract herself from her pain, as well as try to raise funds to pay her bills. Since she was still a semi-invalid during the theatrical run, Froman was transported from the hospital to the theater, wearing a thirty-five pound cast, only to be carried on and off stage by stagehands twenty-two times throughout the play. The show itself got terrible reviews, but her performance was lauded.

Once the war finished in early May 1945, Froman decided she wanted to try once again to go overseas and entertain the troops, even though she was still on crutches with several operations ahead of her. When her mother asked her why she would go when so many healthy entertainers could go instead, she replied:

I'll sing in the military hospitals all over Europe. It'll be better for the wounded soldiers than speeches on fortitude and patience. When they see a

young woman has been able to make up for a crippled leg and other injuries, it will give them hope.<sup>6</sup>

So Froman flew overseas, traveled thirty thousand miles and gave ninety-five shows in three and a half months while still on crutches. When she returned home, she would endure nineteen more operations. Throughout all of her hardship, she was defiant, determined, and strong:

Again the doctors insist I lose my leg, even the dear Doctor Mather Cleveland who has been with me all the way agrees that hope is gone, the leg must go.

I denounce them all. Stubborn and defiant, I will not let them cut off that leg.

Mama takes a little flat nearby. She refuses to believe (even to herself) I'm to be crippled, or even left with scars and braces. Little did she know! She keeps that stiff upper lip, comes daily to the hospital and goes to music classes regularly at the Julliard Foundation.

The leg remains.<sup>7</sup>

Froman kept her right leg, although she would wear a leg brace for the remainder of her life.

Her second husband, John Burn, wrote in the added postscript for the screenplay of *With a Song in My Heart*, the biopic film about Froman's life:

It would seem as though every possible obstacle were interposed between the girl and the thing she sought to attain, as though she were being submitted to the trial, infinite in its severity. She accepted such conditions; further she imposed the strictest of ethics on herself. She must fight all times honorably, ask little of others, and at the same time fulfill every obligation in a fuller measure than is asked those not so burdened as she. I think you may search back through the years...and never find [such] an example of humanity at its best.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in William B. Breuer, "A Patriotic Heroine's Long Ordeal," *The Air Raid Warden was a Spy: And Other Tales from Home-Front America in World War II* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2003), 119.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Stone, *Jane Froman: Missouri's First Lady of Song*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Stone, *Jane Froman: Missouri's First Lady of Song*, 117.



On April 12, 1980, Froman passed away at home by herself. She was buried at the Columbia Cemetery, with a small gold cross that she had always kept by her bed. It was her only possession that was recovered from the 1943 plane crash.

Despite her story being made into a movie called *With a Song in My Heart* (1952), she is not widely remembered like other celebrities of the decade, such as Judy Garland, Marlene Dietrich, or Betty Grable. Strangely, CSI women such as Froman have been omitted from the standard history books. Even though CSI entertainers demonstrated humbling patriotism and bravery by traveling overseas to entertain the troops, their efforts are remembered only in archives.

In fact, the USO and CSI are predominately known about through popular culture, namely in the famous scene at the beginning of *White Christmas* starring Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye, or in the movie *Hollywood Canteen* starring Jack Benny, Bette Davis, and the Andrews Sisters. Moreover, the women of CSI are engrained in American cultural memory as the iconic representatives of American entertainment. Images of women like Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Frances Langford, Mitzi Mayfair, and Betty Grable, performing for men in uniform, come to mind when one imagines the days of the "Great American Songbook."

Contrary to the simplistic, and often times incorrect, Hollywood narrative about the USO and CSI, CSI women did not contribute to the war effort exclusively by performing for the troops

[...] in a tin hut somewhere in Alaska... a make-shift theatre in the Caribbean  
[...] slogging through mud in North Africa [...] in the Solomons; in Ireland; in

England, and in Iceland—wherever there [was] an American soldier, sailor or marine.<sup>9</sup>

Rather, their job was all encompassing and included extensive offstage demands.

As stated in a CSI booklet called *A Guide to The Foxhole Circuit*, which was distributed among their overseas performers to provide “instructions” and “advice” for their “morale” work overseas:

Off stage you have another job—just as important and rewarding. To these men far away from home you represent home. Eat your meals with them. After the show sit around and talk to them. They’re hungry for news from home [...]”<sup>10</sup>

By providing the comforts of home to the men of the Armed Forces in war zones, USO entertainers not only assumed the caregiver role on and offstage, but they also performed in dangerous, war-torn settings. In fact, twenty-eight performers were killed during their CSI service, though their genders remain unknown.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, CSI women put their bodies and spirits in jeopardy to contribute to the war effort, hoping to fulfill their civic duty in ways they knew how, or as Louise Buckley, a CSI performer, says, through “glamour, songs, dances and laughter” and “trying to be with the enlisted men as much as possible.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite popular depictions of this history, limited historical scholarship exists examining the history and structure of USO Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI) in

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<sup>9</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., “A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit”, in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O’Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827),193.

<sup>10</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., “A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit,” 198.

<sup>11</sup> Julia M.H. Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 135.

<sup>12</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

general, despite the fact that “at its peak immediately following VE Day, its curtain rose 700 times a day...in every corner of the world.”<sup>13</sup> Also, out of the ten USO activities most enjoyed by US Service Men, CSI employees offered five of them: dancing, listening to music, meeting people, obtaining food and refreshments, and social contact with girls.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, there is a lack of scholarship analyzing the historical significance of the female entertainers of CSI, who were integral to the mission of the organization. A USO brochure states: “The outstanding need in our program is for live, friendly cooperative, entertainment, well spiced with young, attractive women.”<sup>15</sup> While scholars frequently engage in feminist analyses of World War II-era American history, due to radical shifts of women’s roles in the home, the workplace, the military, and in American society in general, scholars have overlooked the life of CSI women as part of this historical moment. As demonstrated by Froman’s story above, CSI women provide ideal case studies for feminist theorists and historians. For CSI women had to feign a performed femininity both on and off stage to entertain the servicemen, regardless of the emotional or physical conditions existing inside the masculine war zones. Additionally, the USO aimed the propagated image of American female performers entertaining the troops not just at the US servicemen, but also at other Allied

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<sup>13</sup> USO Brochure, USO Clippings File, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>14</sup> USO Brochure, USO Clippings File, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts,

<sup>15</sup> Overseas Flyer: Vol. I, No. 4 – Issued By Program Department, Overseas Division, December 1943, United Service Organization Scrapbook, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

Nations as representations of the American experience, as asserted in CSI's *A Guide to The Foxhole Circuit*: "What [performers] say and do will reflect America in [Allied Nations'] eyes."<sup>16</sup> Despite their symbolic importance in both the US military and international relations, scholars have not granted these female entertainers their deserved place in theatrical, military, or women's history or in performance and feminist theory.

Historian Margaret Winchell aimed to remedy this omission by writing her book, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, about the USO hostesses during WWII, in which she examines how "quasi-state organizations such as the USO mobilized [women] to perform 'women's' work that did not challenge gender norms."<sup>17</sup> Winchell, however, does not even mention the female entertainers; instead, she focuses on the USO hostesses, the women who worked in and maintained the USO canteens for the US Armed Forces during the War. Although the USO hostesses were undoubtedly integral to the functioning of the USO and the war effort, as demonstrated by Winchell, the female entertainers of CSI also participated in similar "women's work," by acting as mothers and sweethearts to the state and military.<sup>18</sup> Yet Winchell concentrates on the social conditions inside USO canteens, and she does not address the USO theatrical projects in her book, leaving the activities of CSI and its female entertainers unexamined.

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<sup>16</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 211.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 1.

Women of CSI warrant inclusion in historical, feminist and performance scholarship about the World War II-era; as aptly claimed in the *CSI Guide to the Foxhole Circuit*, the “sweet voice[s] of wom[e]n carried to a group of tired men...[was] good work—important work.”<sup>19</sup> After analyzing women of the USO during WWII, it is clear that the female entertainers provided essential services to the war effort by performing the role of “America’s Sweetheart” for their largely male military audience. In this performance, these women constituted a unique brand of “double-performance of gender,” a term I coin for female entertainers who must perform gendered behavior onstage, and subsequently sustain that gendered performance offstage.<sup>20</sup> This double-performance of gender is essential to the success of the USO’s mission to boost morale of the troops, for this sustained performance of the “American Sweetheart” idealized femininity for the servicemen and gave the soldiers something to fight for. To prove this, I will examine how the female embodiment of “home” and “sex,” two highly gendered and propagated ideals, translated themselves both on and off stage, and how these gendered ideals contributed to the CSI’s mission of boosting morale. In Chapter One: “‘Over There:’ A Brief Historical Background,” I will explain what exactly CSI was, who was involved, and what the performances were like, to help the reader understand my historical analysis. In Chapter Two: “‘Sweet Dreams, Sweetheart:’ The Performance of the ‘American Sweetheart,’” I analyze how the female entertainers represented

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<sup>19</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., “A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit”, 188.

<sup>20</sup> Judith Butler puts forth the concept of “gender as performance” in “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory.”

“home,” or, in other words, performed the role of “American Sweetheart” for the servicemen and how this performance contributed to the CSI mission to boost morale of the troops. In Chapter Three, “‘You’re My Little Pin-Up Girl:’ The Sexual Implications of CSI Female Entertainers,” I analyze how female performers represented “sex” to the servicemen and how the sexualization of the CSI women contributed to the USO’s hopes to productively and healthfully address the soldier’s sexual needs.

In my analysis of the WWII-era female entertainers, I will focus predominately on the “Foxhole Circuit,” the overseas division. Setting my analysis overseas in the Foxhole Circuit provides the most dramatic setting for the female entertainers “double-performance of gender,” due to its male to female ratio<sup>21</sup>, distance from home, living conditions, and sense of personal danger for the female entertainers. At times, I will refer to the domestic efforts of the Hollywood Victory Committee in the Stage Door Canteens to help illuminate the “women’s work” performed by the entertainers, since many of the CSI women also worked as hostesses at USO canteens. Employment as a hostess did not necessarily lead to employment by CSI, and vice versa. However, occasionally, experiences in the canteens help illuminate the CSI narrative.

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<sup>21</sup> In Louise Buckley’s letter, found in the USO Camp Shows Publicity Records, Buckley describes the male to female ratio as a “topsy-turvy social scheme of one girl to thousands of men.” Although this is not an exact figure, it is helpful to imagine the proportional relationship between men and women overseas. Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

In my analysis, I focus predominately on the white women, ages 18 to 35. One cannot forget that the war in Pacific was a race war, and the obvious "whiteness" of the women I analyze, in the eyes of white soldiers who were living in conditions where "there [were] no white women...for a year and a half,"<sup>22</sup> provided "the superior image of American womanhood."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, for servicemen "still firmly in the grip of white supremacy,"<sup>24</sup> whiteness, physical beauty, and youth became representative of "Americanness" to the soldier; this is why I will use the white women of this age group as my case study for the performance of "American sweetheart" for military audiences.<sup>25</sup>

My paper relies on a combination of archival research in USO documents, photographs, reports, scripts, radio transcripts, guidebooks, newspaper clippings, and personal letters, as well as published sources about performance theory, feminist theory, American women's and social history of the World War II era, and song recordings and printed sheet music from the time period. Over the course of the analysis, I hope to use the contentions of feminist theorists, ranging from Judith Butler to Catharine MacKinnon, not to evaluate their theoretical writings, but

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Fussell, "Yank When We Needed It," quoted in Robert B. Westbrook, "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 1990): 595, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713166>.

<sup>23</sup> Westbrook, "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,'" 600.

<sup>24</sup> Westbrook, "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,'" 599-600.

<sup>25</sup> Certainly, there were black women who entertained the troops, as well as women over the age of 35. The racial and ageist politics at play in those cases, however, become too lengthy and complicated for the main focus of my research.

instead to illuminate this forgotten history and to offer these women as good examples through which to understand feminist concepts.

When researching CSI, I came across a book called *Home Away from Home: The Story of the USO*, which documents the services provided by the USO during the war effort. This book, compiled by the USO historian Julia H. Carson, does not include any citations. Carson admits:

A book of this sort could not have been written without the generous assistance of many people who, knowingly or not, have contributed to it in conferences, in letters, and in reports. I gratefully acknowledge their help and also my indebtedness to bulletins, reports, memoranda, and other publications off the member Agencies of the USO. From these, as from various official documents of the USO itself, I have occasionally taken material directly, without specific indication of the source. I trust that this limited plagiarism, which has seemed to me unavoidable in this type of book, will be taken in good part. For the method of presentation I take full responsibility.<sup>26</sup>

This “limited plagiarism” provides problems for historians in finding primary sources like those Carson references, especially since many of the CSI women who spent years on the Foxhole circuit were relatively unknown.<sup>27</sup> Since Carson wrote *Home Away From Home* to be the main historical source about USO operations during World War II, historians, such as Emily Yellin in *Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* and Margaret K. Winchell in *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun* draw upon Carson’s work. However, when referencing archival text found in Carson’s work, scholars cite the authors as “unnamed.”

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<sup>26</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>27</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers’ War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 88.



Despite the apparent dearth of sources, the New York Public Library for Performing Arts at Lincoln Center houses many primary documents about the USO in the special collections. I came across a plethora of photographs, publicity reports, bulletins, scripts and letters, specifically one archival collection of twenty-five boxes containing USO Publicity reports. After peeling through the stacks of paper, I discovered one of my most interesting finds: a letter I came across that was referenced both in Carson's book and in *Our Mothers' War* by Emily Yellin, another secondary source. Scholars in these published works always referred to the author of this letter as "unnamed." The copy I found, however, was signed: "Louise Buckley."

In homage to my research discovery and to Buckley's service to the United States, I decided to make her the main character of this performance component of this project: an hour-long solo piece compiled from my archival research, recounting the experience of a young woman going overseas to entertain the troops during World War II entitled *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours: The Story of the USO*. The script from the performance is included in the appendix. I modeled the show after the weekly radio broadcasts designed to entertain the servicemen and women, such as *Mail Call* and *Command Performance*. In the show, the "subject matter for the week" is the life of a USO entertainer, or a "soldier in greasepaint," told by Buckley through excerpts of archival text, original text, as well as music from the time period, in which she explores her performative and gendered experience of the war. Therefore, we hear about her experiences working in a Canteen, packing

for war, entertaining the men, surviving air raids, and performing in hospital wings, all to the soundtrack of hit songs from the forties, often performed in the Foxhole circuit by USO performers.

To find the music for *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours*, I not only looked in archives, in published anthologies of World War II music, and in movies and compact discs, but I also used a very helpful research tool: eBay. I typed in “1940s sheet music” into the search engine, only to find hundreds of people auctioning off old, forgotten sheet music they found in their attic. All of a sudden, I found songs I had never heard of before, as well as the no-longer published sheet music of the songs I found in 1940s films. With the help of Ian Coss ‘11, who arranged all the music for an eight-piece, all-male student band in the style of 1940s big bands, I put together the show as I simultaneously put together this written work. In doing so, both the written and performance components shaped one another. Onstage, I could artistically express what I could not in my paper, and more deeply recount and analyze in my paper what I did not have the space for in my show.

Louise Buckley wrote in a letter home from her station in New Guinea:

We were in the Army! Here those sharp uniforms issued us by the USO and the colored cotton dresses we’d been told to buy [...] were literally torn from our backs and we were poured into G.I. trousers and shirts [...] We have not regretted the dresses, however, as the USO, as “morale builders” can occasionally break the rule. And when men in a hospital or men anywhere say, “Can you please wear a dress”, it’s nice to be able to do it. It’s mighty good for your own morale too, at times.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

In analyzing these women, I hope to unearth a compelling, humbling history of an all-consuming, dangerous, and selfless job performed by female entertainers. Additionally, I hope to reveal how women did not necessarily have to adopt masculine roles like "Rosie the Riveter," or join the Women's Army Corps to contribute to the war effort. Instead, CSI women mobilized their feigned "feminin[ity]" into a "task force," recalling home and sex into the soldiers' consciousness, boosting their morale, and ultimately providing inspiration for the men to win the war.

## CHAPTER 1: "Over There": A Brief Historical Background

*[United Service Organization] ha[s] four needs to serve: the emotional, which means movies, Camp Shows troupes and G.I. Shows; the digestive, meaning ice cream pop and candy; the intellectual, met by our library service and phonograph record distribution; the physical, meaning athletics. Overseas, the emotional need is the greatest.*

- General Byron, *USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955*<sup>29</sup>

Louise Buckley, a USO performer, writes in a letter home from her station in

New Guinea:

*[The GIs] have fought a battle against the jungle, the climate and perhaps worst of all, monotony. They've lived in this strange land so long that many of them are almost afraid to go home—they know there's something changed about them forever and they'll not be able to explain it.*<sup>30</sup>

The United Service Organization (USO) sought to combat these major problems of morale, monotony, and inactivity by providing recreational spaces and activities that would "help these men to be, not only the best soldiers in the world, but also, the best citizens when they return."<sup>31</sup> As Franklin D. Roosevelt said: "Entertainment is always a national asset. Invaluable in time of peace, it is indispensable in wartime."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the USO's mission to combat monotony and boost morale necessitated a theatrical space where American entertainment could transport soldiers' minds away from the harsh realities of war. So the USO established USO Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI), the entertainment branch of their services, which "supplied

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<sup>29</sup> General Byron, Motion Picture Division, 1944, *USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955*, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>30</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea," 1944, *USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955*, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>31</sup> *USO Brochure*, USO Clippings File, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 1.

live entertainment to the armed forces both at home and abroad,"<sup>33</sup> creating "the biggest enterprise that American show business ever tackled."<sup>34</sup> At the same time, however, early in 1941, a private philanthropic organization called the Citizens' Committee for the Army and Navy was distributing books, phonograph records, and other entertainment paraphernalia to the servicemen. By May of 1941, the Citizens' Committee had sponsored seven trucks of professional shows to Army camps east of the Rocky Mountains.<sup>35</sup> At that time, however, the majority of American citizens private contributions for the morale of the Armed Forces went to the USO, making the Citizens' Committee difficult to fund. In October 1941, for efficiency purposes, the USO absorbed the Citizens' Committee and established their own theatrical branch: USO Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI). In its first six months of operation, CSI furnished a total of twenty-four units, which gave 3,781 performances to camp audiences of about 2,217,968 men. In 1945, CSI provided 151,153 performances to a total audience of 71,968,363 servicemen and women all over the world.<sup>36</sup>

Supported by public contributions to the National War fund, CSI had four main circuits: the Victory Circuit, the Blue Circuit, the Hospital Circuit, and the Foxhole Circuit. Within each circuit, there were different "units," or different show

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<sup>33</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation "Broadcast with USO-Camp Shows, Inc. Unit #2," in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 188-189.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 1.

<sup>35</sup> Lowell Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," *Educational Theatre Journal* 6, no. 1 (Mar., 1954): 1-2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3204158>.

<sup>36</sup> Julia M.H. Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 130.

offerings. The Victory Circuit provided full-sized musical and variety revues, dramas and concerts to approximately 640 Army posts and Naval stations in the United States; as of June 25, 1944, 2,182 troupers in 75 units toured this circuit. The Blue Circuit offered smaller companies of entertainers to about 1,500 Army and Navy installations in the United States with limited theatre facilities, often none at all. By June 25, 1944, 1,407 performers in 94 units toured this circuit. The Hospital Circuit offered specialized entertainment in wards and auditoriums of all Army and Navy general and convalescent hospitals in the United States; by June 25, 1944, 13 units with a total of 222 performers serviced this circuit,<sup>37</sup> including inaugural performers Gene Kelly and Ed Wynn.<sup>38</sup> The Foxhole circuit, arguably the most famous of CSI programming, as well as the setting for my analysis, sent 271 separate units comprising 1,426 entertainers overseas to

Alaska, Alcan Highway, Australia, Bermuda, Brazil, British Isles, Burma, Canada, the Caribbean, Peru, Sardina [sic], Sicily, Central Africa, Central Pacific, China, Egypt, Greenland, Hawaii, Iceland, India, Iran, South America, the South Pacific, Southwest Pacific, Iraq, Italy, Labrador, Malta, New Caledonia, Newfoundland, North Africa, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Venezuela, West Africa, and France.<sup>39</sup>

Initially, CSI charged twenty-five cents for admission in order to defray expenses.

By March of 1942, however, admission costs were abolished, allowing for all servicemen to attend CSI programming.

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<sup>37</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 189-190.

<sup>38</sup> Abe Lastfogel, "Letter to Board of Directors," 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>39</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 190.

Prior to the fall of 1944, the War Department did not allow shows of over five people to go abroad. Therefore, acts usually consisted of a vocalist, comedian, dancer, novelty act, and a magician or an accordionist. These were most likely called "Variety Units" and were deemed the "backbone of the USO,"<sup>40</sup> since they were easily transported and highly entertaining. In *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, Julia M. Carson refers to an account from "well-known novelist" at the time, in which he describes a typical Variety Unit:

A small USO-Camp Shows unit is aboard this troopship, girls and men who are going out to entertain the 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, pantomimists and tellers of jokes. They have few properties and none of the tricks of light and color that dress up the theater. But there is something very gallant about them. The spirit must be high.<sup>41</sup>

By late 1944, however, the American Theater Wing's production of *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* starring Katharine Cornell toured overseas, becoming the first overseas "legitimate theater" unit, USO Unit 319. It played in "liberated" theaters in Italy and France to enthusiastic reception, proving the validity of sending serious drama overseas.<sup>42</sup> Touring large legitimate productions proved difficult, however, due to the transportability of the large sets and equipment. By the summer of 1945, CSI sent out overseas musicals with companies as large as sixty people, such as *Oklahoma!* in the Pacific and *Our Town* and Billy Rose's "Diamond Horseshoe Revue" in Europe.

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<sup>40</sup> Abe Lastfogel, "Letter to the Board of Directors," USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>41</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, 116-117.

<sup>42</sup> Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 3.

The Army's Special Service Division (Entertainment Branch) reviewed and approved each show, no matter what type of unit. "Vulgarisms, double entendres, and references to race, color or creed"<sup>43</sup> were not permitted. Once the script was approved, it could not be altered during the tour. When a performer changed a script in an improper manner, the "guilty performer" was sent home, though this was rare.<sup>44</sup>

Entertainers ranging from the big name stars of stage, screen, radio, and the concert world to "relative unknowns"<sup>45</sup> would work either as volunteers or serve at nominal salaries much lower than they would normally earn in commercial show business back home. Therefore, performers' salaries ranged from \$50-\$350 weekly, with the average at about \$100, though "top-flight stars," with little need for extra compensation, most likely received as little as \$10 per day.<sup>46</sup>

To get famous actors involved, CSI contacted the Hollywood Victory Committee, a group of Hollywood actors and actresses interested in supporting the war effort. The Committee became more active in CSI offerings when both CSI programming, as well as when the soldiers' demands for entertainment, expanded. Their mission was "enrolling players for entertainment of the Armed Forces in hospitals and camps here and abroad, and for bond tours."<sup>47</sup> Some of the actors

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<sup>43</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, 132.

<sup>44</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, 132.

<sup>45</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 88.

<sup>46</sup> Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 2.

<sup>47</sup> "Speech Read By James Cagney, Chariman Actors Committee at Actors Committee Meeting" September 26, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.



involved in this committee were Gene Kelly, Humphrey Bogart, Andy Devine, and Joan Blondell, with many more.<sup>48</sup> Due to contractual commitments back home with their studios or producers, Hollywood or Broadway performers could not go on long tours overseas. However, more often than not, "the curtailment of a personality's tour [was] beyond the personality's control."<sup>49</sup> Soldiers often criticized CSI when certain personalities failed to complete their announced tours, as well as for the scarcity and quality of shows, which is understandable in view of the loneliness, bitterness, and hardship in the life of the GIs.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, to meet the demand for more entertainment of a higher quality, the Hollywood Victory Committee worked with the studios to provide listings of performers and their availabilities so stars could be used more readily,<sup>51</sup> though CSI predominately hired relative unknowns.<sup>52</sup> While soldiers loved meeting their favorite celebrities, they appreciated the entertainment, regardless of who provided it, as long as it was of high quality. As one radio reporter claimed: "They may not be the biggest names in show business back home, but they're headliners here, and if you could see the faces of GIs watching their performances, you would see why."<sup>53</sup>

To participate in CSI programming, each performer had to obtain a passport, properly fitted uniform, complete physical examination, and a contract. With each

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<sup>48</sup> "Speech Read By James Cagney, Chariman Actors Committee at Actors Committee Meeting," USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>49</sup> Abe Lastfogel, "Letter to the Board of Directors," USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>50</sup> Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 3.

<sup>51</sup> Motion Picture Division, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>52</sup> Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 88.

<sup>53</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, 115.

show, CSI provided press books describing the unit's offerings, and it distributed the material to the areas to be visited by the entertainers. Once on site, all CSI units were subject to the orders of the Commanding Officer in each theater of operations, since they were stationed in war zones.<sup>54</sup> One radio reporter recounts:

For five weeks now these performers have been playing here in Germany, right in the front-line area. Sometimes they live out of trucks and tents and put their make-up on in a muddy field under an apple tree. Other times they live in houses—broken houses with no windows and sometimes the house next to them gets hit by enemy shell fire. And like everybody at the front, they go hunting in the neighboring cabbage patch for a change of diet.<sup>55</sup>

Despite some criticism, overall the soldiers greatly appreciated CSI performers' services. In a speech called "The American Soldier Thanks the Entertainment World," Brigadier General F. Henry Osborn, Chief of Special Services, said:

I am here under compulsion. The compulsion of 7 million men in the Army and Navy who want to thank you. They would like to thank you themselves, personally. Only in that way could their thanks be adequate. You must bear that in mind; it is not my voice you are hearing, it the voice of millions who depend on you more than you realize. For in lonely and distant lands you have gone to them and lifted their spirits with the charm and friendliness of your persons [...] In India, in Africa, in China, in all, distant, strange and lonely lands, you have gone to these men and spoken to them in your own words, which are healing words and stimulating words because they are the words of home and the words they know and love. Over the radio, on the screen, sometimes in person, you have gone to them. You have not been paid in money for this; your appearance on the overseas radio programs the Army makes in such number each week is a free gift on your part...The tough travels (and don't I know they're tough) of you, seen it for three years, and I, of all people know what I'm talking about. These things are the gift of your hearts, and you are paid in the only currency the heart recognizes,

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<sup>54</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, 132.

<sup>55</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, 115.

namely, the gratitude, the love and the admiration of American soldiers whom you are serving.<sup>56</sup>

Due to high demand in the South Pacific after VJ-Day, in September 1945, 91 units were requested to perform there, and within 90 days 1,205 performers were dispatched there. In 1945 alone, 151,153 performances occurred with CSI audiences totaling 71,968,363, with a budget of \$40,000,000.<sup>57</sup> On December 31, 1947, the USO received an "honorable discharge" after spending \$240,000,000 of citizens' contributions for all of its services, which included CSI.<sup>58</sup> Aside from a brief reactivation during the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, the USO ceased to consistently operate until 1979, when Jimmy Carter signed the USO's new congressional charter.<sup>59</sup> Now, according to the USO website, the "USO has evolved, developing new programs and services to meet the ever-changing needs of the troops and their families, while holding fast to the original mission."<sup>60</sup> Though it still provides entertainment for the troops, there has never been a comparable mass movement of American "soldiers in greasepaint" since World War II.

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<sup>56</sup> Brigadier General F. Henry Osborn, "The American Soldier Thanks the Entertainment World", July 14, 1943, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>57</sup> Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 4.

<sup>58</sup> Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," 4-5.

<sup>59</sup> "History," United Service Organizations, accessed November 30, 2010, <http://www.uso.org/history.aspx>.

<sup>60</sup> "History," United Service Organizations, accessed November 30, 2010, <http://www.uso.org/history.aspx>.

## CHAPTER 2: "Sweet Dreams, Sweetheart": The Performance of the "American Sweetheart"

*I'm wondering if your wife, sweetheart, or sister has bucket-seated her way 60,000 miles...at a better than a thousand miles a day, playing even two bad shows, eating C- and K-rations more often than hot groceries, much of it standing up, and then when it's little girls'-room time, go down to the men's toilet and wait till it's cleared so that the girl troupers may use it?*  
– Ann Sheridan, *Time Magazine*, October 23, 1944<sup>61</sup>

Overall, the soldiers' most vivid and shared dream was that of returning home. In *V Was for Victory*, an examination of the home front culture during World War II, John Morton Blum asserts:

Soldiers in the armies of all nations in all wars have yearned to go home, but the GI's sense of home was especially an American sense. "Our men," [Ernie] Pyle wrote, "[...] are impatient with the strange peoples and customs of the countries they now inhabit. They say that if they ever get home they never want to see another foreign country."<sup>62</sup>

For the soldiers, the USO Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI) stage provided an accessible and constructive way to cope with homesickness. In a CSI booklet called *A Guide to The Foxhole Circuit* that CSI distributed among their overseas performers to provide "instructions" and "advice" for their "morale" work overseas, CSI asserted:

To the serviceman on a foreign battlefield [Camp Shows] mean[] a little bit of home. It means the bright lights of Times Square and the smell of Main Street [...] To these men far away from home you represent home.<sup>63</sup>

This strategy definitely proved itself successful, as recounted in a letter dated September 9, 1944 from PFC. Norman S. Lezin, stationed somewhere in New

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Lowell Matson, "Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II," *Educational Theatre Journal* 6, no. 1 (Mar., 1954): 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3204158>.

<sup>62</sup> John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 65-66.

<sup>63</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 194-198.

Guinea, where he recalls how much he enjoyed a CSI tour of *Macbeth* starring Judith Anderson. He writes:

Last night, for the space of a few short minutes, I was no longer in New Guinea, no longer thinking of Japs, and salt pills, and Bully Beef, and the lonely waiting for letters. I was back in New York, sitting in the eighth row center, in a soft plush seat, enthralled by Judith Anderson, as Macbeth and Duncan stepped out of the small type in the musty volumes to become dynamic characters.<sup>64</sup>

After reviewing CSI publicity literature, one wonders what exactly is this concept of "home" that CSI so frequently employs in its rhetoric. Certainly one singular "home" could not have existed for the men in the Armed forces, since they all came from different regional, economic, ethnic, and social backgrounds. In fact, the diverse make-up of many ground and air units preserved "the American convention of the melting pot."<sup>65</sup> In the majority of war films, the composition of the military units "was quite consciously... American, with each group invariably composed of one Negro, one Jew, one Southern boy, and a sprinkling of second-generation Italians, Irish, Scandinavians and Poles."<sup>66</sup> John Hersey reported that a GI hero was typically:

[...] a coffee merchant by profession, a radio actor by avocation, and a soldier by the trend of events... They were just American boys [...] they were ex-grocery boys, ex-highway laborers, ex-bank clerks, ex-schoolboys, boys with a clean record...not killers."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> PFC. Norman S. Lezin, Show Reports, September 9, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>65</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 63.

<sup>66</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 63.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 58-59.

In Richard H. Kohn's "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," he claims:

[...] [American] soldiers have never been homogeneous, but a bewildering mixture of ethnic and racial groups [...] The truth of the matter is that the "American soldier" never existed; the most pernicious myth of all is there has ever been a prototypical American in uniform.<sup>68</sup>

Thus there was nothing unifying about them, except for the fact that they were members of the United States Armed Forces.

Despite this lack of a "prototypical American in uniform," CSI's mission to provide entertainment needed to universally appeal to this "bewildering mixture of ethnic and racial groups." Moreover, even though "home" undoubtedly meant countless things to the men in uniform, CSI hoped to utilize a propagandistic use of "home" in its operations. CSI believed that ideas of "home" guaranteed thousands of troops "smil[ing]," thus preparing them to be "ready—in order to keep us all free—to sacrifice [their] live[s]."<sup>69</sup> And yet, the *New York Times* claimed "home" for the soldier meant a place "where there are chocolate milk shakes, cokes, iced beer, and girls."<sup>70</sup> Since these tangible objects could not be supplied to the troops, CSI needed to commoditize a concept of "home" in its entertainment that universally appealed to its military audience.

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<sup>68</sup> Richard H. Kohn, "The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research," *The American Historical Review* 86, No. 3 (Jun., 1981): 556-560, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1860370>.

<sup>69</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 216.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 66.

Thus “home” was expressed through “American” ideals, or in other words “Americanism.”<sup>71</sup> As John Hersey wrote, “Home is where the good things are—the generosity, the good pay, the comforts, the democracy, the pie.”<sup>72</sup> In *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO*, Julia M. Carson writes:

Amid the terrible uncertainties of his life, the American soldier spent a nostalgic hour laughing at jokes—American brand, listening to music—American style, looking at pretty girls, like no other pretty girls in the world—American girls, as USO-Camp Shows carried forward its far flung program to all the theaters of the world.<sup>73</sup>

The performances Carson describes above were most likely the USO Variety Shows. These shows paired music of the time period, such as sentimental ballads like “I’ll Be Seeing You,” “Somewhere in France with You,” or “Saturday Night is the Loneliest Night of the Week,” or patriotic military songs like “Bell Bottom Trousers,” “The Fleet’s In,” and “God Bless America,” with comedic sketches in the style of Bob Hope or Abbott & Costello, and always ended on a “light and nostalgic note.”<sup>74</sup> This formula perfectly imparted this American version of “home.” The variety show accentuated nostalgia, patriotism, sweetness, and “the good old American sense of humor.”<sup>75</sup> Presenting this “home” to soldiers offered positive imagery of the life

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<sup>71</sup> Julia M.H. Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 133.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 67.

<sup>73</sup> Carson, *Home Away From Home*, 112.

<sup>74</sup> Dramatics and Entertainments, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>75</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

they left behind, or, as Louise Buckley describes, “the fighting men’s ideal of America” defined by its “rosy hue.”<sup>76</sup>

As mentioned above, CSI shows allowed soldiers to “[look] at pretty girls, like no other pretty girls in the world—American girls.”<sup>77</sup> In order to “effectively” use “girl-talent”<sup>78</sup> in the live entertainment, CSI had to implement women into this idealized image of “home,” by positing them as *private* entities, or as objects to be defended or protected. Robert B. Westbrook argues that American representatives of the state and propagandists called upon the American people “to go to war to defend *private* interests and discharge *private* obligations,” more often than appealing to its constituents through public or political creeds.<sup>79</sup> If we use his argument to frame our understanding of the propagandistic strategies used, we can begin to understand how CSI implemented women into this “home.”

According to a *Ladies’ Home Journal* questionnaire on women to soldiers, sailors, and marines, called “Dream girl, 1942 model”:

The ideal woman of American fighting men was short, healthy, and vital, devoted to her home and children, able to participate in at least one outdoor sport, and fond of a moderate amount of dancing. Her skill in cooking was

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<sup>76</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>77</sup> Julia M.H. Carson, *Home Away From Home: The Story of the USO* (New York & London: Harper & Brothers, 1946), 112.

<sup>78</sup> In a USO pamphlet, it reads: “We also realize that girl talent may be rare. (Although reports indicate that girl singers and dancers are available and being used effectively in many locations.)” USO Brochure, USO Clippings File, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>79</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 1990): 588, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713166>.



far more important that 'braininess' or business ability, and her figure and disposition more important than her face.<sup>80</sup>

In the *Guide to the Foxhole Circuit*, CSI advised its female employees to "KEEP IT CLEAN!" and to embody this ideal woman:

One [female performer] gave the boys a lot of wiggles and whistle-pullers along with her song; the other, prim in an organdie dress, just sang. She got the encores. The boys thought she was "so sweet."<sup>81</sup>

This passage insinuates that CSI called upon women to perform their gender with a romanticized sweetness, rather than with a sexual or personal agency, embodying the stereotypical "American sweetheart." It also illuminates how performing the "American sweetheart" led to popularity and positive audience reception.

Sometimes this caused the actresses to create an "American sweetheart" persona to use in their acts, as recounted by Academy-award nominated actor Adolphe Menjou when interviewed about his experiences overseas for the CSI publicity report:

In his troupe there were three English girls. The boys thought they were Americans, and were so thrilled by having girls from home there that the girls changed their routines and each picked a town in the United States and asked Mr. Menjou about streets and points of interest in these towns so they could say they were from America.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Leila J. Rupp, *Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 151-152.

<sup>81</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 213.

<sup>82</sup> Adolphe Menjou, Motion Picture Division, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

Moreover, since men of the Armed Services rarely saw American women in their daily lives on base or overseas,<sup>83</sup> the CSI women's gender had an intensified representative power. Simply because of her gender, she had the power to trigger the men's memory of all the women he left behind on the home front. CSI utilized this power by reminding the women "when the doughboy thinks of his girls from home, he thinks of his mom, his sister, or his best girl [...] Girls from home have to be nice."<sup>84</sup> By asking the women to uphold the image of relatives and lovers back home, CSI implied that women related to or romantically involved with a soldier exemplified ideal female behavior. This concept is undoubtedly absurd, for it is unlikely that all of the women back home were "nice," "sweet," or "feminine." In fact, Judith Butler asserts, "gender reality is performative," producing a social context in which "the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed."<sup>85</sup> Thus, gender is not an essential truth and "cannot be understood as a *role* which either expresses or disguises an interior 'self,' whether that 'self' is conceived as sexed or not."<sup>86</sup> And yet, CSI relied on the "girl from home" to be a clear concept for the women to understand and emulate.

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<sup>83</sup> If servicemen saw American women at all, soldiers interacted with Red Cross Nurses and Women's Army Corps; though the gender politics at play there is a whole other issue unto itself that this paper does not have the time and space to address.

<sup>84</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 213.

<sup>85</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory", in *The Performance Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry Bial (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2007), 194.

<sup>86</sup> Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," 195.

This performance of the “American sweetheart” becomes difficult to analyze, for CSI performers had to sustain their performances of gender offstage, due to their responsibility to interact with the soldiers offstage as well. A very important part of the CSI women’s work was trying to be with the enlisted men as much as possible, and to participate in gendered activities like sewing, dancing, and helping to serve food. Buckley recounts how the CSI women had to behave around the men:

Every woman back home wears a halo now and [the CSI women] who represent her had better keep theirs on too. I’ve heard a girl swear out here and sense a roomful of men freeze for a second.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, the women had to maintain their “sweetheart” image even after the literal performance was over.

Therefore, how does Butler’s contention translate when the women in question are “performers” in the more conventional sense of the word, meaning “entertainers,” “singers,” “dancers,” or “actresses”? Moreover, how can we apply Butler’s concept of societal performed gender to the CSI women when they are performing their “gender reality” both on and offstage? The CSI women, by embodying “home” for the men both on and off stage, must *doubly perform their gender* in a literal performance context, the CSI show itself, and off stage when socially interacting with the boys.

Onstage, CSI asked the women to use their physical appearance to embody this middle-class, dream-like notion of “home.” *A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit* claims

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<sup>87</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

that female performers' most important baggage was their stage wardrobe, and that GIs didn't want to see them in "slacks" or their "uniforms," but rather wanted them to "look like the girls back home on an important Saturday night date."

Additionally, in the *Guide to the Foxhole Circuit*, CSI demands that women take along two pages' worth of cosmetic and clothing items:

FOR WOMEN: Your most important baggage is your stage wardrobe. A G.I. doesn't want to see you in slacks and he's not interested in your uniform. He wants to see you look like the girls back home on an important Saturday night date. Remember that, and take your best clothes with you. And never wear your uniform on stage. Take only essentials but take plenty of them. Some of these articles we list may not seem important now but when you're overseas and away from the Five & Ten you'll be glad you took them. Returning performers say there have been times when they'd have paid \$5 for a bobby pin. And the PX—obliging as it is—cannot stock beauty items and costume accessories in expectation of a visit from a girl performer.

Artificial flowers for your hair are valuable baggage. They make wonderful souvenirs. Edith Delaney, the tap dancer, always got a big hand when she finished her act by tossing out the red poppies she always wears in her hair.

When you go in to buy bobby pins (a must) pick up an extra bottle of nail polish and be sure you have enough cosmetics. Water isn't always plentiful where you're going. You'll need cold cream as you've never needed it before. And don't forget toilet water, soap, and a pair of sun glasses. Also don't forget face powder and talcum and a stiff brush for your hair. And facial tissue. One thing you definitely won't find in a PX is a bleaching agent. The G.I.'s are not trying to be blondes. So—either take along your own peroxide or make up your mind to stay brunette until you get back home.

Vitamin pills are sometimes desirable. You'll be playing under battle conditions. You'll also be glad you took your sewing kit along with you. There aren't any notions counters at the front and there will be plenty of changes to help out a G.I. or the male members of your unit.

You'll want a good mirror, a traveling iron that works and a long cord to go with it.

As for clothes, you'll have your uniform and a stage wardrobe. If you have room you might also take a suit and two blouses. Cotton dresses are valuable additions to your 55 pounds—particularly in warm climates. They are light in weight and easy to keep clean. Remember, there are no dry cleaners at the front. Your shoes are important. A good sport shoe is worth its weight in priorities. Anything else is a matter of taste. Last of all come

stockings. If you're lucky enough to own nylons, take them with you. They'll never be more appreciated—and not only by you. If you have to take silk, or mixed silk and rayon and cotton, remember to take enough. You may find yourself in a damp climate where it takes four days to dry a pair of stockings.

And that about fills the bill. Any extras you might need for cold climates can be bought reasonably at the quartermaster depot as we explained before.<sup>88</sup>

In contrast, CSI provides only two small paragraphs outlining what men should bring with them:

FOR MEN: A man's needs are simpler. You don't need to fill your bags with linen. You'll find laundry facilities most places you go and if the worst comes to the worst you can always wash your own. One entertainer, who wears evening clothes in his act, took along only four dress shirts on an eleven month tour.

If you do have room in your bag it should be filled with the best clothes you own. Time and time again CAMP SHOW veterans have reported that G-Is show a lively interest in their wardrobes. They are tired at looking at uniforms. They take pleasure in noticing the cut of a suit, the pattern in a piece of fabric, the design of a tie. So wear your Sunday best on stage. Save your uniforms for traveling.<sup>89</sup>

In a more conventional theatrical setting, a glamorous hyper-feminine costume at its worst might provide no more than slight discomfort and embarrassment for a performer through the duration of the theatrical act. Contrastingly, as evidenced in many of the personal accounts by female entertainers, the demand of glamour in a war zone, rendered itself awkward, uncomfortable, and utterly ridiculous:

...as a gesture of feminine protest, we wore dinner dresses, only to find that that night was the first of the evening stand-to's and the first gas mask drill, and at sunset we stood for fifty minutes in long dresses, topped by Mae Wests, and for part of the time, grotesque gas masks.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 208-209.

<sup>89</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 209-210.

<sup>90</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea," USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

Similar narratives exist describing how CSI women adorned in their nicest gowns while encountering air raids, unfortunate weather, or cumbersome military vehicles.<sup>91</sup> The image of a woman in an evening gown covered in mud while taking refuge in a trench during an air raid reveals the absurdity of this gendered behavior in a “Theatre of War.”<sup>92</sup> However, this image of a glamorous “sweetheart,” an image perpetuating Otherness and sexual objectification, provided emotional comfort for the soldiers. The “sweetheart” could satisfy the soldiers every need and desire, opening up opportunities for the soldiers to feel like protectors, superiors, and hyper-masculine heroes, giving them impetus to fight.

CSI women, both on and offstage, not only had to look like the “sweetheart,” but they also had to embody her feminine persona. Joan Rivière, psychoanalyst, describes this persona, or “womanliness,” as

assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen goods.<sup>93</sup>

Onstage, to mask themselves as the “sweetheart,” CSI girls behaved in an anti-intellectual and “empty-headed”<sup>94</sup> way, almost always for a comedic purpose. This “empty-headedness” is “simultaneously exasperating, humorous, and romantically

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<sup>91</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 86-92.

<sup>92</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>93</sup> Joan Rivière, “Womanliness as a Masquerade” From *The Inner World and Joan Rivière: Collected Papers, 1920-1958*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 147.

<sup>94</sup> Ilana Nash, *America's Sweethearts: Teenage Girl in Twentieth Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2006, 26.

desirable, for it allows boys and men to appear smarter, and thus makes the girl the approved object of males' attention."<sup>95</sup> In "Dinner A La Bremerton," a CSI sketch, a soldier tries to order dinner, but the waitress, with her lack of intellect and people skills, makes it difficult for the soldier to order his food:

SCENE: A corner in a Bremerton restaurant. On the back wall is a sign reading "Bremerton Restaurant". At stage right, is a small table covered with tablecloth and the soiled dishes of the last patron. At stage left is another and smaller serving table with various utensils on it. At fade-in, a line of impatient customers stands waiting at upstage left. In the foreground at the serving table, two waitresses, Jane and Beluah are ad-libbing. This ad-libbing, which continues through a large part of the sketch, contains such brilliant highlights of conversation as the following:

Gee, he certainly was the cutest sailor. Not good looking but—you know...and do I mean cute! Well, we started talking and I said to him...then he said...and can he jitterbug! And then we made a date for tomorrow night...and you know what he tried to do?...Well I didn't *let* him..etc. (During the beginning of this ad-libbing, Charles, a patron enters at right and he sits down at the table to the right).

Charles: Ah, thank heavens! A table. At last a table! (He waits. Neither waitress pays the slightest attention to him. He tries to catch Jane's eye, but without avail. The ad-libbing continues. Finally he taps on the table. No response. Another moment of wary waiting and then:) I say miss, would you mind, er---- (Jane looks at him for an instant and then resumes ad-libbing. Charles surveys the dirty dishes before him with displeasure, grows more impatient and finally he roars:) I say! (and then in a bit a soft caressing tone) May I please have just a wee bit of service?

Jane: (Without moving) I'm busy now, you'll have to wait.

Charles: *I'll* have to wait? Who's got the job waiting here, you or me?

Jane: (Finally crossing to him at a wilfully lazy pace) O.K. What do you want?

Charles: Food, my girl, Can't you see I'm---

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<sup>95</sup> Nash, *America's Sweethearts*, 26. In *America's Sweetheart*, Ilana Nash examines the role of teenage girls in popular American narratives, using the "sweetheart" to refer to such representations. She contends that discourses around women in Western culture construct otherness, rendering an "emptiness" that causes women to appear "less of a full person than are the members of the dominant population" (19). She then goes on to describe how teenage girls, or "sweethearts" combine both womanhood and childhood, doubling their emptiness and thus heightening their fetishized status in popular American narratives. Though Nash uses the word "sweetheart" to define teenage girls in popular media while I posit the "sweetheart" as a marriageable, attractive, lovable, and mothering woman in a CSI show, Nash's principle of "emptiness" applies to a CSI sweetheart in multiple iterations.

Jane: An optomist, yeah. Wot'll you have?  
 Charles: What have you got?  
 Jane: Say listen. I'm a waitress, not a menu.  
 Charles: Exactly, then bring me one.  
 Jane: One what.  
 Charles: One menu.  
 Jane: Oh, so that's what you want? Well, why didn't you say so. (She hands him a menu and starts walking away.)  
 Charles: Wait a minute. Don't run off like that.  
 Jane: Oh, you made up your mind?  
 Charles: (Reading menu) Heaven's no. Can't you give a man a chance.  
 Jane: That's just what I'm doing. (She starts walking off again.)...  
 Charles: (Reading menu) I'll have macaroni and cheese on the \$6 dinner.  
 Jane: Dinner's off!  
 Charles: Off what?  
 Jane: Off the menu. (She tears out the insert in the menu).  
 Charles: What do you mean? It says here that dinner's-----  
 Jane: Off at 8.  
 Charles: But it's only one minute to 8.  
 Jane: It'll be one minute after when I reach the kitchen.  
 Charles: But I've been here since 7:10.  
 Jane: And who asked you to wait?<sup>96</sup>

The scene continues in a similar matter, until Charles the Patron chokes on his food, and Jane pays no attention, leaving the audience laughing and thoroughly entertained. Thus the waitress may frustrate the soldier character with her failed attempt at customer service, while simultaneously inciting the spectators to view her as sexually desirable and humorous. Therefore, the soldiers can laugh at her expense, objectify her attractive body, and perhaps pursue her after the show is over.

Offstage, to continue their performance of femininity, CSI women appear *emotionally fixed*, thus *void of individuality*, and consequently become *empty vessels*

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<sup>96</sup> "Dinner A La Bremerton," United Service Organization Scrapbook, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.



for the soldier's own emotional turmoil. To appear emotionally fixed, CSI placed limitations on CSI women's behavior. Arlie Hochschild's idea of women's "emotional labor" claims that, in the public sphere, women are required to feign happiness and enthusiasm in order to perform their feminized service positions successfully.<sup>97</sup> In this way, CSI demanded emotional labor from its female performers by placing limitations on their speech acts offstage. For example, the *Guidebook* outlines the "Do's and Don'ts—Mostly Don'ts" for entertainers' behavior on and offstage, including "DON'T GRIPE...", "DON'T FEEL SORRY FOR YOURSELF...", "DON'T SYMPATHIZE TOO MUCH...", and "DON'T ARGUE with fellow entertainers in public..."<sup>98</sup> It also warns its employees: "News of your behavior travels ahead of you. In your own interest and for your own comfort be sure it is good news—that you are a swell bunch of people."<sup>99</sup> Moreover, CSI regulated their female performers' behavior by asking them to disguise their emotions in times of hardship in order to maintain a high morale. For example, Maxine Andrews, one of the famous Andrews Sisters, remembers when she and her sisters performed at a military hospital in San Francisco. A nurse told her: "the most important thing was not to break down [...] The last thing the boys needed were tears."<sup>100</sup> Therefore, this "masquerade"<sup>101</sup> of femininity only allowed for happiness,

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Margaret K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 31.

<sup>98</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 210-211.

<sup>99</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", 211.

<sup>100</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 88.

enthusiasm, and hopefulness as the approved emotional states available to CSI performers while on duty. Thus CSI performers at times appeared *emotionally fixed*, since they appeared only as constant sources of cheerfulness, instead of fully emotional people.

The limitations on the CSI women's emotional spectrum also constrained their expression of individuality. CSI literature insinuates a gendered code of conduct for the women to abide by and violation of this code had negative consequences. Buckley describes:

A certain Hollywood "star" has made herself disliked over the entire area by officers and enlisted men alike simply because she thought drunkenness and bawdy humor was at the G.I.s level.<sup>102</sup>

The girls had to be "sweet" and "nice" no matter what the circumstance. Thereby, CSI women, with a fixed cheerfulness, became representative of the soldiers' "mothers," "sisters," and "best girls," regardless of how sweet and nice those women might have actually been. By demanding the women to behave like the fantasized gendered behavior of the women back home,<sup>103</sup> which insinuates that gender is a stable identity, a notion disputed in the psychological feminist literature such as Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, CSI prohibited its female employees from expressing their own identities, thus marking them as both *emotionally fixed* and *void of individuality*.

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<sup>101</sup> Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as a Masquerade" From *The Inner World and Joan Rivière: Collected Papers, 1920-1958*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 146.

<sup>102</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea."

<sup>103</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea."

Since the women of the CSI appeared emotionally fixed and void of individuality, the women subsequently performed the role of *empty vessel* offstage for the soldiers to pour their own emotional turmoil. By asking its employees to socially interact with the soldiers during meals or in hospital wings, CSI “implicitly expected women to provide informal counseling services for men by way of their ‘natural’ nurturing qualities.”<sup>104</sup> In a mess hall, CSI girls could provide a friendly ear for the men to talk to, replicating the sentiments and structures of home that a mother or “sweetheart” might provide.<sup>105</sup>

By using the women as empty-vessels for the soldiers to pour their own emotional turmoil into, CSI relied on the haphazard, informal counseling provided by CSI women to offer psychiatric services to the male soldiers. On the hospital circuit, however, the circuit in which one can assume that the women came into contact with more disturbing accounts of war and perhaps men suffering from what is now understood as post-traumatic stress disorder, CSI provided its employees with little training in terms of psychiatric support.<sup>106</sup> In fact, employees on the hospital circuit were provided with only a list and instructional packet, explaining how to interact with the wounded soldiers:

1) Do not mention anything about their wounds, sickness, or condition, nor notice that they have lost a limb [...] 6) Do not tell him he will get well quickly for he does not like to be kidded [...] Remember that a soldier loves to gripe [...] He might complain about the hospital, or that the Doctor has not seen him for weeks, or that he is not getting the proper medicine. React naturally, and if

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<sup>104</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 31.

<sup>105</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 13-14.

<sup>106</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 31.

you feel he wants an answer, mention that you will take it up for him. Subsequently talk to the nurse, leaving the situation in her hands.<sup>107</sup>

This passage, with its euphemized advice and instructions, reveals how CSI depended on the fantasy of women to be motherly and able to cope with others' issues, regardless of the situation. This assumption of woman as mother sometimes did a disservice to CSI employees, however, for it underestimated the traumatic scenes in wartime hospital wings, as well as placed the women who worked in the hospitals in emotional and physical danger. By doing so, CSI used the CSI women as emotional collateral for the war effort and banked on their feminine spirit to protect them from such traumatic sights. For example, Ann Miller, singer and dancer, recalls that when she "did forty-eight shows for broken soldiers, who were mostly lying on stretchers" in the lobby of the Coral Gables Hotel, which at the time was a converted military hospital:

We went from ward to ward, singing and dancing and trying to boost the morale of these men. It was just hell...I just fell apart and I think the shock of seeing those men with their arms and legs blown off—it was just frightening. But when you do it, you do it. You try to help them, try to sing and dance. You try to keep their spirits up. It's heartbreaking.<sup>108</sup>

Due to her desire to perform her role of caregiver so intensely, she exhausted herself to the point of collapse, had to be taken home on an Army airplane during her last show. Thus the dependence on the femininity of CSI women sometimes endangered women's own mental and physical health, either by the sights seen in

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<sup>107</sup> Nat Levine, "Data for Artists Making the Army Hospital Tour," 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>108</sup> Yellin, *Our Mothers' War*, 88.

the wings, or by the hopes to perform their gender to the fullest, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion.

In conclusion, when comparing propaganda perpetuated by CSI to propaganda circulated within the domestic United States, both actively exploit a distortion of femininity to elicit support for the war. Advertisers actively inserted masculinity into the fantasy of femininity to appeal to women on the home front to become involved in the war effort. For example, advertisers created queer images of women, like Rosie the Riveter and Wonder Woman, in the hope to unearth masculine desires in their female audiences. These desires include industrial work and military power. On the contrary, CSI employed images of the wholesome sweetheart embodied by the CSI female entertainers to inspire men to fight. These women gave the men something to fight for and something to return to when the war was won. Paradoxically, the fantasized femininity of the sweetheart was propagated to inspire hyper-masculinity on the battlefield. One can see this double gendering of femininity—as in Rosie the Riveter and CSI women—as further evidence of the “catch-all” in the male fantasy of femininity that constructs women as functional no matter what the task.

Furthermore, CSI’s use of “home” in its theatrical offerings mirrors the propagandistic strategy on the home front of the war. In reportorial coverage of the GI’s, journalists used “home” to make the soldiers appear as heroic, or, as John Blum calls them, “homely heroes.”<sup>109</sup> Each GI’s individuality became less important

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<sup>109</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 53.

than the soldier as representative of America in general, just like the CSI women's individuality became less important than their ability to represent "home." Blum explains:

Whether consciously or inadvertently, the reporters tended to find in the young men they described the traits that Americans generally esteemed. Those in uniform shared with their countrymen a common exposure to values dominant in the United States[...]<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, both the reportorial coverage for the home front and CSI entertainment used "homely" diction to unify its audiences around their patriotic and heroic figures, and downplayed regional, ethnic, economic, or religious diversity.

Another similarity between reportorial coverage for the home front and CSI entertainment was the presence of the "American dream," or American hard work yielding endless possibilities. Blum contends:

[The Life of the GI] evoked the cult of the underdog [...] That kind of struggle [...] had particularly marked American experience and consciousness during the 1930's.<sup>111</sup>

In the media, the soldiers' "struggle" evolved from fighting for gains on the battlefield, to fighting for a middle-class American lifestyle. In *The Saturday Evening Post's* series called "What Am I Fighting For," one man asserted: "I am fighting for that big house with the bright green roof and the big front lawn."<sup>112</sup>

Many other soldiers cite other aspects of a middle class lifestyle as reason to fight:

These gravely yearned-for futures of men going into battle include so many things— [...] going to college [...] of driving around the streets of Kansas City

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<sup>110</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 55.

<sup>111</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 67.

once more and, yes, of just sitting in the sun once more on the south side of a house in New Mexico...<sup>113</sup>

While soldiers dreamed about the opportunity to live with a “big front lawn,” CSI shows reinforced the notion that America was a place that dreams came true. While overseas, an American GI might have dreamed about a certain starlet. In a CSI show, he not only saw that Hollywood and Broadway star perform, but he also might had the opportunity to dance with or talk to her. A soldier, depending on his regional or economic background, might have never had the opportunity to see a Broadway show or meet a Hollywood star during his civilian life. Since admission to all CSI shows were free effective March 8, 1942,<sup>114</sup> in his American military life, however, he did have this chance. Thus CSI operations created a fantasy world that epitomized the “American dream,” allowing for American boys of all backgrounds to imagine that they were sitting in the “soft plush seats”<sup>115</sup> of a New York theater, transcending economic or physical circumstances, with the female of their fantasies performing center stage.

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<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 64-65

<sup>114</sup> “Admission Fees Abolished for Camp Shows, INC. Performances,” War department release, Feb 24, 1942, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>115</sup> PFC. Norman S. Lezin, Show Reports, September 9, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

Chapter 3: "You're My Little Pin-Up Girl": The Sexual Implications of  
CSI Female Entertainers

*A boy sent his baby a note  
And this is exactly what he wrote, quote,  
"Honey don't worry your head about  
Those Pin Up Girls you've read about.  
For you most certainly know  
You're my little pin up girl,  
Honestly you are,  
To me, you have the grace of an angel  
The face of a movie star  
You're my little pin up girl  
Though we are apart  
When I'm in Sleepy Willow  
You're pinned on my pillow  
And also in my heart.  
I have to have that smile before me,  
No matter where I roam  
That twinkle in your eyes can warm me  
Like a fireside at home.  
Do I love my pin up girl?  
Bet your life I do!  
So baby keep a grinnin'  
Remember I'm pinnin'  
All my hopes on you."*

– "You're My Little Pin Up Girl", from the movie *Pin Up Girl* (1944)<sup>116</sup>

One cannot fully analyze the women of USO Camp Show Inc. (CSI) and their performance of gender without taking into account the sexualized components of their performed identity. If we use feminist scholar Catharine MacKinnon's definition of "sexuality,"<sup>117</sup> one can argue that the United Service Organization

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<sup>116</sup> *Pin Up Girl*, directed by H. Bruce Humberstone. (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1944), DVD.

<sup>117</sup> Not all feminist scholars agree with MacKinnon's understanding of "sexuality." I choose to use her definition, however, for I believe it is the most fitting for the social situation at hand. Since the female performers entertained a largely male audience (most of whom had not engaged in sexual intercourse on a regular basis for an extended period of time), this dynamic most likely led to the pervasive sexual energy that MacKinnon describes, between CSI female performers and the



(USO) not only relied on the performed gender of CSI women as embodied representations of home, as described in the previous chapter, but they also relied on the women to embody the female of heterosexual fantasy. Specifically, MacKinnon defines sexuality as:

Sexuality, in feminist light, is not a discrete sphere of interaction or feeling or sensation or behavior in which preexisting social divisions may or may not be played out. It is a pervasive dimension throughout the whole of social life, a dimension along which gender pervasively occurs and through which gender is socially constituted...<sup>118</sup>

Therefore, by framing sexuality as a “pervasive dimension throughout the whole of social life,” CSI, in calling upon these women to entertain the men, also called upon these women to provide sexual services to the men—though not by engaging in literal intercourse, certainly. Instead, the USO depended on women, in their performance of the “American Sweetheart,” to provide viable substitutes for sexual intercourse, such as embodying physically attractive women, performing theatrical representations of risqué women, and engaging in physical contact with the men through, for example, dancing. Undoubtedly, these substitutions might be perceived as wholesome or abstract, but nevertheless the USO depended on these sexual services to be sufficient enough to keep the men sexually satisfied.<sup>119</sup>

Throughout the war, sexual activity was at the forefront of military concerns due to an outbreak of venereal disease among the soldiers. Memories of a deadly

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heterosexual military men. This analysis does not mean to evaluate MacKinnon’s feminist writings, but rather I use some of her ideas to frame my historical narrative.

<sup>118</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, “Sexuality” from *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 477.

<sup>119</sup> Margaret K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 107-108.

venereal disease epidemic during World War I<sup>120</sup> provoked the Armed Forces, American Social Health Association (ASHA), and the USO to regulate soldiers' sexual activity. To do so, these organizations launched campaigns designed to discourage soldiers from expressing their sexual needs in undesirable places. A USO booklet reads:

In many of the communities in which we serve there are numerous ways to relieve monotony. The difficulty is that some of these will not help our men either to be better soldiers or later, better citizens. We must compete with these activities and beat them at their own game. It is a tough assignment but this is our job.<sup>121</sup>

In the euphemistic rhetoric above, the USO alludes to the improper behavior from military men, such as drinking and sleeping with prostitutes. In the March 1946 *American Journal of Sociology*, Henry Elkin published an analysis called "Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Military Life," in which he comments on this phenomenon:

Prostitution overseas had a very unsettling influence on the typical G.I. Whereas at home the mere 'going out' with girls often was enough to prove his virility, even to himself, he had now to reach the ultimate limit of physical intimacy, as was offered to him cheaply [...]<sup>122</sup>

Instead of prohibiting this behavior with punitive measures, the USO and ASHA decided that providing alternative spaces to fulfill these desires would yield more favorable preventative results. In providing safer methods to express soldiers' sexual needs, these organizations hoped to dissuade soldiers from potentially

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<sup>120</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 107.

<sup>121</sup> Overseas Flyer: Vol. I, No. 4 – Issued By Program Department, Overseas Division, December 1943, United Service Organization Scrapbook, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>122</sup> Henry Elkin, "Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life," *The American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 5 (Mar., 1946): 412-413, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2771104>.

harming their own bodies, as well as harming the reputation of the American Armed Forces.

Therefore, the “pin-up,” or photographs of physically attractive women to be “pinned up” on soldier’s walls and military vehicles, became the essential tool for the Armed Forces’ sexual campaign, acting as a “surrogate object of sexual desire for soldiers far from home.”<sup>123</sup> Using these photographs to “encourage heterosexual fantasy in the sex-segregated military,”<sup>124</sup> the government hoped to provide activities in which “autoeroticism”<sup>125</sup> could be cultivated in place of the sexual interactions with sex workers, as long as masturbation would not become “habit-forming.” While religious groups and government officials often voiced concerns about the morality of pin-ups, some soldiers often criticized semi-official publications, such as *Yank: The Army Weekly*, which featured these photographs, as too tame for their sexual needs.<sup>126</sup> For example, in response to threats to censor pin-ups due to their immorality, one soldier said,

Maybe if some of those ‘panty waists’ had to be stuck out some place where there are no white women and few native women for a year and a half, as we were, they would appreciate even a picture of our gals back home.<sup>127</sup>

Censorship mainly led to the production of “relatively demure”<sup>128</sup> images of women. Nevertheless, despite access to more sexually suggestive photographs, the

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<sup>123</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James’: American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II,” *American Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 1990): 592, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2713166>.

<sup>124</sup> Quoted in Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,” 596.

<sup>125</sup> Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,” 600.

<sup>126</sup> Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,” 595.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,” 595.

<sup>128</sup> Westbrook, “I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James,” 596.

most popular pin-ups, such as Betty Grable, were still those that appealed not only to the soldiers' sexual desires, but also to the soldiers' desires for their wives and "best girls" on the home front.<sup>129</sup> For pin-ups were more than "masturbatory aides,"<sup>130</sup> as they functioned similarly to how the CSI women functioned: as representatives of the "American sweetheart." For example, the media lauded Grable as "the model girlfriend, wife, and finally mother," and in 1943, her popularity increased after she married bandleader Harry James and became a mother later that year. At the peak of her popularity, *Modern Screen* reported that one soldier had died clutching Grable's photograph, grotesquely demonstrating how much these women meant to the men in uniform.<sup>131</sup> Thus pin-ups were regarded as the American sweetheart to defend and "functioned as icons of private interests and obligations for which soldiers were fighting," paralleling how CSI posited the CSI women in the Camp Shows.

Physically, the most popular pin-ups were not particularly glamorous; instead, they had all-American "average" beauty: fair skin, supple bodies, with "candy-box-top prettiness." In fact, *Life Magazine* described the legs of Betty Grable as "Great American Average Legs: straight, perfectly rounded and shaped, but withal judged by the same standards as millions of others."<sup>132</sup> This type of beauty not only appealed to the male soldiers' sexual desires, but it also influenced American women's fashion. Pin-up girls "suggest[ed] that, if men were obliged to

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<sup>129</sup> Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 596.

<sup>130</sup> Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 596.

<sup>131</sup> Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 600.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 599.

fight for their pin-up girls, women were in turn obliged to fashion themselves to pin-up girls worth fighting for."<sup>133</sup> Therefore, many women sent their men overseas snapshots of themselves styled like their favorite pin-up. As Robert B. Westbrook describes,

American soldiers marched into battle with pin-ups of not only Betty Grable but also of their own wives and girlfriends. Grable both explicitly and by example urged women who thought they looked good in a bathing suit to send a snapshot to servicemen, and many heeded her advice... thousands of American women provided soldiers...with photographs to tuck in their helmets and pin to their weapons, and in these photographs women often expertly constructed their images through the conventions of the pin-up: the one-piece bathing suit or sweater, high heels, the over-the-shoulder look, the 'pleasing convexities' of the bent knee, and the bright, coy 'come on' smile.<sup>134</sup>

If girls on the home front followed the "pin-up" trends, to sustain the fantasy of "home," CSI depended on the CSI women to do the same. In CSI's *Guide to the Foxhole Circuit*, CSI demands that CSI women to "look like the girls back home on an important Saturday night date."<sup>135</sup> In this request, one can see how the USO depended on CSI women to physically emulate Hollywood starlets and popular pin-ups of the time, appearing average but beautiful, just as the "girls back home" did.

If we equate the propagandistic use of pin-ups as the "American sweetheart" to the propagandistic use of CSI women in the same paradigm, we can also infer that the sexual uses of pin-ups parallel the sexual uses of CSI women. Thus CSI women functioned as live pin-up girls: physically attractive American women onto

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<sup>133</sup> Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 603.

<sup>134</sup> Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 605-606.

<sup>135</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit", in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University. (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 208.

which the men could project their sexual fantasies.<sup>136</sup> While CSI cast their female employees in wholesome shows, to adhere with social mores of the time, CSI still depended on their pin-up physique to sexually arouse the predominately male audience. Even if a CSI performer wore a more conservative dress to be more faithful to the women back home, as requested in the *CSI Guide to the Foxhole Circuit*,<sup>137</sup> or if her performance were thoroughly entertaining regardless of what she was wearing, her gender was still at the forefront of the show, as proven by the demands from CSI on her appearance.

Moreover, we know that a large part of the CSI mission was for performers to interact with soldiers offstage, as discussed in the previous chapter. Louise Buckley recounts:

It is difficult at times to see as much of the enlisted men as we'd like, because of the limited facilities in most places for getting together, but the fun you have and the fun you give makes it well worth trying. A couple of nights ago we spent one of the pleasantest evenings of the tour, when officers and enlisted men together took us to the kitchen for cake and coffee and then treated us to an impromptu entertainment (in which we shared, too) of songs by Jack Best, once of Fred Waring's band, tap dances (in G.I. shoes) and to the life imitations of Danny Kaye.<sup>138</sup>

This scene parallels the life of a canteen hostess. According to Maxene Andrews, one of the Andrews sisters,

No one simply performed at the Canteens. You sang or danced or told jokes or played a musical instrument, whatever your specialty was, but you

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<sup>136</sup> Westbrook, "I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl that Married Harry James," 599.

<sup>137</sup> USO Camp Show Inc., "A Guide to the Foxhole Circuit," 208.

<sup>138</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea," 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

also...provided a friendly or sympathetic ear whenever the occasion arose in conversation, which was often."<sup>139</sup>

In *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, Margaret K. Winchell argues that when military men danced with USO hostesses,

[...] a man could get close enough to a hostess to smell her perfume of her hair while he held her in his arms on the dance floor. The act of dancing itself required physical contact between partners, whether it was a slow waltz or a fast jitterbug.<sup>140</sup>

CSI Women also danced with the men as depicted in a letter from Lt. Col. J.M.

Arvey dated July 18, 1944. He describes how Jack Benny, Larry Adler, Carole Landis and two other artists performed their show in the rain for an audience of ten thousand men. He writes:

The show went on, and the rain increased in fury. No dancing was possible, and I understand that Carole and one of the other gals usually wind up the routine with a jitterbug exhibition with the soldiers.<sup>141</sup>

Therefore, by dancing with the men, both USO hostesses and CSI women allowed the men to wholesomely touch them, in addition to conversing with them. This provided a sexual service for the soldiers,<sup>142</sup> for the USO, ASHA, and the Armed Forces hoped this wholesome contact with female bodies could provide viable substitutes for sexual intercourse and thwart any form of unsuitable sexual expression.

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<sup>139</sup> Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2004), 84.

<sup>140</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 112.

<sup>141</sup> Lt. Col. J.M. Arvey, Show Reports, Offshore, 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>142</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 107.

These unique sexual services provided by CSI women rendered themselves successful predominately due to the sexual politics at play during the time period. At this time, both male and female sexuality possessed a unique duality. Male sexuality operated within a “Homely Hero”<sup>143</sup>/Rowdy GI dichotomy, while female sexuality operated within a “Good Girl/Bad Girl”<sup>144</sup> dichotomy. Because society scrutinized the sexual behavior of both men and women, the sexual politics of the time directly affected how the GIs and the CSI women behaved around one another.

In media coverage, the GIs were portrayed as “homely heroes.”<sup>145</sup> Blum explains:

The GI, a homely hero, naturally decent and generous [...] He was as plain, as recognizable, as American as the militiamen of the past, he was the conscript citizen—competent enough but fundamentally an amateur, a transient, and an unhappy warrior. He was the essential republican, the common good man. He was the people’s hero [...] The hero of World War II stood for blueberry pie and blond sweethearts, for the family farm and for Main Street, for perseverance and decency—for Americanism as a people’s way of being. Brave men, those heroes, and nice guys, too [...]<sup>146</sup>

Therefore, amidst his peers, the GI was regarded as a “nice guy,” forthright and all-American. In a public sphere, he would never behave in a socially or sexually dubious manner. If he did behave poorly in private, no one back home knew about it, or cared about it, for the G.I.’s “naturally decent and generous” reputation boosted the morale of the home front.

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<sup>143</sup> John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 76.

<sup>144</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 107.

<sup>145</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 76.

<sup>146</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 76.



Furthermore, to be regarded as a healthy American “boy in uniform” not only required a kind-hearted disposition, but it also necessitated an overtly heterosexual behavior. In fact, many military officials linked heterosexual desire with the required aggressiveness to be an effective soldier. This encouraged a “masculine peer culture”<sup>147</sup> to develop among the men. In *Kilroy Was Here*, an analysis of World War II-era comedy, Charles Osgood states:

We have to remember that most of “boys in uniform” were indeed boys—seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old. Some even younger...Boys will be boys. And they joked about what they thought about all the time and talk about all the time, which of course was sex.<sup>148</sup>

The overt expression of heterosexuality took shape not only in jokes, but also through pin-up girls posted on barracks and planes, through sleeping with women, who were often sex workers, and through bragging about sexual activities. With this encouraged virility, the military hoped to breed strong, capable soldiers, or in other words “rowdy GIs.”

This rowdy GI mentality, however, led to quite misogynistic behavior from the troops, revealing the other side of male sexuality of the time. In the March 1946 *American Journal of Sociology*, Henry Elkin published an analysis called “Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Military Life.” He writes:

Fundamentally, the G.I. did not like or desire women other than as means of gratifying his self-respect and his primitive sexual desire. He commonly referred to women by the profane term for vagina and treated them all, even when there could be no ground for confusion, with a degree of bluntness and

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<sup>147</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 107.

<sup>148</sup> Charles Osgood, *Kilroy Was Here: The Best of American Humor from World War II* (New York: Hyperion, 2011), xi.

indiscrimination that did not help to foster international good-will and understanding.<sup>149</sup>

When reading accounts like this, one is left to wonder not only how the Armed Forces could have tolerated such behavior towards women, but also how did the reputation of the "boys in uniform" remain as good ol' American boys? MacKinnon provides insight into this phenomenon:

Male sexual desire is [] simultaneously created and serviced, never satisfied once and for all, while male forces is romanticized, even sacralized, potentiated, and naturalized, by being submerged into sex itself.<sup>150</sup>

Thus we see how male heterosexuality becomes accepted as essential and healthy for a soldier, for sexual desire and physical force simply were part of the job description. The Armed Forces, the American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA), and the USO endorsed this aggressive heterosexual behavior, rather than punishing the men for misogynistic activity, as aggressive heterosexuality was perceived as normal.

Meanwhile, female sexuality at the time also had a tenuous duality. One might assume that with CSI women's overt sexual attractiveness and agency to dance and talk to whom they pleased, female sexuality might have been acceptable to act upon and discuss. However, this sexual objectification of the women's bodies to boost morale did not initiate societal acceptance of female sexuality. As Marilyn E. Hegarty writes:

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<sup>149</sup> Henry Elkin, "Aggressive and Erotic Tendencies in Army Life," *The American Journal of Sociology* 51, no. 5 (Mar., 1946): 413, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2771104>.

<sup>150</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, "Sexuality" from *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 480.

As women served their country by maintaining male morale, the diverse and often contradictory media images of wartime women reflected societal ambivalence regarding female sexuality. Women were sexualized in support of the war effort but were also subject to negative portrayals if they appeared to exceed the always nebulous standards of acceptability and respectability.<sup>151</sup>

Therefore, a “good girl/bad girl”<sup>152</sup> dichotomy, as Margaret K. Winchell calls it, structured American women’s lives. MacKinnon explains that sexuality implies a male dominated hierarchy, in which “dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity” and “submission eroticized defines its femininity.”<sup>153</sup> However, the “good girl/bad girl” dichotomy does not relegate the woman to a simply feminine submissive status, but instead grants her some masculine pseudo-agency over her sexual life. The “good girl” is simultaneously powerful in her ability to control sexual activity with a soldier by flirting, but also completely vulnerable to ostracism if she does not control the sexual act according to society’s restraints on her sexual life. For example, in a USO hostess manual from the Fort Dix Community Service in Pointville, New Jersey, the USO warned junior hostesses of not only the dangers of sexually transmitted disease but also the danger of “social disease”:

The risk and often tragic results for the girl are far too great for the momentary fun of kissing a strange soldier goodnight. Any girl who is willing enough and stupid enough to run this risk, knowing its dangers, must also be willing to pay the price of possibly contracting a serious social disease from a soldier she will probably never see again.

Remember...the soldier who kisses you goodnight, after an evening’s acquaintance, has no doubt kissed dozens of girls before you and will kiss

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<sup>151</sup> Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Whackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 126.

<sup>152</sup> Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 128.

<sup>153</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, “Sexuality” from *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 477.

dozens after you. No one blames the soldier. Everyone blames the girl, including the girl herself. *Is it worth it?*<sup>154</sup>

Thus this sexual agency granted to women still operated within the male dominant sexual hierarchy, elusively restraining the women's conduct.

In CSI women's daily life overseas, this "good girl/bad girl dichotomy" took shape both on and off stage. Onstage, in Variety Show skits, since the women were merely "pretending" or "playing a part," they could assume more "bad girl," or in other words "sexually active" roles, without disrupting the social expectations of the time. Women would often play a USO hostess, who could impulsively abandon their good girl role, only to reveal her secret bad girl desires. In the skit "Wounded in Action," a USO hostess attempts to flirt with a serviceman, only to be humiliated when she finds out he's seeing someone back home:

"WOUNDED IN ACTION"  
(A Farce)

Davenport in a USO club. A sailor enters, sits down, daydreams. A girl enters, limping, making much in pantomime of her misery her feet. She encounters a senior hostess who motions to the sailor.

GIRL: (SHAKES HER HEAD WILDLY)  
(SPEAKS LOW)

I was nothing to the first one tonight but a pair of ears; he talked about electronics! I was nothing to the last one but a pair of feet to romp on. I'd be even less to that one—look--. He won't even know the color of my eyes!

HOSTESS: (URGES HER TOWARD HIM GENTLY BUT FIRMLY, IN SPITE OF HER LIMPING)

GIRL: (FLOPS ONTO THE DAVENPORT. AS THE SENIOR HOSTESS PAUSES ON THE WAY OUT TO WATCH—SITS. IS SUDDENLY INTRIGUED BY HIS DECORATIONS)

GIRL: Hello—you hero man. Where'd you get that purple heart?

BOY: Hello you so and so of USO. For not minding my own business.

GIRL: Have you been in the Amy long?

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<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 128.

BOY: Ever since I enlisted.

GIRL: What did you do before you joined the Navy?

BOY: Walked out on my draft board.

(PAUSE, WITH MORE DREAMING ON HIS PART, AND RUBBING ON HERS. ANNOYED, DROPPING HER ATTENTION ON HER BRUISES, SHE TOUCHES UP HER MAKE-UP, DROPS HER HANDKERCHIEF, WITHOUT GAINING ATTENTION, FINALLY BEGINS TO RUB HER ANKLES AGAIN)

GIRL: It's your turn to ask the questions.

(HIS FACE LIGHTS UP AND HIS HAND GOES TO HIS POCKET. THEN SHYNESS OVERTAKES HIM AND HE SUBSTITUTES A QUESTION FOR THIS ONE ON THE TIP OF HIS TONGUE)

BOY: Uh—what did you do before you joined the USO?

GIRL: (PANTOMIMES THE KNITTING) Knitted for the Red Cross.

BOY: (HIS HAND AGAIN GOES TO HIS POCKET AND AGAIN HE SUBSTITUTES) Uh—how much do you get paid?

GIRL: My only pay is patriotic corns—(VICIOUSLY) and fallen arches! And they don't rate a purple heart.

BOY: How long have you been in the armed forces?

GIRL: This is my first night. I've stayed through this party—so far.

BOY: (HE EVEN GETS OUT A FEW WORDS OF IT) Would you—uh—I supposed you've had a lot of boy-friends?

GIRL: (SHE SITS UP WITH SUDDEN INTEREST) Mm—Always room for one more.

BOY: (HAND HALF WAY OUT THIS TIME) (GULP) Then—then you'll understand what it means to a fellow like me to have a girl friend.

GIRL: (DELIGHTED THAT HE'S WARMING UP. LEADING HIM ON.

SHOVING CLOSER) Let's not too get personal, Bub. We're still in the USO.

BOY: (ABASHED) I was only going to ask if you'd like to—

GIRL: (SUGGESTIVE) Questions are okay; but keep 'em clean, army boy, keep 'em clean.

BOY: I was wondering if you would—

GIRL: (MORE SUGGESTIVE) Don't ask me for my telephone number because we don't do that in the USO.

BOY: (GRINNING A LITTLE AT THE CONTRAST TO WHAT HE WAS THINKING OF) I wasn't going to ask for your telephone number.

GIRL: (ENCOURAGED BY HIS GRIN) You mustn't ask me to go up to the bowling alley, because we don't do that in the USO.

BOY: (GRINS AGAIN) It wasn't the bowling alley I was thinking of—

GIRL: (VERY SUGGESTIVE) You mustn't ask me to slip out and meet you on the street corner, because we don't do that—in the USO.

BOY: It wasn't the street corner—

GIRL: Whatever it was, I'm sure we don't do it at the USO. But go right ahead anyway, soldier. Ask it. Would I like to—what?

BOY: (PULLING A PILE OF SNAPSHOTS FROM HIS POCKET) Would you like to look at some snapshots of my girl back home? Boy, is she a honey! She's got big blue eyes and yellow hair and she's a stepper!  
GIRL: (Flounces Away in a Fury—Lamer than ever) You ungrateful gob!  
BOY: What's the matter? Where are you going?  
GIRL: Back to my Red Cross Knitting!  
(EXIT GIRL)  
(BOY KISSES PICTURE—GOES OFF LAUGHING, HIGH-STEPPING)<sup>155</sup>

The girl, by suggestively repeating she does not want to go to the locations where soldier/hostess sexual interactions took place, implies that in actuality she wants to leave and break the USO rules. One can only imagine how humorous this must have been for soldiers, for it satirized the sexual interactions in the USO clubs when "good girl" hostesses flirted or rejected the men's courtship. In actual USO Canteens, the junior hostesses, if they behaved according to the USO rules, upheld the "good girl" image and turned down any kind of physical advances from soldiers. Therefore, CSI women, by performing sexually suggestive scenes like this, sent conflicting messages to the soldiers about their own sexual behavior; did the USO girls actually not "do that in the USO?"

Furthermore, this scene also sends contradictory messages to the soldiers about USO hostess' sexual desires. The USO prided itself on the "good girls" who worked in their canteens, and publicly demanded that the servicemen to treat the women respectfully. For example, the *USO Bulletin* reported the experience of a "virtuous" junior hostess in a vignette titled, "Yes, It Really Happened":

A weary USO girl going home late after a long day in the Service Department. A seat in the subway, four U.S. sailors eyeing her prettiness,

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<sup>155</sup> "Wounded in Action", United Service Organization Scrapbook, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

trying to catch her eye, making wise cracks,--the girl too tired to pay much attention. Suddenly a sailor spies on her coat the linked letters of a pin—USO. 'Holy Moses, guys, don't get her she works for the USO!'"<sup>156</sup>

Yet in "Wounded in Action," the soldiers watch a USO hostess want to be sexually pursued and dominated, despite her inability to explicitly say it. These contradictory messages about female sexuality directed at the soldiers likely led to confusion. Were USO girls in fact "good girls" or did they want to "meet on the street corner"?

Satires about female sexual behavior, such as "Wounded in Action," easily could have influenced social interactions in USO canteens. After seeing this sketch, a man in uniform might have expected the "good girls" of the USO to behave promiscuously. However, due to the lack of documentation about this type of specific interaction, we are only left to speculate how sexually charged scenes such as this permeated into the social life of these men and women. Then again, the soldiers might have disregarded the mixed messages of the USO and followed the orders to treat the USO women cordially. From this one simple sketch from a USO variety show, we, as historians, can start examining how the complexities of sexual behavioral standards play out with the problematic sexual politics of the time.

Another example of a sexually suggestive USO sketch is a 1942 BBC Radio Broadcast, in which Mitzi Mayfair and Jack Buchanan performed a scene when Jack asks Mitzi out on a date:

MITZI: Well, Mr. Buchanan, you see...

JACK: Jack, please.

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<sup>156</sup> Quoted in Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 123.

MITZI: Jack...you see... while I was playing the camps, I met a Sergeant.  
JACK: Oh, you met a Sergeant!  
MITZI: Yes—and a corporal.  
JACK: A corporal, too?  
MITZI: And two or three buck Privates.  
JACK: Which means you'll be rather busy during your stay.  
MITZI: I'm afraid so. Those boys have so much energy.  
JACK: (coughs hastily) Mitzi Mayfair, the Queen of Tersichore, will now go into her song and dance. Play Geraldo.<sup>157</sup>

By turning down a date with Mr. Buchanan because she's been "busy" with the "energetic" soldiers, Mitzi insinuates that the CSI women are sexually active with soldiers. Words like "buck Private," "busy," "energetic," are double entendres for sexual activity. Now, of course, this is meant to be humorous, and not meant to be taken literally. Nevertheless, these sexual innuendos demonstrate how the women actively participated in their dramatized sexuality to arouse the soldiers' imaginations. In this scene, Mitzi Mayfair suggests she is sexually involved with a group of soldiers, while maintaining her status of famous American good girl. She is the one who asserts herself as both good and bad, rather than a man suggesting her duality for her. This good girl/bad girl dichotomy kept the soldiers' bodies in the wholesome seats of the Camp Show Theater, rather than going out to brothels, for it allowed their minds to imagine risqué scenarios with a proper American partner. This fantasy of a good girl acting badly rendered the CSI mission successful within the cultural norms of the period.

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<sup>157</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation "Broadcast with USO-Camp Shows, Inc. Unit #2," in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 224.



Furthermore, for CSI women, onstage sexual actions influenced their interactions with the soldiers offstage. Since the girls performed characters with an impulse for sexual deviancy, their shows could provoke sexual harassment from the soldiers during and after the show. Since CSI publicity literature unsurprisingly excludes overt reports on sexual violence or harassment, historians have to piece together this history by “reading in between the lines” of personal accounts. In Louise Buckley’s letter, she recounts:

And when men in a hospital or men anywhere say “can you please wear a dress”, it’s nice to be able to do it [...] I’ve listened everywhere (until this base where the large group of WACs have taken the edge of the wonder of women in New Guinea) to the incessant wolfcalls of men, colored troops, Philippine troops and Australians. Once I discovered I was truly a social success when a group of natives alongside the road greeted me with the old familiar whistle.<sup>158</sup>

She continues:

Certain audience cracks have become an accepted part of the show—we wait for them. Wisecracks are frequent but always friendly and they’ve long since ceased to phase us. If G.I. Joe wants to enjoy a show that way, let him [...] USO Work in the South Pacific is fun. And it is just as true in a sense that USO fun is work. Not really, but it the social life so eagerly supplied by masculine New Guinea that can really knock you out if you don’t take a day off now and then for “sack duty”, just to catch up.<sup>159</sup>

Though we cannot assert exactly what Buckley means to insinuate through her tone, her diction, with words like “incessant” and “wisecracks,” suggests a tenuous relationship between the female entertainers and their sexual objectification. On the one hand, objectification can frustrate and demean the female performers,

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<sup>158</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>159</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

while simultaneously constructing her own self-worth. Buckley allows the men to heckle her during her show, ask her to wear a dress, and whistle at her as she walks by, because it is part of her job and helps the men protect our nation. She writes:

We've played to audiences, many of them, ankle deep in mud, huddled under their ponchos in the pouring rain (it breaks your heart the first two or three times to see men so hungry for entertainment) [...] And the gratitude of them to you for coming out here is as pathetic as it is undeserved and embarrassing. From where I sit, I'm watching Helen Ford dust off her trench coat. Clouds of dust are blowing around her; soon she'll don the coat and cover her face and head completely with a scarf, not for warmth, indeed, but for the long dusty jeep ride. But once there, that audience of Engineers, Sea Bees, Ack-Ack troops, Port Bastalio, or whatever it may be tonight, will compensate a thousands times over for the dust in your hair, your eyes and your teeth.<sup>160</sup>

This acceptance of sexual objectification conjures up MacKinnon's revealing metaphor: "All women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water."<sup>161</sup>

However, this metaphor is much more complex than it appears. As Martha C. Nussbaum argues, MacKinnon's metaphor depicts the realities of women to be such that "they derive their very nourishment and sustenance from [sexual objectification]."<sup>162</sup> But "women are not fish," and objectification "cuts women off from full self-expression and self-determination-from, in effect, their humanity."<sup>163</sup>

And yet, CSI women, being products of their time, whole-heartedly performed these sexual acts for the men, for they viewed this as part of their national duty, as

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<sup>160</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea," USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

<sup>161</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, "Sexuality" from *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 484.

<sup>162</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (Autumn, 1995): 250, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2961930>.

<sup>163</sup> Nussbaum, "Objectification," 250.

well as essential to their self-value. Louise Buckley explains:

[...] [In] the USO, as "morale builders" [...] when men in a hospital or men anywhere say, "Can you please wear a dress", it's nice to be able to do it. It's mighty good for your own morale too, at times.<sup>164</sup>

Thus to be attractive "American Sweethearts" for the men to fight for gave the CSI women something to live for.

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<sup>164</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea," USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955.

### Conclusion: "When The Lights Go On Again"

At first glance, the women of USO Camp Shows, Inc. (CSI) appear to be no more than your average American starlets: able to perform their shows wherever, skilled in performance techniques, and pretty to look at. However, after examining just how much was demanded of them, we see that these women sustained the performance of the "American Sweetheart," embodying the fantasy of home and sex, both on and offstage. These women did this in the face of war and bloodshed, all as means to keep the men emotionally intact. These women were not any average American entertainers; they were American heroes.

Dorothy Dinnerstein writes in her book *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, a feminist psychoanalytic exploration, about how men and women collaborate to "keep history mad,"<sup>165</sup>(225) or, in other words, maintain historical narratives that pursue money and power. She writes:

[...] the emotional contrasts and complementarities between woman and man, as these grow out of her sameness of gender, and his difference in gender, [] fit her to embody [] intuition, just as they fit him for the historic undertaking to whose pathology the intuition points. But the essential point is that both depend on the pathology, and both want the intuition steadily and harmlessly ventilated. He is capable of intuition and articulates it now and then, here and there. She is capable of history-making, and engages in it now and then, here and there. But if he allowed himself more generally to dwell upon the intuition, to give it full status in his pattern of conscious concerns, he could not go on making the kind of history he makes. And if she immersed herself more generally in that kind of history, she would have to bury the intuition.<sup>166</sup>

Using Dinnerstein's "intuition" versus "history-making" to define gender identity,

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<sup>165</sup> Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976), 225.

<sup>166</sup> Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, 225-227.

the gender politics in CSI operations become even more apparent. If the soldiers, while stationed overseas, tried to embody ideas of “home” and “sex” by themselves, they would be left unfulfilled, disappointed, and depressed, for home and sex with American women was too far away to obtain, which perhaps could have distracted them from their jobs in the war effort. If CSI women attempted to help out in the “history-making” of the war effort, or the violence on the front lines, the gender hierarchy of 1940s America would have collapsed. If all women fought in the Armed Forces, no one would have preserved the American “generosity, the good pay, the comforts, the democracy, the pie”<sup>167</sup> on the home front.

The women of CSI knew how important their work was; they knew what it meant to an American soldier to see a girl smile and dance for him. They had to defend that image with all of their being. As Louise Buckley wrote home, “Every woman back home wears a halo now and [the CSI women] who represent her had better keep theirs on too.”<sup>168</sup> Dinnerstein writes:

Not only is [] intuition [...] too well-developed in woman to be pushed under as men push it under. She is also unwilling to bury it. Her unwillingness rests in part on a sense of responsibility, a fear of what the world would be like if the perspective that she embodies were lost to all of us: she knows, and man knows too—hence his enraged alarm at the prospect of her entering history—that the side of life she protects, maintains, and stands up for is the side that keeps the world at least partly sane. Both need to have this side of life affirmed.<sup>169</sup>

So while the men in uniform were on the front lines defending our nation, the

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<sup>167</sup> Quoted in John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York & London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 67.

<sup>168</sup> Louise Buckley, “Letter from Louise Buckley with ‘Over 21’ Unit in New Guinea,” 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

<sup>169</sup> Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, 227.

women of CSI were fighting their own war to keep their “side of life affirmed.” They did not fight against the Nazis with military might, but instead they defended American optimism and way of life from the realities of war and destruction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I hope that my readers are affected by these women’s stories, as I intended to lift their spirits out of archives and into historical scholarship. In the women’s historical narrative of World War II, which is typically dominated by Rosie-the-Riveter or the Women’s Army Corps, Jane Froman’s courageous encounter with near-death injuries, Ann Margaret’s exhausting performances in the hospitals, and Louise Buckley’s experiences while performing in New Guinea alter our definition of a heroine. These women did not have to take on masculine roles to be awe-inspiring; instead they were a “feminine task force,”<sup>170</sup> defending their right to be American by bravely putting on their dresses with ack-acks blazing away behind them.

In addition to this paper, I extended my research by creating an original theatrical piece about the female entertainers of the USO called *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours*. The experience of performing the role of Louise Buckley in *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* deepened my understanding of the life of a United Service Organizations (USO) entertainer. *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* takes place at a live radio broadcast with a studio audience, where Louise Buckley is the host for the

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<sup>170</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation “Broadcast with USO-Camp Shows, Inc. Unit #2,” in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O’Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 222.

week to tell the military listeners about her experiences while entertaining overseas. Throughout the show, Louise tells anecdotes about her life in the war zones and sings popular music of the time to boost morale of the troops. When she begins discussing her experience in the hospital wings, however, the realities of war become too overwhelming for her, and she cannot continue the broadcast. She composes herself and finishes the show, to keep the spirits of the boys intact, as she and the audience grapple with their feelings about the war. Throughout the performance, I felt myself, as Louise, wanting to interject my own personal feelings about what I saw and what I thought, but I could not within the constructs of my "American Sweetheart" performance. Simultaneously, regardless of what she felt, the desire to "do her part" for the war effort and to mother and "sweetheart" the men was her main objective, keeping Louise's stakes high for the duration of the broadcast.

I also felt sexually objectified in the performance both by my own doing, with the lines I spoke and the clothes I wore, as well as the male gaze upon my body from my band and the audience. Sometimes the audience would whistle at me, or laugh at my sexual innuendos. To be faithful to the period, I could not comment on my sexualization or sexual desires, but had to play the part of the USO girl. For example, on closing night, when I performed the section of the show, "How to Pack for War," the audience whistled at me when I put on a feather boa. Promptly, I responded in my squeaky, ditzy character voice, "Thank you!" and then continued with the rest of the scene. Although I enjoyed being able to improvise based on the

audience's response, I also felt uncomfortable. As a woman in the twenty-first century, I have more agency to remove myself from feeling sexually objectified than the women of the 1940s. In the context of the show, however, I had to allow the objectification to feed me, give me purpose, and push the performance forward, just as the women of CSI would have done.

Moreover, offstage, when I was not rehearsing my show, I made a concerted effort to perform the role of "sweetheart" to my all-male band. I cast my musicians as all men on purpose, not only to help theatrically create the image of "one girl to a thousand men,"<sup>171</sup> but also to help me understand a gender ratio of one woman to ten boys throughout the rehearsal process. This definitely helped my performance and understanding of Louise because I was inherently different from my band, not only in my role in the show as performer and writer, while they acted as musicians, but also in our genders. Over spring break, after a long day of a rehearsal, I cooked my entire cast dinner and allowed them to leave without doing the dishes (something I would never do in the twenty-first century), helping me understand the exhaustion of "sweethearting" a group of men after a day of performing. Moreover, that experience emphasized the intellectual difficulties I have with understanding the performed femininity of the 1940s, given that I grew up in a time of modern gender roles. In spite of all of this confusion, I developed a wonderful working relationship with the boys in my show, as well as a deep concern for their

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<sup>171</sup> Louise Buckley, "Letter from Louise Buckley with 'Over 21' Unit in New Guinea," 1944, USO Camp Shows Publicity Records 1941-1955, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, New York. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.



well-being and happiness, just as Louise would have done when she interacted with the boys in uniform.

While watching my show, it is so easy for an audience to relish in the entertainment value of USO material, and forget the individuality of each woman's story. As discussed in Chapter Two, CSI shows, in the style of good ol' American fun, posited each woman as an empty vessel for its audience to pour their own emotional turmoil into. In *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours*, Louise Buckley begins as a typical "American Sweetheart" in a USO Variety Show. As the show continues, however, the audience watches Louise devolve into her *real* self: a *real* woman with a *real* family, *real* motivations, and *real* emotions. We learn about the death of her father, an air raid during one of her shows, the bloodshed she saw in the hospital wings, and the emotional "rollercoaster" of working as a USO girl. By the end of the show, after breaking down on air, Louise's performative façade is no longer there, revealing Louise's humanity throughout all of her efforts for the war. As she signs off by saying, "Devotedly, Sincerely Yours, Louise Buckley," the way she says her name at the end of the show is notably different than how she said it at the beginning; she speaks without a feigned USO smile, but instead with vulnerability and genuineness. Louise Buckley and her fellow "soldiers in greasepaint," had their own stories behind all the "glamour, songs, dances, and laughter"<sup>172</sup> in the Camp Shows. And those stories deserve our recognition. I hope that I did them justice.

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<sup>172</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation "Broadcast with USO-Camp Shows, Inc. Unit #2," in *Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO—Camp Shows, Inc., During World War II*, by Lynn O'Neil Heberling Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University (Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 1989) (Publication No. 9014827), 222.

# Appendix

# DEVOTEDLY, SINCERELY YOURS

## The Story of the USO

Text compiled and written by  
Samantha Joy Pearlman

*Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* is inspired by the lives of female USO entertainers, as well as the radio broadcasts designed to entertain the US servicemen during World War II.

*Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* is also inspired by, or takes texts from Louise Buckley, Grace Drysdale, Maxine Andrews, Ann Miller, Lena Horne, Judy Garland, Arch Oboler, Robert B. Westbrook, Tampax Incorporated, Woman Power Campaigns, the National Center for PTSD, *Four Jills and a Jeep*, the USO Camp Shows, Inc. "Guide to the Foxhole Circuit," *Command Performance*, *Mail Call*, and the USO Camp Show Inc. Publicity Records (1941-1945), among others. Musical numbers include: "Over Here, Over There," by George M. Cohan, "You're My Little Pin-Up Girl," by Mack Gordon and James V. Monaco, "Accentuate the Positive," by Johnny Mercer and Harold Arlen, "On the Sunny Side of the Street," by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields, "First Lullaby," by Jack Popplewell and Michael Carr, "Sweet Dreams, Sweetheart," by Ted Koehler and M.K. Jerome, "Something for the Boys/Hey Good Lookin'," by Cole Porter, "First Class Private Mary Brown," by Frank Loesser, "Nursie, Nursie!," by Art Noei and Don Pelosi, and "I'll Be Seeing You," by Irving Kahal and Sammy Fain.

FANFARE.

Announcer: Devotedly, Sincerely Yours: The greatest entertainers in America as requested by the US servicemen and women of the Armed Forces throughout the world. Presented every week over here till it's over, over there.

"OVER THERE" Musical interlude.

Announcer: (over music) To answer your letters to Devotedly, Sincerely Yours Radio, Los Angeles, USA, tonight we're going to answer nine billion thirty-seven million and three requests, for a show about your favorite brand of entertainment: the USO Camp Shows. While you've been reading about the big invasion carried out in North Africa by American and British task forces, perhaps you didn't realize that a smaller invasion of a very different kind was taking place right next to the front lines. It was carried out by the women of the USO: a feminine task force—armed not with tanks and guns but with glamour, songs, dances and laughter. There was no defense against these girls. They came, they were seen, they conquered.

To tell her story, I'd like to introduce you to our mistress of ceremonies for this week—the darling of the USO—here you are folks —the lovely Louise Buckley!

*Louise enters, steps up to the microphone, with the introduction of Pin Up Girl playing underneath.*

**LOUISE:**

**"Pin Up Girl"**

Boys: You're my little pin-up girl  
Honestly you are

Louise: How would you like some coffee,  
A donut, an apple, a candy bar?

Boys: You're my little pin-up girl  
Give a guy a break

Louise: The best that we can give you is cocoa,  
A cookie, a piece of angel cake.

Boys: I have to have that smile before me  
No matter where I roam

Louise: How 'bout some nice  
Old fashioned minced pie

Like your mama used to bake back home?

Boys: Do I love my pin-up girl  
With all my heart and soul?

Louise: I surely understand you  
but I'm here to hand you  
A hot dog on a roll.

I surely understand you  
but I'm here to hand you  
A Weenie on a roll.

Boys: Eenie Meenie Miney Moe  
Who's the darling of the USO?  
Louise Buckley, must be you!  
Tell us a story, darling do!

Louise: Ok, I'll tell you one that's true.

A boy sent his baby a note  
And this is exactly what he wrote, quote,  
"Honey don't worry your head about  
Those Pin Up Girls you've read about.  
For you most certainly know  
You're my little pin up girl,  
Honestly you are,  
To me, you have the grace of an angel  
The face of a movie star  
You're my little pin up girl  
Though we are apart  
When I'm in Sleepy Willow  
You're pinned on my pillow  
And also in my heart.  
I have to have that smile before me,  
No matter where I roam  
That twinkle in your eyes can warm me  
Like a fireside at home.  
Do I love my pin up girl?  
Bet your life I do!  
So baby keep a grinnin'  
Remember I'm pinnin'  
All my hopes on you.

(Dance Break)

So baby keep a grinnin'  
Remember I'm pinnin'  
All my hopes on you.

:APPLAUSE SIGN:

Louise:

Thank you, thank you, and salutations to Uncle Sam's Armed Forces everywhere and our wonderful studio audience.

Announcer:

Well that was swell, Louise. It's always a pleasure to hear you sing.

Louise:

Well, that's awfully kind of you, sir. But I must admit, I didn't come down here just to sing. I've got something on my mind.

Announcer:

Me too. Let's get outta here, huh?

Louise:

Oh come on! There's something I need to say to all the boys listening. You know fellas, for all of us here working for the USO, we send our hellos, our songs, our laughter, yes and our hearts—clear around the world, to you, wherever you happen to be. My band, straight from the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, say hello boys!

Boys:

Hello! (Ad lib.)

Louise:

My band and I have worked awfully hard to put this show together for you all, and I hope wherever you're tuning in from, you can feel just how much we are thinking of you back home. *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* tries oh so very hard to send you week after week the kind of entertainment that you used to look for back home. So keep letting us know what that is. This is *your* program.

Tonight, *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* greets you from California, where we postponed our argument with the Florida sun until you guys have settled your argument with the rising sun. Our subject matter this week is something I know a little something about. It's about the life of a USO entertainer, a soldier in greasepaint if you will, as requested by you, and according to me, Miss Louise Buckley.

Announcer:  
Say, Louise?

Louise: (wide-eyed) Yes, sir?

Announcer: Jack, please.

Louise:  
Oh... I beg your pardon, Jack

Announcer: Louise, I've been thinking and in view of the fact that two great nations are at this moment joined as Allies; in view of the fact that this alliance is not merely military, but personal, spiritual as well; in view of the fact that we are now operating with advantages of reciprocal Lend-Lease... what about a date tonight?

Louise:  
Well, Jack... you see, while I was playing the camps, I met a Sergeant.

Announcer:  
Oh, you met a Sergeant!

Louise:  
Yes— And my sergeant gave me this whistle. He told me to use it in case any of the other boys got too fresh.

Announcer:  
Too fresh? Oh come on, Louise. Why don't you take me as your leading man? Forget about that sergeant, and live a little. You know, when I kiss a girl, it's murder.

Louise: Yes, and I'm too young to die.

Announcer: Alright, alright Louise. Suit yourself. Besides, I would never want to disrespect a man in uniform. Say Louise?

Louise: Yes, Jack?

Announcer: Thank you a lot for coming along to entertain us, and for being such a delicious little thing. You are delicious, you know. And your hair—lovely. And your hands—so graceful...

Louise:  
Jack, please...

Announcer:  
And your wonderful... your thrilling... your magnificent...

(She blows her whistle.)

Louise:  
Play, Geraldo!

"Accentuate the Positive"  
You've got to accentuate the positive  
Eliminate the negative  
And latch on to the affirmative  
Don't mess with Mister In-Between

You've got to spread joy up to the maximum  
Bring gloom down to the minimum  
Have faith or pandemonium's  
Liable to walk upon the scene

To illustrate my last remark  
Jonah in the whale, Noah in the ark  
What did they do just when everything looked so dark?

(Man, they said "We'd better accentuate the positive")  
("Eliminate the negative")  
("And latch on to the affirmative")  
Don't mess with Mister In-Between (No!)  
Don't mess with Mister In-Between

If someone were to tell me nine weeks ago, I would shake Bob Hope's hand, have soldiers wait in line for my autograph, tap dance on a makeshift stage near the battlefields of France, or barely dodge the angel of death more than a handful of times, I would have never believed them! But for a jaded faith in human kind, the best thing I could wish anyone is a trip to the Overseas Theatre of War. To tell you adequately all the reasons why would take someone far more skilled than I and my temerity in even trying appalls me. But here I go!

To go 'way back— six short months ago—I had begun volunteering at the Stage Door Canteen in NYC, as a hostess. Only theatre folk worked there, and, being an aspiring entertainer on the Great White Way, I decided to sign up for Tuesday nights. I was to dance with any soldier, sailor, or marine who asked me—get drinks or coffee for them, listen to their stories. They wouldn't complain per se—not bitterly, that is, as a certain amount of griping is always part of the army game, as well as the good ol' American sense of humor. That's the eternal wonder of you



boys, that makes me so proud of you I could “bust”. You never wave flags, you don’t talk about the ideals you’re fighting for; you resolve yourselves into a job to do. All for the homeland to return to—the ultimate goal of all you’ve been through. And it will be worth it when you get back. I, with the girls back home waiting for you, will make sure of it.

In fact, many of the boys at the Canteen had girls at home—were homesick—would transfer their affections to one of us USO girls out of loneliness and need. Some would come every Tuesday to see the same girl. It was the “natural set up for a dreamer:” sweet, sad and fun.

Though this became frustrating some nights, when I was nothing to one boy but a pair of ears; nothing to another but a pair of feet to romp on. I’d be even less to that one—look—he won’t even know the color of my eyes!

Hello—you hero man.

Owen: Why hello there, sweetheart.

Louise: Where’d you get that purple heart?

Owen: I got it for not minding my own business.

Louise: Have you been in the Army long?

Owen: Ever since I enlisted.

Louise: It’s your turn to ask the questions.

Owen: Uh—what did you do before you joined the USO?

Louise: (Pantomimes the Knitting) Knitted for the Red Cross.

Owen: Uh—how much do you get paid?

Louise: My only pay is patriotic corns—(VICIOUSLY) and fallen arches! And they don’t rate *that* at a purple heart.

Owen: Would you—uh—I supposed you’ve had a lot of boy-friends?

Louise: (SHE SITS UP WITH SUDDEN INTEREST) Mm—Always room for one more.

Owen: (GULP) Then—then you’ll understand what it means to a fellow like me to have a girl friend.

Louise: Let’s not too get personal, Bub. We’re still in the USO.

Owen: I was only going to ask if you’d like to—

Louise: (SUGGESTIVE) Questions are okay; but keep ‘em clean, army boy, keep ‘em clean.

Owen: I was wondering if you would—

Louise: (MORE SUGGESTIVE) Don’t ask me for my telephone number because we don’t do that in the USO.

Owen: (GRINNING A LITTLE AT THE CONTRAST TO WHAT HE WAS THINKING OF) I wasn’t going to ask for your telephone number.

Louise: (ENCOURAGED BY HIS GRIN) You mustn’t ask me to go up to the bowling alley, because we don’t do that in the USO.

Owen: (GRINS AGAIN) It wasn’t the bowling alley I was thinking of—

Louise: (VERY SUGGESTIVE) You mustn't ask me to slip out and meet you on the street corner, because we don't do that—in the USO.

Owen: It wasn't the street corner—

Louise: Whatever it was, I'm sure we don't do it at the USO. But go right ahead anyway, soldier. Ask it. Would I like to—what?

Owen: (PULLING A PILE OF SNAPSHOTS FROM HIS POCKET) Would you like to look at some snapshots of my girl back home? Boy, is she a honey! She's got big blue eyes and yellow hair and she's a stepper!

Louise: (Flounces Away in a Fury—Lamer than ever) You ungrateful gob!

Owen: What's the matter? Where are you going?

Louise: Back to my Red Cross Knitting!

(EXIT LOUISE)

(SOLDIER KISSES PICTURE—GOES OFF LAUGHING, HIGH-STEPPING)

"On the Sunny Side of the Street" *Uptempo*.

Grab your coat and get your hat  
Leave your worries on the doorstep  
Life can be so sweet  
On the sunny side of the street

Can't you hear the pitter-patter?  
And that happy tune is your step  
Life can be so sweet  
On the sunny side of the street

I used to walk in the shade with the blues on parade  
But I'm not afraid  
Trouble's over, I've crossed over....

If I never had a cent  
I'd be rich as Rockefeller  
with Gold dust at my feet  
On the sunny side of the street.

Louise:

One night at the canteen, there was a tall, dark-haired GI who asked to dance with me. He held me in his arms, and neither of us said anything. We just sort of swayed, slowly, swayed, listening to the music, and feeling the warmth of each others' bodies. I could feel a sadness in him, that perhaps his spirit belonged miles away from the Big Apple.

**"Sweetdreams Sweetheart/First lullaby"**

Hushabye my baby  
Darling don't you cry!  
That's the tender strain of a lullaby  
Back in the world's early dawn  
This is how a lullaby was sung

Goodnight, sweet dreams, tomorrow's another day  
Till then, sweet dreams, sweetheart

Goodnight, sleep tight, I'll see you along the way  
In dreams, sweet dreams, sweetheart

When the refrain was over, I said to him, "I hope I was able to bring to you the spirit of your sweetheart...Or maybe your wife?" Still nothing. "Ah. Your mother, then." Then, he let out a great big laugh, and not knowing what to do, I did, too. Then, he whispered in my ear: "Miss Buckley, you don't look like anyone's sweetheart. You don't look like anyone's wife. And God knows you don't look like anyone's mother. You look like an angel."

May angels up above watch over you  
And keep you safe, my love, until the dawn breaks through

Someone heard the heart beats of a loving mother  
They sent them to the angels in the big blue sky  
Then those angels up above wrote the sweetest song of love  
And gave us the first lullaby

Goodnight, sweet dreams, tomorrow's another day  
Goodnight, sweet dreams, sweetheart  
Goodnight, sweet dreams, tomorrow's another day  
Goodnight, sweet dreams, sweetheart

Then he kissed my forehead, and left the Canteen. As he walked away from me, I began to cry. Not really sure why. Out of embarrassment, maybe, or fear, or sadness, or any emotion from this rollercoaster of a job. I just stood there on the dance floor of the canteen, crying like a baby as every man around had his handkerchief out for me.

Announcer: We interrupt this broadcast for a brief commercial break. **WOMAN POWER.** The power to create, and sustain life. The power to inspire men to bravery, to give security to little children. A limitless, ever-flowing source of moral and physical energy—working for victory! That is woman power. So little ladies, do your part. For war and peace, buy bonds.

Louise: Welcome back to *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours*, brought to you from Los Angeles, CA. Although we may be in Hollywood now, *Devotedly* girls are not buttercups. We were soldiers over there, feet away from the action. We went where the men went, if they let us. So remember boys, this is your program. Please send in your requests.

So there I was, on the dance floor, surrounded by handkerchiefs and strapping, strong boys, wanting to do my part. I was never a Rosie-the-Riveter type, so the factory wasn't an option. The Women's Army Corps intimidated me, and I didn't have much of a family left to call my own after the last war. I bought my bonds, danced with the men, but it wasn't enough. It was then I remembered what a girlfriend of mine told me, one who'd been dancing with a touring troop in Naples. "Darling," she said, "If going overseas is gonna be like some one night stand to you, then it means nothing. If it's the after-dinner story of how you went animal shooting by jeep or picked out a pretty little South Seas island for yourself after the war—then it's a story told by a tourist. The experience hasn't touched you. But I promise, after you've watched the faces of the men light up, seen the tiredness disappear from their eyes, and after you've given them everything you've got on a rough board stage in the middle of nowhere—then you feel like you carried on the traditions of the troupers of all ages and all wars and yours is the power and the glory for ever and ever."

***"Something For the Boys"***

I'm always doing something,  
Something for the boys  
I'm always doing something  
For the lads if it adds to their joy  
So don't tell me it's a wrong thing  
If I'm out with 'em nightly till three  
'cos I'm always doing something for the boys  
Or they're doing something for me.

Hey hey hey good lookin'  
Say what's cookin'  
Do you feel like bookin' some fun tonight?  
Hey hey hey good lookin'!  
If you're not already tookin',  
Can you meet me soon  
In the moonlight?  
Why don't we two go roamin'  
Through the globein'  
While the stars are combin' the skies above?  
Hey hey hey good lookin'

Give in and we'll begin cookin'  
That delish little dish called love!

So don't tell me its a wrong thing  
If I flop on some corporal's knee  
'cos I'm always doing something for the boys  
Or they're doing something  
Always doing something  
Always doing something for me.

Announcer:

This week, PFC. Norman S. Lezin, a small-town boy from Lincoln, Nebraska, wrote to *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* Radio. He wrote: "Dear Devotedly Sincerely Yours, last month, I had the pleasure of seeing Louise Buckley perform. I was enthralled by her show and her rather put-together appearance. I was wondering: how did Louise know what to bring along to look so beautiful overseas in the theater of war? To answer his inquiry, *Devotedly Sincerely Yours* presents an excerpt from the USO Handbook: "Chapter Three: How to Pack for War."

Louise: What to Take Along: Fifty-five pounds is not a lot, but you will have everything you need if you pack judiciously.

Your most important baggage is your stage wardrobe. A G.I. doesn't want to see you in slacks and he's not interested in your uniform. He wants to see you look like the girls back home on an important Saturday night date. Remember that, and take your best clothes with you.

Some of the articles we list may not seem important now but when you're overseas and away from the Five & Ten you'll be glad you took them. One of those things is a bleaching agent. The G.I.'s are not trying to be blondes. So—either take along your own peroxide or make up your mind to stay brunette until you get back home. Edith Delaney, the tap dancer, always wore artificial flowers in her hair, to toss into the audience at the end of her routine. They make great souvenirs. Just an idea girls! You'll need cold cream as you've never needed it before, and don't forget soap, a pair of sun glasses and a good mirror. Last of all come stockings. If you're lucky enough to own nylons, take them with you. They'll never be more appreciated—and not only by you. Anything else you decide to bring along is a matter of taste.

Boy, this is war, and the Army certainly means what it says.

Ian: ATTENTION!

*Military Drumming.*

Ian: Name?

Louise: (muffled) Louise Buckley.

Ian: SPEAK UP PLEASE!  
LOUISE: LOUISE BUCKLEY, SIR.  
Ian: Age?  
LOUISE: Twenty-two.  
Ian: American Citizenship?  
LOUISE: Yes sir. Born and raised.  
Ian: Raise your right hand.  
*Drumming stops.*

Louise:  
I solemnly promise that I will not collect, record, publish, communicate or divulge any information which may directly or indirectly come into my possession as a result of my entrance upon a military or naval reservation under the sponsorship of USO-CAMP SHOWS, INC and which may compromise any plans or conduct or supposed plans or conduct of any naval or military operations.

Ian:  
This is war, and the Army means what it says.

Louise:  
Amen.

There are people who say: "Peace at any price! Why not end it now—call it off—make some sort of a deal and have peace!" At first I listen—it sounds reasonable—why not stop before more men and women and children were killed—why not work something out with reason! Then I suddenly realized that's what they want—yes, the Nazis!

This war has got to go on—it can't stop like the last war, with just part of a victory. They've got to learn about war right in their own countries—and it must keep on going back until every man, woman and child of them really knows what an awful thing they have given the world! Not just their crazy leaders but they—each one of them—because they didn't rise up and stop what the crazy men were doing when they had the chance to stop it.

Will and Ian: Well, you're certainly in the army now, Miss Buckley.

### **"First Class Private Mary Brown" – sung by the men**

First Class Private, Mary Brown,  
she wore that uniform like a million dollar gown . . .  
How my heart would leap when she drove the Jeep  
with the one big stripe on her arm,  
and it seemed to me that a PFC

stood for "perfect feminine charm" !

First Class Private, Mary Brown,  
Oh! how she smiled at me when they shipped me out of town . . .  
Let the big guns roar, let me win this war,  
'cause I want to hurry right back  
to First Class Private, Mary Brown, my wonderful WAC!

( Doo, doo, doo doo, doo . . . )

First Class Private, Mary Brown,  
I've got her army serial number written down . . .

She's got bulgy eyes, but when she marched by,  
I just had to look at her twice,  
and it struck me then that the ASN  
meant an "angel, specially nice"!

First Class Private, Mary Brown,  
could make the PX seem like the Ritz in New York town . . .  
Let the big guns roar, let me win this war,  
'cause I want to hurry right back (on the double)  
to First Class Private, Mary Brown, my wonderful WAC

Let the big guns roar, let us win this war,  
'cause I want to hurry right back (on the double)  
to First Class Private ( Private ) Mary ( Mary ) Brown,  
. . . my wonderful WAC

Announcer: We interrupt this broadcast for a brief commercial break: Women at War! Pay attention to Tampax. Internal sanitary protection makes work easier on "those days!" When your entire daily life is speeded up by war conditions, you will find Tampax a great help on such days... For tampax is *worn internally*. It requires no belts, pins or pads. It is neither bulky nor bulgy and there is no odor...Think what this means to plant workers traveling in buses and to housewives on their feet early and late, giving their best to the war effort...Tampax, perfected by a doctor, buy it before next month!

Louise: Welcome back to *Devotedly Sincerely Yours*. Gosh, I wish I could kiss and dance with all of you soldiers all at once. I got the mouth and the legs that could do it too. (wink) And I'm not only willing to sing and dance for you, but I'm also willing to stick out my neck, if uh necking is entertainment.

Myles: Say Louise, I'm wondering how did a sweet gal like you survive the rough and tough of Army life?

Louise: Well, in the army, I had to set a course of policy, as it were, to guide me in the topsy-turvy social scheme of one girl to thousands of men. Obviously, the latrine situation at a theatre in a man's domain afforded me many a problem and many a laugh, but I ceased to be embarrassed. I was in the Army, after all! I remember one night, as a gesture of feminine protest, I wore my best dinner dress and evening gloves, to help the boys see a girl in her best light, only to find that that night was the first of the evening stand-to's and the first gas mask drill, and at sunset I stood for fifty minutes in my long dress, and a grotesque gas mask. Another night, while I performing for some boys in the men's mess, all hell broke loose. There was an air raid. Soldiers flung me out of the building so fast I didn't know what was happening. Across the pitch-black field, with the ack-acks blazing away, they dragged me headlong, in my silly high-heeled shoes, with my gas mask banging against me, until we stumbled and fell into a muddy hole. We continued to crawl the rest of the way on our hands and knees, until we got to the section of the trench that protected us from shrapnel.

The soldiers were lucky; they were wearing their uniforms. But I, had on my grandmother's fur, now destroyed from all the mud.

This job, to entertain, to boost moral, is a job I certainly know how to do or I wouldn't have been hired. Wherever I was, or whatever the conditions, whether it was before ten men or 10,000 men, I had to play it as though I was on the stage of Radio City. But at first, I had trouble. Not only did I have to play my show all over, in the back of a truck, on a mess hall table, in a leaky tent on some remote beachhead, in the rain, in the cold, sometimes up to six times a day, but I also had to deal with the wisecracks. As exhausting and hard as it was, I realized how valuable this training was for me! Performing in such difficult conditions! And yes, the wisecracks were frequent but after a while, I only heard the friendly ones. If G.I. Joe wanted to enjoy the show that way, I let him.

**"Nursie! Nursie!"**

Nursie, come over here  
And hold my hand  
Nursie, there's something  
I can't understand  
'Round my heart  
I've got a funny pain  
Oh-oh-oh-oh  
It's coming up again

Nursie, come over here  
And hold my hand  
I feel awful blue



Nursie, when I look at you  
My heart goes dooby-doo  
Nursie, nursie  
Can't get any worsy  
What ya gonna do?

Now girls, here's some advice if you ever want to become a USO entertainer: don't ever fool yourselves that the G.I. audience, hungry for entertainment as it is, is not a discriminating and smart one. I might not be the biggest name in show business back home, but I've become a headliner here, with audiences as large as 8 to 10,000 boys. And you can't do that with just a lot of wiggles and whistle pullers along with your song. You can't fool a G.I. with a Hollywood face and very little talent; above all, you can never underestimate him by thinking all he wants is a leg show and dirty cracks. Every woman back home: the sisters, the mothers, the best girls—wear a halo in these boys' minds. So those who represent her must keep theirs on too. I've heard a girl swear out there and sensed a roomful of men freeze for a second. One night, I tried to give the boys the leg show I thought they wanted; another night, prim in an organdie dress, I just sang. That's how I got the encores. So when men in a hospital or men anywhere say, "Can you please wear a dress", it's nice to be able to do it. It's mighty good for my own morale too, at times.

Issac: Hey Louise! Did you get to spend time with the soldiers over there?

Louise: Of course! It was very important to be with the enlisted men as much as possible.

Dan: What did you talk about with the men over there?

Louise: Mostly home. Their gals and loved ones. In fact, every conversation with the G.I.'s began with the invariable pattern:

Myles: Where are you from?

Louise: Albany, NY, hero man. How about you?

Owen: How long have you been here?

Louise: About nine weeks or so. How about you?

Will: A big star like you must have a special man in her life, eh?

Louise: Now, keep it clean, soldier boy. Keep it clean. I'm currently on the market, but we don't do that in the USO. But let me hear about you. What are *you* fighting for?

Zach: My country, of course.

Louise: Well, that's very honorable of you soldier. But that can't be the only reason why you fight. A man who dies for the state defeats his only purpose in forming the state; thus death is the contradiction of politics. A man who risks his life for the state accepts the very insecurity he was trying to avoid with political obedience.

Therefore, war is the failure of politics. Hence there can be no political obligation either to die or to fight. (A beat.) So what are you *actually* fighting for, soldier?

Zach: (Pause) Blueberry pie, just like my mom makes it.

Louise: That's the spirit. Now you remember that pie while you are out there fighting for freedom. Don't let anyone threaten your right to eat your American pie.

Zach: Thanks, Louise. You're quite a gal.

Will: Say, wait a minute. What are *you* doing over here?

Louise: Why, I'm here for my country, of course.

Owen: (A beat.) Why are you *actually* here, Louise?

Louise: My father fought in World War I and ever since then, according to my mother, he was never the same. He never talked about the war, or anything for that matter. He drank heavily, could never hold onto a job... It seemed like whatever he saw during the war haunted him—almost like a ghost. And the strange thing was, he thought that by not allowing my mom and me to talk about the war, he was sparing us from the pain of it all. In actuality, I was in constant mourning over my dad, even before he died when I was eight years old.

I remember growing up and wondering how could anything be worth dying for. Now, you might say my dad didn't die in the war, but I think he did. His body was alive, but he was not. His spirit died out there with the other men. So when all of the boys in my class started enlisting, such young boys, boys who had not lived yet... (A beat.)

I needed to help these boys live. I needed to provide music and beauty and a link to our American homes. If these boys risked dying in our countries name, I was going to make sure there was no way they would die without living, even if it was only for a minute of sitting and talking to me. (Pause.)

Announcer: We'll be right back after this commercial break. (interrupting, off air) Buckley, what do you think you're doing? The boys over there don't want to hear this stuff. The men you're playing to have had a tougher time than you and they don't like self-styled heroes feeling sorry for themselves.

Louise: Oh I'm sorry. I never meant to insinuate...

Announcer: Just get on with it.

Louise: Right. (On air) Welcome back to *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours*. Remember, boys, this is your program exclusively. To give you the entertainment that you want. So please send in your requests.

On a more somber note, perhaps the shortest way and the only way to describe my experience overseas is with this unforgettable impression. At the end of each day, I don't think there was a soul around who didn't feel a momentary pang of loneliness and fear over there, and we all felt it, each and every evening. Even though we all hope with all our being that our country to prevail. I often went to the church

services in the men's mess hall, to pray for the safety of all our brave men in uniform. The Chaplain's prayer that concludes the service always choked me, not because it's a particularly good prayer—but because I knew what every man prayed for. I certainly prayed for it. Daddy, I pray to see you again, like you were before our world took you away from me.

### **"I'll Be Seeing You"**

I'll be seeing you  
In all the old familiar places  
That this heart of mine embraces  
All day through.

In that small cafe;  
The park across the way;  
The children's carousel;  
The chestnut trees;  
The wishin' well.

I'll be seeing you  
In every lovely summer's day;  
In every thing that's light and gay.  
I'll always think of you that way.

I'll find you  
In the morning sun  
And when the night is new.  
I'll be looking at the moon,  
But I'll be seeing you.

I'll be seeing you  
In every lovely summer's day;  
In every thing that's light and gay.  
I'll always think of you that way.

I'll find you  
In the morning sun  
And when the night is new.  
I'll be looking at the moon,  
But I'll be seeing you.

Announcer: Brigadier General F. Henry Osborn, Chief of Special Services, wrote to *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours* Radio. He wrote: "Dear Devotedly Sincerely Yours, On behalf of 7 million men in the Army and Navy, especially on behalf of the wounded warriors in military hospitals throughout the world, I want to thank the USO

entertainers for bringing a little bit of home to the foreign battlefield. My boys wanted me to ask: "how do USO performers adapt their shows for the hospital wings?" To answer his inquiry, Devotedly Sincerely Yours presents another excerpt from the USO Handbook. CHAPTER SIX: How to entertain in a hospital ward.

Louise: 1) Do not mention anything about his wounds, sickness, or condition, nor notice that he might have lost a limb. If he mentions his sickness, listen attentively, and gradually try and get into another subject.

2) Avoid controversial subjects, such as strikes, unions, how much money is being made by civilians from this war, and religion.

3) Do not sympathize with him as he does not want sympathy—and his morale is high.

4) Do not ask about his COMBAT experiences or how he got wounded, because he usually wishes to forget.

5) Do not tell him he will get well quickly for he does not like to be kidded.

6) Do not ask to see the sickest boy, for they are all sick.

And most importantly, 7) do not break down. The last thing that these soldiers need are tears.

(A beat.)

Here's a little number to lift those boys spirits.

*Music for On the Sunny Side begins. She does not sing. Music collapses.*

Announcer:

We'll be right back after this commercial break. (On air sign turns off. Louise is obviously shaken.)

What the hell do you think you're doing?

Louise:

(fighting back tears) I'm sorry. I *never* talk about this.

Announcer:

Louise, you don't have a choice. There are men out there listening. So speak your speeches like you're in a Hollywood big picture.

Louise: Jack, Have you ever been inside one of these wings?

Announcer:

Well I...

Louise: You have NO idea what it's like. The USO has no idea what it's like. It's blood. Bombs. Bodies. It's not a picture. It's war, it's real and I saw it in those hospitals. I went from ward to ward, relentlessly singing and dancing, trying to lift those men's spirits...The shock of seeing those men with their arms and legs blown off... Look, I love what I do. I try to help them, try to sing and dance, make them smile. But it's heartbreaking, Jack. All these boys I get to talk to over there; I don't know if they are even still around. I'm so sick of people dying, *real people* dying. Your brothers, fathers, husbands. Even my own goddamn father died because of this kinda mess. This isn't just a stupid song and dance. This is fucking war and it's not glamorous, or fun, or something to sing about. I'm sorry, but I can't do this anymore.

Announcer: Oh come on, honey. You're not gonna start acting like an actress now, are you? You can philosophize all you want little lady, but there are still boys tuned in who want to hear you sing for them. Either you suck it up and do your job, or you will be on the next plane back to Albany. (A beat.) You're not gonna let these boys down, are you?

Louise:  
No, sir. I'm ready for duty.

Announcer: Welcome back to *Devotedly, Sincerely Yours*, provided each week and every week, until it's over, over there. I'd like to reintroduce you to one of our little USO ladies, here just for you boys, the lovely Louise Buckley!—

Louise:  
Hello. My band and I; we worked hard; probably harder than any of us ever did before in our lives—but we wouldn't have missed the trip for anything in the world. This next song is dedicated to all of the wounded soldiers, who demonstrate utmost selflessness and bravery. I hope with this song you will be inspired return home safely, so we can take some time, sit and talk, face to face, and live freely in our beautiful nation. It would be my honor.

"On the Sunny Side of the Street" *Ballad*.  
Grab your coat and get your hat  
Leave your worries on the doorstep  
Life can be so sweet  
On the sunny side of the street

Can't you hear the pitter-patter?  
And that happy tune is your step  
Life can be so sweet  
On the sunny side of the street

I used to walk in the shade with the blues on parade  
But I'm not afraid  
Trouble's over, I've crossed over....

If I never had a cent  
I'd be rich as Rockefeller  
with Gold dust at my feet  
On the sunny side of the street.

I used to walk in the shade with them blues on parade  
Now I'm not afraid  
I'm crossing over and walking in clovers

Now if I never made one cent  
I'll still be rich as Rockefeller  
There will be gold dust at my feet  
On the sunny --  
sunny side of the street

Announcer:

Well, the time is getting on and before we sign off, we'd like to say how much we appreciate you, Louise, coming down and helping us at our broadcast.

Louise:

I don't want to say goodbye. I wish I could have stayed over there with you boys till it was over-- but I pray that time of peace may come soon.

For those of you who have written me, I appreciate the letters, but if you haven't time for everybody, and you know someone out there, please write to him instead.

With all my heart, I thank you for myself and my associates, my fellow soldiers in greasepaint, for the privilege of being here tonight. And for all our brave men and women in uniform out there, I want to close with, Devotedly and sincerely yours,  
Louise Buckley.

Musical interlude out. "Over Here (Reprise)"

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