

Name: _____

Home Front - USO

When the United States entered World War II, President Roosevelt began looking for ways to involve civilians with the war effort. He knew that the best way to keep support high was to have as many civilians involved as possible. One of these ways was through the USO, United Service Organization.



Roosevelt asked six organizations -- The Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, National Catholic Community Services, National Jewish Welfare Board, and National Travelers Aid Association -- to cooperate in the formation of the new service organization. Through the USO, the quality of life for service people and their families could be improved.

On the local level, USO workers set up clubs all over the United States. They might be in a nice hall, a backwoods cabin, barns, or churches. They were a place where service people could relax, dance, have a cup of coffee and donuts, or just find a quiet corner to write letters home. It was a place where those in the armed services could be sure to receive support.

Chartered by the U.S. Congress as a non-profit organization, it was approved by both the President and the Secretary of Defense. Roosevelt was its first honorary chairman, and each succeeding president has held the same position.

Perhaps one of the most well known aspects of the USO were the performances put on for the troops while they were deployed. The long difficult weeks away from family and loved ones were hard on the men. Being able to attend the shows was like getting a breath of air from home, familiar and comforting.

The best known of all the USO performers, Bob Hope epitomized the organization's mission to serve. As a comedian, Hope understood the need for men and women away from home to laugh and relax for a little while. As a former Vaudeville performer, he was used to traveling and performing in less than perfect conditions.

In May 1941, Bob Hope began his second career by helping the troops at March Field, CA. In 1943, he took his small group of performers to Ireland, England, Africa, and Sicily to perform for the soldiers. That first comedic troupe included Frances Langford, Tony Romano, and Greg Pepper.

Other stars also formed touring groups to entertain the soldiers away from home. Martha Raye, Carol Landis, Al Jolson, and others also contributed to the USO through their willingness to perform.

By 1947, the USO was almost defunct. The war was long over, and most of the soldiers had returned home. The need for such a special support service was considered unnecessary, and most of the clubs were closed. When the Korean War started a short time later, the USO increased services again.

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The civilians who served in the USO proved themselves to be true patriots in service to their country. They were always willing to help support those who protected their country so bravely and selflessly.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Which of these groups did NOT help form the USO?
- A. ACLU
 - B. YWCA
 - C. Salvation Army
 - D. YMCA

2. Who was the USO designed to support?

3. Why was the USO considered to be so important for the morale of service people?

4. What are three ways the USO helped the war effort?

5. Why would so many celebrities want to be involved with the USO?

- _____ 6. Who has always been the chairman of the USO?
- A. Roosevelt
 - B. The Secretary of Defense
 - C. Bob Hope
 - D. The U.S. President

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7. What popular function of the USO is still carried on today by entertainers?

8. Why was entertaining the troops through the USO such a good fit for Bob Hope?

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How many of these can you write about? Think! Write! Check all the ones you answered.

- If you were in the military, what services would you want the USO to help provide?

- Contact with home is much easier now than it was during WWII. Is an organization like the USO still necessary? Explain your answer.
