Defied Expectations but Satisfactory Results: How Recording Industry Contributions Influenced the Reception of Popular Music during WWII

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Abstract

Within recent scholarship on wartime propaganda, music's position as a device remains examined and debated. This critical academic conversation invites musicology to continue exploring the lesser-known areas within the pre-existing scholarship. It remains understood that many aspects of the relationship between war and music have yet to be discovered and shared. This thesis holds to this idea and examines the reception of World War II war music and joins in a body of work dedicated to understanding the cultural trends and social tendencies of the United States during this significant conflict. While previous research has explored the exchange of WWII war music in relation to the musical artists themselves and the expectations of governmental institutions, the relationship between the technology and the production of war music still has much to offer. The rise of the recording industry in the early part of the twentieth century establishes a dialogue between the serious needs of war and the lighter side of popular entertainment. Recognizing the need to investigate technology's role in creating satisfactory WWII music, this thesis, through evidence-based narrative and historical accounts, examines the creation, production, and distribution of the V-Disc in United States World War II history.

Acknowledgments

Any research undertaking requires a community of contributors. Without the constant support and guidance from my advisor Dr. Barry Bilderback, I would not have seen the unique value of the V-Disc program. I am also grateful to the Lionel Hampton School of Music for the assistantship that brought me to the University of Idaho and sustained me through my program.

I am forever grateful to Katherine Berry, who volunteered her time to assist me in my archival research by reviewing the *Billboard* online archives and identifying the location of the weekly popularity charts in each issue from 1941 to 1945. Her efforts were vital to the development of my thesis and will always be appreciated.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family members who fought in of the United States' conflicts. I thank those family members and friends who maintained my sanity and ensured I was still eating as this project came to fruition. A special thanks to my good friend Emma Woolstenhulme, who acted as my main sounding board during the process and helped me untangle the web of my own thoughts. Without her insightful curiosity, I may not have seen the many connections drawn in this thesis.

I also thank my feline companion Mars who kept me emotionally stable.

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Introduction

"In a time of war everybody, everything must do a job. Music no less than machine-guns has a part to play and can be a weapon in the battle for a free world."[1] This quote stated by classical composer Marc Blitzstein in 1942 illustrates the cohabitation of two topics that are not often thought about together. Although the two will often invoke opposing thoughts and feelings, warfare exists alongside music. There is an increasing interest in the juxtaposition of these two seemingly polar disciplines among scholars. Many noteworthy scholars and historians like Sarah Mahler Kraaz recognize that an "assimilation of knowledge from disparate fields" is necessary to understand the past, and consequently, the present.[2] Scholars such as Annegret Fauser, John Bush Jones, Nancy and William Young, and William H. Kenney are just a few historians who demonstrate that music holds a unique place in war time history.[3] Their research is essential to the study of WWII war music and is key to this current study. Within this combined discipline, significant research trends range from music created after a military conflict to reflect on the experiences of the war, music to represent the sounds of warfare, and music to tell the tales of fallen heroes of battles that have already been fought and won. In addition, music such as "(We'll Be Singing Hallelujah) Marching Through Berlin" (1942) has announced victory even before the outcome of a particular battle had been determined. Scholars have attempted to codify the different intentions of war music, and still, there is more work to be done.

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[1] Marc Blitzstein, "Composers Doing Their Stuff," *The New York Times*, May 3, 1942.
[2] Sarah Mahler Kraaz, *Music and War in The United States* (New York: Routledge, 2019), xvii.
[3] See bibliography for a list of works by these authors and others.

Musicologist Sarah Mahler Kraaz provides the most comprehensive list categorizing the purposes of war music. She identifies six different ways that music is used in wartime.

1) Recruitment, training, and directing soldiers
2) Celebration of heroes and national ideals
3) Advocate for the support or protest of wars
4) Weaponized through propaganda by drumming up enthusiasm at home while demonizing an enemy
5) Expression of the heightened emotions of wartime including but not all-encompassing love of country and family, grief, loneliness, fear, separation of loved ones
6) Provide entertainment and commentary on topical events for both military and civilian populations.[4]

These six categories identified by Kraaz cover a broad range of music usages in warfare. This list, however, is not exhaustive. The role that music plays within each military conflict is fluid and can change and adapt during the time of the event and for each participating group. A selection of music often fits into several of Kraaz's categories when fulfilling its role as war music, so why even attempt to categorize the musical selections? The significance of the music in question is realized when the original intention and audience reception is understood. Kraaz's categories help define the intention or reception of the war music may have been. Once the purpose of the music is understood, then how that music contributed to the outcome of the conflict can be analyzed. This is not to say that the music itself determined victory or defeat, but understanding how music was both used and received either, intentionally or unintentionally, can reveal the specific elements that make music a weapon of warfare. However, whether the composers and performers intended the perceived purposes remains unanswered. Furthermore, how the music was distributed and if the audience reshaped its purpose helps further define the unique position of the war music.

[4] Sarah Mahler Kraaz, xv.

In the studies of warfare and music, this thesis joins a body of work examining what made U.S. popular war music successful during World War II. Particular attention is paid to American troops and the recording industry. Drawing from Kraaz's categorization of war music, the purposes of emotional expression and entertainment are examined; however, this study also accounts for technological advancements. The advancing record industry played a significant part in successfully serving the needs of U.S. military troops, while also serving the needs of the popular music industry and public audiences.

Historic Backdrop

December 7th, 1941, Japanese fighter planes bombed the United States military naval and air bases in Hawaii. The nation had been directly attacked by the Axis powers. The bombing of Pearl Harbor was the first direct attack on U.S. soil from an external country since the War of 1812. The attack elicited an unquestionable response across the nation. Although the United States had politically maintained neutrality for the first three years of World War II despite divided sentiments, the attack on Pearl Harbor unified the nation under the desire for retaliation and justice. The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives voted unanimously to declare war on Japan.[5] The decision to enter WWII was made efficiently and quickly. The United States officially entered WWII declaring war on Japan on December 8th, 1941, and upon Germany and Italy a few days later.[6] The country was at war once again and

[5] It is interesting to note that although the vote was considered unanimous in both the Senate and House of Representatives because of the overwhelming support from congress and the cry of war from the nation, there was one vote against the declaration of war in the House of Representatives. Jeanette Rankin of Montana voted against war in 1941 and in 1917. US Congress. House of Representatives. Tally Sheet of the House of Representatives for Declaration of War Against Japan, 12/8/1941. 77th Cong. *National Archives Catalog*. (December 8, 1941): 2600932.

[6] US Congress. Senate. Senate Joint Resolution 116, Declaring War Against Japan. 77th Cong., 1st sess. *National Archives Catalog*. (December 8, 1941): 4477429; and Joint Resolution of December 12, 1941, Public Law 77-331, 55 STAT 796, which declared war on Germany. 77th Cong., 1st sess. *National Archives Catalog*. (December 12, 1941): 299851.

only after a short period of time since the first world war, which had ended in 1918. With the declaration of war came an unprecedented outpouring of support from the entire nation. Scholars and many surviving civilians that lived through the war have noted that never before had a U.S. military conflict been so supported by the entire nation.[7] Every person contributed to the war effort in any way possible, whether as a military personnel, a defense factory worker, a civilian participating in the many scrap campaigns, a citizen abiding by the rationing regulations, a purchaser of war bonds, or a member of the music industry rallying the nation. Due to the nature of this study, the 'music industry' refers directly to popular music only. Although the realm of classical music played a highly significant role as war music in WWII, it functioned under different expectations than popular music. It is worthy of its own discourse in a separate discussion.

Jeffrey Livingston explained in his WWII research, the music industry, notably the popular artists of Tin Pan Alley, had already proven their worth and effectiveness during WWI, by producing rousing war songs such as "Over There" (1917), "Wake Up America" (1917), and "Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" (1918).[8] As the nation entered another world war, leaders expected these musicians to once again provide rousing war songs for the men and women fighting the Axis powers. At least this was the expectation put forth by the government agencies in charge of war propaganda. In 1942, the government agency titled the Office of War Information (OWI) was created to manage the relationship between real-time war information and the U.S. public's exposure to said information. This included

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[7] John Bush Jones, *The Songs that Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939-1945* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 17.

[8] Jeffrey C Livingston, "'Still Boy-Meets-Girls Stuff': Popular Music and War," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society*, edited by Kenneth J. Bindas, 33, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992.

all propaganda material, which included war music and the music industry's contributions to the war effort. The OWI agency expected musicians to produce songs equivalent to George Cohan's famous "Over There" that had been so popular in WWI. Remembering the public's response to previous war songs, they hoped for music that would replicate that same response for the new conflict. The Office of War Information preestablished their own set of expectations that determined what successful war music should sound and look like and how the public should receive this music.

But WWII was not like WWI. The United States was in combat far longer in WWII than they had been in WWI. Combat tactics had changed from trench warfare to machine warfare. The music industry itself underwent many changes, consequently changing the public's response to war music. The rousing war songs with heavy military overtones were not as effective in WWII as in WWI.[9] As the popular entertainment magazine *Billboard* reports, there were many songs written during the war that were considered war songs because of their direct propaganda message like "We'll Knock the Jap Right into the Laps of the Nazis" (1941) or "Any Bonds Today?" (1941), but they never enjoyed lasting popularity. There were hundreds of songs in the world of popular music that contained references to the war. The OWI did not qualify them as successful or good war songs, because they either did not contain militant overtones and direct military messages, or they never gained the desired popularity among the public.

The scholarship agrees that sentimental love ballads and upbeat dance tunes remained the leading popular music during the war years of 1941-1945, and that was unacceptable in the eyes of the OWI agency. The absence of appropriate war songs was not for a lack of

[9] Jeffrey C Livingston, "'Still Boy-Meets-Girls Stuff': Popular Music and War," 37.

effort within the music industry. Many composers like Irving Berlin, who had been successful in writing war songs in WWI, wrote many popular tunes with militant overtones with "Any Bonds Today" being one of his. However, this type of song was not what the public wanted. Very few OWI-approved songs became popular for an extended amount of time to count, and the songs that did achieve popularity were not militant enough to classify as war songs. This was all according to the OWI agency's standards. Nothing took hold despite Tin Pan Alley's best efforts to produce the next great war song. That, however, did not diminish the music industry's enthusiasm or contribution to the war effort. Much like how the fighting style of WWI changed from trench warfare to the mechanical war of WWII, the music industry changed from 1918 to 1941.

The music industry changed dramatically with technological developments. The 1920s marked a decade of advances, including the commercialization of the record player and the spread of the radio. According to popular music scholar Russell Sanjek, it was not until after WWI that the record industry hit its stride and the record player became a household fixture. Sanjek's research demonstrated that sheet-music sales gave way to record sales. By 1921, the American public had turned away from sheet-music and turned towards the phonograph record to supply the demand for popular music.[10] The desire for recorded sound by the best and most popular performing artists of the day rather than printed music for home reproduction became fashionable. This was supported by the growth of the radio.

Historians note that the 1920s marked the Golden Age of radio. In the year 1922 alone, the number of radio stations in the United States grew from 27 in January to 570 by

[10] Russell Sanjek, *From Print to Plastic: Publishing and Promoting America's Popular Music (1900-1980)* (Brooklyn, NY: Institute for Studies in American Music Conservatory of Music, 1983), 13.

December.[11] The sweeping influence of radio impacted the history of the recording industry. Together, these advances in music technology played a significant role in the reception and consumption of music that was very different than what had been experienced during WWI. As WWII music specialist Annegret Fauser concluded, the concept of a singing army had transformed into a listening army.[12] Although the record player was used in WWI, sheet music still dominated the military's access to their favorite tunes, but in WWII recordings became the requested form of music. Soldiers were still encouraged to sing and often did, but they were learning the music from recordings rather than sheet music. Music of all types, performed by favorite artists back home, was made available to the troops through recordings and radio broadcasts. This did not, however, render sheet music obsolete to the military. The Army Hit Kit was specifically a WWII military initiative that provided soldiers with popular sheet -music that would encourage singing. Leaders still believed in the power of singing within a military unit. During this war, the music industry added the remarkably effective tool of recorded music as a necessity to its music sector.

Within these initiatives, a newfound music program was created to provide the troops with the music they desired. The initiative was called the Victory Disc Project or the V-Disc program. The program began in October 1943 within the Music Section, Athletic and Recreation Branch of the Special Service Division, Army Forces. They were directed to "make monthly releases of phonograph records, not only of the latest and best in popular songs and marches, but also of the finest classical, concert, military, sacred, folk and patriotic

[11] Sanjek, *From Print to Plastic*, 13.

[12] Annegret Fauser, *Sounds of War: Music in the United States during World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 106.

music, so that the individual interests of the men in the Armed Forces may be fulfilled."[13] The V-Disc program was pioneered by a persistent Lieutenant Robert Vincent who followed through on an idea to fulfill the requests from overseas troops for more current music. The V-Disc program was born to fulfill a need and was supported by the music industry despite tumultuous times. The need for the V-Disc program arose from the recording ban of 1942. The American Federation of Musicians (AFM), union president James C. Petrillo banned all recording for commercial purposes for its members. The V-Discs, which were for military purposes only, were exempt from this recording strike. This allowed the popular hits of the day that the military troops were hearing on the radio to be recorded and distributed among military personnel for morale purposes. Despite the issues at home within the music industry, the war effort came first, and popular music and the recording industry were willing to make exceptions for the greater cause. The fighting men had requested the popular tunes of the day, and the V-Disc initiative worked with the recording industry and countless musicians to satisfy those requests. As history proves, the music industry carried out precisely what it had promised in contributing to the American war effort.

The music industry declared very soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor how it would participate in the nation's war effort. On December 27, 1941, AFM director James C. Petrillo wrote to U.S. President Roosevelt declaring the music industry's loyalty to the nation and announced how the industry would contribute to the cause. He stated that "in this fight we realize that morale plays a most important part," and it was announced that their new slogan for the upcoming year would be "music for morale."[14] The music industry leaders had

[13] War Department, Headquarters, Army Service Forces, F.H. Osborn, Brigadier General, Special Service Division preview of V-Discs letter, as found on https://www.savethevinyl.org/v-disc-the-story-of-the-american-military-record-label-during-wwii.html.

[14] "American Federation of Musicians," *Billboard*, December 27, 1941, 33.

declared that inspiring music would be their contribution to the war effort. The concept of "music for morale" fits into every one of Sarah Kraaz's war song categories. It is the overarching purpose of music in warfare. Music is meant to stimulate emotions; how the music is written or how it is used determines the direction of the emotions. The AFM did not specify the type of music that the musicians and composers of the music industry would produce. They promised that their musicians would provide a flow of sound and melody that heightened morale in whatever shape that may be. This meant that if the public wanted to hear sentimental love ballads and upbeat dance tunes, then this was what the music industry was going to provide. Whatever music it took to entertain the populace, boost morale, and generate revenue remained highly sought after.

By the 1940s, the music industry had capitalized on the commercialization of popular music and the concept of selling the next big hit. This phenomenon, completely favorable to the American economic system, was promoted by the recording industry during the 1930s to promote record sales during the Great Depression. This meant that the music industry tracked what songs were in high demand; therefore, they could capitalize on the quick sales of those popular songs in both print and record form, but especially record sales at this point in history. In order to increase sales and maintain an upward trajectory of sales, music did not remain popular for very long before it was pushed aside by the next new hit song. Well suited to the quick turnover rate of hits, the record soon became the leading format for popular music consumption. This aspect of the music industry's commercialism played a significant role in determining the popularity of war songs and affected how the public and the military troops consumed war music. Instead of wanting a thematic and unique war song to act as the battle cry for the duration of this second world war, the troops wanted to hear the popular

music that their family and friends were listening to back home. This was the reason the V-Disc initiative was started and what made it such a remarkably successful program unique to WWII under the banner “music for morale.” Leaders, especially those associated with the OWI, may have believed that WWII did not produce any great war songs for the nation to rally behind, but the success of the V-Disc program disproved those assumptions. Many WWII specialists agree that popular music was successful in its morale-boosting capabilities. The results that the OWI desired from good war songs still transpired, although it did not happen in the form they expected.

This thesis, therefore, analyzes how the V-Disc program in the recording industry contributed to the satisfactory results of popular music in the mission of "music for morale," while defying original expectations generated by the governing propaganda OWI agency. In providing an overview that links the main areas of inquiry, chapter one begins with the formation of the Office of War Information. Discussed is the agency’s mission and the role it played in the United States war efforts. The difference between a successful war song as found in music from WWI versus the unsatisfactory war songs of WWII are compared by standards established by the OWI. The chapter also contains a small sampling of popular war songs that satisfied the public. A brief history of the recording industry is provided in chapter two. With it, the chapter examines the commercial practices behind producing and distributing ‘popular hits,’ and the influence this had on the cultural reception of war music. Chapter three provides details on the V-Disc program and its history and process. Consequences of the 1942 recording ban are also detailed in this chapter. Chapter four explains the reception of the V-Disc program by military personnel as it relates to the complexities of the program itself. This chapter discusses the role recorded music played in

fulfilling the emotional and entertainment needs of soldiers through means of escapism and positive reminiscence. The concluding statements in chapter five summarize the significant paradigm shift in defining war music due to the documented events of WWII.

Chapter 1: The Office of War Information and the Quest for a Great War Song

> Up on deck in the blackness the colored troops are sprawled. They sit quietly. A great bass voice sings softly a bar of the hymn "When the Saints Go Marching In." A voice says, "Sing it brother!" The bass takes it again and a few other voices join him. By the time the hymn has reached the fourth bar an organ of voices is behind it. The voices take on a beat, feeling one another out. The chords begin to form. There is nothing visible. The booming voices come out of the darkness. The men sing sprawled out, lying on their backs. The song becomes huge with authority. This is a war song. This could be *the* war song. Not the sentimental wash about lights coming on again or bluebirds. … We have not yet a singing Army nor any songs for a singing Army. Synthetic emotions and nostalgias do not take hold because the troops know instinctively that they are synthetic. No one has yet put words and a melody to the real homesickness, the real terror, and the real ferocity of war.[15]

WWII war correspondent, John Steinbeck penned these poignant words for the *New York Herald Tribune* syndicate in 1943. The event took place aboard a troopship somewhere between the US and England the evening of June 24, 1943. It demonstrated the expected role music was to play in the war. Everyone awaited the great war songs of WWII. This expectation directly stemmed from the popularity of war songs produced during the events of WWI. Steinbeck's comments about lights coming back on and bluebirds are direct references to the songs "When the Lights Go On Again (All Over the World)" (1943) and "(There'll Be Blue Birds Over) The White Cliffs of Dover" (1941), which contained direct references to the war but were considered in Steinbeck's words "sentimental wash."[16] These songs were not militant nor rosing enough to qualify as proper war songs, nor did they accurately express the real emotions experienced by the troops in the conflict. The songs that Steinbeck referenced reflected the sentiments of hope for the conflict to be over soon and for the restoration of normal things like lights and songbirds. He implied that these topics were

[15] John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War* (New York: Bantam Books, 1958), 12-13.
[16] Steinbeck, 13.

unhelpful sentiments for troops that needed to focus on the fight at hand and keep their morale high. Since these songs were considered unsuccessful war songs for WWII, what defined a good war song and who determined which songs fit the bill? According to the weekly popular hit charts published in the *Billboard* magazine, there were hundreds of popular songs created and recorded between 1941 and 1945. Scholarship agrees that the OWI did not accept these songs as proper, rousing war songs. OWI officials decided that the popular songs of Tin Pan Alley were not living up to the standards they once had accomplished during WWI in producing a plethora of appropriate war songs that the nation could identify with both on the home front and abroad.

Formation and Mission of the Office of War Information (OWI)

The Office of War Information, OWI, was unique to WWII, created on June 13, 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt under Executive Order 9182.[17] This order consolidated all the individual federal agencies involved in the distribution of information and propaganda sentiments from music, the arts, and literature to marketing, advertising, and news under a single governmental branch.[18] The director of the Office of War Information was appointed by the president himself and chaired the Committee on War Information Policy. Elmer Davis, a popular CBS news reporter, served as the first director of the OWI. He gave weekly radio reports from their broadcasting headquarters in New York City.[19] Davis's reports updated the American public and listeners in the European divisions on recently received

[17] Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 9182, "Consolidating Certain War Information Functions into an Office of War Information," *National Archives Catalog*, (June 13, 1942): 7488389.

[18] Executive Order 9182, 1-2. The agencies consolidated were the Office of Facts and Figures, the Office of Governmental Reports, the Coordinator of Information including the Foreign Information Service Branch, and the Division of Information within the Office for Emergency Management.

[19] This broadcasting conduit become known as the Voice of America, which is still broadcast to foreign listeners today.

reports from the European and Pacific war fronts. He also updated listeners on the conditions at home and what the American public were sacrificing to support the war.[20] A separate broadcasting station in San Francisco, California served the West Coast and the Pacific war front. The OWI's purpose was to shape American public opinion and sway foreign listeners through the dissemination of carefully reviewed mass media.

According to Annegret Fauser in her book *Sounds of War*, the newly formed OWI agency targeted four primary groups of listeners in its informational campaign. The first effort targeted neutral countries presenting the U.S. as a cultured, forward-looking, powerful nation and a world-leader of democracy. [21] In a global military effort having the support and possibly swaying neutral countries to join or at least not prevent the efforts of the Allied forces was the number one priority. This was especially important for the US, who had no direct access to either front being separated by both the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans. The second targeted Allied countries presented with the same message as neutral countries, but also celebrated the cultural and musical similarities, establishing a sense of comradery.[22] The third targeted the American troops themselves, using American concert and popular music to bolster morale and build a sense of nationalism. The fourth targeted enemy listeners.[23] America had to be presented as a nation of sophistication and a haven of freedom to enemy listeners, while also carefully preventing any information of vulnerability from falling into enemy hands. The primary target that this study will focus on is the third objective in the OWI campaign: namely music for the American troops to bolster morale.

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[20] For Director Elmer Davis's weekly reports on the war see "Elmer Davis: Progress of War" Series, *The NYPR Archive Collection*, accessed October 8, 2021, https://www.wnyc.org/series/elmer-davis-progress-of-war.

[21] Annegret Fauser, 85.

[22] Fauser, 85.

[23] Ibid.

At first the OWI did not highly prioritize music. Bess Lomax Hawes, a young folk singer with the Almanac Singers was one of the first hired for the OWI's Overseas Branch, Music Division in New York, and she remembered the uphill challenge for the music department to gain acceptance and serious relevancy within the OWI in her memoirs.

> The Music Department where I worked was constantly on the defensive against the many people who believed, with some justification, that broadcasting music over short-wave was foolhardy and hopeless and money down a rat hole. We fought back vigorously, pointing out the Allies were trying to win the hearts, minds, and souls of both the occupied and unoccupied nations, so we must show ourselves, as a nation, to be cultured and open not only to technology and representative government, but to the arts as well.[24]

Hawes served as the longest-serving staff member within the music department, fulfilling the responsibilities of the music librarian. With the help of Henry Cowell, the second longest-serving member of the music department, Hawes collected and managed one of the largest collections of world, folk, and American symphonic music in the country with 200,000 items by early 1945.[25] Hawes explained in an interview that Cowell was hired for the Overseas Branch on June 23, 1943, because of his expertise in world music, which enabled him to find and use music that represented the United States positively to the rest of the world and attracted a broad spectrum of listeners.[26] Both Henry Cowell and Bess Lomax Hawes were crucial figures in the agency especially in relation to war music because of their consistency in the program. Hawes worked for the OWI from the beginning of the creation of the music division to the end of the war. President Truman dissolved the OWI in late 1945.[27] Cowell was hired as a musical consultant in June 1943 until his sudden resignation in spring of 1945,

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[24] Bess Lomax Hawes, *Sing It Pretty: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2008), 47.
[25] Fauser, 82.
[26] Joel Sachs, "The War Effort," in *Henry Cowell: A Man Made of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 390.
[27] Sachs, 393.

because of growing McCarthy purges and a security check issue.[28] Leadership within the music department of the OWI shifted and changed often leaving Hawes to fulfill the role of acting director until a new Director of Music was hired. She recalled that between 1943 and 1945 she was "acting director of the music programs … five or six times because people would take the job and then quit in a couple of months."[29] Hawes's consistent time spend within the OWI, Music Division allowed her to see firsthand the role and power that music held in the propaganda efforts of the war.

The music that the OWI chose to broadcast in both occupied and free territories had the same effect on the troops overseas listening as well. Between short-wave radio broadcasts and the distribution of various prerecorded programs on discs to several military transmitters based all over the continental United States and overseas, the OWI was able to cover nearly the entirety of the globe with its music and messages.[30] Not only were the "hearts, minds, and souls"[31] of the allied, neutral, and enemy people at stake but so too were the American fighting men and women. Hawes admitted that her efforts along with the efforts of other musicians hired by the OWI "were only a tiny part of it, but this was the Good War … we were going to change the world and make it better, and somehow some small part of all this effort was strongly influenced by music -- the emotional part that so often goes unnoticed."[32] The many musicians who worked periodically for the OWI during the war knew of the important emotional influence that music played in bolstering military and civilian morale and swaying the opinions of foreign listeners. The OWI also employed Macklin Marrow a

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[28] Sachs, 393.

[29] Andrea Olmstead, interview with Bess Lomax Hawes (transcript), November 18, 1977, *HCC*, Box 81, as cited in Annegret Fauser, *Sounds of War*, 81.

[30] Fauser, 85.

[31] Hawes, 47.

[32] Hawes, 48.

Broadway and movie industry musician, popular songwriter Oscar Hammerstein II, as well as classical composers Samuel Barber, Elliott Carter, Marc Blitzstein, and Aaron Copland just to name a noted few. These musicians worked together to fulfill the mission of music within the OWI, including the third objective to provide American troops with morale bolstering music, which was why the OWI agency was so invested in the search for good war songs of WWII.

Comparison of WWI versus WWII War Songs

According to existing research, the popular music industry produced a mass amount of music considered great war music during the previous war.[33] The songs such as "Wake Up America" (1917), "Keep the Home Fires Burning" (1915), and especially the great "Over There" (1917) were considered the great war songs of WWI. They were marketed as songs that encapsulated the war for the American people as a whole. This was, at least, the consensus of the governmental institutions promoting and monitoring propaganda music. Through the lyrics and rhythm these songs with their upbeat attitude fulfilled their role as militant yet still morale-boosting war music. According to the OWI and other governmental officials, the war songs of World War II did not meet the same standards that they had during the Great War. Because of their continued promotion of programs searching for better war songs, the OWI never seemed satisfied with the popular music industry's efforts to produce appropriate war songs for the United States in WWII.

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the music industry was relatively disinterested in the war. The popular music artists of Tin Pan Alley remained neutral on the subject of the

[33] For further information about WWI war music see Jeffrey C. Livingston, "'Still Boy-Meets-Girls Stuff': Popular Music and War," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society*, 33-42, and Sarah Mahler Kraaz, *Music and War in The United States* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

war. County and Western, a relatively new genre that was slowly growing in popularity, actively performed war-related songs, [34] but Tin Pan Alley artists, who had provided war songs in WWI, remained silent on the matter. A few foreign war songs made it to the American popular hit charts of 1941, songs including "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square" (1940), "He Wears a Pair of Silver Wings" (1941), and "The White Cliffs of Dover" (1941). These few songs in circulation were mostly written by English artists and then copied by Tin Pan Alley artists. The song "The White Cliffs of Dover" was not originally an English import, but many thought it to be so because of the English themes. Even these early songs were more sentimental ballads that only contained faint hints of the war, not music considered proper war songs.

Once Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese and the United States official entered the war, the trend immediately reversed. Within the month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, rousing songs with heavy war lyrics flooded the market. The song "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire" was a sentimental romance song, first recorded in June 1941.[35] It was one of the very few American songs alluding to the war that was recorded before Pearl Harbor, but it became an instant hit after the attack on Pearl Harbor. It became so popular in such a short amount of time that it landed as number one in the "No. 1 Sheet Music Sellers of 1941" in *Billboard's* yearly popularity review.[36] Dozens of songs like "Remember Pearl

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[34] There was by far more war songs generated by Country and Western artists than by Tin Pan Alley artists before the attack on Pearl Harbor. In fact, this genre of music would take the lead in producing war music after WWII, but up to this point the popular expectation was focused on the music of Tin Pan Alley. See Jeffrey C Livingston, "'Still Boy-Meets-Girls Stuff': Popular Music and War," in *America's Musical Pulse: Popular Music in Twentieth-Century Society.*

[35] Tommy Tucker Time, "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire," recorded June 26, 1941, OKeh, accessed December 13, 2020, *Authentic History Center*, https://www.historyonthenet.com/authentichistory/1939-1945/3-music/02-WarInEurope/19410626_I_Dont_Want_To_Set_The_World_On_Fire-Tommy_Tucker_Time.html.

[36] "No. 1 Sheet Music Sellers of 1941," *Billboard*, January 31, 1942, 11.

Harbor" (1941), "You're a Sap, Mr. Jap" (1941), "We'll Knock the Japs Right into the Laps of the Nazis" (1941), "Blitzkrieg Baby (You Can't Bomb Me)" (1941), "Cowards Over Pearl Harbor" (1941), and countless more with heavy militant tones and anti-Japanese/anti-Nazi feelings quickly hit the market and filled the homes of all Americans.

Within the first year after the United States entered the war, the Tin Pan Alley artists joined the ranks of the Country and Western artists. Composers created popular tunes one right after the next that were directly related to the war in both martial style and lyrics. Some of these songs made it to *Billboard's* weekly top-hits popularity music charts. In the early part of 1942, songs such as "Der Fuehrer's Face" (1942), "Yankee Doodle Ain't Doodlin' Now" (1942), "Allegiance to the Red White and Blue" (1942), "Dig Down Deep" (1942), "For the Flag, For the Home, For the Family" (1942), "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" (1942), and "Praise the Lord, and Pass the Ammunition" (1942) all made it to *Billboard's* popularity charts, but only a few of them would remain popular for more than a couple of weeks. The popularity of most of the direct war songs fizzled out rather quickly, and the public moved on to the next new upcoming hit. The culture created by the record companies to bombard the public with a continuous stream of new popular hits played a heavy hand in why most war songs did not last very long on the popular hit charts. Whether they were war songs, the traditional sentimental love ballads, or dance tunes no song remained popular for as long as they once had in the 1910s. The songs that managed to remain popular for the most extended amount of time during WWII were dance tunes like "Kalamazoo," (no.1 hit in 1942), and the traditional sentimental ballads like "I've Heard that Song Before," (no.1 hit for 1943). The type of war songs that maintained their popularity the longest fit the criteria for both love ballads or dance tunes and addressed the war, songs like "Praise the Lord and

Pass the Ammunition" and "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer." The public considered these songs as war songs, but the OWI did not rank them among what they believed to be appropriate war songs.

Even with so many war-type songs on the market, the OWI was still concerned about national morale and wanted better war music from the industry. Popular culture historians, William and Nancy Young observed that the United States struggled on the battlefields during 1942 and 1943 suffering one defeat after another, something that was unexpected and quite disheartening.[37] This propelled government officials to search for greater morale-boosting avenues. As the Youngs remarked, "the United States went from peace to war, from plenty to rationing, from optimism to serious doubts about victory, officials fretted about sagging public morale. In the face of military setbacks, many in government felt the country needed, if not demanded, stirring martial music for the nation to be victorious."[38] The war music that Tin Pan Alley had provided thus far was insufficient. The country needed better war songs. They wanted songs that accomplished the same reactions and results that they had achieved for WWI.

In an attempt to address the perceived issue between popular music and the war effort, Elmer Davis director of the OWI formed the National Wartime Music Committee (NWMC) in November of 1942. The NWMC was designed to evaluate the suitability of recently released popular songs according to the song's capacity to bolster morale and maintain that level of morale throughout a lengthy and costly war.[39] For nearly a year before the formation of the NWMC, OWI and other government officials had requested better war

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[37] William H. and Nancy K. Young, *Music of the World War II Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 8.

[38] Young, 8.

[39] Young, 11.

songs from the popular music industry. In February 1942, New Jersey Representative J. Parnell Thomas argued, "what America needs today is a good 5¢ war song. The nation is literally crying for a good, peppy marching song, something with plenty of zip, ginger and fire. Something like Over There, Keep the Home Fires Burning, Pack Up Your Troubles."[40] All of these popular songs that Representative J. Parnell Thomas referenced were popular war songs of WWI. The connection between successful war songs of WWI and unsatisfactory WWII war songs was made once again by OWI officer William B. Lewis in the newspaper *Variety* in August 1942. Lewis stated that "comprehensive plans for the Government to aid in and encourage the writing of rousing war songs are shaping up."[41] Lewis believed that the overarching need for successful war songs was to "whip up public enthusiasm by reviving the old 1917-18 idea that 'a nation that sings can never be beaten.'"[42] The OWI agency held compositional competitions, encouraged publishing companies to form war song committees, and encouraged music performance venues to perform war songs more consistently.

The NWMC was one of these attempts to extend the heavy hand of the OWI into the music business. Since the agency had no real power other than the power of suggestion, it faced the impossible task of controlling a consumer-based market and immediately encountered opposition or indifference from both the music business and the public.[43] In April 1943, just six months after its formation, the NWMC members voted that the committee be disbanded due to its unsuccess.

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[40] "Music: Songs of the Times," *Time*, February 09, 1942, accessed February 2, 2022, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,777599,00.html.

[41] "Govt. Help for War Songs," *Variety*, August 26, 1942, 3, accessed December 2, 2020, https://archive.org/details/variety147-1942-08/page/n177/mode/2up?q=%E2%80%9CGovt.+Help+for+War+Songs.%E2%80%9D.

[42] "Govt. Help for War Songs," *Variety*, 44.

[43] Young, 11.

Shortly after the termination of the NWMC, another committee was formed, because the OWI still wanted the music industry to produce better war songs. The Music War Committee (MWC) recruited committee members who were already successful popular songwriters. Oscar Hammerstein II was president of the MWC, but even with this successful and esteemed popular songwriter at the head this committee was also doomed to fail. News reporter Abel Green reported in *Variety* in May of 1943 about a recent meeting held in the ASCAP board room of New York City between the newly formed MWC, OWI officer William B. Lewis, and Jack Joy of the War Department. In this meeting, the MWC discussed their vision to encourage songwriters to write war songs that fit the war in 1943 rather than trying to harken back to the style of 1917. The committee encouraged a positive approach to the writing of war songs in an effort to reduce the strong sentimentality of the current popular songs that referenced the war. Hammerstein explained,

> Even though great is the song, 'The Last Time I Saw Paris,' maybe we should now sing of 'The Next Time I See Paris.' Instead of harping on Tokyo and Berlin, let's inculcate the idea as strongly as possible that this is a global war, not restricted to any one capital. From the Aleutians to the South Pacific, from the Lowlands to the Balkans, there's more bitter warfare and hatred manifested right now than around the immediate geographical Axis capital. Eventually we'll march into there, of course. But it's different from 1918's 'Mademoiselle from Armentieres' and its restricted Gallic idiom.[44]

Hammerstein addressed the fact that many people in leadership were looking for songs similar in style and effect as were the wars songs of WWI, but he acknowledged that war songs for this current war were going to be different than what had been successful during the Great War. He also acknowledged that the propensity of popular music to be reminiscent or sentimental provided its own set of challenges especially in relation to maintaining

[44] Abel Green, "Songwriters' Own Positive Approach to War Song Problem Shelves OWI Hypo; MWC Jumping All Hurdles," *Variety*, May 26, 1943, 54.

national morale. As a solution to the issue at hand, Hammerstein encouraged the creation of war songs that fit the current war and still maintained a positive and victorious attitude rather than the reminiscence of what life used to be like.

Despite their best efforts, even the MWC was unsuccessful in changing the music industry's approach to songwriting, because the public's opinion of war songs had not changed. The public continued to purchase and play the sentimental music, the dance tunes, and the love songs on their own record players and in public juke boxes. They continued to request these songs over the radio, and they continued to buy the sheet music for this type of music that had been called "slush and sentimental war ditties"[45] more than the robust war songs. Driven by a market of supply-and-demand, the public wanted the sentimental love songs and dance tunes, and musicians continued to provide them.

Successful War Music in WWII Public Opinion

Although government officials believed that the nation needed rousing war songs to keep up national morale, public opinion proved otherwise. Despite their fears, national morale never sank. War bonds continued selling, production in defense factories did not decline, recruitment rallies were still well attended, and morale among the troops rose because of the constant flow of current popular music, even with its sentimental overtones. The music industry was fulfilling the promise made in December 1941 of how the industry would contribute to the U.S. war effort.

Within the month of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the AFM publicly declared the unwavering support of the music industry and promised that they would once again do their part. The AFM declared its intent six months before the formation of the OWI. James C.

[45] "Inside Stuff – Music," *Variety*, August 12, 1942, 50.

Petrillo director of AMF on December 27, 1941 published a letter written to President Roosevelt in one of the most popular magazines of the time centered around popular entertainment, the *Billboard* (see figure 1). President Petrillo pledged that every member would do their part and "fight with every weapon at their command" to provide the most important contribution that the music industry could offer which was "music for morale."[46] Petrillo stated that "in this fight we realize that morale plays a most important part. And in the building of morale the Federation and its members can and will do its share. For music has always been and is today one of the finest media for maintaining high public morale." He then declared that their new slogan for the upcoming year would be "MUSIC FOR MORALE."[47]

As a significant and influential leader within the music industry, President Petrillo established the mission of the music industry. He did not declare that the music industry would produce a plethora of satisfactory war songs, nor did he guarantee the next great war song for the current war. He did not establish a specific style of music, nor did he restrict the creative liberties of musicians. Restrictions would come later with the recording ban in 1942, but in this letter, Petrillo simply declared that the music industry would provide music for morale. The music industry's mission was simple, supply a constant stream of morale boosting sound for the nation in whatever form necessary. The AFM supported the people in the country working in the defense factories, the people juggling the many different types of shortages and ration restrictions, the families losing loved ones in the carnage of war, and especially the men and women sacrificing their lives on the battlefields. The music industry bolstered the morale of this audience, not the morale and concerns of the OWI agency.

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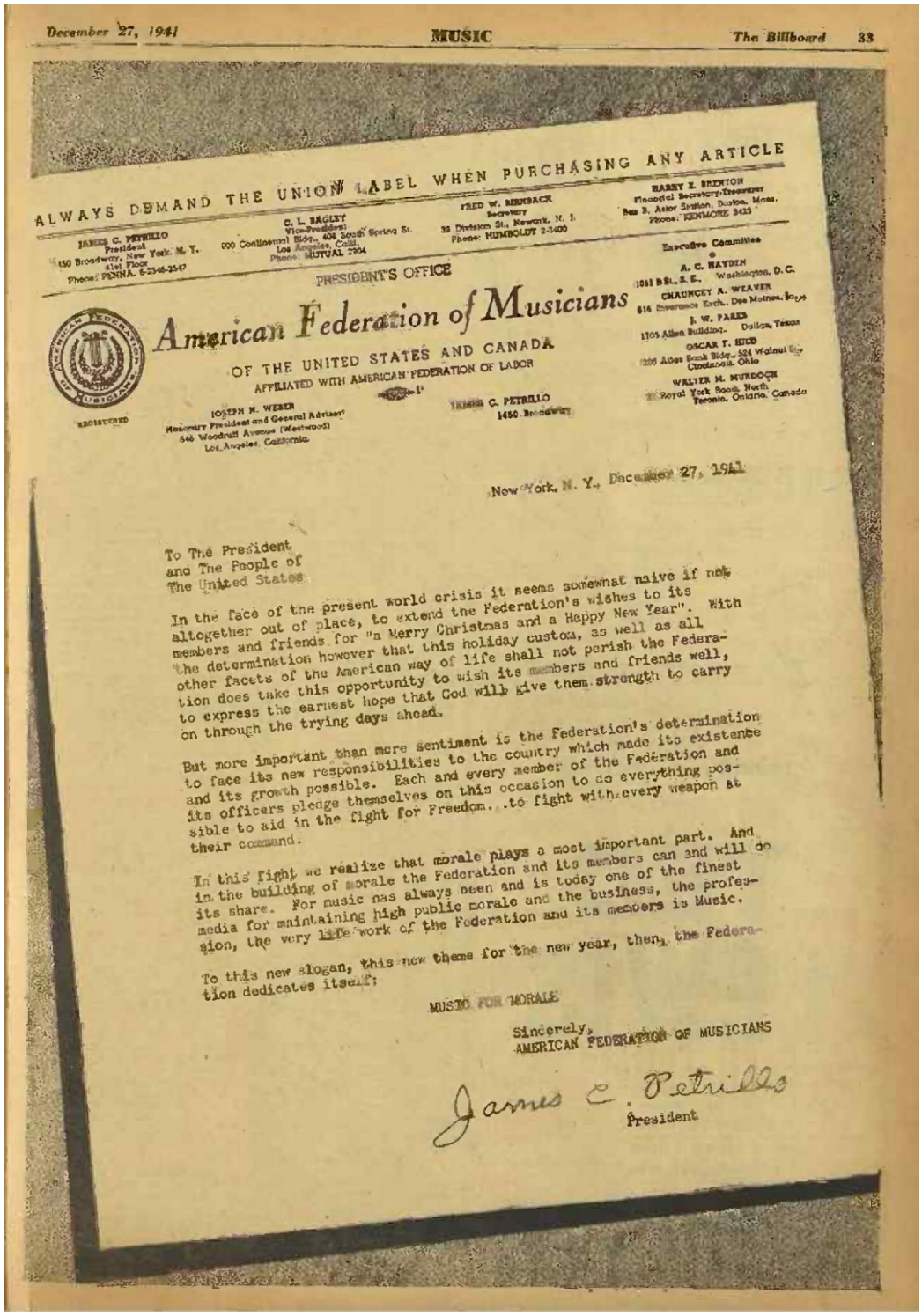
[46] "American Federation of Musicians," *Billboard*, December 27, 1941, 33.
[47] Ibid.



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New York, N. Y., December 27, 1941

To The President
and The People of
The United States

In the face of the present world crisis it seems somewhat naive if not altogether out of place, to extend the Federation's wishes to its members and friends for "a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year". With the determination however that this holiday custom, as well as all other facets of the American way of life shall not perish the Federation does take this opportunity to wish its members and friends well, to express the earnest hope that God will give them strength to carry on through the trying days ahead.

But more important than mere sentiment is the Federation's determination to face its new responsibilities to the country which made its existence and its growth possible. Each and every member of the Federation and its officers pledge themselves on this occasion to do everything possible to aid in the fight for Freedom...to fight with every weapon at their command.

In this fight we realize that morale plays a most important part. And in the building of morale the Federation and its members can and will do its share. For music has always been and is today one of the finest media for maintaining high public morale and the business, the profession, the very life work of the Federation and its members is Music.

To this new slogan, this new theme for the new year, then, the Federation dedicates itself:

MUSIC FOR MORALE

Sincerely,
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF MUSICIANS

James C. Petrillo
President

Figure 1. Photograph of the original AFM letter written by President James Petrillo to United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt on December 27, 1941, declaring the music industry's MUSIC FOR MORALE mission statement for World War II.[48]

[48] *Billboard* magazine, December 27, 1941, 33, accessed March 4, 2022, https://worldradiohistory.com/Archive-All-Music/Billboard-Magazine.htm.

After the first year of the U.S.'s direct involvement in World War II, the music industry responded to the many accusations of inadequate war music production. The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) published a rebuttal to the governmental accusations that no great war songs were being produced in the 1943 *Billboard* Music Yearbook. In the rebuttal titled "Where Are the War-Songs?" ASCAP claimed,

> The songs the soldiers sing are not the only war-songs. The Music that rings through our factories … that enlivens the tired workers … increases production so vigorously as to become beautiful, even to unmusical efficiency experts.
> Those are war-songs too. …
> It's no time to worry about war-songs … or American music. The people of this country want music today more than ever before in our history and, as always, American writers will produce it, and American musicians play it.[49]

The OWI seemed to believe that the country needed its popular war songs to be more militaristic and march worthy for soldiers. From their rebuttal, ASCAP disagreed and claimed that all of the music the public chose to listen to during this war could be considered war music as long as it fulfilled its purpose in maintaining the spirit of victory and therefore morale. This public response informed the OWI that the people determined what music was successful war music and what was not. There was plenty of musical choice available on the market for people to listen to through record sales, radio broadcasting, and the ever-increasing number of jukeboxes spreading across the county and into military bases across the world. Due to these types of musical distribution, the people determined for themselves which music served as war music. The years of 1942 and 1943 may have been less than successful in Allied military conflicts as mentioned previously, but the music industry pressed forward through its own challenges of recording strikes, paper shortages for sheet

[49] "Where Are the War-Songs?," *Billboard*, 1943 Music Year Book, 30.

music, shellac shortages and record restrictions, and loss of music personnel to the draft. Despite the many challenges faced during WWII, the music industry kept the music coming. The popularity charts ranked the success of the music. *Billboard* magazine determined popularity through a combination of different economic factors including number of record sales, number of sheet music sales, radio request numbers, and number of jukebox plays. These rankings allowed the music industry to track public taste and therefore fulfill public demand. The music industry had their own way to determine what was successful war music and what was not, all according to public opinion rather than governmental propaganda.

Below is a sampling of three songs that the public beyond the OWI considered successful war music. These songs were incredibly popular, ranking highly in the popular hit charts for several weeks. They sold well and were requested often by listeners. Still, they did not satisfy the OWI as war songs because they lacked sufficient militant overtones and fell more into the category of sentimental slush. None of these songs became the iconic war song for WWII, because their popularity, while fast and hard, was not sustained throughout the entirety of the war. The recording industry had changed the life span of popular music, and this war lasted far longer for the American people than the time spent in WWI.

World War II music specialists, William and Nancy Young ranked the song "White Christmas" as the number one most popular song of 1942 in their survey of popular WWII music.[50] The *Billboard* magazine ranked it in the top ten in "The Year's Top Recordings" review for 1942.[51] *Billboard* divided its music popularity charts into 4 categories; record sales, sheet music sales, radio plugs, and eventually jukebox plays. It was unclear if the "The Year's Top Recordings" for 1942 was a combination of all four categories or just record

[50] Young, 39.
[51] "The Year's Top Recordings," *Billboard*, January 2, 1943, 27.

sales. Regardless, Irving Berlin's "White Christmas" became incredibly popular in a short period of time. Irving Berlin, a noted Tin Pan Alley songwriter, wrote many successful war songs for WWI. He attempted to write popular songs for the current war, but not many of his songs found great success. "White Christmas" was the exception. Although Berlin wrote the song in 1940 before the U.S. even entered the war, the song was not recorded until the summer of 1942 for the movie *Holiday Inn* sung by Bing Crosby. By October of 1942, the song rocketed to the top of the popularity charts and continued to sell well each subsequent year. By 1945, the song was still ranked number 13 in *Billboard's* popularity charts and in 1946 it ranked high at number 20.[52]

"White Christmas" was never intended as a war song, but it "turned out to be the perfect vehicle for summarizing the feelings of troops far from home as well as the hopes of their loved ones back in the States."[53] The song contained no lyrics directly related to the war, but the words "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas"[54] and the other nostalgic infused lyrics hit home for the troops serving in foreign lands. The song may not have directly mentioned the war, but the concept of longing for home was an ongoing emotion caused by the war. It also resonated with the factory workers who migrated to the northern cities in the U.S. to produce equipment for the war. The war uprooted thousands of people that were dreaming of Christmas "just like the ones [they] used to know."[55] Although not intentionally a war song, "White Christmas" captured the feelings of so many experiencing the effects of the war. According to Kraaz's categories of war songs discussed above, this song fell perfect

[52] Young, 39.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Irving Berlin, "White Christmas," (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 1942), 3-5.
[55] Berlin, "White Christmas," 3-4.

under category five "expression of the heightened emotions of wartime."[56] Perhaps not the traditional type of war song, and especially not the type the OWI was looking for, "White Christmas" still fulfilled a war time need and was received with extraordinary success. According to surveys taken within military troops, Bing Crosby's music including this piece was a G.I. favorite.[57] Of the music produced during WWII, "White Christmas" remains the most remembered and popular song from this era.

Two other songs that met with great success during WWII were "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" (1942) and "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" (1942). Both of these songs were intentionally written as war songs but failed to satisfy the OWI. Broadway songsmith Frank Loesser wrote "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" based upon a reportedly true event in 1942 of a Navy chaplain helping his comrades pass ammunition to the gunners on the ship's deck during a Japanese attack.[58] In the difficult early years of the war for the U.S., stories like this one served as a great morale booster. It was a reminder that despite how difficult times got, everyone needed to remain unified and take action to "praise the Lord and pass the ammunition, so we all stay free."[59] The idea of passing the ammunition not only applied to the troops using firearms, but also to the people back home keeping the troops supplied with the ammunition they needed. This song sold serval million records and landed as #10 in *Billboard's* top recordings for 1942. It gained popularity and was ranked #1 in *Billboard'*s weekly popularity charts in the early part of 1943, but it faded in popularity as most songs did at the time.

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[56] Kraaz, xv.
[57] "GI's Tab Their Favorites," *Billboard*, September 16, 1944, 12.
[58] Young, 9.
[59] Frank Loesser, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," performed by Kay Kyser & His Orchestra, recorded 1942, Sony Music Entertainment, 1990, Spotify streaming audio.

Another war song that provided much need morale during the difficult years of 1942 and 1943 was "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" music by Jimmy McHugh, lyrics by Harold Adamson. This song was ranked #12 for 1943's top hits by *Billboard* magazine. The song's lyrics talked about a bomber crew trying to make it home after being shot up during a mission. Just as "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" contained implications of unity, "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" contained implications of sacrifice for victory. The lyrics talk about the success of the mission in the statement "yes, we really hit our target for tonight," but then the sacrifice of that success is revealed in the statements "how we sing as we limp through the air, … with our full crew aboard and our trust in the Lord. Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer."[60] The song contained lyrics of hope for victory while still acknowledging the possible sacrifice of men.

These three popular songs served as samples of the type of music the populace interpreted as war songs and wanted to hear. They were successful war songs for the immediate present. Unfortunately, these songs did not fit the ideal war song according to the OWI standards. "White Christmas" was too sentimental, and "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" and "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer" did not maintain their popularity ranking for more than a year. Consequently, few popular songs be they militant or sentimental remained popular throughout the war. The OWI's expectations for a long-lasting war song were unrealistic because no popular song was going to remain popular for the duration of the war. The United States fought for years in WWII, while they were only involved in military conflict for a matter of months in WWI. The length of American involvement was vastly different between the two wars. As Hammerstein had stated in May

[60] Jimmy McHugh and Harold Adamson, "Comin' in on a Wing and a Prayer," performed by The Song Spinners, recorded 1942, Decca Records, 18553 A, YouTube streaming audio.

of 1943, this war was different than WWI,[61] and just as the style of music had changed so too had the popular music industry. The growth of the recording industry changed the market of popular music and changed how the public consumed music.

[61] Abel Green, *Variety*, May 26, 1943, 54.

Chapter 2: The Growth and Commercialization of the Recording Industry

> The phonograph business enjoyed the largest year it ever experienced in 1927, and this also in the face of the fast growing radio business. However, instead of forcing the phonograph out of the field, as so many dealers thought the radio would, it has broadened the market for music. While the radio has grown, yet it must be credited with having helped the market for good music, but it was a one-time proposition, while to have the pleasure of listening to a repeat of a favorite piece of music, the phonograph naturally fell heir to this most profitable growth of the worth of good music. It was but natural that with this rapid growth, and with the same rapid growth of nearly every industry supplying the wants of a busy people, the inventive geniuses of the musical world would turn to the ultimate in the reproduction of record playing – the automatic phonograph.[62]

The above quote came from an article in the phonograph trade paper *Talking Machine World*. This trade magazine published monthly was one of the few uniquely devoted to the phonograph. It advertised new recording equipment and record player designs, and it discussed the social role of the technology. This article titled "Get Behind Automatics" published in August 1928 stated that the recording industry was on the rise. Overall record sales increased exponentially in the pre-WWII period. People invested not only in radios, which enabled them to listen to music essentially for free, but also in phonographs. The record industry benefited people because they could listen to their favorite music as many times as they wanted to and whenever was convenient. The two industries worked together to determine and then provide the public's favorite music in whatever musical style they would purchase as consumers. In the article, this was called "good music" and good music became known as popular music. The radio and recording industry worked together to provide and influence the nature of good music for the public.

The effects of the Great Depression forced the recording industry to focus on the commercialization of music in order to survive the economic crisis. The industry developed

[62] E.O. Hobbs, "Get Behind Automatics," *Talking Machine World*, August 1928, 58.

the concept of the popular hit and promoted the quick sale of a continuous supply of these popular hits. The idea of a short-lived popular song had become a permanent feature of the music industry by the time the United States entered WWII. This affected the reception of war music. No songs during WWII remained popular for as long as they had during WWI, which meant that the search for a song to represent the entirety of the war was futile. The recording industry changed how people consumed popular music. The popular music in 1942 would be old and forgotten by the time 1945 rolled along. The recording industry played a much smaller role in WWI than in WWII. While the phonograph and recorded music technology existed, it did not become an integral part of society until after the late 1920s. This meant that once the United States joined WWII, recorded music was an established part of everyday life for the American people.

A Brief History of the Recording Industry

The phonograph existed since the turn of the century. Thomas A. Edison patented the first functioning prototype of the phonograph in 1877.[63] This early device was limited to recording the human voice as a dictation machine. Soon the recording process improved and enabled the recording of music. People knew that "this invention will lead to important changes in our social customs,"[64] and that soon a phonograph would be found in every house and "a phonographic version of every piece of music will accompany the printed sheet."[65] At first, the phonograph only recorded vaudeville acts and sounds in 1894. With many improvements to the process, by 1915 the device was recording grand opera and symphonic

[63] William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

[64] "The Phonograph," *New York Times,* November 7, 1877, 4.

[65] Philip G. Hubert Jr., "What the Phonograph Will Do for Music and Music-Lovers," *Century Magazine*, May 1893, 153-154.

music.[66] In 1917, the Victor Talking Machine Company captured the first jazz record by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. The immediate success of the ODJB recordings opened the flood gates for record companies to record any type of popular music that was in demand at the time.

The record and record player development had come far enough for any type of music to be successful in recorded form. The Berliner Gramophone Company which would later become Victor Records, the world leading record company in the 1920s, designed the flat disc, a far more efficient device than the Edison cylinder. A master wax copy of a flat disc captured the initial recording. It was then used to cast as many copies for distribution of the recording as was necessary. The mass production of records increased sales. More sales meant more affordable prices, which in turn increased demand. Increased demand led to increased profits for the recording companies and spread recorded music across the country. Between 1901 and 1920, the phonograph became a common household item.[67] Record sales went from 4 million in 1900 to almost 30 million in 1910. That trajectory continued, with a slight dip in sales caused by radio circulation in the early 1920s, until the economic crash of the Great Depression.[68] The course of record sales from 1900 to 1946 can be seen in figure 2. The introduction and immediate popularity of the radio affected the recording industry negatively initially in sales, but as Hobbs explained in his 1928 *Talking Machine World* article, the long-term effects of the radio helped to increase record sales. By 1927 record sales reached 100 million in the United States, not only recovering from the drop in sales

[66] Kenney, 45.

[67] A Voice, "History of the Record Industry, 1877-1920s. Part One: From Invention to Industry," *Medium.com*, June 7, 2014, accessed December 8, 2021, https://medium.com/@Vinylmint/history-of-the-record-industry-1877-1920s-48deacb4c4c3.

[68] Ibid.

caused by the radio but also exceeding the 30 million sales that the industry had obtained before the invention and diffusion of the radio. Recorded music was once again trending in popularity, supported by radio broadcasting. The public could hear various types of music and different artists on the radio and then purchase their favorite songs at a record distributor. The upward trajectory of record sales was back on track by the late 1920s.

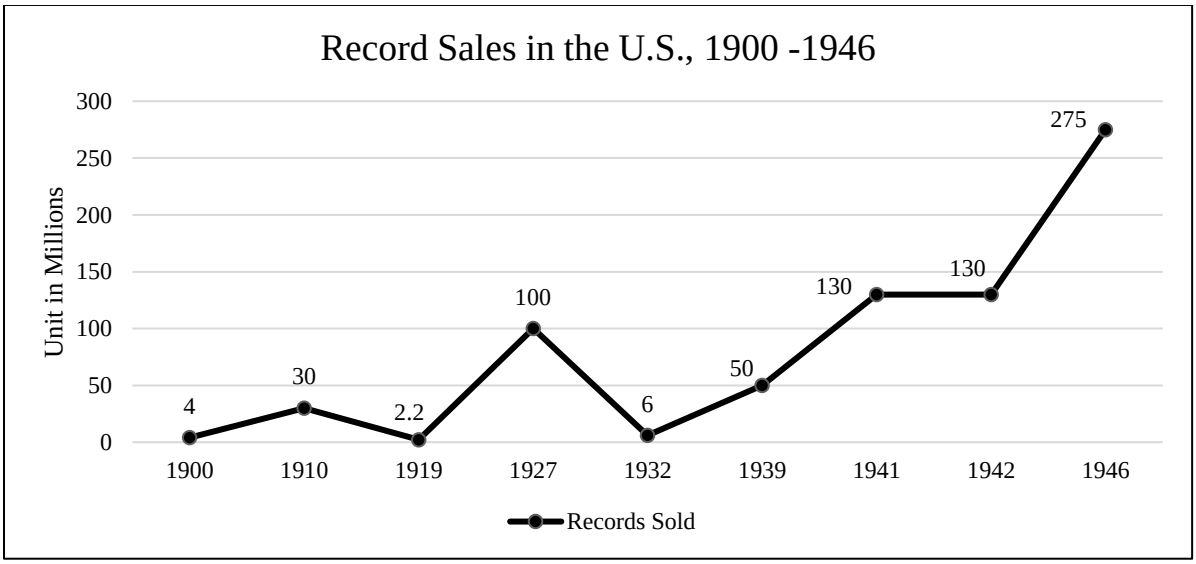

Figure 2. Record Disc Sales in the U.S. in the first half of the 20th century.[69]

Unfortunately for the record industry, it was a short-lived recovery. As seen in figure 2, record sales plummeted once again in the early 1930s due to the economic crash of 1929. A low figure of 6 million records were sold in the United States in 1932, which represented only six percent of the 100 million records sold in 1927.[70] The production and sales of record players also dropped by 96 percent, falling from 987,000 units in 1927 to 40,000 units by 1932.[71] During this time of economic decline and financial instability, the recording industry

[69] *Source*: Data from William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 158-181; William H. and Nancy K. Young, *Music of the World War II Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008),85-86.

[70] Kenney, 163; A Voice. "History of the Record Industry, 1920 - 1950s."

[71] Kenney, 163.

either adapted, or went out of business. Not many of the recording companies survived the crash of 1929. Most of the smaller independent labels either went under or were bought out by larger companies. For instance, Edison Records, once a leader in the recording industry alongside Columbia Records and Victor Records, went out of business in 1929.[72] The independent labels of Odeon and OKeh had already been sold to Columbia Records before the depression hit in 1926.[73] The young record company of Gennett Records and champion of the jazz era in the 1920s suffered severely from the Great Depression and halted all production in 1934.[74] Paramount Records including the Puritan label survived until 1935 when it too went under.[75] Warner Brothers purchased the Brunswick Record Company and its Vocalion 'race records' division in 1930, only to resell the record label to the American Record Corporation in 1931.[76] Managers Jack Kapp and Joe Bishop sold the British manufacturing rights of the Brunswick label to Edward R. Lewis, head of the British, Decca Record Company in 1931.[77] This transaction led to the creation of the American Decca Record label in 1934 arranged by Jack Kapp and funded by E. R. Lewis. The marketing talent and business ingenuity of Jack Kapp and his vision for American Decca Records enabled the new label to quickly rise as a leading record company of its day and helped pull the recording industry through the depression.

The few record labels mentioned here are just a small sampling of the many record companies that could not survive the Great Depression. Even the larger record labels such as Columbia Records and Victor Records only "survived by merging with other media

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[72] A Voice, "History of the Record Industry, 1877-1920s."
[73] Kenney, 160.
[74] "You Are There 1927: Gennett Studio," *Indiana Historical Society*, 2018, accessed December 12, 2021, https://indianahistory.org/events/you-are-there-1927-gennett-studio.
[75] A Voice. "History of the Record Industry, 1920 - 1950s."
[76] Kenney, 163.
[77] Kenney, 164.

corporations,"[78] marking one of the earliest corporate consolidation periods within the music industry. Columbia Records changed hands many times through the 1930s. Eventually, Sam Paley purchased the label in 1938 for the unrelated Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) for $700,000.[79] The Victor Record Company was purchased by the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) in 1929, which was the radio manufacturing branch of the larger national radio network known as the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), founded in 1926.[80] RCA rebranded the record label RCA Victor and with financial backing from the radio corporation survived the depression and continued to produce a high number of records. Once the recording companies merged with radio broadcasting companies, both industries survived the difficult financial times of the Great Depression. Together, both industries, radio and records, controlled a large portion of the music market. With this control came the ability to market and track the concept of nationwide popular hits. In exchange the public held the power of popularity to determine which song would make an instant and large revenue. Funds were limited for everyone during the Great Depression, so in order to access a portion of these limited funds the recording industry had to provide the type of music that would sell well and widen their listening audience.

Shifting to a Consumer Based Industry

The Great Depression threw all industries into survival mode. Companies had to capitalize on tactics that worked, invent new tactics to survive, or admit defeat and shut their doors. As a result, many record labels went bankrupt. However, several others efficiently

[78] Kenney, 158.
[79] Sean Wilentz, *360 Sound The Columbia Records Story* (China, Sony Music Entertainment, 2012), 92.
[80] Kenney, 180.

implemented consumer-based techniques, which succeeded in pulling them through the hard times and redeveloped themselves as multimillion record-selling companies. Through the Great Depression, the record industry established itself as a permanent and vital feature of American culture. People found great comfort in the popular music of the 1930s. The music provided a moment of pleasure and a means of escape from the depressing challenges of life that everyone faced. Historian Lawrence Levine explained this phenomenon, "large segments of the population found relief from their economic anxieties and faltering sense of self-worth by basking in the reassuring glow of their favorite 'idols of consumption' whose casual, stylish nonchalance provided models for surviving hard times."[81] The energy and the glamour of popular musicians and the carefree style of sound found in popular tunes provided a necessary distraction and a sense of better times for their listeners. During desperate times, people want a way to escape from their constant troubles. This culture of escapism transferred with the people into the conflict of World War II. The music industry provided the supply of music that the public wanted, because the consumer had power of choice over what music they would purchase. To keep selling records and keep their own businesses afloat during the depression, the recording industry supplied the music that was in demand.

The concept of music ownership, through recorded discs, gave power to the consumer to determine what type of music they would and would not buy. With the growing popularity of recorded sound came more musical options. This was the simple yet delicate balance of supply-and-demand. The more music was made available through records, the greater the pool of consumers. Company profits increased with the sale of more records. Of course,

[81] Kenney, 171 pulling from Lawrence W. Levine, "American Culture and the Great Depression," *Yale Review* 74, 2 (1985), 196-223.

profit margins would only increase if they could successfully fulfill the demand for the type of music the public wanted. The recording companies had the power to determine what music they would provide for the public, but the public had the money the record companies needed to operate. To track what type of music the public wanted, the music industry began tracking which popular songs were selling the best. These tracking charts were known as the popular hit charts as discussed in the previous chapter. *Billboard* magazine charted the highest-ranking songs in separate categories; most popular songs sold in sheet music form, most popular song in record sales, the songs with the most radio plugs, and eventually the category of jukebox plays was added in the mid-1930s when the jukebox became all the rage.

The Automatic Musical Instrument Company created the first commercial jukebox in 1927. This mechanical device enabled consumers to play a favorite record for a nickel from a selection of records. It spread prolifically in the 1930s and was a universal fixture of American life by the time of WWII (see figure 3). Sean Wilentz, an American researcher of Columbia Records explained that the jukebox "brought low-cost entertainment to customers and extra profits to the saloon owners just when both were needed badly. Soon, jukeboxes could be found in diners, drugstores, pool halls, bus stations, and beauty parlors - wherever people sat down and had to wait for anything."[82] The demand for popular music permeated every part of life, which benefited the record companies. With the growing number of radio stations and jukeboxes, the music consumer determined the success rate and popularity of music more than they had ever done before. The jukebox was an essential aspect of the music industry that helped to pull the record companies out of the Great Depression. It widened the market for recorded music. It negatively affected live performances, but it greatly benefited

[82] Wilentz, 77.

the recording companies. Smaller businesses like drugstore, diners, and beauty parlors could purchase a collection of records for a fraction of the price that a group of live musicians would cost. Jukeboxes also allowed businesses in remote areas to play the top-hits performed by the country's favorite artists.

Recorded sound dominated American public life, and people became accustomed to hearing their favorite songs and artists on a regular basis. In addition, the popular music of the 1930s era of Swing helped people forget their troubles and generated hope for better times to come. These shifting expectations for the music industry carried over into the conflict of WWII. The music culture shifted from World War I, so people received the attempted war songs differently in the 1940s than they had in the 1910s. Another aspect that had changed was the concept of top-hit songs. Record companies capitalized on this aspect of spreading commercialism in the music industry by tipping the balance of supply-and-demand in their favor. They developed and then marketed the concept of the 'popular hits' to the public.

Recording Companies Establish 'Popular Hits'

When so many record companies were going out of business, record producer Jack Kapp started a new record label in the United States in 1934. With an initial investment of $250,000 and repeated injections of capital from English record company owner Edward R. Lewis, Kapp founded the new American Decca Record Company.[83] In a very short about of time, it grew to be one of the top selling record companies in the United States. Kapp's business approach was key to the company's success. He undercut competitors in two ways. First, he sold Decca records to the America public at 35 cents a record or three records for a

[83] Kenney, 164.

Figure 3. Soldiers listening to a jukebox in WWII.[84]

dollar, while the standard price in 1934 was at least 75 cents for a popular recording.[85] Kapp knew that the 35-cent record would bring in more consumers to the record retail dealers and

[84] Office of War Information, Overseas Operations Branch, New York Office, Picture Division, Exhibit Section, 1942-1945, National Archives Catalog, 535751.

[85] Russell Sanjek, *From Print to Plastic*, 20.

that people would often end up spending more than just 35 cents by purchasing new players, or extra needles, or additional records.[86] Cheaper records also meant that he would be able to sell more records as long as the supply was there for the demand.

His second approach marketed a constantly changing circulation of new popular hits. The consistent supply of new hits kept people coming back for more. Kapp's "new popular plan hinged on the swift turnover of a strictly limited retail stock."[87] This kind of turnover rate was rare in the 1920s, "but under the new Depression-generated policy, a dealer could turn over his record investment twenty-four to thirty times a year."[88] Constant new stock for a short period of time revolutionized popular music and the recording industry, increasing the rate of records sales. Jack Kapp became known as champion of the 35-cent 78rpm record. He transformed the record industry from the concept of timeless and immortal classics to the idea of "short-run profits from the quick sale of the latest recordings of popular music."[89]

Led by the innovative techniques of Jack Kapp, other companies within the record industry also capitalized on the success 'popular hits.' Record sales were once again on an upward trajectory by the mid-1930s. In order to facilitate this marketing strategy, some sort of record was needed to track consumer's choice. *Billboard's* popular song charts among others fit the bill. The system was self-perpetuating: consumers consulted the list to see what others were purchasing. This fueled increased sales, which in turn vaulted those songs to the top of the charts, and so forth. The key to this marketing stratagem was a never-ending supply of new songs. As phonograph historian William Howland Kenney pointed out in his history of recorded sound, the culture around the phonograph disc had changed music

[86] Kenney, 166.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Kenney, 164.

consumption from the concept of timeless classics to the rotating consumption of fleeting popular hits.[90]

The growing usage of the jukebox also contributed to the success of the 'popular hit' stratagem. These jukeboxes had to be supplied with a relatively large selection of records from which to choose. Jack Kapp successfully tailored Decca Records to fill the supply demanded by jukeboxes. He undercut other record companies by selling Decca records to jukebox retailers at 21 cents each, which was far less than the other record companies could afford.[91] He managed to maintain this strategy by cutting the cost of production and by selling more records than his competition.[92] Historian, Kenney found that "by 1936, at least 40 percent of all records produced in the United States went to automatics; by 1939, jukes were consuming 30 million records (60 percent of all manufactured) and Decca Records made 19 million of them."[93] Profits brought in from jukeboxes helped the record companies survive the Great Depression, as long as those jukeboxes were filled with the popular music that the public was willing to pay a nickel to listen to. The popular songs charts available for public viewing helped facilitate the jukebox listening experience.

By the time the country was fighting in WWII, the consumption of popular hits was an American way of life. Both consumers and producers influenced the type of music available on the market, because music producers, like the record industry, sold the music that consumers wanted to listen to and purchase. The recording companies and the public predetermined this unique balancing act of supply-and-demand long before the creation of

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[90] Kenney, 164.
[91] Kenney, 167.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Kenney, 166-167 with statistic from "America's Jukebox Craze: Coin Phonographs Reap Harvest of Hot Tunes and Nickels," *Newsweek XV*, 23 (June 3, 1940): 49-50.

the OWI agency. This was partially why the OWI suggestions of proper militant war songs fell upon an unwilling audience. The American public had become familiar and comfortable in finding escapism in their music before they ever needed it to escape from the horrors of warfare. What the soldiers fighting in battlefields wanted was the music they were familiar with. They wanted the popular tunes of the day. These troops already knew the power of escapism that popular music could provide, so that was what they requested when it came to their music preference. The Victory-Disc program strove to achieve the troop's requests.

Chapter 3: All Things V-Disc

> The product was a reflection of America's way of life, portrayed in its music. The high caliber of the artistic selections and the technical quality of the V-Discs made this program one of the most important morale sustainers of the war. The V-Discs were a tie to home and presented an almost instantaneous projection of what was transpiring across the total musical spectrum in our country. That the program was an immense success was demonstrated by the thousands of responses to the questionnaires that recipients of the V-Discs returned to headquarters. The responses were fabulous in their praise of the program, especially the ability of the staff to meet requests for particular artists, tunes, and programs, whether from live session, broadcasts, or rerecordings.[94]

Commander E.P. DiGiannantonio made this statement in the forward of Richard Sears's complete Discography of the Army and Navy V-Discs, which he complied in 1980. Commander DiGiannantonio was the Navy representative assigned to supervise the Navy shipments within the V-Disc program. Sears managed to contact living members of the original V-Disc production team and recorded their thoughts and feelings toward this unique WWII music initiative. Every member responded positively and were proud to witness firsthand the program's success within the fighting troops. Walt Heebner, the assistant manager at RCA Victor records and administrator in the V-Disc program, recounted

> I made one lengthy inspection trip to several Ports of Embarkation (Newport News, Charleston, and New Orleans), where I was really thrilled to see the great care with which our V-Disc packages were handled by brass and enlisted men alike. Some of them told me that we had a top priority on handling because of the tremendous and favorable response of the men in the field to this music form home.[95]

Heebner testified of the importance of the V-Disc program for the entire military, both high brass leaders and enlisted men alike. Everyone had finally recognized the important role that music played in the war effort.

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[94] Richard S. Sears, *V-Discs: A History and Discography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), xviii.

[95] Sears, xvii.

Short for “Victory,” V-Discs were part of a morale boosting initiative from the Special Service Division of the War Department.[96] This initiative produced and distributed vinyl records for the sole purpose of military use. These records were a special arrangement made between U.S. private publishing companies and the U.S. government from October 1943 to May of 1949.[97] The discs contained various recorded material that ranged from popular music, to classical music, to radio network live feeds, to movie studio set rehearsals.[98] These discs were instrumental in carrying the popular songs of the day to the troops serving overseas, because they were excluded from the AFM recording ban of 1942.

The Recording Ban of 1942

For several decades musicians struggled with copyright laws that had not caught up with the current technology. They fought for fair payment of royalty fees. The most current Copyright Law of 1909 granted legal property rights of phonograph records to the song composers and music publishers. The performing musicians and the record company engineering the discs were given no legal right to royalties. Historian, William Kenney noted that "the record companies claimed that the taste and skill of their record producers and engineers had done much to shape the final product; musicians insisted that their arrangements and instrumental interpretations helped to make records what they were. The law, however, had directly granted rights to the composers and publishers of the music."[99] Because of this law, performing musicians often did not receive fair compensation for their

[96] John Nikolopoulos, “War Department Headquarters, Army Service Forces,” in “V-Disc: The Story of the American Military Record Label During WWII,” Save The Vinyl, last modified 2020, accessed November 20, 2020, https://www.savethevinyl.org/v-disc-the-story-of-the-american-military-record-label-during-wwii.html.

[97] John Nikolopoulos, “V-Disc: The Story of the American Military Record Label During WWII.”

[98] Ibid.

[99] Kenney, 188.

contribution to popular music. Music producers often paid performers a flat rate fee for the recording session. Musicians were not given further compensation if their recording became a popular hit and sold more than what was originally contracted.[100]

The advent and growth of the radio exaggerated the issues of fair payment and royalty fees. It was cheaper for radio stations to purchase and broadcast recordings rather than hire the entire band and broadcast the musicians live. Musicians were now competing with themselves for performance opportunities. Instead of being hired by broadcasting stations to perform their new hits, musicians would hear their songs over the radio knowing they would never see any compensation from the money the radio stations were making from their music. The popular hits increased the listening audience of the radio station. The more listeners a program had the more money companies paid to sponsor the program to run advertisements for their services/products. Both musicians and record companies gained no royalties from radio stations using their recorded music. The issue was taken to state and eventually federal courts, but the judicial decisions did not favor the musicians. The Supreme court case *RCA Mfg. Co., v. Whiteman et al.* (1940) "ruled that bandleaders like Paul Whiteman, who recorded under contract with record companies, retained no musical property at common law in their commercial recordings; common-law musical property ended with the sale of the records."[101] This meant that once the record was legally purchased, the owner, be it a radio broadcaster, then had ownership of that record and could play it at will. In response to the unjust treatment and the reduction in wages, President James C. Petrillo of the AFM union declared a recording ban that would begin as of August 1, 1942.

[100] Kenney, 178.
[101] As cited in Kenney, 190.

Petrillo's ban prevented any musicians who were members of the union from recording with any record companies until the following demands were met: firstly, restrictions were to be placed on radio broadcasters. Secondly, record companies would have to make direct payments into the AFM unemployment fund for every record and transcription made by AFM members.[102] Petrillo claimed that "canned music" on the radio and in jukeboxes had contributed to a 60 percent unemployment rate among the 138,000 members of the AFM union.[103] The real target of the ban was the unauthorized broadcasting by radio stations. Petrillo had his hand tied by the federal government preventing him from directly attacking the radio stations. According to Kenney, Thurmond Arnold, head of the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice, in 1939 warned any company that tried to force another company to hire any unessential workers constituted a violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. The Federal Communications Commission specifically warned Petrillo that the Justice Department would prosecute if the AFM tried to force broadcasters to employ musicians.[104] Since no direct action could be taken against the radio companies, Petrillo decided to stop the supply of recorded music.

Having been warned of the impended strike, recording companies began in June of 1942 to stockpile a backlog of previously recorded yet unleased records. The record industry went even so far as to hire union musicians to record new pieces around-the-clock to build up their supply of new releases before the ban went into effect.[105] These records were released over the course of the strike. As a result of their foresight and preparation, Victor, Decca, and

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[102] Jones, 4.

[103] "Govt. to Stop Petrillo," *Billboard*, August 1, 1942, 62, as reported from "Chicago Musicians Grumbling because of Ban on Records," *The Chicago Daily News,* July 21, 1942.

[104] Kenney, 191.

[105] Jones, 4.

Columbia Records maintained their impressive total of 130 million records sold in 1942 (see figure 2), but unfortunately the recording ban lasted longer than expected.[106] It was not until November 11, 1944, when the last of the record companies conceded to AFM conditions. Decca was the first company to agree to AFM terms. On September 30, 1943, Decca agreed to pay the AFM according to a schedule of fixed rates based upon the retail prices of the different types of records.[107] Fourteen months later, in November 1944, RCA Victor and Columbia, both who were owned by radio companies, finally agreed to AFM terms. Decca was the only large record company that remained independent from the radio companies and relied on their revenue from record sales.

The recording ban occurred during the most critical time of the United States' involvement in WWII. The nation needed music to inspire and uphold morale. While live performances and the radio continued to provide popular morale-boosting tunes for the American people at home, the recording ban cheated the soldiers fighting overseas. Radio stations were not always available to the men and women on the battle front, although the industry did the best it could despite the issue of distance. The USO camp shows brought live entertainment into military camps, but again it was not enough. According to surveys taken within military bases, soldiers clamored for recordings of the popular tunes of the day. Captain Robert Vincent answered that call with the V-Disc initiative.

Launching the V-Disc Initiative

The history of the V-Disc Initiative began when the Army acknowledged that music played a greater role in warfare than just the marching tunes provided by the company band.

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[106] See article "Third Year of Record Ban Starts with AFM Planning New Contract Regulations," *Billboard*, August 5, 1944, 19.

[107] Kenney, 192.

Music contributed to the overall well-being of the troops. The military created the Morale Branch of the Army in July of 1940 to promote the overall well-being of soldiers. It was renamed the Special Services Division in March of 1942. Under the mission of this branch, the V-Disc program found fruition. Due to the AFM recording ban, in August of 1942 the Music Section of the Special Services Division experienced setbacks in their supply of phonograph records. The troops were still provided with radio programs and classical music transcriptions, but the packages lacked popular songs. This did not set well with the troops for they wanted popular tunes.[108] To answer the call, in July 1943 Lieutenant Robert Vincent requested permission from Major Howard Bronson chief of the Music Section at the Pentagon to initiate a special recording project to alleviate the record-request issue caused by the recording ban. Promoted, Captain Vincent left the Pentagon with full permission from Major Bronson and Colonel Theodore Bank (Chief of the Athletic and Recreation Branch) plus an allotted one million dollars to initiate the special recording project that became known as the V-Disc program.[109]

Captain Robert Vincent (figure 4) spent many years working for both the military and the recording industry. He attempted to enlist in the British Army during WWI at the age of fifteen but was sent back to the states because he was underage. He finally enlisted in the United States Army in 1918 and went to Officers Candidate School, earning the commission of Lieutenant at age seventeen. After the end of WWI, he remained in France making voice recordings with a wax cylinder. In 1922, he joined the Thomas A Edison Laboratories in New Jersey, focusing on recording and sound research. When the U.S. entered WWII, he tried once again to enlist, but was turned down because of his age. Eventually he received a

[108] Sears, xxviii.
[109] Sears, xxix.

Figure 4. Captain Robert Vincent[110]

commission to work with the radio section of the army, because his military camp sound recording had been positively received by the White House.[111] With his experience in both

[110] Courtesy of Dennis M. Spragg, "V-Discs," Glenn Miller Archive, University of Colorado Boulder, September 2013, accessed March 11, 2022, https://www.colorado.edu/amrc/sites/default/files/attached-files/V-DISCS%20PDF.pdf.

[111] Sears, xxviii.

the recording industry and the military, Captain Vincent had the connections necessary to make the unique recording project a success.

The "Victory" Disc program operated from October 1943 to May 1949. Vincent pulled together a committee of military personnel who had previous experience in the recording industry and connections to the popular performing artists of the day. The V-Disc organization initially consisted of Steve Sholes from RCA Victor. Morty Palitz was connected to Decca Records but also had worked with the Brunswick and Columbia Records in the 1930s. Tony Janak was a recording engineer for Columbia Records. Lieutenant Marie Swanstrom of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) acted as accountant for the program. Walt Heebner was also associated with RCA Victor, but he was assigned the role of liaison between the V-Disc group and the AFM. By mid-1944, Morty Palitz left the V-Disc program. He was replaced by George Simon who had worked as an editor for *Metronome,* a music magazine. Simon had also played drums for some of Glenn Miller's recordings in 1937, so he came with many connections to the popular artists of the day. According to V-Disc historian Richard S. Sears, "Simon had an inexhaustible number of contacts in the music world and thus was able to arrange for recording sessions by a myriad of well-known jazz and popular artists."[112] Then Lawrence 'Jack' Hurdle was associated with the Theatre Guild in the 1930s. The last person to join the V-Disc program was Commander Edmond DiGiannantonio of the U.S. Navy.[113] Captain Vincent had initially invited the Navy Department to participate in the V-Disc initiative in 1943, when the program was getting off the ground. They initially declined, arguing that their personnel did not need morale

[112] Sears, xxxvi.

[113] All of the personnel and their positions within the V-Disc program are from Richard S. Sears, *V-Discs: A History and Discography,* xxxi-xli.

boosters.[114] They changed their mind in the spring of 1944 and assigned Commander DiGiannantonio as the navy representative to the program in June 1944. As of July 1944, the first Navy V-Discs were released.[115]

Once the team was created, Captain Vincent needed permission from the AFM to record their musicians despite the strict recording ban for all union members. With the assistance of Walt Heebner, the V-Disc committee attained permission on October 27, 1943, from President James Petrillo "for those members of the American Federation of Musicians, who are desirous of so doing, to volunteer their services for the making of such recordings."[116] Petrillo readily gave his full support to the V-Disc program to show his and the AFM's full support of the music industry's war effort. He honored his earlier statement in December 1941 that the music industry would use every tool at their command to provide music for morale. The AFM agreement with the V-Disc program was based on the understanding that the discs would be for military personnel only and the recordings would not be exploited. The military upheld their side of this arrangement. The personal possession and particularly the sale of V-Discs was illegal, even for several years after the war ended.[117] Postwar, a record-company employee in Los Angeles was arrested and received a jail sentence for the illegal possession of twenty-five hundred V-Discs.[118] The FBI confiscated and destroyed hundreds of illegally owned V-Discs after the war. All masters were destroyed with the exception of a complete collection of V-Discs housed by the Library of Congress.[119]

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[114] Sears, xxxv.
[115] Ibid.
[116] James Petrillo to Walter Heebner, October 27, 1943, in Richard S. Sears, *V-Discs: A History and Discography*, *xxxiv.*
[117] It is no longer illegal to owner or sell V-Discs for personal collections.
[118] Sears, xlvii.
[119] Young, 102.

The V-Discs program was permitted as an exception to the AFM recording ban of 1942, because the discs were exclusively for troop morale.

The key to the V-Disc success was waiving of "all fees and royalties for the musicians' services and copyright payments for the published music."[120] All musicians and recording companies volunteered their time and equipment for this project. The funds provided by the Army paid for the material to process and press the recordings. Nearly all of the most popular artists of the 1940s volunteered their time and talents to cut records for the V-Disc program. Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" was a favorite for the troops, but other favorite artists included Frank Sinatra, Glenn Miller, Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Jo Stafford, the Andrews Sisters, the Three Suns, Lionel Hampton, Artie Shaw, Louis Armstrong, and hundreds more. Six hundred forty popular artists in total volunteered for this program.[121] This number did not include the classical, folk, country, and other artists that recorded for the V-Discs (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Photographs of three original V-Discs. War Department, Music Section, Athletic & Recreation Branch, Special Service Division; Disc No. 16A, No. 235A, No. 805A.[122]

[120] Sears, xxxi.

[121] Kenney, 198.

[122] Photographs of original V-Discs courtesy of John Nikolopoulos, "V-Disc: The Story of the American Military Record Label During WWII," *Save The Vinyl*, last modified 2020, accessed November 20, 2020, https://www.savethevinyl.org/v-disc-the-story-of-the-american-military-record-label-during-wwii.html.

Mass Distribution of Recorded Popular Music

V-Discs were pressed onto a nearly unbreakable plastic material called Vinylite, and Vinylite was used for two reasons. First, the war had caused a shortage of shellac material, which was shipped to the states from Southeast Asia. Second, the discs had to be durable. The discs needed to survive the lengthy transportation overseas and the rough handling by the troops on the front lines. Each V-Disc was cut onto a 12-inch, 78-rpm record and labeled with a distinctive V-Disc label usually in red, white, and blue.[123] Because the V-Disc was larger in size than the commercial 10-inch disc, they contained up to six minutes of sound on a side rather than the standard three or four minutes. This allowed the record producers to put two songs to a side or allowed the jazz improvisators to play longer solos. It allowed for each disc to contain a spoken introduction or message from the performing artists to the troops.

On April 3, 1945, during a V-Disc recording session in the World studios, New York, Bob Crosby recorded with Martha Tilton and gave the following introduction to the popular WWI war song "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag (And Smile, Smile, Smile)" (1915),

> "You know, it wouldn't be much fun making a V-Disc without a V-male. As far as V-males are concerned, I guess I'm a regular slot machine manipulator, because I made a tiltin'. But, surprise, fellows, Martha Tilton was nice enough to come over to make some records with us. How are you, Martha?"
> "I'm fine, thanks, Bob, and it's really fun being able to make V-Discs with you and the fellows. And now we'd like to do a little tune for you called – what is the name of this next tune gonna be, Bob?"
> " 'Pack Up Your Troubles In Your Old Kit Band and Smile, Smile' …"
> " 'Smile' … that's it."[124]

[123] Young, 101.

[124] Transcript of the Bob Crosby and Martha Tilton's introduction to V-Disc 480-A/Navy V-Disc 260-A as found in the Discography section of Richard S. Sears, *V-Discs: A History and Discography*, 183.

Many musicians enthusiastically supported the V-Discs program and willingly gave of their time to perform even old WWI war songs. They had been popular and successful then so why not record them again? The troops welcomed any familiar song from home, and the personalized introductions before the music let the troops know they were not forgotten. A little reminder of what they were fighting for and a reminder to 'smile, smile, smile' even if there was not much to smile about.

Although the V-Disc program officially started in October, the first shipment of discs was distributed to military bases in September of 1943.[125] American recording industry historian Russel Sanjek noted that the first batch of 100,000 12-inch unbreakable discs shipped out with 90 percent of them headed overseas in transport planes.[126] Recorded music was on its way to U.S. military troops one year after the recording ban had gone into effect. Within a year, production more than doubled, and in 1944 alone two million V-Discs were shipped overseas. Sanjek estimated that 13,000 to 14,000 waterproof containers were shipped out monthly containing boxsets of twenty double-sided discs totaling four hours of recorded entertainment[127] (see figure 6). Each box of records contained a set of a hundred steel phonograph needles, since steel tended to wear out rather quickly especially under prolonged and constant use. The boxset also included detailed questionaries for the G.I.s receiving the discs to fill out and return. The surveys let the V-Disc producers know which songs the troops liked best and what music they would like to hear in the future.[128] The program was met with such great success that the Army developed its own portable, hand-cranked

[125] Russell Sanjek, *Pennies from Heaven: The American Popular Music Business in the Twentieth Century*, updated by David Sanjek (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 219.
[126] Sanjek, *Pennies from Heaven*, 219.
[127] Ibid.
[128]Kenney, 197.

phonograph that military personnel could use when stationed in isolated areas lacking power[129] (see figure 7). Music became more readily accessible to military troops no matter where they were stationed.

Figure 6. *Top Left:* Photograph of an original box and packaging of V-Discs. Each box contained a set of 20 discs.
Figure 7. *Top Right:* Photograph of an original WWII military issued record player that was distributed as part of the V-Disc program.[130]

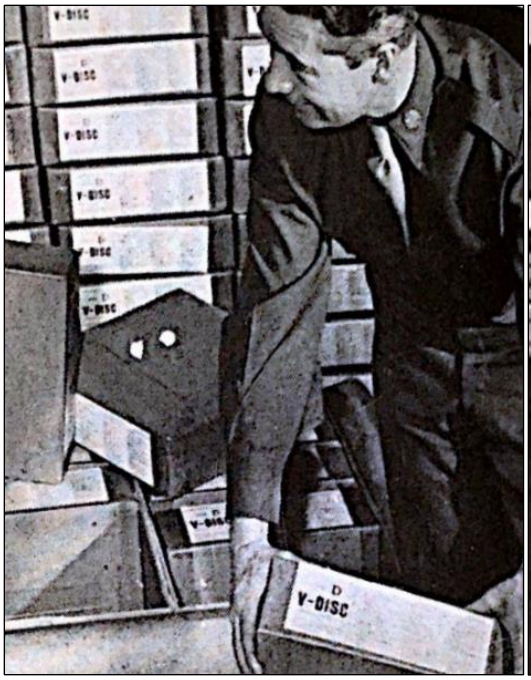
At the beginning of the program, only one third of each shipment of V-Discs contained newly recorded music. The majority of the music was cut from existing masters provided by the recording industry. However, after the return of the questionnaires, the ratio of newly recorded music increased to 86 percent.[131] Soldiers wanted not only the music they were familiar with, but they wanted the new stuff. They wanted to play the new hits they

[129] Young, 101.
[130] Both figures 6 & 7 courtesy of John Nikolopoulos, "V-Disc: The Story of the American Military Record Label During WWII," *Save The Vinyl*, last modified 2020, accessed November 20, 2020, https://www.savethevinyl.org/v-disc-the-story-of-the-american-military-record-label-during-wwii.html.
[131] Sanjek, *Pennies from Heaven*, 219.

heard on the radio, when they could catch a program, or the songs that their family members wrote about in letters from home. The type of music provided through the V-Disc program also adjusted according to the requests from the troops.

By 1944, 70 percent of all V-Discs were made up of popular music, the remaining amount divided between classical, hillbilly, ethnic and other specialized forms of entertainment. The program was launched to provide current popular tunes for the soldiers in spite of the recording ban. It was not military marches or overtly militant war songs the fighting men wanted; it was the songs that were making it to the popularity charts. Proper war music or not, the fighting men and women wanted popular music regardless of the style. The sentimental love ballads and the hot dance tunes the OWI found so lacking for war morale were exactly the kind of music the soldiers requested., and the V-Disc program provided it.

The V-Disc initiative was an essential element for the success of popular songs in WWII to provide morale-boosting music for the fighting troops. More than eight million records were distributed during the lifespan of the project (see figures 8 and 9). The program was an incredibly unique contribution from the recording industry to the war effort. Phonographs have been used in WWI, but not on the scale that the V-Disc program was able to accomplish. The program not only provided entertainment for the soldiers to escape the horrors of war temporarily, but more importantly, it provided a necessary lifeline to the family and friends back home whom they were fighting to protect.



Figures 8. *Top Left*: Brooklyn POE – unidentified Army Transportation Corps Captain and boxed V-Discs being prepared for overseas shipment, January 1944.[132]
Figure 9. *Top Right:* Tony Janak, Steve Sholes, and two RCA Victor employees in RCA Victor packing room. V-Discs were collated and packed here for shipment overseas, late 1944.[133]

[132] Photograph courtesy of Robert Vincent as found in Richard S. Sears, *V-Discs: A History and Discography*, introduction pages.
[133] Photograph courtesy of Steve Sholes as found in Richard S. Sears, *V-Discs: A History and Discography*, introduction pages.

Chapter 4: Recorded Music Within the Troops

> Their minds and their bodies became machine-like. They did not talk about the war. They talked only of home and of clean beds with white sheets and they talked of ice water and ice cream and places that did not smell of urine. Most of them let their minds dwell on snow banks and the sharp winds of Middle Western winter. But the red dust blew over them and crusted their skins and after a while they could not wash it all off any more. The war had narrowed down to their own small group of men and their own job. It would be a lie to suggest that they like being there. They wish they were somewhere else.[134]

Here was another observation from war correspondent John Steinbeck. Steinbeck spent a few years with the Allied troops on the European front. He recorded his observations and documented the experiences of military life firsthand. This observation was written on September 29, 1943, somewhere in the Mediterranean war theater on the beaches of North Africa before the invasion of the Italian coast. As a war correspondent, Steinbeck had experienced several aspects of warfare in WWII. He traveled by transporter ship to different military posts around the world. He was stationed in England with units of bomber crews and infantry men. This particular observation was penned at a training post in North Africa as the troops prepared for the invasion of Italy. Because of his many assignments, Steinbeck interacted with Allied soldiers from all walks of life. The soldiers' sentiments about the war were often the same no matter the unit. The fighting men fulfilled their assignments, but they longed for home. Stationed in northern Africa's hot dry desert sands, the men pined, not surprisingly, for things they remembered as cold, clean, and comforting – things like ice cream, ice water, and snowbanks.

The sentiments of escapism and of longing for familiarity were ever present. This was what the fighting troops needed from their music, and this was the type of music they

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[134] John Steinbeck, 107.

requested when allowed to ask. Knowing that they were listening to the same popular hits that their loved ones back home were listening to was comfort enough. Ultimately, this was why the V-Disc program met with such great success. It was the same reason that popular songs succeeded as morale-boosting war music. Not because the popular tunes were necessarily great war songs, but because the music fulfilled the emotional need of escapism and familiarity for the soldiers, which maintained high morale levels.

The Positive Reception of V-Discs by Military Personnel

The V-Disc program was an undeniable success. Between the unbreakable discs, the constant resupply of record needles, and the portable hand-wound phonograph players that could be taken anywhere under any conditions, the U.S. military troops were supplied with a steady stream of music for morale. The troops lived for it. From the expressions on the faces of the soldiers in figure 10 the V-Disc program provided the necessary lift in morale. Marine officer "Ray" confirmed this fact in a letter he wrote on March 20, 1944 to Harold Spivacke, leader of the Subcommittee on Music for the Joint Army and Navy Committee on Welfare and Recreation. Ray recounted the following story.

> Saturday night I asked my two tent mates if they would like to hear some good music. Yes. We brought down the machine and some of the wonderful records which you sent along. Lowbrowly, we first put on Dinah Shore singing that tantalizing *Mood Indigo*. It wasn't on three minutes before a major came tumbling in from a nearby tent demanding to know what kilocycles we were on; he had been frantically trying to get the music on his radio. We laughingly explained what it was all about.
> Off he rushed to turn off his machine and back he came to stay all evening. A helter-skelter programme proceeded. While *Finlandia* (cracked but acceptable) was playing a Lieutenant wandered in. … Soon the tent was crowded.[135]

[135] Marine Officer "Ray" to Harold Spivacke, March 20, 1944 as cited in Mary Macklem, "War, Vinyl and Print: Music for the Troops during World War II," blog, *National Endowment for the Humanities*, August 10, 2015, https://www.neh.gov/divisions/research/featured-project/war-vinyl-and-print-music-the-troops-during-world-war-ii.

If it had not been for the discs and record player provided by the V-Disc program, Ray and his fellow officers would not have been able to enjoy an evening together comforted by the sounds of familiar music. Although the radio provided popular music for the troops overseas, it was not always guaranteed. Discs and record players were far more reliable. They could constantly accompany the troops no matter how far away they traveled from a radio broadcast station.

Figure 10. Soldiers enjoying the opportunity to listen to their hand-wound record player while on the battlefield.[136]

[136] Phonograph courtesy of Brian Matthews, "V-Discs'…," *Tomahawk Film Music* (blog), August 11, 2014, http://www.tomahawkfilms.com/blog/index-p=8673.html.

The power of recorded sound to comfort in an extreme time of need was especially true for the soldiers preparing to storm the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944. The Invasion of Normandy was the largest amphibious military assault in human history. More than 156,000 American, British, and Canadian soldiers landed on the beaches of occupied France. These soldiers represented the Allied offensive campaign, which began the long journey to capture Berlin and defeat Germany.

Figure 11. American soldiers keep calm to music from their portable Victrola as their craft heads across the English Channel to the coast of France. Normandy Invasion, June 1944.[137]

The photograph in figure 11 captured a moment aboard one of the American transport carriers while crossing the English Channel. Many of the men in this photo could only imagine the horrors they were about to face on the beaches of Normandy, France. For a brief

[137] Courtesy of National Museum of the U.S. Navy, "Normandy Invasion, June 1944," accession #:26-G-2401, accessed March 11, 2022, https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-europe/operation-overlord/crossing-the-channel/26-g-2401.html.

moment, they found solace in listening to the familiar sounds of music from back home. It was not documented whether or not the disc these men were listening to was a V-Disc, but either way this photo captures a powerful and revealing moment of the importance of music to the American troops.

Figure 12. World War II sailors in the Pacific theater inspect a new shipment of V-Discs. Each shipment included 20 records and 100 new needles.[138]

This next photo does contain verified V-Discs. While figure 11 captured American troops in Europe listening to music, figure 12 captured American sailors in the Pacific theater listening to V-Disc music. While the Navy did not initially participate in the V-Disc program,

[138] Courtesy of E. P. DiGiannantonio, as found in William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

it quickly regretted that error and requested their own line of V-Discs. In January of 1944, the *Billboard* magazine published an article arguing that sailors felt neglected by the popular music industry. Once they shipped out, they did not get the same opportunities to enjoy popular music as the other fighting men. They often missed USO camp shows by mere days, and they experienced very little radio entertainment. Secrecy was the nature of Navy deployment, so it was never public where their ships were or when they were coming into port. This made live entertainment challenging to arrange. The article posed the question, "wouldn't it be possible for each ship to get a supply of these recorded programs before they leave port? … Four weeks of programs could be carried in a small stack of records and would keep the crew mighty happy."[139] Just 6 months after this article was published the first Navy V-Discs were released in July 1944. Military troops across the different branches now all had access to the popular music provided by the V-Disc initiative.

In September 1944 *Billboard* published its first annual G.I. music popularity poll. The poll ranked the GIs favorite top three artist in five categories: (1) bands, (2) male vocalists, (3) female vocalists, (4) singing groups, and (5) the most promising new bands. Harry James's band was ranked number one for bands beating Glenn Miller's band which took third place. This was surprising since Glenn Miller was a popular bandleader within the military. Bing Crosby was the favorite male vocalist, Dinah Shore was the favorite female vocalist, the Andrew Sisters were the number one singing group, and Stan Kenton was the favorite promising new band.[140] These leading popular-music artists never produced a proper

[139] Lou Frankel, "Sailors are Forgotten Men on Overseas Troupe Skeds, 'Feel Lost in the Shuffle,'" *Billboard*, January 15, 1944, 30.

[140] "GI's Tab Their Favorites: First Annual GI Music Popularity Poll," *Billboard*, September 16, 1944, 12.

war song according to OWI expectations, but the troops loved their music anyways. The article went on to say,

> Hundreds of polls were conducted in camps and navel installation to determine just what the gang wanted. What they wanted was very clear – music, music and more music. It didn't matter whether the camp was big or small, male or female, army, navy, seabeas or marine – they not only wanted music but they wanted their special favorites so overwhelmingly that a post-wat musical patter might be drawn with the greatest of ease.[141]

War songs or not the troops wanted music from home. They wanted the hot dance tunes they were acquainted with from the 1930s. The sentimental love ballads reminded them of the loved ones they had left behind. The OWI may have thought that the nation needed better rousing, popular war songs, but the troops just needed music and that need was fulfilled by the V-Disc program. The recording ban would have prevented the current popular music from reaching the troops without the V-Disc program. The sentimental popular songs would not have been so successful in boosting troop morale if the troops never had the chance to hear them in the first place. The V-Disc program developed a symbiotic relationship with the popular music industry, which produced positive results for everyone involved.

Fulfilling the Need for Escapism

Although the popular music and the intended war songs of WWII did not meet the standards of the OWI, the music met the standards of the men and women fighting the war. This brings up the question once again about who gets to determine what was and was not successful war music? Since music was intended to bolster morale for the people fighting and supporting the war, then it follows that this demographic held the power to define what was and was not war music and determine its level of success. According to the polls taken from

[141] "GI's Tab Their Favorites: First Annual GI Music Popularity Poll," *Billboard*, September 16, 1944, 12.

within the military units, any popular songs that fulfilled the need for familiarity and provided escapism served as their choice of war music. If fun and enjoyable new music was still being produced back home, then there was hope for a better future. Hope inspired by the sounds of love songs and humanity rather than the misery experienced on the battlefield, an aural escapism.

Olin Downes, an editor for the newspaper *Variety,* responded on August 1942 to the OWI's criticism about the lack of war songs in the popular music industry. Downes claimed that the scarcity of popular war songs was because "this present war is a soberer war than the last one, and the generation that fights it has to fight and overcome tragic misrepresentation."[142] He continued that the first world war was believed to be the war to end all wars, and in that time "the men who had a rendezvous with death went with a flaming faith to meet it. There was also the fact that war had not yet lost its heroic glory. That came later …"[143] By the end of WWI the entire world had changed. Previously constructed social orders had broken down, and the antiquated heroic glory of warfare no longer disillusioned most people. The faith in humanity that had propelled so many to war during WWI had long been lost by the 1940s. The Great Depression in the 1930s significantly contributed to the need for escapism, and it had done nothing to restore people's faith in humanity. Downes continued his article by claiming "we have not only to win a war, but, as a people, to win back a faith. When men have a faith they sing."[144] The troops did not need rousing war songs that they could sing to while marching. They needed music to escape, music to renew their faith in humanity, and music that reminded them of good things in the world worth the fight.

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[142] Olin Downes, "Downes in the Times," *Variety,* August 26, 1942, 44.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.

The public did not need war songs to instill the ideas of heroic glory or honor in battle especially by the time the V-Disc program began, because they were fully aware of the harsh realities of war. They knew quite well that war was hell. This was made clear from the photograph in figure 13 were four Coast Guardsmen subject their heads to shaving to kill time. The soldiers did not need heroic war songs to misrepresent what they were about to face when the boats landed on German-lined beaches and the bullets started flying and their buddies around them started falling.

Figure 13. Four Coast Guardsmen, serving as scouts and proceeding in an LCM to the French invasion beach shortly before H-Hour, get their heads together and display their full accord with General Sherman on the subject of war. Normandy Invasion, June 1944.[145]

[145] Courtesy of National Museum of the U.S. Navy, "Normandy Invasion, June 1944," accession #:26-G-2410, accessed March 11, 2022, https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-europe/operation-overlord/crossing-the-channel/26-g-2410.html.

The hard realities of war would not be soothed through rousing war songs. There was no glory in mass destruction, nor honor in killing soldiers who were just like themselves, let alone the serious consequences of civilian casualties. WWII had the highest civilian cost of warfare up to this point in history. What the troops needed was a renewal of faith. They needed to hope in better days and escape from their hard reality. Sentimental love songs gave hope to troops abroad that there was something to look forward to if they managed to survive. There was still goodness and love in the world despite the destruction and death that surrounded them. Love songs and dance tunes provided the much-needed escape from the harsh realities such as extreme cold or heat, persistent hunger pains, never-ending exhaustion, long periods of boredom, intense moments of fear and anger, and so many other intense emotions that shadow warfare. Popular music also represented many aspects of the American culture that troops left behind to fight in foreign lands. Popular songs captured the commercialism of American culture. The songs were heavily influenced by the jazz style of music that had come to represent a uniquely American sound. Many song lyrics talked directly about specific places or specific cultural actions in America that would have been familiar to a wide range of soldiers. Songs like "Chattanooga Choo Choo" (1941), "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" (1942), "Oklahoma!" (1943), and "Swinging on A Star" (1944),[146] are a few immediate examples that come to mind. Instead of decreasing morale as the OWI feared, the popular sentimental music helped the troops remain connected to their loved ones back home. Just as the AFM had promised on December 27, 1941, "music for morale" was exactly what the music industry provided, even if it was not in the form of militant war songs.

[146] *Billboard,* weekly popularity charts in each year.

Familiarity and Relief Found in Recorded Sound

Soldiers did not want the militant marching war song that had been so successful in WWI. Those were songs of a completely different context. The soldiers of WWII wanted reminders of home and what they had left behind. The popular songs reminded soldiers of life before the war and all of the things they believed they were fighting to protect. These included "White Christmas," the number one song in popularity according to Billboard popularity charts for 1942; "I've Heard That Song Before," number one for 1943; "Swinging on a Star," #1 for 1944; and "Rum and Coca-Cola," number one for 1945. These songs were performed alongside hundreds of other popular songs that may or may not have had heavy or even slight referential material to the larger conflict at hand. Since these were the popular hits back home, these were also the songs that the soldiers were requesting through the V-Disc surveys. They wanted the new popular stuff from home.

In whatever form it was available, popular music from home carried emotional power. They also provided strength for the soldiers whose circumstances were far more dire than the folks back home. Colonel Leonard E. Pratt flew sixteen missions for the Army Air Force before he was shot down over enemy territory. He recounted a story to historian Lewis Erenberg about how the YMCA International managed to get a phonograph and a few records into his POW camp in Germany.

> I shall never forget the first time I heard one of the records. It was Lena Horne singing, "Embraceable You." This was followed by Frankie Carle's theme "Sunrise Serenade" with Miller's "Moonlight Serenade" on the flip side. One of the most stirring records which brought tears to my eyes was "I'll Be Home for Christmas." We played the records for hours at every opportunity permitted by the German guards.[147]

[147] Pratt to Erenberg, July 1994, as cited in William Howland Kenney, *Recorded Music in American Life: The Phonograph and Popular Memory, 1890-1945,* 200.

The popular tunes of "Embraceable You" (1930) and "Moonlight Serenade" (1939) sustained Colonel Pratt and his fellow soldiers during their internment in an enemy prison camp. Colonel Pratt also shared that when they played the popular hits on the camp piano even the German guards, once in a while, shouted a request for a particular song, like "Ein der Mood."[148] The popular songs from the United Sates carried the power of familiarity for American troops, and they were easily absorbed and enjoyable. While classical music played its own role in the U.S. war effort of WWII, it did not necessarily hit the same vein of familiarity as the popular music. The troops did not request more and more classical music in their V-Disc survey responses, although classical music was included in the V-Disc program. Instead, it was the familiar songs of popular tunes the soldiers wanted.

William Kenney recognized that songs like Glenn Miller's "Chattanooga Choo Choo" (1941) reminded the GIs of former feelings of happiness. Feelings they hoped to feel again. The song recalled the sensations of entering a train station to traveling back home to the countryside of Tennessee. A sensation most soldiers looked forward to, if they managed to survive the war.[149] Romantic love songs like Jo Stafford's "I'll Be Seeing You" (1944) reminded soldiers of the loved ones they were fighting for. For the fighting men, there were girls back home waiting for their return if they had known them before enlisting or not. From "The *Billboards* 1st Annual Survey of All Service Music Preferences" taken in 1944, the following songs were the top ten favorite records among military personnel.

1. *I'll Be Seeing You* …… Bing Crosby …….. Decca
2. *Swinging On a Star* ……. Bing Crosby …….. Decca
3. *Is You Is or Is You Ain't?* …. Louis Jordan ……. Decca
4. *G. I. Jive* …….. Johnny Mercer ……..... Capitol
5. *Holiday for Strings* …….. David Rose ……... Victor
6. *I'll Be Seeing You* ……..... Tommy Dorsey (Sinatra vocal) …… Victor

[148] Pratt to Erenberg, July 1994, as cited in Kenney, 200.
[149] Kenney, 199.

7. *I'll Get By* …… Harry James …….. Columbia
8. *Long Ago and Far Away* …. Bing Crosby …….. Decca
9. *Going My Way* ……. Bing Crosby …….. Decca
10. *G. I. Jive* ……... Louis Jordan ……. Decca[150]

This survey revealed that soldiers, sailors, marines, coast guarders and everything in between preferred sentimental songs and dance tunes opposed to marches and war ditties. The survey also tracked how the troops were securing their records. Purchasing the records was the primary acquisition method, but the second method was "supplied by Special Service Division."[151] The V-Disc program was part of the Special Service Division of the Army.

The type of music that soldiers categorized as war songs changed from the previous wars to the current war. Just has Oscar Hammerstein II had pointed out in May 1943 the type of music that was going to successfully fulfill its purpose as morale lifting music differed in this war.[152] The context in which the U.S. experienced the two wars was different, so naturally the music that accompanied the troops to battle would differ as well. War music still played the vital role of boosting morale, but the manner in which music accomplished its task changed. Troops needed their war music to provide moments of escapism and comforting sounds of familiarity.

[150] "G. I.'s Tab Favorite Disks," *Billboard*, September 23, 1944, 20.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Abel Green, *Variety*, May 26, 1943, 54.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: A Paradigm Shift in War Music

> Absence of marching songs in the G.I. preferences is not surprising because the boys are just not marching to the wars – they're riding and when they ride they sing nostalgic or novelty tunes – not marches or military slanted songs. As Dinah Shore put it neatly "You can sing anything you want to when you ride – and you probably do."[153]

The observation above was made in the *Billboard* magazine in September 1944 after popular vocalist Dinah Shore returned from an overseas USO tour along the European front. These words announcing the lack of new marching songs eloquently explained that popular songs met the needs of troops. The celebrity figure observed that soldiers transported from one area to another in machines did not need war songs with march-like rhythms and tunes. Instead, soldiers sang whatever songs they wanted to when sitting and waiting to arrive at the next objective. They sang familiar and comforting songs; songs their families back home were also singing. At a fundamental level, Dinah Shore's comments summarized a shift in the type of music that qualified as war music brought about by the changes in technology and delivery. If poplar music fulfilled both civilian and military personnel's morale needs, then that music counted as war music.

As discussed in the introduction, historians like John Bush Jones, Annegret Fauser, Nancy and William Young, and William Kenney have already explored the specific songs classified as war music during the 1940s. Sarah Kraaz codified the qualities of successful American war music into six neat classifications summarized as follows: (1) recruitment and training, (2) celebration of heroes and ideals, (3) support/protest of war, (4) weaponized propaganda, (5) expression of emotions, (6) entertainment. The early war songs of the 1940s fell into the first four categories. Songs like "Remember Pearl Harbor" (1941) fit into

[153] "G.I.'s Report Their Sing-Songs" *Billboard*, September 30, 1944, 11 and 65.

recruitment and support. “You're a Sap, Mr. Jap” (1941) and “We’ll Knock the Japs Right into the Laps of the Nazis” (1941) qualified as weaponized propaganda. “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition” (1942) fell nicely into the category of celebrating heroes and ideals, but what about the popular songs the troops listened to in 1944 and 1945? How could popular sentimental songs like “I’ll Be Seeing You” (1944), “Swinging on A Star” (1944), and “Is You Is or Is You Ain’t?” (1944) classify as war songs? As this thesis demonstrates, any popular song be it sentimental or militant can be used as a war song. The use of popular music in WWII expanded the nature of war songs. If the songs met the morale needs of the troops, then they served as war songs. War music also entertained and expressed the emotional experiences of those fighting and supporting the war. Music that qualified as successful war songs had shifted unexpectantly, and it was difficult for many to accept.

This paradigm shift in war music was not accepted by the OWI agency. As explained in chapter one, the OWI spent most of the war looking for the same type of war songs that had been used to great success in WWI. The organization desired the rousing militant war songs that inspired visions of victory and were easy to sing and march worthy. Perhaps out of touch due to a myopic view idealizing a victorious past, this vision was not shared by the public or the troops. As described in chapter four, marching music did not fulfill the emotional needs of the soldiers. Music that brought back fond memories of home and provided a sense of familiarity satisfied the U.S. military troops. The emotional need for escapism, prevalent in American culture by WWII, was another emotional need of military forces that popular music fulfilled. The success of popular music as war music would not have been possible if it were not for the growth and permanent fixture of the recording industry in the American way of life. As discussed in chapter two, the recording industry

established the concept of ‘popular hits’ to increase record sales through the Great Depression, but these popular hits also shortened the timeless quality of popular music. New musical releases did not remain popular for very long before they were replaced by the next new fad in popular music. This change in the music industry influenced the popularity lifespan of war songs, which greatly concerned the OWI. The OWI failed to recognize that no song, be it a war song or a romantic love ballad, managed to remain popular for a prolonged period in the 1940s; a trend that continues today.

The recording industry shifted how people consumed music. Music became far more accessible through the radio and recorded discs. Recorded sound made any type of music more available to military troops. This meant that any popular songs could serve as war songs if the troops needed them, as was the case in WWII. From the realm of recorded music, the V-Disc project was born. This program was a vital tool in providing morale-boosting music for the troops fighting overseas. The program provided the morale-boosting type of music determined by the troops, and the troops’ choice was current popular songs. The success of the V-Disc initiative disproved the claims that the popular music of WWII was not fitting war music and would not provide the necessary morale improvement. The program was highly successful, and the music was exactly what the U.S. troops needed to fulfill their mission in 1945. The popular music found on V-Discs and the nature of the program itself demonstrated a paradigm shift in defining war music. Soldiers no longer had to create their own music through singing. Rather, they carried portable music players while being transported on mechanical machines from one battle to the next.

A Singing Army to a Listening Army

WWI produced war songs that the troops could sing to while marching. It was a common belief that "a nation that sings can never be beaten."[154] The advancement of recorded sound changed this philosophy. Phonograph technology was around during WWI, but it had not engrained itself into the American way of life until the 1930s. By WWII, people had grown accustomed to hearing their favorite popular tunes performed by their favorite performing artists. Songs became associated with specific artists, for example it was known as Bing Crosby's "White Christmas," not Irving Berlin's "White Christmas," even though he composed it.

Soldiers found familiarity in the sounds of the recorded popular music not necessarily in the sheet music. The sounds of famous artists like Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, Duke Ellington, and many more stimulated comforting memories that a self-recreation could not. This is not to say that recorded music made singing within the military obsolete. It merely placed a greater emphasis on listening to music rather than recreation. No matter the musical talent level, any soldier could listen to the plethora of recordings provided through the V-Disc program. Each soldier could enjoy the sounds of a professional rendition without the fear of sounding terrible because they could not sing very well. This meant that the music soldiers could consume did not need to be easily recreated marching songs. Fitting war music for soldiers could now be any type of music they could obtain on a record, and it was the popular sentimental music they requested in record form. All the soldiers had to do was listen.

[154] "Govt. Help for War Songs," *Variety*, August 24, 1942, 44.

Mechanical Warfare

In summary, World War I was very different from World War II. WWII was a mechanical war. WWII was fought with increasingly mechanical devices such as fighter planes, long-range artillery with coordinates transmitted through short-wave radio signals, tanks, aircraft carriers, and eventually the atomic bomb, just to name a few. In an article published in the *Billboard* magazine in 1944, it was stated,

> Today we have a mechanize war – and mechanized use of music, too. Instead of songs to cheer the lagging soldier, there's a long line of motor trucks to whisk him from camp to front-line duties, and back home. [T]he juke box on the corner, together with the radio in the living room, serves to bring us the music of the moment. It's a mechanized age, and music has accepted the mechanization, taking the change in stride.[155]

As warfare changed the music industry responded in kind. The production of popular songs that fulfilled the necessary qualification for war music was paired with the industry's machine-like response of distributing that music. Much like how defense factories mass produced war machinery, the music industry extended their morale-boosting music through machines like the jukebox, portable record players, the radio, and television. In turn, popular music was created with these machines in mind. Soldiers did not need to sing war songs anymore because machines provided the morale-boosting sound. Just as Dinah Shore observed from her USO tour in 1944, troops did not need marching songs because they were not marching. Soldiers were transported from battles in machines. They destroyed the enemy with long-distance artillery machines. They communicated through machinery, so it naturally followed that a machine provided music. WWII saw the beginning of a paradigm shift for war music in military conflicts.

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[155] "War Songs on Wheel and Wing," *Billboard*, 1944 Music Year Book, 46.

The mechanical age opened the flood gates for any type of music to serve as adequate war music. The mechanics of recorded sound allowed for all types of music to reach military troops all over the world. This trend was supported by the successful realization of the V-Disc program in WWII. As long as the music lifted soldiers' morale during the time of war, it was then considered war music. Singable tunes were no longer necessary because the troops did not need to rely on signing to enjoy morale-boosting sound. Although WWII saw an increase in company bands, recorded sound would eventually void the necessity of each military unit having their own band to recreate morale boosting war music. The technology of recorded sound forever changed the nature of war music.

Recording projects like the V-Disc program supplied the music to important listeners like the soldiers fighting the war. Although governmental agencies like the OWI disagreed, the popular music of WWII served as appropriate war songs for those that needed it during the moments that mattered most. The method of distribution was key in determining successful war music. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that when music meets the emotional and entertainment needs of those listening to music to deal with war, that music then qualifies as war music.

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