"For the Soldier, By the Soldier": Self-produced Theater on Stateside U.S. Army Bases from 1983 - 2013

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“FOR THE SOLDIER, BY THE SOLDIER”:
SELF-PRODUCED THEATER ON STATESIDE
U.S. ARMY BASES FROM 1983 – 2013
by
KAREN MICHELLE DABNEY
B.A., Saint Olaf College, 2003

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“For the Soldier, By the Soldier”:
Self-produced Theater on Stateside U.S. Army Bases from 1983-2013
written by Karen Michelle Dabney
has been approved for the Department of Theatre & Dance

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(Dr. Bud Coleman, Committee Member)

Date______________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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“For the Soldier, By the Soldier”: Self-produced Theater on Stateside U.S. Army Bases from 1983 – 2013

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Oliver Gerland

Throughout the history of the U.S. military, soldiers have created their own theatrical entertainments as a means to boost morale, maintain resiliency, and avoid boredom. Today, the annual U.S. Soldier Show, Army Entertainment Division’s most widely attended production, reaches approximately 140,000 people worldwide. With over 200 Army bases situated in the United States alone, the reach of the Army Entertainment Division’s biggest national offering in 2013 was estimated to be 60,000 soldiers, family members, retirees, and civilian Department of Defense (DoD) employees.

This study aims to fill in a gap of knowledge for most theater scholars. Many are unaware that theater plays any role in organized military service. Because the number of U.S. Army bases operating their own independent theater seasons has dwindled over the years, it is important to study the few remaining Army-based community theaters to appreciate the unique structure and operations required within a military environment. Not only is this research important, it is long overdue. While the history of the U.S.O. during World War II has been heavily documented, there has been very little research on more recent uses of entertainment, specifically theater, in the military and even less research on those
performances produced from within the military (not just for the soldier, but created by the soldier, as well). Theater scholars would benefit from recognizing the potential contributions of the military, specifically the U.S. Army and its long-running Army Entertainment Division with its multi-million dollar budget, in building new generations of both theater artists and enthusiasts. Likewise, theater scholars must recognize the potential contributions they can make on U.S. military bases as artist-educators who can continue the development and facilitation of live theater in new and creative ways before the arts disappear from military installations altogether.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the first soldier I ever met, who taught me about integrity, compassion, and the art of storytelling: my grandfather, Harold C. Longaker.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I want to say thank you to my advisor, Dr. Oliver Gerland. His enthusiasm and patience kept me afloat during this journey. Additionally, the guidance and encouragement of the rest of my committee helped enrich my scholarship with passion. Thank you to Dr. Bud Coleman, Dr. Anja Lange, Dr. Beth Osnes, and Dr. Cecilia Pang. Many thanks also to my family who supported me with patience and endless love while I was consumed by this work.

Finally, this research would not have been possible without the enthusiastic involvement of Tim Higdon, Program Manager of Army Entertainment Division (AED). Tim was pivotal in helping me make connections, learn about AED, and appreciate the unique rewards and challenges of living and/or working in the Army community. Other contributors who gave significant time and multiple interviews during this process include Darryl Allara, Ken Freehill, Amy Kosby, and Steve Walpert. But I would be remiss if I did not offer genuine and heartfelt thanks to each of the 35 individuals who agreed to be interviewed and share their stories as part of this study. It was a privilege to learn about the role of theater in the lives of active duty soldiers and their families, and I am honored to share my findings with the global community. Hooah!
CONTENTS

CHAPTER

INTRODUCTION 1

I. AN OVERVIEW OF MILITARY AND ENTERTAINMENT 17

II. THE RISE OF ARMY ENTERTAINMENT BEFORE 1983 55

III. U.S. ARMY NATIONAL THEATER TOURS 78

The U.S. Army Soldier Show 80

Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program 102

BRAVO! Army Theater Touring Company 130

IV. U.S. ARMY COMMUNITY THEATER 140

Harlequin Dinner Theatre, Fort Sam Houston, TX 141

Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre, Fort Gordon, GA 153

Lee Playhouse, Fort Lee, VA 163

Fort Carson Community Theater, Fort Carson, CO 169

Showboat Theatre, Fort Polk, LA 175

Theater, Fort Campbell, KY 177

CONCLUSION 184

BIBLIOGRAPHY 200

APPENDIX

A. Military Ranking System 210

B. Military Acronyms 211
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C. Glossary of military terminology, synonyms, etc.</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. MWR Baseline Standards – Resource Drivers, Entertainment</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Installation Community Entertainment Program</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Proposal from 2010 for Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Participant testimonials from 2013 Tour of “Murder Two Point Uh-Oh!”</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Summary of Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company Tours, 2000-2006</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLES

Table

A. 2013 U.S. Army Soldier Show Tour Statistics 94
B. 2013 Improv Theatrical Workshops: Statistics on Participants and Audience 109
C. Comparison of Participation in 2011 and 2013 Improv Theatrical Workshop Tours 109
D. Percentage of Cast Participation at 2013 Workshops 110
E. Comparing Cast Size with Audience and Overall Participation in 2013 Tour 111
F. A 2012 comparison of statistics demonstrating Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre’s impact on the success of Army Theater programming on posts. 157
G. A comparison of stateside Army Theaters statistics, looking at output over a period of six years, 2008-2013 158
H. A comparison of stateside Army Theaters statistics from 2013 159
FIGURES

Figure

1. 2013 statistics showing the division of volunteer hours dedicated to Army community theaters, active duty soldiers vs. civilians (including spouses, retirees, and DoD employees) 179

2. 2013 statistics on the box office revenue of operating stateside Army theaters (not included: Fort Gordon) 181
INTRODUCTION

Entertainment eases the burdens of life, and it has always been a means of refreshment from fatigue and boredom. The original meaning of entertainment catches this point. The old French word _entretenir_ means to maintain, to hold together.

(Mæland & Brunstad 175)

It is a little known fact that two of Broadway’s giants, director/choreographer Bob Fosse and producer/director Joseph Papp, began their theater careers while serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II. Papp developed and directed a variety show in which Fosse was a performer; the production toured various ships and U.S. military bases overseas as part of the Navy Entertainment Group. These theater legends got their start in military entertainment that was created by and for active duty servicemen and women. Throughout the history of the U.S. military, soldiers have created their own theatrical entertainments as a means to boost morale, maintain resiliency, and avoid boredom. The U.S. Army has the longest-running and most diverse entertainment programming of any American military branch. Today, the annual U.S. Soldier Show, Army Entertainment Division’s most widely attended production, reaches approximately 140,000 people worldwide. With over 200 Army bases situated in the United States alone, the reach of the Army Entertainment Division’s biggest national offering in 2013 was estimated to be 60,000 soldiers, family members, retirees, and civilian Department of Defense (DoD) employees.
For as long as America has been its own nation, there has been a military in place to defend it. Most citizens have limited knowledge of military life and culture. The little that is known is based on the generalized, stereotyped depictions found in the media. Many Americans have never had exposure to the military lifestyle. Therefore, they have no understanding of the significance of live theatrical performances created by and for the U.S. military. As long as there have been American soldiers, those soldiers have found ways to occupy their down time. However, the U.S. Army has only formally supplied entertainment, in war and peace, for its soldiers in the last century. According to Mæland & Brunstad, “entertainment in war and conflicts ranges from playing cards, reading books, writing letters, all kinds of physical activities and even regular ‘front theatres’ during the First World War, to electronic and digital activities in recent operations [...] the zone of war is also a zone of entertainment” (175). While the effect of entertainment on morale has not been quantified, many scholars deem the military’s acceptance and continuation of entertainment programming an unspoken, informal acknowledgment that the absence of diversion and leisure activities is associated with low morale, poor performance, and poor soldier retention.

Currently, there are more than 450,000 active duty soldiers and officers serving in the U.S. Army. In a survey conducted in 2004 (when 486,812 men and women were active), self-reported levels of morale were lowest, by far, among soldiers, whereas those who identified as officers and senior officers had much higher self-reported levels of morale (Dempsey 47). War has impacted soldiers and their families differently than in previous generations. In World War II, for every 2.4 service members wounded, one died; in Vietnam, it was 3:1. With the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the ratio was 9:1 (Hosek 19).
During World Wars I and II, American males joined the military primarily through the draft and their deployments (to Europe, North Africa, or the Pacific) were extended until the conclusion of the war. Soldiers often were gone, fighting, for several years. When they returned home, especially after the end of World War II, soldiers were received as national heroes. Their contribution and patriotism were honored. Korean War veterans experienced more lukewarm homecomings, but their service was still commemorated.

Soldiers who returned from the Vietnam War often were vilified, however. The “conflict” in Vietnam was politically-charged and many Americans did not agree with the United States’ involvement. Not only was the deployment of soldiers to Vietnam not universally supported but, because America lost the war, returning soldiers were viewed as losers.

Although the draft was in effect until 1973, draftees for the conflict in Vietnam were only enrolled for one-year deployments. These shorter terms meant an end to unit cohesion and camaraderie as soldiers were being sent in one by one to replace others who had fallen or were discharged (Saddik 177). Such strategies contributed to the loneliness that soldiers felt while overseas in combat; focus was placed not on the survival of the unit but, rather, on that of the individual. Loved ones who tried to ease veterans’ homecoming experience were ill-prepared to deal with the psychological and physical injuries soldiers brought home with them.

Psychological and physical injuries are also a major concern for veterans of recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Improvised explosive devices triggered by widely available technological instruments such as cell phones were frequently employed; medical advances led to injured soldiers returning home alive, but scarred. While survival rates are higher than ever, the number of soldiers returning home with “invisible wounds” has grown exponentially.
Recent veterans have had to learn to live with Traumatic Brain Injuries and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; it is interesting to note that during previous wars, these conditions were known by terms such as “battle fatigue” and “shell shock,” signaling damage to a soldier’s external, physical self and not his psychological well-being (Adams 7). Michael Meade, who runs a program called Voices of Veterans, explains how “even the most wounded people, given the chance, want to tell the story of that wound. A wound is like a mouth” (Goodwin). These soldiers and their families have stories to share and, as “mouth” and “voices” suggest, they do it through performance.

This study aims to fill in a gap of knowledge for most theater scholars. Many are unaware that theater plays any role in organized military service. Because the number of U.S. Army bases operating their own independent theater seasons has dwindled over the years, it is important to study the few remaining Army-based community theaters to appreciate the unique structure and operations required within a military environment. Not only is this research important, but it is long overdue. While the history of the U.S.O. during World War II has been heavily documented, there has been very little research on more recent uses of entertainment, specifically theater, in the military and even less research on those performances produced from within the military (not just for the soldier, but created by the soldier, as well). Theater scholars must recognize the potential contributions of the military, specifically the U.S. Army and its long-running Army Entertainment Division with its multi-million dollar budget, in building new generations of both theater artists and enthusiasts. Likewise, theater scholars must recognize the potential contributions they can make on U.S. military bases as artist-educators who can continue the development and facilitation of live
theater in new and creative ways before the arts disappear from military installations altogether.

Army Entertainment Division serves the larger mission of the Army’s division of Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR). According to the MWR website, this entails a commitment “to the well-being of the community of people who serve and stand ready to defend the nation, to enhance the lives of Soldiers, their families, civilian employees and military retirees.” In a 2005 government document outlining the funding of MWR programming, the goals of MWR services were summarized as such:

a) Supports combat readiness and effectiveness
b) Supports recruitment and retention of quality personnel
c) Provides leisure time activities which support a quality of life commensurate with generally accepted American values
d) Promotes and maintains the mental and physical well-being of authorized personnel
e) Fosters community pride, soldier morale, and family wellness; promotes unit esprit de corps
f) Eases the impact of unique aspects of military life, such as frequent relocations and deployment. ("Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Activities" 1)

In the passage above, I have underlined the key terms that are most often used to support the propagation of Army Theater. My research has addressed the specific nuances of theater produced from within the U.S. Army on stateside bases from 1983 to 2013 as it pertains to the MWR mission.

The years 1983-2013 are significant for many reasons. The year 1983 was the beginning of an avalanche of changes in the U.S. Army which caused a shift in both the focus of and the funding available for MWR programming. Then Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham, Jr. published a White Paper announcing 1983 as the “Year of the Family,” officially acknowledging the importance of serving the soldier’s family in efforts to retain the soldier.
Having been an all-volunteer army since 1973, there was at the time a new responsibility and dependence on the soldier’s family to ensure soldier readiness and resiliency (the draft made retention an unnecessary concern). By 1985, Congress had approved major budget cuts which forced the Army’s Music and Theater Program to begin charging admission for its on-post entertainment. The U.S. Army Soldier Show began its current incarnation of its traveling variety show in 1983.

The main questions of this study focus on the theater produced by and for active duty soldiers and their family members as part of the U.S. Army’s Morale, Welfare, and Recreation division on stateside U.S. Army bases from 1983 to 2013. These questions include:

* What are the forms and functions of live theater produced by and for U.S. Army personnel (and their families) on select U.S. Army bases from 1983-2013?
* How do the form, function, and organization of the Army Entertainment Division and individual Army community theaters compare?
* How did Army Entertainment Division originate and how did theater become such a valued component of AED?
* Is there a relationship between the different forms of theater offered (i.e. scripted versus improvised dialogue) and the effects on morale, well-being, quality of life, or resiliency?
* Is there evidence that Army Entertainment Division and individual Army community theaters are producing new theater enthusiasts and/or artists?
* Is there a relationship between the demand for live theater on Army bases and the number of extended or multiple deployments in recent years?

This study will seek to discover the form and function of self-generated, live theatrical entertainments in the U.S. Army on select U.S. Army bases from 1983 to 2013. Included will be an examination of the organizational structures in place at the garrison, local, and national levels. Because the Army had more than 200 installations and bases in the United States in 2013, this research focused on a representative sample of stateside Army bases that either hosted Army Entertainment Division theatrical touring productions (the long-running Soldier Show, the newer Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program, or the now
extinct Bravo! Army Theatrical Touring Company) or operated their own theater season between the years of 1983 to 2013. Practical issues of accessibility for visiting bases, conducting interviews, and digging through base archives affected the selection of Army bases included in this study: Fort Carson near Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fort Riley near Manhattan, Kansas; Fort Lee near Petersburg, Virginia; Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia; Fort Polk near Leesville, Louisiana; Fort Campbell near Clarksville, Tennessee; Fort Leonard Wood near Lebanon, Missouri; Fort Shafter in Honolulu, Hawaii; Fort Bliss near El Paso, Texas; and the home base of the Army Entertainment Division, Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.

There are a few terms that need to be defined before exploring the state of theater produced by and for U.S. Army personnel (and their families) on select stateside U.S. Army bases. The following definitions are derived from the U.S. Army, as well as other military sources. According to Military One Source, a website for troops and families in all branches of the U.S. military, resilience is defined as “the ability to withstand, adapt, recover and grow in the face of challenges and demands.” According to a recent 2011 study, Promoting Psychological Resilience in the U.S. Military, the word resilience has been explained many ways by many people, as seen in a ten-page appendix with hundreds of definitions. The one used throughout the study comes from Jensen and Fraser in 2005: “Resilience is the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity” (Meredith, et. al 3). The Army frequently references this notion of resilience or resiliency in its continued support of MWR.

Central to the very name of MWR, morale was defined in 1999 by the Department of the Army as “the state of the spirits of an individual or group as shown by confidence, cheerfulness, discipline, and willingness to perform tasks” (Edens, et. al 405). It is necessary to
understand how the Army defines this term and uses it in its mission to improve the *quality of life* for soldiers and their families. Another phrase often used by the U.S. Army, this underlined term was defined in a military study from 1992: “The quality of life is the degree to which the experience of an individual's life satisfies that individual's wants and needs (both physical and psychological)” (Kerce). In addition to these terms, the emphasis on *well-being* has become more present in the literature. In a 2009 military study, the researchers acknowledge the U.S. Army’s modern definition of well-being is ineffective, as it merely refers to “a state of physical, mental, and social health” and DoD research has focused on “only limited aspects of well-being” (Goodwin, et. al 16). The research has not always kept up with the MWR’s efforts to meet the demands of soldiers and their families.

When considering the people I interviewed, it is important to understand the classifications of civilian and active duty. A *civilian* is “a person following the pursuits of civil life, especially one who is not an active member of the military, the police, or a belligerent group” according to Webster’s Dictionary. A person who is labeled *active duty* serves full-time in the active military service of the United States as defined by the Department of Defense. Many of the people interviewed had served for the U.S. Army previously, making them civilians who are also veterans. *Veteran* is defined by the American War Library as “any person who served for *any* length of time in *any* military service branch [original emphasis].”

Beyond these definitions, it is useful to review a few terms I have incorporated into my study. The term “theater” (or “theatre”) is rarely found in the literature of the world of military entertainment. However, the phrases “live performance” or “live entertainment” are often used to describe live theatrical events. Therefore, this study uses the terms interchangeably.
Additionally, in narrowing the scope of this study, I created my own categories of military theater based on the motto coined by Irving Berlin that serves as Army Entertainment Division’s mission statement: “For the soldier, by the soldier.” Using the terms “self-produced” and “outsourced,” I distinguish entertainment based on who it is made by and who it is made for. Additionally there are several Appendices at the end of this study to assist readers in interpreting the abundant military vernacular. One will find an appendix dedicated to each of the following: ranking system, acronyms, and a glossary/thesaurus of commonly used terms and phrases (Appendices A-C).

This research project was a heartfelt endeavor that spanned two years, five states, eight cities, four rehearsals, two live performances, three archived performances, and thirty-five interviews. Along with my personal observations, the interviews serve as the foundation for this study. They were conducted in-person whenever possible (phone interviews were the alternative mode of inquiry) and were recorded on a digital voice recorder. The individuals contributing to this study have varying levels of theater production and military experience. Working both with the Institutional Research Board and the Army bases’ individual Media Relations offices, steps were carefully taken to ensure that this research endeavor protected individual rights and military security. Below is the complete list of interviewees who contributed to this study. Their involvement in Army Theater will be detailed as they are referenced within the body of this dissertation. Interviews ranged from ten to seventy-five minutes in length, given an individual’s involvement and availability.

Timothy Higdon, Fort Sam Houston, TX
Army Entertainment Division Program Manager, civilian/ veteran

Amy Kosby, Fort Sam Houston, TX
Army Entertainment Division, Accounts & Video, civilian/veteran

Nicole Coppinger, Fort Sam Houston, TX
Army Entertainment Division, Scenic Designer, civilian

Sabine Mann, Fort Carson, CO
Fort Carson Community Theatre, Artistic Director, civilian/military spouse

Vic Colletti, Fort Carson, CO
Fort Carson Community Theatre, Former Artistic Director, civilian/veteran

Darryl Allara, Dallas, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Artistic Director, civilian/veteran

Ken Freehill, Dallas, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Artistic Director, civilian contractor

Trecia Wilson, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, civilian/military spouse

M SGT Mike Zaring, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, active duty

Julie Zaring, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, civilian/military spouse

2CL PVT Catin Downing, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, active duty

SPC Sarai Eckblat, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, active duty

SGT Cassandra Eckblat, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, active duty

Katima Underwood, 29, Fort Bliss, TX
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, civilian/military spouse

Brad Carlton, Fort Riley, KS
MWR, Recreation Manager, civilian/veteran

Carolyn Tolliver Lee, Fort Riley, KS
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, civilian/military spouse
John Triplett, Fort Riley, KS
Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop, Participant, civilian

Lee Farmer, Fort Lee, VA
Lee Playhouse, Artistic Director, civilian/ veteran

Steven Walpert, Fort Gordon, GA
Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre, Artistic Director, civilian/ veteran

Thomas Watson, Fort Polk, LA
Showboat Theatre, Artistic Director, civilian/ veteran

Vanita Rae Smith, Fort Shafter, HI
Richardson Theater, Former Artistic Director, civilian

Shawn Kjos, Fort Sam Houston, TX
Harlequin Dinner Theatre, Managing Director, civilian

Robert J. Olivas, Fort Sam Houston, TX
Harlequin Dinner Theatre, Artistic Director, civilian

Bonnie Murphy, Fort Campbell, KY
MWR, Special Events Coordinator, civilian

Denise Heller, Fort Bragg, NC
MWR, Special Events Coordinator, civilian

Patric Taylor, Los Angeles, CA
Former member of V Corps Training Road Show, veteran

Jeremiah Luttrell, Boulder, CO
Former member Old Guard, veteran

SPC Joshua Theno, Fort Leonard Wood, MO
2013 U.S. Soldier Show, Performer & Technician, active duty

SPC Millie Sneed, Fort Leonard Wood, MO
2013 U.S. Soldier Show, Performer, active duty

SGT Quentin Dorn, Fort Leonard Wood, MO
2013 U.S. Soldier Show, Performer, active duty

MSG Renee Hamilton, Fort Leonard Wood, MO
2013 U.S. Soldier Show, Performer, active duty
Before asking interview subjects specific questions based on their relationship to Army Entertainment, I began with broad questions and prompts to get participants to speak openly and freely about their experiences. These questions and prompts included:

* Please discuss your involvement with current and past live theater within the Army.
* What first compelled you to get involved with Army entertainment opportunities?
* Which entertainment endeavors have been most successful, in your opinion, at boosting morale and/or enhancing “quality of life”?
* What skills have you gained from performing, producing, or attending live performances?

Specific questions for those soldiers and family members performing in live theater events included, but were not limited to, the following questions:

* What live performance opportunities exist within your base?
* What type of performer are you?
* Did you perform prior to your involvement with the military?
* Do you hope to continue performing after your military career?
* What is the audition process like?
* How long are you contracted to perform?
* In your opinion, what role does live entertainment play in troops’ and their families’ lives?

Specific questions for producers and directors of theatrical programs on Army bases included:

* What live performances are offered on base?
* How do you recruit performers and technicians?
* How many troops attend performances on base? Family members? Civilians?
* How are performances advertised?
* What is the cost of attending performances?
*What are the costs of producing performances?*
*How much support do you have from your base? From the U.S. Army?*
*Which performances have been most successful and why?*
*What are the dimensions and technical capacity of your post theater?*
*How often is your post theater used for live performance?*
*How many audience members can you accommodate at your live performances?*
*Do you seek support and/or consultation from civilian theater professionals?*
*How did you first begin producing/directing for U.S. Army entertainment?*
*Do you see a decline or increase in the popularity of live entertainment?*

Beyond these semi-structured interviews, I was able to accumulate research from military archives. This included accessing official Army documents, personal photos, archival footage of performances, and on-site tours of theater facilities. During my field research, I took copious notes on my own observations from interviews, facility tours, rehearsals, and performances. In rehearsals, I acquired consent from participants before making any digital recording and taking notes.

In my field research, I was both participant and observer. In my compilation of this research, I was an archivist. In my conversations and interviews, I was an artist/scholar. These various identities informed my perspective on the material presented in this study. Applying Heisenberg’s Principle, it should be noted that my participation in the events I observed not only affected the outcome but also eliminated the possibility of complete objectivity.

Recently, there has been a surge of theater scholarship in the area of war and performance. In 2014, both the Association for Theatre in Higher Education conference and the American Society of Theatre Research conference featured sessions that were dedicated to the relationship between theater and military. Notably, the research presented in these conferences focused either on earlier military history (pre-Vietnam War) or on the veteran
experience. No scholars apart from myself were conducting research on the role of theater in the lives of active duty soldiers and their families.

My own appreciation and passion for theater education is rooted in the personal and communal benefits of making theater and it is refreshing to see the recent cooperation of the arts, the military, and the mental health profession. Since the summer of 2014, I have been a volunteer with a local Denver group, The Art of War Project, which provides an artistic outlet for veterans to meet and discuss their experiences while creating pieces of visual art, outside the sterility of an institutional setting. The project was started by U.S. Army veteran Curtis Bean, who served two extended tours in the recent Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Bean returned to the states and identified a desire for local veterans to express themselves, both socially and artistically.

This dissertation is the culmination of intense field research and personal connections made across delineations of civilian/soldier, professional artist/amateur artist. It has given me a deeper respect for soldiers and their families. In my study, I discovered that the human need for self-expression and communal celebration can be found anywhere. My research provides a thorough guide to ways that the U.S. Army currently utilizes theater to serve this inherent need.

Chapter One serves as a literature review and provides an overview of the diverse paths taken over the last century of American history in which military and entertainment have converged. The chapter is divided into sub-categories that identify 1) whether the programming was “self-produced” or “outsourced” entertainment, and 2) whether that programming was created before or after 1983, the start of this study’s chronological scope. By looking at the various ways the U.S. military has initiated and/or benefited from live entertainment, the
reader will be able to appreciate the specific theatrical endeavors produced by the U.S. Army on stateside installations for soldiers and their families from 1983 to 2013.

I narrow the focus in Chapter Two to the beginning decades of Army Theater. From the formation of the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) division to the establishment of an Army Entertainment Division, I show the evolution of the world’s largest community theater producing entity of the 1960s and 1970s. With financial and artistic support, Margaret “Skippy” Lynn, a female civilian actress, was able to establish an Army Music and Theater program on every single Army installation across the globe (upwards of 400 bases at its peak). Every base had its own entertainment director(s), and, often, its own on-post facilities dedicated to the performing arts. By the early 1980s, a major shift was felt in the world of Army Entertainment. As more attention was placed on family-oriented programming, Army Theaters were forced to become self-sustaining, for-profit theaters. Worldwide, the number of full-time operational theaters fell from 400+ in the 1960s to 20 in 2013.

Though individual post theaters were not thriving, there was an increase in the demand for national entertainment programming to serve the communities that had lost their Army Theater. Chapter Three examines three theatrical touring shows that Army Entertainment Division sponsored between 1983 and 2013: the U.S. Army Soldier Show, the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program, and the BRAVO! Army Theater Touring Company. These national tours varied greatly in content, format, production budget, and venue. Looking at the number of participants versus spectators provides insight into AED’s future programming goals.
In 2013, there were only six remaining stateside Army community theaters still regularly producing live shows. Chapter Four provides case studies of these remaining post theaters and reflects the variety of methods entertainment directors have used to stay afloat. By comparing the remaining Army Theaters, future methods can be proposed to maintain or increase the presence of theater year-round on stateside installations.

The Conclusion provides a new model for approaching the use of live theater on stateside U.S. Army bases, based on the history of Army Entertainment Division and the mission of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Division. Pulling from first-hand interviews gathered in this study and looking at spectator/participant relationships, I propose that the Army Entertainment Division expand its motto, “For the soldier, by the soldier” to include more community-based practices which focus on process and building an ensemble. AED’s new motto should evolve to utilize theater to its fullest potential: “For the soldier, by the soldier, with the soldier.”
CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF MILITARY AND THEATER

Theater and the military have been associated for millennia. Even in the limited span of American history, there are many examples of military-related theater events. The relationship is portrayed in musicals and operettas that depict soldier characters producing entertainment for their fellow soldiers. These moments of meta-theater allude to an awareness of self-initiated entertainment occurring in the military. Some examples include *Dames at Sea* (1966), *South Pacific* (1949), *Privates on Parade* (1977), and *Pirates of Penzance* (1879). The most direct reference is found in the start of Act II of *South Pacific*, where we see enlistees and nurses performing in a holiday revue, “Thanksgiving Follies.”

This chapter will provide a brief historical survey of various ways that theater and the military have merged in the United States to serve soldiers and their families, and, sometimes, civilians as well. When surveying the various forms of entertainment and theater being produced for soldiers past and present, it is important to consider the producing body: *Who* is providing the funding and other support services, *why* are they doing so, and *what* is the effect? An additional factor to consider is *when* these examples occur in modern American military history. The 1980s was a decade of major changes in the areas of military and entertainment. There was a noticeable shift in the function of entertainment in the efforts of
the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) divisions across U.S. military branches. In addition, the role of technology and its impact on the evolution of modern warfare have made contemporary strides towards soldier retention and resilience more significant and more challenging.

Specifically, 1983 is an important marker in the timelines of military and theater. That year saw major shifts in the U.S. Army’s approach to and employment of live entertainment. Then Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham, Jr. published a White Paper announcing 1983 as the “Year of the Family,” calling for a major change in the military branch’s focus on soldier retention and resilience. MWR programming began offering more family-oriented activities, including child-care and after-school classes. 1983 also welcomed the launch of the modern day U.S. Army Soldier Show, Army Entertainment Division’s most successful and widely-seen theatrical endeavor. By the mid-1980s, many Army Music and Theater programs worldwide were closing their doors. Reasons were primarily financial and managerial. Entertainment directors were retiring or passing away, but an even larger complication was the shift in the amount and type of funding Army Entertainment was eligible to receive. In 1985, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget Act was passed (the legislation likely had been developing well before 1985). The few Army Theaters still operating were given a five-year term to transition into a fully self-sufficient theater requiring no financial assistance from the U.S. government. Lastly, in 1982, the USO officially stepped away from non-celebrity entertainment, increasing demand for the U.S. Army and other military branches’ MWR entertainment programming.
The survey provided in this chapter is delineated into two major time periods: before 1983 and after 1983. Within each of these time periods, I will consider both “outsourced” and “self-produced” military entertainment. By “self-produced” military entertainment, I mean entertainment that is 1) fully funded by a U.S. military branch and/or the Department of Defense and 2) created by and for soldiers and their families. By “outsourced” military entertainment, I mean entertainment that is 1) initiated and/or partially funded by non-military or non-governmental agencies and 2) created by civilians and intended for soldiers and their families.

The role of outsourced entertainment in military communities is complex. Cooperating with government and military agencies, civilian programs and organizations like the USO target their talents and resources towards providing diversion and entertainment for the troops, during periods of war and peace. The motivation behind outsourced theatrical endeavors can be difficult to discern; though well-intentioned, such efforts can come across as presumptive, patronizing, and pandering. “Presumptive” because assumptions are made by outsiders regarding what military communities require to cope with stress. “Patronizing” because actions are carried out by a majority (the civilian population of America) providing for a minority population (less than 1% percent of U.S. population is active duty military) with its notion of suitable entertainment. “Pandering” because “civilian guilt” is alleviated in the provision of live performances for soldiers and their families. Whether participating at a local or national level, though not burdened by the protocol and restrictions of operating within a military hierarchy, civilian-created entertainment is serving troops and their families from a place of difference, or otherness.
Military agencies, including those funded by the Department of Defense, operate their theatrical endeavors more rigidly than most civilian entertainment entities, though often they have more resources (financial, manpower, etc.) at their disposal. Military organizations acknowledge the benefits of social interaction and communal celebration, putting energy and resources into theatrical outlets to boost morale, enhance quality of life, and strengthen individual and family resiliency. The phrase entertainment “for the soldier, by the soldier,” first coined by Irving Berlin during World War I, suggests a sense of ownership, pride, and dedication that is absent when soldier communities experience outsourced performances. While the number of self-produced entertainment initiatives and the funding behind them fluctuate from year to year, the military has actively continued entertainment programming for its soldiers and their families, identifying benefits from attending as well as participating in the creation of entertainment. The military community is responsible for its own morale boosting and diversionary entertainment, offering live performances from a place of familiarity or similarity.

While it is important to understand the spectrum of performances provided for soldiers and their families by non-military entities, my case studies focus on entertainment endeavors funded and manned by the military. Upon discovering the variety of self-produced entertainment endeavors within the military since 1983 and the scarcity of research investigating them, I began to focus my dissertation on theater “for the soldier, by the soldier” in the U.S. Army starting from this point in American military history. I further narrowed my research by honing in on the decline of Army Theater being produced on stateside installations since 1983 and centering attention on the first-hand experiences of theater-producing soldiers, family members, and Department of Defense (DoD) civilian employees. The scope and purpose
of this study will be more evident after I survey the wide variety of theater and entertainment created for soldiers and their families.

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*Outsourced Theater & the Military: Before 1983*

**Federal Theatre Project’s CCC Murder Mystery**

As part of the New Deal, President Franklin D. Roosevelt set up a “Tree Army” to beautify national parks. The Tree Army, known officially as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), was a collaborative effort between the U.S. Army and the U.S. Forestry Service (Osborne 154). Young men enlisted to serve as soldiers for the environment. They were shipped to the northwestern United States, where they lived and worked in isolation from civilian life. Affectionately referred to as CCC boys, these young men craved diversion and entertainment to occupy their leisure time.

In response to this new demand for live entertainment, the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) created an innovative production to tour to CCC camps in late 1936. Hallie Flanagan, leader of FTP, wrote about serving the Tree Army:

> Three hundred thousand boys in C.C.C. camps throughout the United States want dramatic entertainment [...] they do not want from us pallid productions of the classics or lukewarm imitations of Broadway. The camps deserve and should have the best that we can send out. (Osborne 156)

Flanagan tapped Grace Hayward to write a script that would appeal to the CCC boys. Hayward researched CCC camps and interviewed enrollees to specifically cater her script for its intended audience (Chansky 343). The resulting interactive production, *The CCC Murder Mystery*, rehearsed for two days at each new stop and incorporated 32 CCC boys from the local camp for
each performance. In its thirteen-month lifespan, the “Theatre of the Wilderness” utilized some 6,500 CCC performers and reached an audience (composed entirely of male enlistees and commanding officers) of nearly 50,000. (Osborne 153, 157; Chansky 332). Reports suggested that young CCC officers’ performance improved after their involvement in producing The CCC Murder Mystery. Major Earl L. House, the first national coordinator of CCC, noted how the “boys” took a more active role at their camps, having “benefit[ed] both in experience and knowledge” (Osborne 157). Not only did FTP establish a new model of military entertainment that would be seen in 21st century reinventions like the Army Theatrical Murder Mystery Comedy Workshop Program (see Chapter Four), but it also created a new audience for American theatre as 40% of CCC enrollees reported having never seen live theatre prior to their attendance at The CCC Murder Mystery (Osborne 167).

**Camp Shows, Inc. (USO)**

There are a number of resources that discuss the origins and history of the USO and its initial producing body, Camp Shows, Inc. Three major sources I utilized for this brief survey include Weldon B. Durham’s book on Liberty Theatres, which concludes with a concise overview of military entertainment’s evolution from WWI to WWII, Frank Coffey’s photographic history Always Home: 50 Years of the USO, and Lynn Heberling’s dissertation from 1989 entitled Soldiers in Greasepaint: USO – Camp Shows, Inc., during World War II. The United Service Organizations is an interfaith group that was established on February 4, 1941 at the urging of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help provide off-post recreational opportunities for drafted and enlisted soldiers. The original organizations involved include the Young Men’s Christian
Association (YMCA), Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), National Catholic Community Service, Salvation Army, Jewish Welfare Board, and Travelers Aid Society.

The newly minted USO coordinated dances, ice cream socials, and entertainment tours featuring both celebrities and non-celebrities. Performers were nicknamed “soldiers in greasepaint” and were paid standard union rates to entertain troops in the states and overseas. According to Durham, in its first seven years, USO entertainment endeavors employed over 7,000 performers and produced over 400,000 performances (164).

Camp Shows, Inc. was created on October 30, 1941. Though it was funded through the USO, the entertainment entity was led by professionals in the theater and film industries (Coffey 25). The first president of the entertainment group, Abe Lastfogel, managed to convince all the performance unions (SAG, AEA, and major musicians’ unions) to allow USO entertainers to waive typical payment and working condition agreements in order to bring live theatrical entertainment to troops overseas (Coffey 25). Camp Shows, Inc. produced four different entertainment circuits to meet the various needs and demands for diversion during World War II. The Victory Circuit produced full-length Broadway plays and musicals, the Blue Circuit toured vaudevillian acts, the Hospital Circuit was a more intimate and condensed entertainment offering for wounded soldiers and medical staff, and the Foxhole Circuit provided celebrity entertainment near the front lines of battle (Coffey 25-26). The Foxhole Circuit was the most popular circuit for several reasons: the entertainment was an assortment of variety acts; it drew A-list celebrity visitors; and it often utilized make-shift performance areas, such as flatbed trucks, because it was down range. It was named “Foxhole” Circuit because of the tour’s proximity to the action where snipers could be embedded in nearby foxholes. The talent
recruited for this tour was not given details about their overseas travel plans in advance; the itineraries were kept very secure because of their proximity to battle sites. Like the Liberty Theatres of WWI, USO shows initially charged soldiers the price of admission but soon abolished such fees realizing there was no feasible way to keep admission fees low and recuperate production costs. Such costs would be alleviated by corporate sponsorships, private donations, and “smileage” stamp-books (a term and product created in WWI for civilians to give “smiles” to soldiers far away at military training camps) (Collins). By early 1947, Camp Shows, Inc. was deactivated, though the USO retained its corporate identity. But by early 1950, with the impending Korean War, Camp Shows, Inc. was reinstated for a few more years.

The most iconic figure of the USO was comedian Bob Hope. He began touring overseas with the USO during World War II, and continued to do so during the Korean and Vietnam Wars. According to a special forward written by the comedian in Always Home: 50 Years of the USO, the Official Photographic History, Bob Hope began his involvement with the USO in May 1941. Hope performed his radio show live stateside in 1941, went on his first USO wartime tour in Alaska by 1942, and conducted his first combat-zone tour in 1943 (Coffey 27). The comedian continued to entertain troops on USO tours through the decades, bringing his annual USO Christmas Show to Vietnam for the first time in 1964 (Coffey 91). Fifty years later, at the publication of this photographic essay, Hope was still actively involved with the USO. In the collection, Hope both commended the organization, whose sole purpose was to entertain and provide for the U.S. military, and also celebrated the USO for its complete subsistence on civilian donations and volunteers. The President of the USO at the time of publication,
Chapman Cox, also commended the “American spirit of volunteerism” that enabled the USO to remain healthy and operational (Coffey).

**The Army Play by Play contest**

In late 1942, the U.S. Army approached Broadway producer John Golden about acquiring simple, self-contained plays to self-produce at its camp theaters. Golden suggested a playwriting contest for enlisted soldiers to write and submit one-act plays. The five winners selected from 115 submissions were combined and presented as one event, *The Army Play by Play* series. According to the production’s *Playbill*, the contest was “primarily aimed at discovering material for shows which might be presented with relatively little effort and a minimum of scenery, before soldier audiences in all parts of the world” (14). “This form of soldier art,” as *Life Magazine* refers to it, was created for distribution to Army camp theaters stationed throughout the globe (“The Army Play by Play” 61).

The five winners selected include: *Where E’er We Go: A Play in One Act*, by PFC John B. O’Dea, *Mail Call*, by Aviation Cadet Ralph Nelson, *First Cousins: A Play in One Act*, by CPL Kurt S. Kasznar, *Button Your Lip: A Farce in One Act*, by CPL Irving Gaynor Neiman, and *Pack Up Your Troubles*, by PFC Alfred D. Geto. Two of these soldiers had been involved in theater prior to their enlistment: Air Cadet Ralph Nelson was a professional actor and CPL Kurt S. Kasznar worked extensively with Max Reinhardt both in Germany and in the United States. Kasznar dedicated his play to “the thousand foreign-born American soldiers”. Another soldier playwright, PFC John O’Dea, developed a successful TV and film writing career after WWII. According to its *Playbill*, this series of plays were written, directed, and performed by enlisted
soldiers who, after the run closed, would rejoin their comrades in “whichever theatre of war they may be assigned” (14). Ultimately, 50 of the 115 submissions were selected and distributed to U.S. Army camp theaters worldwide (“The Army Play by Play” 61).

On June 14, 1943, the five winning plays were produced for one night only at 46th Street Theatre for a special audience that included New York City Mayor LaGuardia, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and several high-ranking Army and Navy officers. That single performance netted more than $100,000, which was donated to the Soldiers and Sailors Club of New York. The positive response delighted Golden, who produced the series along with the U.S. Army’s Special Services Command. He was able to re-mount the production for a short run on Broadway for the public to appreciate. For four weeks, the Martin Beck Theatre housed The Army Play by Play series free of charge thanks to the producer John Golden; Lee Shubert did the same for the premiere production of the series, according to Golden’s special thanks in the production Playbill (13). From August 2 to September 4, 1943, The Army Play by Play ran for a total of 41 performances. The profits from this four-week run were given to the Army Emergency Relief Fund.

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Self-produced Theater & the Military: Before 1983

Liberty Theatres

During World War I, the U.S. War Department set up Liberty Theatres at several different military camp sites primarily across the eastern United States. Liberty Theatres were
temporary structures built on U.S. Army grounds to help divert the attention of soldiers in training from less wholesome leisure activities, as Sue Collins explains:

The provision of theaters, live entertainment, and other recreational facilities in the camps constituted a new military policy determined to sequester freshly conscripted and enlisted soldiers within the safe confines of the training camps during their free time, where they would be provided with morally sound and culturally uplifting entertainment. (4)

These theatres housed a variety of live (and eventually, cinematic) entertainment so that “soldiers could entertain themselves and develop their talent” (Martin). While much of the talent that took the stage was outsourced from professional touring companies, a portion of the live entertainment was produced by the soldiers themselves.

Under the responsibility of the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA), a total of 42 theatres of varying sizes were built during the years 1917-1919 to facilitate morale-building entertainment on U.S. training camp grounds. In the War Department’s rush to provide entertainment for its troops, the facilities were constructed without consideration of live performance needs (i.e. acoustics, sight-lines, fly space, or comfortable seating). There were several different models of theatres built, including Class A, B, C, D, and G, with the most noticeable distinctions being overall size and roof shape, though none were particularly effective for theatrical productions (Durham 71).

The Class A theatre contained the largest stage of all Liberty Theatres: 76 feet wide by 26 feet deep (Durham 71). Its auditorium was considered large compared to the typical Broadway venues of that time. The auditorium was 120 feet wide by 131 feet deep, accommodating up to 3,000 bodies on plank seating at a performance. By comparison, new Broadway theaters built during this time housed between 800-1,200 audience members (Durham 72). The Class B theatre was smaller in size, seating just upwards of 1,000 spectators.
There were a total of 19 Class A and 10 Class B theaters built on Army encampments by 1919. Eventually there were also Class C, Class D, and Class G theaters built. The former were reconstructed Class B theaters now equipped with fly lofts and greater stage space; the latter two featuring curved roofs which provided for better sightlines, and one would imagine, improved acoustics as well (Durham 80).

The goal was to link entertainment with a modern, strong, and ever-expanding Army. Initially, Liberty Theatres sought out tent Chautauquas as entertainment to accommodate delays in theater construction camp sites. Tent Chautauquas were a popular form of traveling theatrical entertainment at this time. Using an easily transportable tent as its performance venue, the tent Chautauquas would perform seven different small plays in seven neighboring towns, with different acts circulating amongst the towns for citizens of the community to appreciate the larger theatrical narrative (Durham 67, 116). Durham notes that tent Chautauquas, typically created and performed for a homogenous audience from a single community with similar points of view, were unappealing to the young enlisted men who were coming from all over the country with various perspectives and experiences; the singular focused tent Chautauquas were an ineffective morale-booster (Durham 116). Besides uninteresting content, the soldiers could not afford the admission costs (Collins 13).

Musical comedies, musical revues, and burlesque were more successful offerings at the Liberty Theatres, though combined they only provided about 20 percent of the entertainment in the camp theaters. Musical stock companies combined for another 20 percent, with the remaining 60 percent of entertainment provided by vaudeville and motion pictures (Durham 119-120; Collins 13). In cooperation with major theater producer Lee Shubert, the Commission
on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) contracted successful musicals straight from Broadway to be rehearsed and toured around to Liberty Theatres, with design elements donated by the Shuberts and the maintenance costs of the tour kept below $2000 per week (Durham 123). Regular comedies and melodramas were also booked at the camp theaters. The standards of content and production quality were lowered from CTCA’s original goals, as camps hired acts based on entertainment value alone (no longer burdened by questionable aesthetics) (Collins 14). Financial limitations and a lack of understanding of the professional theater industry led CTCA to acquire primarily the very types of entertainment they were trying to keep soldiers from attending off post (i.e. burlesque) (Collins 11).

Though most of the entertainment offered on the stages of the U.S. War Department’s Liberty Theatres was outsourced from professional theater companies, Durham notes that “participating rather than spectating was the watchword of the recreation movement” (150).

By April 1918, there was a movement to facilitate self-produced Soldier Shows. The Department of Dramatic Activities Among the Soldiers was established and camp dramatic directors were assigned to a select few camp theaters (Durham 151). Much like their U.S. Army contemporaries, Durham found “many camp commanders didn’t like the idea, because they thought their troops were too busy with military training to produce plays” (152). Though camp dramatic directors were responsible for over 900 performances in the final eight months of 1918, the Department of Dramatic Activities Among the Soldiers was discontinued by mid-1919 (Durham 154).
Irving Berlin

The most popular Soldier Show produced at a camp theater during WWI was Irving Berlin’s *Yip, Yip Yaphank*. Rehearsed and performed at Camp Upton’s Liberty Theatre in July 1918, it was transferred to Century Theatre in New York City for a long and successful Broadway run. Though it was presented in a camp theater, *Yip, Yip Yaphank* was not a CTCA-produced entertainment. Instead, it was initiated, created, and produced primarily by working theater professionals from New York City who had been drafted into the U.S. Army and were stationed at Brooklyn’s Camp Upton (Durham 153). When World War II loomed upon the horizon, Irving Berlin was asked to create another musical revue incorporating hundreds of active duty soldiers. *This is the Army* went straight to Broadway, and, upon Berlin’s insistence, the musical became the first U.S. Army unit to be racially integrated. The production raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Army Emergency Relief Fund. Irving Berlin’s contributions and inspiration for the current repertoire offered by Army Entertainment Division is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Civilian Actress Technicians (CATs)

Champion of the U.S. Army Entertainment Division for more than twenty years, Margaret “Skippy” Lynn began her career in military theater immediately following World War II. Skippy was one of a few dozen women hired by the U.S. Army to serve as Civilian Actress Technicians (CATs). CATs toured war-torn parts of Europe carrying backpacks loaded with scripts, props, instruments, and costumes, prepared to rehearse, direct, and perform theatrical entertainment on a moment’s notice. The idea was the brainchild of former actor and head of
Special Services Entertainment, Major Thomas Ireland, and Paul Baker, a theater professor and former Special Services Entertainment officer (Durham 167). According to an article in the Milwaukee Journal from 1946, a new career was available to recent female college graduates who had majored in theater and had production experience. Signing up for one year of civil service through the U.S. Army, these capable and talented women would be responsible for organizing, and often directing, soldier show workshops for an annual salary just above $5,000 (4). According to Florence Von Wein, who first wrote about this new employment opportunity in Independent Woman earlier in 1946, “the American soldier likes his ‘theater’ two ways – the traveling USO camp show and the soldier show that he stages for himself. As a result the civilian actress technician portion of the special services soldier show program was conceived” (4). In Allan Bérubé’s Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II (2010), more specifics can be found regarding a woman’s eligibility to become a CAT. The Army Special Services Division was seeking out women between 21 and 30 years of age “to participate in soldier-acted and soldier-staged dramatic, variety and musical shows” throughout Europe (Bérubé 96).

More detail of Ms. Lynn’s involvement with Army Entertainment is found in Chapter Two.

Sky Blazers & Other Self-made Entertainment

Jack Jacobson’s memoir, Introducing...The Sky Blazers: The Adventures of a Special Band of Troops That Entertained the Allied Forces During World War II (2009), is a great resource for understanding “self-produced” military entertainment that grew out of boredom and a need
for diversion. The memoir also highlights the role of the draft in taking fledging and established performers from the glitz and glamour of Hollywood films or Broadway stages to the front lines of the European and Pacific conflicts. After only a few weeks at sea, Jacobson and his fellow soldiers decided to put on a variety show; they held auditions, rehearsed, and finessed comic bits. The diversion came about out of pure necessity: “the show was the glue that held our sanity together – it was our savior” (Jacobson 87). After the success of the initial variety show, the performance troupe was asked to tour its act to fellow soldiers; entertainment became their new mission. They eventually named themselves “The Sky Blazers” and toured Europe and North Africa, entertaining U.S. troops.

There are similar stories found in the biography Free for All: Joe Papp, the Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told, by Kenneth Turan and Joseph Papp. Papp provides first-hand accounts of his experience enlisting in the Navy during World War II and his involvement in self-produced military entertainment:

About four or five weeks into boot training, as much out of boredom as anything else, I’d get some guys together on Sundays and we’d kid around and put on little shows right there in the barracks [...] An officer who’d been trying to start some kind of entertainment unit on the base heard about what I was doing. He asked if I would do some shows in the main theater and I said I’d try. I put together a variety show, with guys singing, guys tap-dancing, things like that, and I emceed it [...] The navy was trying at the time to start a unit of in-service entertainers that would play for the troops in various Pacific Islands [...] I began interviewing people. None of them had reputations of any kind; they were just young and talented. One of them was this very thin, Irish-looking kid, a dancer whose idol was Gene Kelly. His name was Bob Fosse and I took him on. (27-28)

Fosse was cast in Papp’s troupe as part of the Navy Entertainment Group. He describes some of the variety acts: “One guy would sing Irish songs, somebody would sing hillbilly songs, there was a tap dancer and a guy who did impressions of James Cagney” (28). Fosse also references numbers where he would wear a mop wig and perform in full drag.
These two first-hand accounts are just an opening into the world of self-produced entertainment that became larger, more established productions after military leadership learned of their effectiveness in dissuading boredom and uplifting morale.

**Armed Forces Entertainment**

In operation since 1951, Armed Forces Entertainment has been the producing entity for military entertainment dedicated to American servicemen and women overseas. This organization serves members of all five branches of the United States military (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard). According to its “Fact Sheet” webpage, Armed Forces Entertainment reaches approximately 500,000 people each year across 300+ installations worldwide. Though the name of this organizing body has changed over the years, from the United Services Organization Camp Shows, Incorporated to the Armed Forces Professional Entertainment Office (AFPEO), the currently named U.S. Air Force’s Armed Forces Entertainment office has kept its mission constant: “to provide a program of live, professional entertainment to enhance the quality of life for Armed Forces personnel” (AFE website).

Since 1982, the USO has focused on securing celebrity entertainment for troops stateside and overseas, while the AFE arranges the non-celebrity talent and handles logistics and transportation of celebrity talent to international installations. While the USO is a non-military entity, it coordinates with Armed Forces Entertainment to secure military transportation and convoys for its celebrity performers. For several decades, the Secretary of the Army had been the administrative agent maintaining the relationship between the
Department of Defense (DoD) and the USO. In 1997, the U.S. Air Force was assigned as the Executive Agent in charge of Armed Forces Entertainment and coordinating with the USO.

When the U.S. Army was still in charge of recruiting, auditioning, and assigning non-celebrity talent to international entertainment tours for troops, it published pamphlets that assisted Army personnel in such responsibilities and functioned as informational guides for any interested civilian performers. There were a few points of interest to be found in the 1987 publication produced by Army’s MWR, including an understanding that DoD Touring Show personnel perform without compensation and that AFPEO was responsible for auditioning and selecting all non-celebrity entertainment. The “non-combatant” performers would be allowed to travel with soldiers to designated installations; they were “issued two copies of DD Form 489 when their itinerary includes areas where they might be captured or detained as prisoners of war.” The scheduling of non-celebrity tours dictated that no more than six of every seven days would be working days. Performances were suggested to be no more than 75 minutes in length and booking would include an assortment of full-length performances, hospital ward performances, and handshake visits. Interestingly, performances were not held where alcoholic beverages were served.

In another AFPEO brochure (also published in 1987), there are more specifics listed on the qualities sought in potential non-celebrity entertainment. Small units of four to six members are ideal, with each “unit” including at least one female member. Tours vary in length from two and a half to eight weeks in length, and there is an expectation that performers will stay after each show to meet with soldiers. The publication emphasizes how this after-show social engagement is just as important, if not more important, than the performance itself. The
document also clarifies the objective of Armed Forces Entertainment is “not to alter or change the cultural levels of the audience, but rather to provide live entertainment that will appeal to diversified tastes.” It then reminds the reader that the average American soldier is less than 24 years old, and that light, melodious, and current music styles are the preferred form of diversion. Between the lines, these last words of advice steer performers towards light, fun, and contemporary forms of entertainment that won’t alienate the target audience of Armed Forces Entertainment.

**Other national military entertainment**

As the focus of this study is on the United States Army’s entertainment pursuits in the last few decades, this section will provide an overview of the various military entertainments discovered worldwide. It is not intended to be an extensive and thorough survey.

During WWII, both Canada and Great Britain invested resources in military entertainment for their respective troops. Though Allied Forces served together against the Axis, their diversionary entertainments were segregated. Great Britain established large scale entertainments to tour Europe and North Africa during World War II. Most notably, the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was formed in 1939 to provide diversion for British troops. Very briefly in his memoir *American Girls, Beer, and Glenn Miller: GI Morale in World War II* (2012), James J. Cooke notes the tensions between American and British military commanders denying soldiers access to a different nation’s military entertainment (37). Cooke’s minor remark hints at the division between different national militaries, and how each unit has its own diversionary demands dependent upon their cultural and historical
backgrounds. The history of ENSA is provided in much greater detail in *Greasepaint & Cordite: How ENSA Entertained the Troops during World War II* (2013) by Andy Merriman.

Information on Canada’s entertainment efforts can be found in Laurel Halladay’s article in *Canadian Military History* (2002), “‘It made them forget about the war for a minute’: Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units during the Second World War.”

Canada’s three branches of military had access to their own entertainment units, which employed various genres of theater including variety shows, musical revues, and Broadway-style musicals. The *Canadian Army Show* cast both male and female performers. The Royal Canadian Air Force toured *The Blackouts of 1943* overseas (Halladay 26). *Meet the Navy* included almost 200 performers and crew members, and netted profits from performances for civilians for the Canadian Naval Service Benevolent Trust Fund (Halladay 28-29). Like other national military entertainment practices during times of war, these entertainment opportunities served to not only boost morale of current Canadian soldiers but to serve as a positive publicity and recruitment tool as well.

In a brief article in an online resource of Hebrew songs, “The Development of the Military Singing Groups” by Oded Gordon, we get a glimpse at the self-produced entertainment that began in the late 1940s and early 1950s in Israel (www.hebrewsongs.com). The demand for diversion originally facilitated soldier entertainment “from within,” with those soldiers who could sing or play an instrument to put on shows. These initial efforts established the first entertainment teams, known in Hebrew as *Tzivtei Havai*. These entertainment crews toured to different army bases throughout the nation. By the 1960s, the demand grew and the military began entertaining the general public as well.
V Corps Training Road Show

The history of the V Corps Training Road Show, a pre-1983 self-produced military entertainment, was provided by Patric Taylor, former enlisted Army E5 soldier, and was supplemented by other research. Taylor served in the U.S. Army from 1971 to 1974, and spent the majority of that time working as an actor in the V Corps Training Road Show, touring U.S. Army bases throughout Europe. According to Taylor, there were two major traveling theater units, the Fifth (V) Corps and the Seventh (VII) Corps. The units had been operating for a few years when Taylor happened to ask about a “TRS” sign when he first arrived in Frankfurt, Germany after completing basic training. He auditioned for the group by reading sides from one of TRS’ frequently performed scripts, and was cast as a performer. Taylor had been studying theater in college before he enlisted, so he was excited about the opportunity to continue his acting career. The Army’s V Corps Training Road Show would tour only two productions throughout Taylor’s tenure with the troupe: Hope House (about drug abuse) and Who You Calling Boy, Pig? (about race relations within the U.S. Army). The 35 young soldiers in the Training Road Show (which included Michael Richards, who portrayed Kramer on the popular TV show “Seinfeld”) wrote, directed, performed, designed, stage managed, and ran crew for these shows.

The device of theater was used to educate and “train” soldiers stationed in Europe about these important issues. The unit operated as part of Special Services. Taylor felt the soldiers in the audience engaged in the material, staying after performances to speak with the cast and crew. He also recounted an incident when he was performing a bigoted character in
Who You Calling Boy, Pig? when a young black soldier stood up in the audience, grabbed a flag staff, and began to charge the stage, ready to impale Taylor’s character. No one was harmed, but Taylor notes that this avenue of education was more effective than being lectured at by high ranking officers: “[they] responded to theater because it was life-like […] They forgot about the training component […] They expected a speech and got a play” (Taylor).

The troupe performed as any repertory company would: alternating shows, often performing twice a day, setting up and tearing down the equipment. They would rehearse for a couple of months and then tour the remaining 7-8 months of the year. Taylor admits “it was a lot of work.” But he also celebrated the “autonomy” he and his fellow Training Road Show soldiers possessed. Taylor only hints at the revelry and rebellious activities his troupe were involved in, noting a lot can happen when “35 young soldiers [are] left alone to their own devices.” Because the mission of V Corps Training Road Show was to present these plays on important social issues, they were allowed to dress in civilian clothes and grow out their hair. They also lived together in apartments off-base. However, like any U.S. Army troop, they were supervised and managed by a few officers who lived and toured with the young men. Despite little snags and reprimands, the troupe was able to convince Army officials they needed to avoid regulation dress and hair to best portray real-life characters dealing with the very real problems of drug abuse and race relations. Interestingly, though they appeared to be the Army’s rascally bunch from Taylor’s experiences, the V Corps Training Road Show had G2 status, meaning they had special security clearances. Such status was granted because the theater troupe would tour close to the Czechoslovakia/Germany border.
The document Drug Abuse Control Program Activities in Europe, produced by the Department of Defense in 1972, briefly cites the traveling theater units spoken of by Patric Taylor. In December 1970, the United States Air Forces in Europe established the Drug Abuse Control Committee (10). Around this time, the Third Infantry Division began employing a series of theatrical skits to demonstrate how soldiers became addicted to those drugs most commonly used and accessed in Germany. These skits were presented by the Seventh (VII) Corps (United States 1972, 17). The military supplemented these performances with literature and short lectures, and surveyed the audience of young soldiers before and after to assess their education via the programming. According to the DoD document, there was a notable decrease in drug-related hospitalizations from approximately eight per month to less than three per month after commencing the education program which incorporated theatrical skits (United States 1972, 19). Rather than a series of skits that intertwined with lectures and slides, the V (Fifth) Corps Training Road Show, started in 1970, was established to produce 90-minute theatrical productions that “told about drug abuse in terms understandable to the soldiers” (United States 1972, 20). According to the DoD document, in less than a year, the road show had reached more than 20,000 soldiers (20). The V Corps Training Road Show was dismantled in December 1973, and Patric Taylor was reassigned to his original Frankfurt post as a mortar man.

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*Outsourced Theater & the Military: Since 1983*

USO
The United Service Organizations (or USO) has continued its efforts to bring entertainment and diversion to troops stationed worldwide since it was established in 1941. The comedian Bob Hope continued to spearhead entertainment efforts throughout his lifetime, with Congress appointing him the status of honorary veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces in 1997. After Hope passed away, Wayne Newton has served as the main entertainer at the forefront of celebrity USO tours.

With a shift in the political landscape and rapid advancement in technology, efforts made to relieve stress and boost morale have adjusted accordingly. As Operation Desert Storm became a reality in 1990, the USO facilitated a new initiative “Better than Letters,” providing camcorders, VCRs, and televisions to relay recorded messages back and forth from remote combat locations (Coffey 140).

While the USO has focused its efforts since 1982 on securing celebrity entertainment for troops stationed overseas, it has still funded smaller scale, live performances by non-celebrity entertainers in the states and overseas. In a recent email interview with current USO performer, Katherine Mears Beshear, I learned of the recent incarnation of USO non-celebrity entertainment. Mrs. Beshear auditioned for the USO Show Troupe in February 2013, after the encouragement of the group’s music director who knew her informally through her temporary job at a restaurant. Postings for USO entertainment opportunities are also found in audition announcement sections of actor-oriented publications and websites, such as Backstage and Playbill. Beshear noted there were hundreds of performers in attendance at her open call audition. She had to prepare one musical theater song and one pop song, as well as learn and perform choreography. Her contract was for one-year; performers are eligible to do more
tours, but must re-audition each year to earn new contracts. She is currently in the middle of
her second one-year contract and it appears the performance opportunity has been fulfilling:

I was attracted to this job because it is a great opportunity to perform and do what I love to
do, but also to give back to the people who are putting their lives on the line for us every
day. When we go to camps and bases to perform, especially overseas, you can just tell how
much the troops really appreciate us being there. It's a great feeling!

Currently, Beshear says there are 48 members of the Show Troupe, and usually they are sent
out in smaller groups (typically made up of three females and one male). The small groups
perform in a variety of settings and contexts, including nationally televised appearances,
parades, VA hospitals, and professional sporting events.

“Shakespeare in American Communities”

In 2004, the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with the Department of
Defense, launched a targeted Military Base Tour of Shakespeare as part of the NEA’s larger
project, “Shakespeare in American Communities.” Dana Gioia, NEA Chairman, stated the
organization’s increased attention on this once overlooked population:

If we are truly going to fulfill our charge of bringing art of indisputable excellence to all
Americans, we have to reach into communities where we’ve never gone before. As our
country now has the best-educated, best-trained military in our nation’s history, the
Endowment has made a conscious effort to extend programs of artistic excellence, including
Shakespeare in American Communities, to the men, women, and families in our nation’s
armed forces. (“The Scottish Play Tours to 13 Military Bases”)

In the first year of this program, Alabama Shakespeare Festival toured its Macbeth to 13 bases
in 11 states (Knight & Hutter 3).

Kent Thompson, then artistic director of Alabama Shakespeare Festival, wrote about the
unique challenges of producing theater on a military installation in his article for American
“Operation ‘Macbeth’: How the Alabama Shakespeare Festival Took the Front Line into a New Cultural Campaign.” Sending his touring manager to scout each tour stop for possible sites of performance, Thompson acknowledges “these were very tough performance venues – basketball gyms, aircraft hangars, outdoor stages, converted movie theatres. Only one real theatre in the whole tour” (24). Fortunately, ASF had allotted for body mikes but had to allow time for additional masking, make-shift dressing rooms, and alternative crossover paths. Tom Jeffords, Thompson’s tour manager and admitted “Army brat,” returned from his scouting trip with a new respect for those who work and live in military communities: “These were people very committed to their jobs, people who were always trying to do their best” (Thompson 24). Thompson recalled how the atmosphere of live theater on a military base contrasted with the typical Alabama Shakespeare Festival audience, with “constant traffic of audience members in and out of the theatre during the show” and spectators responding verbally to Lady MacBeth challenging her husband's courage:

I thought that this responsive, rowdy audience – not used to live theatre – was a lot more like Shakespeare’s audience than the ticket-buyers at ASF. They hadn’t learned our theatre etiquette, which has made our usual audiences so well-behaved and quiet. It was refreshing. (Thompson 78)

Such responses indicate a new, inviting audience for American theater.

Previous partnerships between the NEA and DoD include “Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience,” which brought professional writers in 2004 to 16 stateside military bases to create an archive of troops’ writings for publication. These stories were never performed. “Great American Voices Military Base Tour: Unforgettable Melodies from Opera and Broadway” was launched in 2005 (Williams). All of these collaborative tours were presented on military bases free of charge.
“Theater of War”

In 2008, Bryan Doerries, a theater professional with no personal military affiliation or service, began to pursue a potential collaboration with the United States Armed Forces using classic Greek plays to facilitate discussions around issues of PTSD and other psychological trauma. By 2009, with the recognition of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, Doerries secured $3.7 million from the Pentagon to tour his “Theater of War” program to 50 stateside military bases. Doerries translated and adapted two Greek tragedies by Sophocles, *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*. Sophocles, a soldier himself, wrote about the difficulties of re-immersion to aid in the healing of Greek “citizen-soldiers” after decades of war.

The cast of professional film, television, and theater actors has limited rehearsal time prior to the performance and the entire presentation, including time for conversation, takes no more than two hours. The cast is joined by a panel that can address the issues brought up in the plays, including PTSD, suicide, and family struggles with re-integration. Panel members typically include an active duty soldier, a veteran, a spouse or other family member, and a mental health professional. To date, “Theater of War” has reached over 40,000 service members, veterans, and family members.

After the success of “Theater of War,” the Department of Defense has commissioned Doerries to unveil a new series targeted at substance abuse for soldiers and veterans. Doerries took a series of selections from Conor McPherson plays to form “Rum and Vodka.” Using a similar structure – professional actors, minimal rehearsals, and a panel of military participants,
family members, and health professionals – the program will begin touring in 2015. In 2014, “Theater of War” received a grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in collaboration with the USO to expand the program to engage mixed civilian-military audiences to further discussions about the “visible and invisible wounds of war.”

**National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military**

In 2013, the National Initiative for Arts and Health in the Military published a White Paper providing a national plan for action titled “Arts, Health and Well-Being across the Military Continuum.” Rear Admiral Alton L. Stocks, in an introductory message, explains how the White Paper originated after attending the first “National Summit: Arts in Healing for Warriors” in October 2011. Stocks notes:

The 2011 Summit was the first time various branches of the military collaborated with civilian agencies to discuss how engaging with the arts provides opportunities to meet the key health issues our military faces and a key strategy to help heal our wounded warriors. (Rollins 4)

The success of this session led to a second “National Summit: Arts, Health, and Well-Being across the Military Continuum” where the discussion addressed the role of arts for the entire breadth of the military experience, “including pre-deployment, deployment, reintegration into community and family, veteran, and late-life care” (Rollins 5). Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO of Americans for the Arts, provides a brief history of the arts in the military in the White Paper. He touches on the influence of music, visual art, textiles, and creative writing, along with theater, throughout our nation’s military history. Lynch believes the connection between the arts and the military is so deep that it’s taken for granted; the public does not always
acknowledge how the arts are helping soldiers, veterans, and families survive the dangers and aftermath of war (Rollins 7).

The Executive Summary of the 2013 White Paper outlines recommendations in research, policy, and practice. My attention is drawn towards the practical application of these insights as they relate most directly to the case studies in this dissertation. Included are five points of recommendation to maximize the positive influence of the arts in the lives of military communities:

1) Develop training programs for artists and performers, artists in healthcare, arts coordinators, and healthcare providers [...]  
2) Incorporate family-centered arts programming at all stages of military service and beyond [...]  
3) Engage artists and performers, artists in healthcare, arts organizations, and creative arts therapists at the grassroots level [...]  
4) Establish an online presence to promote information sharing, collaboration, and samplings of interactive arts experiences [...]  
5) Get the word out. (Rollins 10)

These goals seem essential, yet reasonable, in developing a greater footing for the arts in military circles.

While there is much work to do, this White Paper’s existence suggests there are those in the arts and in the military who are committed to paving the path towards more integrated use of the arts for service members, veterans, and family members. One sign of progress is the recent development of the NEA Arts and Human Development Interagency Task Force, which includes organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the National Science Foundation (Rollins 41). The 2013 White Paper concludes with
a healthy perspective on encouraging the involvement of the arts at every stage of the military continuum:

Military readiness is an enormous concern with implications for national security. Stress is a part of military life from enlistment onward, not just post-trauma. How service members deal with stress before trauma determines performance after. We know from research that the arts offer powerful tools for coping with stress. Thus, an introduction of the arts in the very beginning can help build coping mechanisms and resiliency to benefit individuals throughout their lifetime. (Rollins 45)

The 2013 White Paper briefly addresses the benefits of the arts for soldiers and their families before deployment. “With the arts as a tool for coping and building resilience, service members and their families can weather the storm of deployment and perhaps even grow from the experience” (Rollins 19). This acknowledgement is most relevant to my research on operational theater programs touring among or housed within stateside U.S. Army bases, serving primarily active duty soldiers and their families, as well as retirees and DoD civilian employees.

“Human Kind: What Does it Mean to be Resilient?”

In addition to NIAMH and “Theater of War,” there are other avenues for artists and soldiers to collaborate and explore issues of mental health and well-being. For instance, there was a one-week dance residency by the Joe Goode Performance Group at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, in early 2013 which resulted in a performance inspired by stories of resilience garnered from soldiers and their families from nearby Fort Riley. The performance, “Human Kind: What Does it Mean to be Resilient?,” was part of a larger two-year project the California-based dance company has been developing. The resiliency project with the Fort Riley community was supported by the Institute for the Health and Security of Military
Families (Schneider). Joe Goode, the dance company’s artistic director, interviewed members of the Fort Riley community primarily through e-mail and Skype about their personal stories of resilience and survival:

We thought the topic of resiliency would be interesting to work with because of issues like post-traumatic stress disorder, wounded warriors, dislocation and separation, which are all huge life issues. The Army actually uses resilience as a term for returning veterans and the impact their injuries or post-traumatic stress disorder has on their families. (Schneider)

I interviewed Carolyn Lee Tolliver, a participant in the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program at Fort Riley, and discovered her involvement with “Human Kind.” In one of Goode’s pieces, Ms. Tolliver is portrayed by a dancer on stage. Using Ms. Tolliver’s own words, the character tells the audience about the difficulty relating to her husband who suffered a traumatic brain injury eighteen years into his service (just four years away from retirement):

Don’t take this the wrong way, ladies and gentlemen, but in order for me to function I don’t commonly refer to him as my husband; I refer to him as Mr. Lee. [...] It took me years to get to that point. Whenever – and you may see it in my eyes now – whenever I start to say “husband,” I tear up, but if I say “Mr. Lee,” I’ve separated myself emotionally, and I needed to do that in order to live. (Schneider)

According to Goode, the dance his company created is a means for people to share their stories of struggle and perseverance. He notes that the performance was successful because “dance has a way of expressing something visceral that sometimes is hard to do in words; you can go farther in the feeling” (Schneider). In cooperation with the Institute for the Health and Security of Military Families, artists were able to shed light on topics difficult to discuss in everyday life.

This performance is also noteworthy as resilience has become the key term in recent military studies regarding soldier morale, retention, and readiness. While there are several definitions of the word, my preferred definition for resilience came from Ms. Tolliver herself: “I summarize it as managing your life while in a crisis.”
Talent competitions

There are a number of other entertainment opportunities beyond theater, beyond amateur ambitions, beyond the United States, and beyond Army Entertainment Division that still firmly reside in the genre of military entertainment. Let us first clarify the wide variety of opportunities provided by AED beyond its theatrical tours and community theaters that take place at stateside U.S. Army bases, which are the focus of this study and covered in detailed case studies in Chapters 3 and 4.

AED also sponsors multiple talent competitions each year, channeling the competitive and ambitious spirit of its soldiers and their families. This includes the Festival of the Arts, which recognizes locally-produced theater, music, and special events performed by soldiers, family members, retirees, and civilian volunteers on Army installations each year. Michael Norris in Pentagram (2012) explains how “the festival highlights the dedication, quality of execution, and commitment” of those involved in entertainment and recreation programming at garrisons, serving the MWR mission of enhancing the Army community’s quality of life on post. Contracted judges are sent to participating installations, rating and ranking entries, culminating in honors awarded at the end of a given year. The competition serves as a feeder program for the Army’s other entertainment initiatives, including the U.S. Army Soldier Show and Operation Rising Star.
The latter is another international entertainment competition, which completed its ninth season in 2014. Initially titled “Military Idol,” Operation Rising Star (ORS) is modelled after the long-running reality television competition “American Idol”. The competitions start at a unit level and culminate in worldwide finals (United States, 2010 154). After the initial rounds of competition, ORS is filmed live at the Fort Sam Houston Theater in San Antonio, Texas, being simultaneously telecast on the Pentagon channel and on the internet. Soldiers and families are asked to vote, as in other reality competition shows. Both active duty soldiers and their family members are eligible to audition for Operation Rising Star, and do so either live or by submitting a video if they are unable to attend one of the Army’s local events. Finalists receive cash prizes and the winner gets the opportunity to record a three-track demo CD at a legitimate music studio.

Army Entertainment Division also sponsors theatrical awards specifically celebrating productions on U.S. Army bases in Europe, The Topper Awards. International installations can compete both in the Festival of the Arts and the Topper Awards. The European-wide awards show features musical theater numbers and individuals are presented with “Toppers - golden statuettes - for outstanding achievement in military community theater” (Weisel). The international U.S. Army theater program has more funding because it’s more in demand by soldiers and their families stationed overseas where English is not always spoken and access to familiar aspects of American culture are not always within reach.

Beyond competitions, AED also produces several national and international music tours. USA Express is a small five to seven-member cover band which can easily travel overseas and to locations down range. The U.S. Army Field Band is a more formal symphony orchestra which
tours at larger, primarily domestic, venues. AED also produces concert tours on occasion, which feature several cover bands, including former Soldier Show participants such as 4TROOPS.

Beyond the U.S. Army’s offerings, other U.S. military branches offer their own MWR programming and entertainment avenues. The Air Force holds its own talent competition, Tops in Blue, which is used to select the performers for its annual entertainment tours. According to its webpage, The Tops in Blue, a touring entity since 1953, started with the motto “family entertaining family.” Tops in Blue serve the U.S. Air Force’s MWR mission. The U.S. Navy also has an entertainment program facilitated by its MWR division. This group facilitates concert tours of both celebrity and non-celebrity talent. The Marine Corps have a Community Services division and the Coast Guard has an MWR office. These latter two divisions seem to have limited programming in terms of live entertainment.

**Historical Demonstrations**

In a tangential sub-genre of more recent, self-produced military entertainment, there lies the category of historical demonstrations performed and produced by the U.S. Army for soldiers, families, retirees, and the public at large. Army veteran Jeremiah Luttrell used to serve in the Army’s “Old Guard,” officially known as Delta Company, 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment. The “Old Guard” was responsible for performing in historical demonstrations that incorporated costume, lights, sound, and rehearsed dialogue a few times a year. Luttrell, who served from 2006 to 2013, explained two different theatrical presentations he was involved with as a member of the “Old Guard.”
*Spirit of America* was an elaborate production that took place in the fall, touring to only a handful of cities each year. The soldiers would train for approximately one month prior to their tour. This performance was scripted, and would include scenes on different historic eras in America’s military history. The scripts, lighting and sound were provided by civilian personnel, though the performers and technicians were all active duty soldiers who served on the “Old Guard.”

*Twilight Tattoo* was a newer addition to the “Old Guard” list of responsibilities. These were more demonstrations than performances, showing off colonial infantry skills and colonial marching bands. These demonstrations were held every Thursday at the base of the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. In *Twilight Tattoo*, historical accuracy was imperative, with soldiers wearing the uniforms and using the weapons of the colonial period. Luttrell spoke of how “they taught us how to make our own wigs...no one else in the military does that, except for that company.” He continued to explain that the “Old Guard” Regiment “sat around for weeks at a time learning how to make wigs,” explaining how they were taught how to take a full size wig, wash the hair, straighten it out, get the bun in the back, and curl the sides with chopsticks. Luttrell did not miss “wearing a wig and tights,” though he enjoyed learning about the colonial weaponry and infantry drills.

From his time serving in *Spirit of America* as a technician and *Twilight Tattoo* as a colonial infantryman, Luttrell learned to respect the amount of work that goes into producing a theatrical event. “I had no clue what goes into setting up a stage...I didn’t realize how much time it took.” Though he doesn’t intend to pursue performance in a professional sense, armed
with a new appreciation for military entertainment, Luttrell has taken a couple of introductory theatre courses as a college student.

**Theatre Simulations & Military Training**

Scott Magelssen’s prominent article “Rehearsing the ‘Warrior Ethos’: ‘Theatre Immersion’ and the Simulation of Theatres of War” in *The Drama Review* in Spring 2009 directed theater and performance scholars’ attention to theatrical techniques and strategies employed by the U.S. Army to train soldiers for deployment to recent Middle Eastern conflicts. In the desert of California, U.S. Army base Fort Irwin contains re-productions of villages built to resemble those found in Iraq and these communities are peopled with hundreds of Iraqis and Iraqi-Americans who are contracted to “perform” for a living wage of $20 an hour. Actors live in the simulated villages 17 days every month with only four hours of generator power each day to authenticate the experience, with scriptwriters producing the back story and daily life of the villagers. The paid actors are shuttled back and forth several miles to the base for showers every three days (Magelssen 55).

Before Magelssen’s insider perspective was published, previous theater scholars had covered performance in military war-gaming. Using animated simulations to help soldiers and officers with tactical decision-making, actors were employed to give life to these virtual, theaters of war operation trials. But the use of real actors in actual desert settings is a more recent military strategy and provides soldiers with a better sense of the living and fighting conditions they’ll find themselves immersed in when deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan.
Though Magelssen’s work explores a different avenue of performance studies, his work signifies a legitimate, revived interest in the intersection of theater and military. While his article focuses on the performances of the actors portraying Iraqi civilians, it is clear that the soldiers are performing as well. Magelssen refers to them by the Boalian term, spect-actors. They are “rehearsing for real life,” preparing themselves to react and engage in a new environment, with cultures and languages they may have never been exposed to. However, Magelssen is quick to observe that the individuals rehearsing are not “The Oppressed” that Boal had in mind when designing his techniques (50). The fact that the military uses the term “theater” for its war operations is not lost to Magelssen – he includes it in his article’s title.

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Upon reviewing these select samples demonstrating a myriad of ways military and theater converge, there are some patterns that emerge. It appears that many outsourced entertainment endeavors, though funded and created by civilians, are often facilitated, if not initiated, by the military. Also, such performances have greater opportunities for success because the entertainment is produced with the cooperation of multiple resources and organizations. Looking specifically at outsourced military theater being produced since 1990, there is a noticeable focus on mental health and using the performing arts to help soldiers, veterans, and their families. This shift in focus is less marked in self-produced military entertainment.
There is a noticeable difference between soldier self-initiated and officer-initiated performances when examining self-produced military entertainment efforts. There is also a clear division between those military performances that serve as training, preparation, or demonstration and those that function as self-expression, diversion, or communion. More recently, it appears that self-produced military entertainment has been favoring more generic entertainment performances and producing less theatrical offerings. These specific observations about self-produced live performances will serve discussions in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as the Conclusion of this dissertation, regarding the recent past and impending future of Army Entertainment Division.
CHAPTER 2
THE RISE OF ARMY ENTERTAINMENT BEFORE 1983

For approximately sixty years, U.S. Army Entertainment Division has been serving soldiers and their families, enhancing their quality of life and striving to ensure their overall well-being. While the U.S. Army has informally provided self-produced entertainment since the Revolutionary War, morale building and support efforts have formally existed since 1903. At the start of the 20th century, the United States Congress approved funding for the Army to build and operate much needed facilities, including libraries, schools, recreation centers, and PXs (Hipps, “Army MWR Integrated”). These facilities provided leisurely outlets for soldiers’ down time. It wasn’t until 1918, when America was immersed in World War I, that the Army officially established an Army Morale Division (ArmyMWR.com). This office maintained recreational programming, which would come to include theatrical opportunities. After the end of World War I, the War Department established an Education and Recreation branch with a Dramatic Sub-section which included both a Camp Activities Section and the Liberty Theatre Division (Durham 161). The chief of the Morale Branch of the General staff, General Edward L. Munson, praised the value of recreational activities, referring to them as a “safety valve” for soldiers to release physical and psychological energy in safe ways (Durham 161). In 1941, the Morale Division was renamed as Special Services (Durham 163). By 1943, U.S. Army Special Services
encompassed all of Army Recreation Services, including Army Exchange and the Soldier Show in its original form (ArmyMWR.com). After the conclusion of World War II, Special Services was reassigned to the Army’s General Staff as part of its Personnel Section (G-1) (Durham 166). Not until 1952 was an entertainment program established permanently as part of the Army’s Recreation programming (Durham 168). Morale services and its associated entertainment endeavors exchanged leadership in 1965, with Army Community Services taking over (ArmyMWR.com).

The biggest shift in the U.S. Army’s operation of MWR services began in 1983, with the publication of a White Paper by then Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham, Jr. that declared “family” become an integral part of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programming (Hipps, “Army MWR Integrated”). Soon after, in 1984, the Army Community and Family Support Center was established to solidify the consideration of family in all programming efforts (ArmyMWR.com). Interestingly, though family became a prominent target of MWR operations, it was not until 2006 that it became part of the division’s official Army title: Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (FMWR, also known as G-9) (Hipps “Army MWR Integrated”). Finally, in June, 2011, there was an official Army ceremony to commemorate the integration of MWR and Installation Management Command (IMCOM) (Hipps “Army MWR Integrated”). IMCOM was affectionately referred to as “the Army’s landlord” in an interview with Nicole Coppinger, a civilian AED employee (Coppinger). This means that IMCOM maintains the grounds and facilities on every U.S. Army base worldwide. At the ceremony, the commanding general of IMCOM, Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch emphasized that the merger of MWR under IMCOM leadership was not about “efficiencies [but] it has everything to do with effectiveness” while former MWR commanding
general Maj. Gen. Reuben Jones reinforced the reality of often-fluctuating names of Army divisions, noting “through all the name changes, the mission of Family and MWR has remained constant” (quoted in Hipps “Army MWR Integrated”). That mission, according to the MWR webpage, entails a commitment “to the well-being of the community of people who serve and stand ready to defend the nation, to enhance the lives of Soldiers, their families, civilian employees and military retirees” (ArmyMWR.com).

Having clarified the evolution in leadership, and name, of the Army’s Morale, Welfare, and Recreation division, it is now time to examine the overall funding of MWR services and the extent of MWR programming on U.S. Army bases stateside and overseas. Army Entertainment Division (AED) is only one program within Morale, Welfare, and Recreation, and therefore only minimal data can be found pertaining to its specific budget, supply, and demand. However, there are several studies and Congressional reports that summarize the overall fiscal and programmatic health of MWR enabling us to ascertain Army Entertainment’s ability to thrive for the foreseeable future.

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**Funding of MWR and AED**

The document “Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Activities and Nonappropriated Fund Instrumentalities,” otherwise known as Army Regulation 215-1 and published most recently in 2005, provides a useful guide to the delineation of funding and other forms of support the Army invests in theater and other recreational programming. Using its glossary, we can define
the terms commonly used when discussing the categorization of MWR programming: non-appropriated funds (or NAF) and appropriated funds (or APF).

[Appropriated funds] are monies made available to [military departments] by the Congress of the United States. Such appropriations are of two types: annual and multi-year. The purposes for which these funds are appropriated are specified by Congress in its appropriation acts (158)

[...] 

[Non-appropriated funds include] cash and other assets received from sources other than Congressional appropriations. NAFs are Government funds used for the collective benefit of those who generate them. These funds are separate and apart from funds that are recorded in the books of the Treasurer of the United States. (162)

The survival of entertainment activities and other MWR programming on Army bases is heavily dependent on the type of funding that supports them.

Financial factors as well as psychological factors combine to justify the categorization of MWR programs. The three classifications used by MWR articulate a program’s direct impact on the military mission and its ability to generate revenue. Simply titled, programs listed as Category A are “mission sustaining activities,” Category B “community support activities,” and Category C “revenue-generating activities” (United States, 1998 1). (Note that the descriptions below include a program’s potential for self-funding):

Category A – mission-sustaining activities. Considered essential to sustaining readiness, these activities generally enhance and promote the physical and mental well-being of soldiers. Activities in this category have little or no capacity for generating NAF income and are supported by APFs, with use of NAFs limited to...

Category B – community support activities. These activities are closely related, in terms of supporting the military mission, to those grouped in Category A. They satisfy the basic physiological and psychological needs of soldiers and their families...these support programs should receive substantial amounts of APF support, but differ from those in Category A, in part, because of their ability to generate NAF revenues...
Category C – revenue-generating activities. These activities have less impact on readiness. They offer desirable social and recreational opportunities. Activities in this group have the capability of generating enough income to cover most of their operating expenses, but they lack the ability to sustain themselves based purely on their business activity. (United States, 1998, 6)

In Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Programs in the Future: Maximizing Soldier Benefits in Times of Austerity, a source produced in 1994 by the Arroyo Center at RAND, a nonprofit organization that strives to improve public policies through research, and funded by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, the valuing system of the two categories affecting entertainment programming is explained in terms of well-being and quality of life (two key components of MWR’s mission):

Category A: Mission Sustaining ...These activities are considered most essential in meeting the organizational objectives of the Army. They promote the physical and mental well-being of the soldier, a requirement that supports accomplishment of the basic military mission...

Category B: Community Support ...These activities satisfy the basic physiological and psychological desires of soldiers and their families. (Way-Smith et al. 8)

This categorization of activities indicates a program’s value and need and therefore its access to Army funding.

Reporting on the overall condition of the U.S. Army’s MWR division to a Congressional subcommittee in 2009, Richard Gorman, Chief Operating Officer of U.S. Army FMWR Command, noted the near doubling of budget for its programming during the 2008 fiscal year from $750 million to $1.4 billion (United States, 2010 9). These funds helped to build more than one hundred new youth facilities and to boost survivor outreach services. In 2011, Gorman reported at a Hearing on the National Defense Authorization Act that “Army MWR funds’ collective financial posture is sound and supports our soldiers and families today” (United States, 2011, 5). While assuring Congress of the fiscal health of the Army’s MWR, Gorman emphasized his
division’s ability to earn $200 million each year through Non-appropriated funds, leading him to conclude that the “lion’s share” of MWR’s appropriated funding went towards recreational programming (United States, 2011 12). In simple terms, the MWR is supported heavily by corporate sponsorships and partnerships, alleviating the burden of funding while maintaining access and minimizing cost to soldiers and their families. While the Army (and ultimately, the United States government) acknowledges the importance of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation services for soldiers and their families, there seems to be a hyper-awareness of the financial burden of programming for the U.S. military (which amounts to less than 1% of the entire nation’s population). MWR, unlike other Army divisions, has an ability to earn income and sponsorships, alleviating the money-related stressors from Congress.

It is encouraging to find evidence of strong government support. Congressman Joe Wilson, chairman of the subcommittee on military personnel, addressed the benefits of MWR programming and the necessity of maintaining operational budgets in a statement from February 9, 2011:

This subcommittee has always viewed the wide range of programs that comprise the military morale, welfare, and recreation, or MWR community as essential elements within a healthy military community [...] [A]s a recipient of appropriated funds, MWR programs will be subjected to increased pressure to maintain effectiveness while operating more efficiently. While demands for increased effectiveness and efficiency are to be expected, I fear that misperceptions about the absence of a link between MWR programs and combat readiness will place those programs at greater risk of being cut too deeply. I believe that vibrant MWR programs are critical to the health of the military community they support and that superior combat capability is directly dependent on the strength of the military community. We must not allow MWR programs to become easy targets for the budget cutters [...] managers must also be prepared to fight hard to factually justify the programs that are truly critical to service members and their families. (United States, 2011, 27)

At that same 2009 hearing before Congress, Gorman reported the standards followed in terms of APF and NAF supporting activities on post. A minimum of 85 percent of funding for Category
A programming should come out of Appropriated funds and 65 percent for Category B (United States, 2010, 158). For several decades, Army Entertainment and its Music and Theater program, fell under Category A, receiving appropriated funding. By 2013, most MWR programming, including the Music and Theater program, were listed as Category B and received only non-appropriated funding; national and international touring endeavors such as the U.S. Army Soldier Show still ranked under Category A.

Regarding Army Entertainment’s specific financial situation, there was a notable shift in funding from 1999 to 2013. In 1999, Army Entertainment operated on a budget of $5.4 million, of which 41% came from Non-appropriated funding (Durham 169). From my interviews with AED staff, I gathered that the 2013 operational budget was $1.6 million (Coppinger). Formally organized in 1983, the current incarnation of the U.S. Army Soldier Show requires the largest portion of the AED budget to produce big-budget, Broadway-level spectacle for its soldiers and their families. Demand for the annual touring production remains high, but other Music and Theater programming offered by Army Entertainment division as part of MWR does not appear to be as popular. In a 2005 survey conducted by Morale, Welfare, and Recreation, music and theater programming was not ranked high by either enlisted soldiers or officers when they were asked which MWR programs were most important to enhancing quality of life. Music and theater ranked slightly higher when soldiers surveyed were asked about using MWR programs within the last two years (Fafara and Westhuis). In research conducted by U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences in 1993, there was an awareness of MWR services, including music and theater programming, and various military personnel admitted to using them sporadically, preferring civilian equivalents instead (Segal and Harris 47-48). In 2009,
Chief Operating Officer of FMWR, Richard Gorman, praised Army Entertainment Division’s contribution to the Army community, by providing opportunities for soldiers to explore personal entertainment ambitions and fulfilling MWR’s mission: “This program contributes to morale by responding to the basic human need for entertainment/diversion” (United States, 2010, 153).

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*Rise of Music & Theater Programming in MWR*

The United States Army has long recognized the connection between maintaining morale and its soldiers’ productivity and resiliency. One strategy to improve and maintain the morale of soldiers and their families is to program and present live theater on base. Entertainment has been provided by the Army under a variety of organizational umbrellas. During World War II, all military branches were actively organizing and producing theatrical entertainment of all sizes for their soldiers stationed overseas, on the front lines and away from the action. The success of these operations influenced the continuation of such activities on U.S. Army bases, both in the states and overseas.

Led by one of the first Army CATs, Margaret “Skippy” Lynn, Army Entertainment began its own official theater program in 1962, according to the pioneer’s obituary in *Backstage*. With a backpack of props, scripts, and costumes, Skippy Lynn and her fellow CATs toured throughout post-World War II Europe, providing theatrical entertainment opportunities to war-ravaged communities and the soldiers who were helping to rebuild them. Prior to her service as one of the first hundred CATs, Skippy earned a master’s degree in Speech and Drama from Catholic
University, served as a dance captain with the Rockettes, danced with Martha Graham’s company, and appeared in several Broadway musicals (Martin). While a CAT, she worked on dozens of shows under commanding officer and successful Broadway stage director, Joshua Logan. Lynn continued to work with the Army during the Korean War, producing and directing shows down range, and helmed a musical that toured worldwide from 1955 to 1961, *Rolling Along* (Martin). In 1962, Lynn convinced the Army it was essential to provide performing arts opportunities on Army bases around the world and to establish a Music and Theater program for soldiers. If a post theater did not already reside at a garrison, one was built according to Army and Air Force Exchange Services (AAFES) regulations, unless an unused movie house could be converted into a functioning live theater (Martin).

The Music and Theater Program (sometimes known as the Music and Drama Program) was a resource for thousands of drafted “artistic type” soldiers who would never have enlisted on their own volition. The arts provided an outlet for soldiers (and to a lesser extent during its inception, their families). With amazing performers and producers such as Bob Fosse, Joseph Papp, and Glenn Miller serving in the military at times of war, Army Entertainment (and other military branches’ entertainment divisions) discovered an untapped resource for recreation and diversion for its draftees. At its peak, the Music and Theater Program had approximately 400 operational entertainment programs in U.S. Army bases around the world. It was credited by *The Washington Post* in 1976 as "the largest producing organization of music and theater in the world", at that time, having staged more than 25,000 performances annually for more than 2.5 million people worldwide (Martin). Skippy Lynn succeeded in bringing the arts to soldiers, enriching the quality of life available to them on base. Ms. Lynn also established scholarships
and competitions to “discover and encourage talented soldiers and officers”, as scholarship recipient Darryl Allara attests in Chapter 4 (Martin).

The presence and prominence of the Music and Theater program at a garrison were dependent upon a number of factors. According to protocol in the Army Entertainment Program Operational Guide from 1966, each garrison of a certain size was supposed to have a performance venue of a certain size and be operated by a set number of individuals. For instance, any garrison with fewer than 12,000 troops was supposed to be led by a single entertainment director whereas garrisons with more than 30,000 troops would employ four entertainment directors to accommodate its population (United States, 1966 20). A similar resource from 2002 highlights how little the standards have changed (though, unfortunately, few posts are able to provide an entertainment program anymore). Still being used as the guidelines for Army Entertainment in 2013, the document titled “MWR Baseline Standards – Resource Drivers: Entertainment” specifies that a garrison with a population of 10,001-25,000 (based on 100% active duty plus 25% family members and 10% DoD civilians) may employ up to three paid staff members to assist the theater program (See Appendix D). Both of these documents, however, assume a garrison’s Music and Theater program has sole access to a performance venue. In the 1966 Operational Guide, there is great emphasis put on maintaining a “base of operations” for Army Entertainment’s mission to succeed:

If the entertainment program is to function as intended, it must have adequate facilities to house its operation. It cannot perform its mission properly operating out of the service club, the post theater, the gymnasium or sports arena; it is just as impractical and impossible for entertainment directors to move their operations from hour to hour, or day to day, and for the same obvious reasons, as it would be for librarians, or service club and crafts directors to move constantly their program functions from one facility to another. Therefore, another essential for program development is a designated base of operations where program activities can be planned, rehearsed, equipped, and performed; where supplies and
equipment may be fully utilized, maintained, and stored; and where directors and technicians can work designing, building, painting, rigging, and mounting their productions. (21)

Though Skippy Lynn established Music and Theater programs on U.S. Army bases worldwide (including the construction of devoted performance venues), by the 1980s, with few exceptions, those remaining theater programs still operating were no longer using post theaters. Alternatives for rehearsals and performances have included re-purposed AAFES movie theaters, recreation center gyms, service clubs, and ballrooms.

Entertainment directors have always reported to the division of Family Morale, Welfare, and Recreation. The Army Entertainment Program Operational Guide from 1966 is a 130-page document outlining the exact duties of an Entertainment Director as well as the benefit of Army Entertainment for soldiers on an Army base. An abbreviated version of this document published by the Army in 2002 identifies more current expectations of an Entertainment Director and it is clear little has changed over the years (see Appendix E). An Installation Community Entertainment Director (known in 2013 as Garrison Community Entertainment Director) is responsible for a long list of duties including acquiring copyright clearances, directing productions, coordinating special events, maintaining a partnership with local community theaters, overseeing scheduling, and supervising any subprograms (music, theater, etc.) on post (see Appendix E). An Army document from 1981, Design Guide for Music and Drama Centers, demonstrates the growth and expansion of the Army Entertainment Program from its post-World War II launch. This document identifies four subprograms (versus the three noted in 1966): Music, Theater, Unit Level Entertainment, and Commercial Entertainment (4). This document serves as a tool for entertainment directors seeking to renovate or construct an all-
purpose entertainment facility (in their prime, Music and Theater operated out of multiple venues on a single garrison, with buildings designated specifically for music or for theater).

While it was not a requirement for Installation Entertainment Directors, Theater Specialists, or Music Specialists to be Army veterans, often this was the case. The primary requirements for individuals in these positions were a college degree in Music or Theater and professional (or semi-professional) production experience. The most recent job descriptions of these roles are from 2002 and, according to Tim Higdon from Army Entertainment Division, very little has changed in terms of the roles and responsibilities (see Appendix E). Whether an entertainment director was ranked at GS-7, GS-9, or GS-11, the individuals in charge of the Music and Theater program at specific Army installations played both artistic and administrative roles. Rankings of civilian Entertainment Directors which impacted both leadership and salary amidst the Army’s hierarchical structure were determined by an individual’s post-secondary education and experience in the arts. According to the 1966 Operational Guide, the difference between GS-7 and GS-9 or GS-9 and GS-11 was merely one additional year of “progressively specialized experience” (19). Two Entertainment Directors who served Army Entertainment before 1983 participated in interviews for this study: Vito Colletti and Vanita Rae Smith. Their assorted tales of experiences with Army Entertainment have proved invaluable to my research. They provided both insight into the Music and Theater program as it existed during its broadest expanse from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s and also an understanding of how Army Theater has changed since 1983.

Vito “Vic” Colletti is from Colorado and was drafted by the U.S. Army to serve during the Korean War. He returned to the states to complete a college degree in Theater and soon after
found a position as an Entertainment Director at Fort Carson, near Colorado Springs, Colorado. He was a civil service employee for the U.S. Army and served as Fort Carson’s Installation Theater Director from 1967 until 1990, when he retired. Fort Carson’s Little Theater resided in the post theater, which held a small proscenium stage and seated approximately 200 people. During its peak, the Fort Carson theater program had three separate divisions, together producing up to 15 shows per year (Colletti; Ansorge). The Main Stage productions were primarily musicals. To keep audiences coming and to offer an outlet to soldiers’ families, Colletti began a Children’s Theater program and an Explorer Scouts program. The latter was for participating Boy Scouts in the area, whereas the former aimed at involving children of both genders from the local community otherwise not engaged in the scouts program. Twice, during the 1970s, Colletti devised a touring production, called “The Fort Carson Experiment,” that traveled and entertained troops at U.S. Army bases throughout the United States; he considers it a pre-cursor to the modern incarnation of the U.S. Army Soldier Show. Colletti acknowledges the difficulties his theater experienced starting in the 1980s. VOLAR (Volunteer Army), limited MWR funding, and bureaucratic disagreements all impacted Colletti’s ability to maintain active duty soldier participation, let alone military audiences. In an article from the *Colorado Springs Gazette – Telegraph*, Rick Ansorge gives voice to the Fort Carson community’s concerns during the 1980s decline. Recreation chief Russ Lee believed it was mere lack of interest in the arts: “It started after the draft was eliminated...we had a bigger cross-section of interests and backgrounds” (Ansorge). Another person, then volunteer Ken Markus, pointed a finger at the post’s decline of its support and promotion of its own programming (Ansorge).
Vanita Rae Smith began working for Army Entertainment immediately after graduating from college in 1967, serving for a brief period as Command Entertainment Director at Fort Leonard Wood near Lebanon, Missouri, and then transferring to Fort Shafter in Honolulu, Hawaii. She helmed the Music and Theater program at Fort Shafter from 1969 to 2012. Smith established a good reputation in Honolulu’s arts scene with Fort Shafter’s quality productions, rivaling or topping the other regional theater happening in the region. In 1983, she requested funding for the renovation of an old movie theater to become the new live performance venue on post. By 1987, the Richardson Theater was completed. This new space held 800 patrons and became the site of four major musicals each year in addition to a Reader’s Theater program. Started in 1997, the Reader’s Theater held as many as four staged readings of plays each season, with both actors and audience seated on the proscenium stage of the Richardson.

Both Colletti and Smith had to meet difficult requirements for their theaters to remain operational. While the exact figure is disputed, it was understood that participation (assumed to be performers) in Army Music and Theater programs would be between 50-75% active duty soldiers. This was a difficult expectation to meet, because soldiers were not always given permission to attend rehearsals or performances. The environment of acceptance of Army Entertainment varied from post to post, from year to year, depending on the commanding general and his/her support of the programming. Eventually, the Entertainment Directors were able to maneuver within the participation limitations by including all those active duty soldiers involved in back stage activities (light operating, building sets, tailoring costumes, etc.). Both Fort Carson and Fort Shafter created touring productions in the 1970s produced by Army Entertainment. Originally, these were in-house variety shows submitted to a competition, with
the winning production touring other stateside, and possibly international, U.S. Army bases.

Other challenges faced by Colletti and Smith, along with current Entertainment Director at Fort Gordon, Steven Walpert, were the disparities between supply and demand. During the 1970s, even when fully funded by APF and fully operational, Entertainment Directors felt pressure to accommodate increasingly high demands from installation management for more and more productions. Fortunately, at that time there was financial support to meet such demands. For instance, Walpert was one of three full-time Entertainment Directors at Fort Gordon. However, Colletti notes this demand for more shows was not based on the number of people attending the performances.

The impact of MWR’s entertainment programming can be found in the words of military spouses and MWR employees, acquired from blogs, publications, and interviews. Robin Fettig, a Yahoo! Contributor, wrote about her passion for theater and its role in creating new friendships with each new move. Fettig was delighted to discover that “military MWR offers performing arts on many installations worldwide.” She encouraged experienced and amateur performers alike to utilize the programming: “Getting involved in a MWR theatre is an excellent way to feel at home in a strange place quickly and make some great friends” (Yahoo.com). Army Entertainment similarly helped another Army wife find her footing after the tragedy of 9/11. In an article from the December, 2001 issue of Parks and Recreation, Harriet Rice begins her discussion of entertainment and the military with Wilma Guerra’s personal letter to AED. Guerra attended the U.S. Army Soldier Show at Fort Lewis, Washington, just days after the attacks and thanked Army Entertainment for the opportunity to be “able to laugh inside and outside” at the performance (quoted in Rice 40). She mentions the importance of community,
coming together in a shared space and laughing as a means towards healing. Later in the article, Harriet Rice, an MWR employee, reflects on the impact of entertainment for soldiers and their families. Inspired by Ms. Guerra’s letter,

[She] realized that the three letters M – W – R stand for much more than the programs we deliver in Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation. Those letters embody what it means to be an American. That we have free time and the freedom to make choices about what to do with that free time. They also embody caring: caring about and supporting soldiers, children, families, retirees and our civilian neighbors. Those letters also remind us of our heritage. Morale-boosting programs have always been there for our armies, from the Revolutionary War to the Balkans. We applied lessons to make our MWR programs stronger and better. We endured. (41)

Those who serve as part of MWR recognize the importance of their work and celebrate their contributions to the Army community. There are several more testimonials about the benefits of Army Entertainment’s MWR programming from soldiers, family members, and DoD staff found in Chapters 3 and 4.

In 1976, Army Entertainment Division reached the status of being the largest community theater producing entity in the U.S., with an estimated 25,000 performances and 2.5 million spectators (Martin). Because of its prominence in community theater internationally, the Music and Theater program maintained an active presence in national and international organizations such as the American Association of Community Theatre (formerly part of the American Theatre Association). Among noteworthy high points of Army Entertainment’s theater endeavors are Colletti’s production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* on base at Fort Carson as the musical’s first ever non-profit production after its Broadway premiere (Ansorge). In fact, Colletti had to delay opening his production until a day or two after Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *JCS* had its Broadway opening. According to Colletti, *The New York Times* sent its theater critic to attend the Colorado production and printed something to the effect that Fort Carson’s performance
was better than Broadway (though I was unable to locate this article in my research). A more established and long lasting Broadway relationship was built by Vanita Rae Smith at Fort Shafter in Honolulu. Smith was able to secure rights for Richardson Theater to be the first community theater in the United States to produce several successful musicals produced by Cameron Mackintosh, including *Miss Saigon*, *Cats*, and *Curtains*.

Among the high points of Army Entertainment is its widespread popularity in the 1960s and 1970s. During these two decades, Army Entertainment Division maintained a firm presence in national and international theater production. The talented individuals employed as entertainment directors were acknowledged for their experience and expertise, and the Army Music and Theater program was seen as a legitimate and professional quality entertainment operation. The retirement of entertainment directors and the decline in the number of functional Music and Theater programs led to a decrease in quality, making the live performances created in recent decades more clearly amateur level entertainment.

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*The Shift Away from Music & Theater Programming*

There are three important factors that affected the success and prevalence of Army Entertainment Division’s Music and Theater programming on stateside U.S. Army bases which precipitated its decline over the past few decades. In 1973, the all-Volunteer Army (VOLAR) replaced decades of populating the Army by way of the draft. Now, soldiers were in the Army by their own choice, and efforts were made to maintain morale in order to keep retention rates high. A second milestone appeared ten years later, in 1983, when Army Chief of Staff General
John A. Wickham, Jr.’s White Paper was published. This important document recognized ‘the integral support role of Soldiers’ families’ and MWR programming became more concerned with addressing the needs of family members, not just soldiers (ArmyMWR.com). Army Entertainment easily transitioned, appealing to a soldiers and family members of all ages, both with its big budget tours and with locally-sourced, live entertainment.

The third factor marked a major shift in Army’s Music and Theater Program worldwide during the late 1980s. In 1985, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Balanced Budget Act was passed, mandating reductions in the federal deficit (Ansorge). Installation commanders were ordered to reduce costs by tens of millions of dollars. The Music and Theater Programs which provided entertainment for their post communities free of charge because of their Category A status under MWR funding were given a five-year window to determine how to continue operating despite a shift to Category B. Most Army theater programs worldwide had dissolved before the 1990 deadline, unable to meet self-sufficient funding demands. Though Fort Shafter’s Theater program went from having six paid support staff members to only one (besides Smith), the Richardson Theater continued to thrive for two more decades because of Smith’s adept maneuvering on the financial and political tightrope that the Balanced Budget Act created for Army community theaters. She proudly relates her choice to transition the Richardson Theater from an Army Entertainment operation to an Army Community Relations Program (acknowledging the positive publicity the theater brought to the military). The establishment of a non-profit organization also proved pivotal in keeping Fort Shafter’s Theater program afloat.

The shift in 1984, “The Year of the Family,” led to a surge in family programming. Besides the acknowledgement of the role of family contentment in soldier retention, the shift
to an all-volunteer Army and increased opportunities for women in service led to more MWR programming for female soldiers. In 1972, women made up fewer than 2% of Army soldiers; by 1992 that number had climbed to 12% (Segal and Harris 9). Recent statistics show that figure is nearing 16% (army.mil). Whether an Army family contains one soldier or two, Segal and Harris discovered that the Army’s ability to retain its soldiers was dependent upon a soldier’s perception of the “quality of Army community” (19). The mission of MWR is to provide a “quality of living comparable to that found in the civilian sector” (Way-Smith et al. 7). This goal is simply stated but progress toward it is not easy to quantify. As Congressman John McHugh cites at an MWR Hearing in 2007:

I think the opening sentence to the staff memo that tells us quote “MWR programs are intended to provide military personnel the same quality of life as is afforded the society they have pledged to defend” end quote kind of says it. That is the challenge. (United States, 2008, 2)

In response to its broad mission, including the emphasis on family that began 1984, the U.S. Army’s MWR has offered a vast array of programming to its soldiers and families. The exact mix of offerings is based on the demands and needs on individual installations (Way-Smith et al. 7). As of 1994, there was no system in place to determine the recent use or demand of various MWR programs, though individual MWR offices assess an installation’s programming needs every three years (Way-Smith et al. 35).

Starting in the 1980s, the financial strain of maintaining Army entertainment facilities and programming began to wear on garrisons. This pull was particularly felt stateside where soldiers and families were more commonly seeking civilian alternatives to MWR services. A national budget cut drastically impeded the operations of Army Music and Theater programs. Without funding (and therefore, without staffing, resources, or facilities), entertainment
opportunities disappeared. Buildings used as performance venues were in states of disrepair and their conditions provided excuses for the reduction or removal of live performance opportunities on post.

The constant pressure to reduce costs and still provide ample programming is being met head-on by the Army MWR. The wide variety of services MWR offers will be briefly addressed below. The programs geared toward youth include day-care and activity classes (arts and crafts, theater, dance, swimming, etc.). Outdoor recreational offerings differ depending on a garrison’s demands and may include shooting ranges, golf courses, go-karting, horseback riding, fishing, and hunting. Indoor sports activities include recreational centers equipped with fitness gyms, basketball courts, swimming pools, and bowling alleys. Libraries are another service provided by MWR. The few remaining Army Theater programs offer regular dinner theater performances (these are discussed in depth in Chapter 4). Funding in recent years has primarily gone towards youth services and fitness equipment, having recognized the desire for diversionary activities for children, particularly when a parent is deployed, and for soldiers and family members to maintain physical and mental well-being by engaging in routine exercise and conditioning.

Along with a shift in financial and programmatic priorities, Army Entertainment also encountered major managerial and structural changes around 1983. At its peak, Army Music and Theater programs passed 400 in total and each one of those employed one or more entertainment directors to facilitate successful operations. These entertainment directors possessed college degrees in the fields of theater and music, as well as semi-professional and professional performance experience. In the 1960s and 1970s, individual entertainment programs were mounting upwards of ten theatrical productions per year. By the 1980s, those
entertainment programs still operating were faced with a rapidly retiring roster of entertainment directors. Rather than replace these individuals, the Army allowed Music and Theater programs to fade away. Another managerial issue was the routine reassignments of Army leadership and the ordeal of re-education or re-inspiration of those in charge on the value of entertainment provided by and for soldiers on individual installations.

With the assistance of Army Entertainment Division’s Amy Kosby, who assists Army community theaters with securing production rights for their seasons, I was able to take a closer look at operational outcomes from 2008 to 2013. Whereas once there were more than 400 Theater programs running on U.S. Army bases worldwide, there were now only 22. There remain a handful of successful internationally located U.S. Army Theater programs with a built-in “captive” audience who seek out entertainment in English. These theaters are still allotted appropriated funds by the U.S. Army, as the demand for MWR programming is greater overseas. This study, in contrast, is focusing on the operation of stateside Army theaters which must be financially self-sufficient and maintained with non-appropriated funding. Self-produced theater was happening on eleven stateside Army bases in the early years of the 21st century. By 2013, only six were still operational. Before providing more detailed studies of these remaining six theater programs, let us examine an example of an attempted (and failed) resurrection of theater programming.

The slow dissolution of theater programs worldwide began in the 1980s. Despite a fully funded Army Entertainment Division producing international tours, individual Army installations were unable to meet the mission of MWR’s Music and Theater program while staying afloat. Keeping entertainment accessible and affordable rarely translated into profits at
the box office. The demand might exist for live theater from soldiers and their families, but the garrisons usually lacked the funding and experienced leadership to facilitate a regularly operating community theater. One example of this can be found at Fort Bragg, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. In early 2011, Ken Freehill and Darryl Allara visited the post for a week-long workshop of *Murder 101*, an improvised murder mystery dinner theater. Utilizing volunteers from the Army community, Fort Bragg’s MWR office produced a successful residency. Denise Heller, then a member of MWR’s Recreation Delivery Systems team, was encouraged by Freehill and Allara to use the momentum of the week-long workshop to create a full length theater production to enter into the Army’s international competition, Festival of the Arts. With suggestions of possible shows from Freehill and Allara, Heller selected *Dorothy Meets Alice, or the Wizard of Wonderland*. Serving as producer and the only paid staff member involved, Heller realized two performances in June 2011, a matinee and evening performance, in a nearly sold out 650-seat venue, the Pope Theater (primarily used as a movie house). Tickets were reasonably priced at $5 per person or $15 per family of four. Admirably, the Fort Bragg production was entirely cast with military individuals. Specifically, there were 6 active duty soldiers, 4 family members, and 5 DoD civilians, retirees, or their family members. The outcome was so successful that a local community theater invited Fort Bragg to remount the production at their venue. As Fayetteville has several other theaters and college drama programs to provide live entertainment, Heller did not feel that demand was an issue at Fort Bragg. More specifically, it was the lack of a dedicated performance venue and dedicated entertainment director which made continuing a potential theater program on post too difficult.
While Ms. Heller’s experience at Fort Bragg was exceptional, other MWR offices attempted to bring theater to their garrisons with less success. Fort Hood, Fort Rucker, and Fort Irwin all produced shows between 2008-2012, but no one currently working out of these MWR offices has much experience and knowledge of live entertainment. The Army lifestyle of regular reassignments makes obtaining accurate oral or written histories difficult (and signals a definitive reason for hiring civilian Entertainment Directors rather than assigning active duty officers). More detailed case studies of those entertainment programs still operating in 2013 are provided in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 3:
U.S. ARMY NATIONAL THEATER TOURS

Between the years 1983 and 2013, Army Entertainment Division offered three theatrical touring productions to U.S. Army garrisons nationally and internationally, even occasionally to stations of deployment. Though AED produces a variety of live entertainment every year, this study focuses on the three tours which incorporate aspects of scripted dialogue and rehearsed performance: the U.S. Army Soldier Show, the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program, and the BRAVO! Army Theater Touring Company. Each tour is unique in its theatrical style, artistic leadership, production budget, performance regularity, active duty participation, and target audience.

The long-running Soldier Show, which follows a variety show format, is by far the most prominent of AED’s offerings. Its current incarnation has been operating since 1983, though it existed in less formally produced and promoted formats prior to that time. Inspired by the success of Sgt. Irving Berlin’s musical revue *Yip Yip Yaphank*, created during World War I when the theater legend was drafted shortly after becoming a citizen of the United States of America, the U.S. Army Soldier Show has been modelling a similar format. Using popular musical theater numbers, choreography, and short scenes, active duty soldiers produce, perform, direct, and operate the performances for their fellow troops, as well as family members and DoD civilian
employees. This tour is supported by a large production budget and dedicated full-time artistic staff, with professional theater and music artists working side by side with several retired Army personnel who are also Soldier Show veterans.

The Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program, by comparison, is much smaller. Its size, however, does not correlate with its perceived and reported impact on the U.S. Army communities who have played host to it. This tour was first proposed in 2000 by an Army veteran and a civilian, both theater professionals, who had been contract employees of the Army for decades as judges of the international Army competition, Festival of the Arts. These tours, which have occurred irregularly over the program’s fourteen-year lifespan, were specifically created to bring theater to those Army bases which did not have their own community theater on post. The Theatrical Comedy workshops are week-long residencies which rely on the participation of host base soldiers, family members, and DoD civilians in performances which the post community attends. Utilizing improvisatory techniques, these tours subsist on very small stipends for the co-directors and serve as revenue-building opportunities for local MWR offices.

The third theatrical tour produced and promoted by Army Entertainment Division was short-lived. Running from 2000 to 2006, the BRAVO! Army Theater Touring Company presented full-length non-musical plays at U.S. Army bases and some entrenched locations at the front-lines of combat. These productions were directed, designed, and performed by active duty soldiers. Play selections were based on small cast size, minimal design requirements, and entertainment value. Like the Soldier Show, BRAVO! performances were always held free of charge. The tour’s abrupt end signals the constant challenges of exposing new audiences and
producing entities to non-musical plays (versus the variety show or improvised mystery show formats of the former two tours).

Army Entertainment Division actively produces live theater for and by active duty soldiers. These three tours represent different theatrical styles, production budgets, and artistic challenges, but they all were created with the same end goal in mind: to serve the MWR mission by providing soldiers and their families high quality entertainment to enhance their quality of life and boost morale. By examining each tour in detail, we can ascertain whether AED was successful in its mission and how it may enhance the experience of national tours for both its participants and spectators.

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*The U.S. Army Soldier Show*

“For the Soldier, by the Soldier” has been a motto of Army soldier entertainment since World War I, before Army Entertainment was established as an official division of the U.S. Army. The term was coined when Irving Berlin created, directed and produced *Yip Yip Yaphank*, using soldier actors to perform for fellow soldiers. A drafted soldier at the age of 30, Sergeant Irving Berlin dodged basic training rigors such as waking up at revelry because his skills as a songwriter served the U.S. Army in a grand way, witnessed first-hand in his memorable song “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning.” The successful musical revue was first performed in a Liberty Theatre at Camp Upton in Suffolk County, New York, in 1917 and proved to be highly profitable for Army camp centers. The production was eventually transferred to a professional theatrical venue in New York City. After the start of World War II, the U.S. Army reached out to Berlin to create another patriotic, entertaining, and profitable musical revue for the masses.
Taken straight to Broadway, *This is the Army* proved to be another financial boon for the military branch. The show concluded every night with the cast and crew in full uniform marching off the stage, through the audience, and out onto the streets of New York as if heading into battle. With creative license and hundreds of soldier-actors, Berlin insisted that *This is the Army* be performed by a racially integrated cast. The ensemble became the first Army-sponsored assignment with racially integrated troops. Army Entertainment Division continues to produce variety musical shows for its soldiers and their families in the current U.S. Army Soldier Show, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2013. This production tours Army bases worldwide for four to eight months each year. Free admission ensures that everyone has access to these morale-boosting performances which carry out the mission of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR), which includes enhancing the quality of life for troops and their families.

During the summer of 2013, I had the opportunity to visit the base of operations for the Soldier Show, which is the biggest and most popular theatrical endeavor of Army Entertainment Division. Stationed at Joint Base Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, AED has been enjoying its newly renovated facilities after relocating in 2011 from Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Not only did AED provide me with a thorough tour of their facilities, I was also able to conduct interviews with several full-time Army Entertainment staff members about their involvement in the coordination of the Soldier Show. Additionally, I was able to attend the live performance of the 2013 tour of the U.S. Army Soldier Show on July 4, 2013 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and conduct interviews with several performers and technicians prior to show time. Finally, I
will supplement my field research with archival video footage of selected Soldier Show tours provided by Army Entertainment Division.

The passionate statement below was provided by Tim Higdon, Program Director of the U.S. Army Soldier Show, when asked how Army Entertainment serves its community and how it differs from outsourced, celebrity entertainment:

It all boils down to our motto, entertainment for the soldier, by the soldier. And that really traces back to when soldiers and war fighters sat around a campfire at the end of the day, and would tell stories to each other, would sing songs with each other, as a way to let go of the stresses of the day of battle that they just went through together. And that’s really at the core, at the heart of what we do and why we do it...it’s something else when somebody who’s been in the foxhole with you, who’s been on your right, been on your left, who experienced the exact same things as you did, and then takes the time to share their talent with you [that] makes it really special...there’s nowhere else in the world that you get that...When it’s your battle buddies doing something for you it just instills that sense of esprit de corps in a way that nothing else can. (Higdon)

Higdon reinforces the given reality that soldiers have been entertaining themselves for centuries. That practice has only been formalized into an annual, live touring production for the past few decades. The current version of the U.S. Soldier Show was started in 1983 and has been consistently produced every year since then. There had been previous incarnations and attempts at nationally touring variety shows for soldiers but they were not officially or continuously organized (for instance, Vic Colletti’s touring “Fort Carson Experiment” as discussed in Chapter 2). The U.S. Soldier Show tours the globe annually, entertaining soldiers and their families with fun and light-hearted theatrical entertainment. Utilizing a successful variety show model, the U.S. Soldier Show predominantly features singing and dancing, with short bits of dialogue between some numbers; the precise balance between these elements is determined by the strengths of the soldier-actors cast in a given year. The premise of the
performance has always been to entertain in a family-friendly format as a means to support the troops and their families, during times of war and peace.

Every year, the theme of the tour changes. In recent years, the three-star General who oversees MWR, and by extension AED, has chosen the message (or theme) of the upcoming Soldier Show – utilizing the live performance as a way to inform and educate soldiers and their families on the Army’s mission. The theme of 2013 was “Ready and Resilient”; it was “Army Strong” in 2012. By comparison, the theme for 2009 was “Lights, Camera, Action.” Higdon, the Program Manager of the U.S. Army Soldier Show, approaches the General to assess his ideas regarding concepts or themes far in advance of the upcoming tour. These thoughts are shared with the Artistic Director of the Soldier Show, Victor Hurtado in 2013 (who has served as AD for several years as well as AED Program Manager before Higdon). Hurtado then conceives three different performance concepts he can use to structure the program’s music and performance elements. The General selects from these options and makes the final determination of the year’s Soldier Show production concept.

Additionally, the General is responsible for encouraging fallen soldier recognition to be included in the programming. While Hurtado and Higdon selected the music and presentation of that moment, the acknowledgement had not yet become a part of the Soldier Show until 2013. When asked how the tone and somber note was integrated into the primarily up-beat evening of entertainment, Tim Higdon reflects on the natural absorption into the programming: “Loss is a part of who we are and what we do... they deserve that recognition. We want to make sure to take a moment to acknowledge the sacrifice and even the worry they have day after day.” Also upon the General’s urging, the Soldier Show has incorporated SHARP training
(Sexual Harassment and Assault Response Program). In 2013, this included a sequence of three songs that playfully enforce concepts of consent, boundaries, and empowerment. The Soldier Show presents this “training” within its entertainment package, as an alternative to formal, dry, mandatory sessions of sitting and listening to officers teaching soldiers about these issues. This utilization of entertainment as a medium for education is known as *edutainment* in the worlds of public health and theatre for social change worlds (Campbell and Scott 275). Edutainment can be seen in earlier Army entertainment endeavors, such as the V-Corps Training Road Show which toured Europe during the Vietnam War (discussed in Chapter 1).

Upon receiving audition packets and holding a one-week live audition, Hurtado can then fine tune his concept to fit the specific talents and skill sets of his eventual cast. This accommodation can be seen in the archival film footage of past Soldier Shows. The 2009 tour features an ensemble with excellent singing abilities and limited dance experience; the 2003 tour featured a cast with a variety of talents. The 2013 ensemble I observed at Fort Leonard Wood had several vocalists who could dance and some who could perform dialogue. Of the Soldier Shows I was able to analyze, dialogue always was a component, though the extent to which it was employed varied greatly. “Ready and Resilient” used dialogue throughout the performance as a narrative device incorporating smartphone technology and social media to reflect contemporary forms of communication. In previous tours, dialogue was used sparingly as a means to transition between scenes.

Choreography was incorporated in every performance I watched, though the extent and variety of styles varied depending on the abilities of the ensemble. There were a few times in the 2003 show when more traditional movement forms were present. This was seen in a short,
solo performance of a Native American ritual hoop dance done by a male soldier-actor to an instrumental track with a voice-over component and in a short, ensemble performance of three percussionists and four African Jazz dancers. These instances of direct, cultural performance were refreshing and, in my opinion, would have improved the other years’ programming. The 2009 tour included a brief Bollywood montage, but the homage to “Jai Ho” felt superficial because there were no performers who seemed to have a solid grasp of the dance style. Moreover, the incorporation of bright, colorful saris felt like an instance of unintentional cultural appropriation, especially when viewed alongside the pieces mentioned above from 2003.

Singing has always been the most featured and consistent aspect of the modern day Soldier Show. The quality and variety of voices fluctuates, but singing is central to bringing popular music to life for the Army community. Channeling the good feelings of eras gone by and the spectacle of Broadway musicals, the Soldier Show provides music of all tempos and styles with a pre-recorded instrumental track. Occasionally, support vocals are also pre-recorded. In the case of “Lights, Camera, Action” in 2009, the music director was able to facilitate the performance of two “auto-tune” style songs with Kanye West’s “Love Lockdown” and Rihanna’s “Disturbia” (“auto-tune” being the synthesized vocal quality often produced in music of the early 2010s – distorting the human voice to sound more robotic – commonly used to mask pop singers’ limited vocal abilities). There seems to be several musical theater numbers incorporated each year, from a Chicago song-and-dance medley to Irving Berlin’s “Putting on the Ritz,” as well as excerpts from operas Porgy and Bess (“Summertime”) and Carmen. In 2013, two different songs from the politically-charged musical Les Miserables were performed by a
male soloist in recognition of fallen soldiers and wounded warriors (“Empty Chairs at Empty Tables” and “Bring Him Home”). Beyond musical theater, there are often songs incorporated from popular Disney films, whether directly or indirectly (“Ready and Resilient” included an entire four-movie montage). Other song styles found regularly in the programming include doo-wop, soul, gospel, blues, pop, rock, hip hop, country, and Latin.

Other noteworthy moments from the archived film footage of past Soldier Shows include historical references. In 2003, the opening stage picture and accompanying song was an ode to Irving Berlin’s first Soldier Show, *Yip Yip Yaphank*. A trio of soldiers dressed in World War I uniforms sang a remix of “Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning,” made famous by draftee Berlin in 1917 and revisited in *This is the Army*. The 2009 performance included video/song montages honoring the 65th anniversary of D-Day as well as wounded warriors. Similarly, in 2013, the program included a historical video montage to the song “God Bless America.” The song, originally penned by Berlin in 1917 for *Yip Yip Yaphank* was cut and not recorded until 1938. 2013 marked the 75th anniversary of this unofficial national anthem, the 150th anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice, and the 50th anniversary of the start of the Vietnam War. Another notable aspect of the 2009 production was the inclusion of three commercial breaks and footage of production assistants who were counting down the end of commercials back into the live broadcast of the live theatrical production. Viewing such moments was a reminder that for many years the Soldier Show, along with other Army Entertainment programming, has been broadcast live via the Pentagon channel so soldiers stationed down range can access entertainment “for the soldier, by the soldier.”
The Soldier Show is designed to run approximately 90 minutes and is consciously structured to meet a wide range of expectations. Shifting from up-tempo to slower numbers, from full ensemble sections to simple moments on stage with one or two performers, spectators can dance and sing along or sway and cry. The assortment of songs, bodies, and design elements on stage allows the audience (of all ages) to experience a range of emotions. While some stops on the tour might serve audiences of primarily young soldiers in training, other sites will have more military families, retirees, and DoD civilians present. Several songs might have re-written lyrics to sync up with the Army experience and make performance material more family-friendly.

My visit to Fort Sam Houston Theater began with a two-hour tour of the facilities and follow-up interview with Nicole Coppinger, and for a brief period, Steve Smith. Smith and Coppinger, a married couple, are both civilian employees for Army Entertainment Division, who never served in any branch of military service. They bring more than fifteen years of professional theater experience to the full-time AED staff in San Antonio. Smith grew up an “Air Force brat,” travelling the world with his family whenever his father was re-stationed in his career with the Air Force. This insight gave Smith an advantage in terms of understanding the lifestyle and language of Army Entertainment. He had been working with AED for several years before his wife also was recruited to work for them.

Coppinger, with a BFA in Theater from Ithaca College, had the distinction of being the original set designer for *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson* when it was first produced at Williamstown Theater Festival before its off-Broadway and short-lived Broadway runs. Her specific skills were instrumental in the design of an entire stage and truss system to take out on
the road with the Soldier Show. Such a system would accommodate the variety of performance venues hosting the tour. The design idea came after Coppinger was made aware of Army regulation architecture on most bases. After World War II, most U.S. Army bases were equipped with an Army and Air Force Exchange Services (AAFES) structure, intended to house a variety of purposes – the “PX,” movie screenings, theatrical performances, dances, etc. These AAFES buildings were all created using the same set of architectural blueprints. Coppinger drafted plans for the Soldier Show truss and stage to fit inside any of these pre-existing performance facilities, as well as any other large venues on Army posts (or elsewhere). Because of this structure, the Soldier Show tour is self-contained; it only needs power wherever it is rigged up.

Smith and Coppinger provided insights on the similarities and differences between their experiences working in professional theater and in Army Entertainment. They note how soldiers are not paid for their talents beyond their regular Army salary (with the exception of a $15 per diem stipend). They also note the absence of Equity or union labor contracts. The absence hints at both the amateur level of theater being produced and the general lack of awareness in regards to actor and technician rights. Coppinger affectionately, and aptly, calls the work produced by Army Entertainment “community theater on a Broadway budget.” This summary hints at the various complications and confusions that can arise when means do not align with ends. Standards for design and performance skill may not match the access to resources the Soldier Show budget allows.

Additionally, I was able to interview Amy Kosby at Fort Sam Houston. Kosby was managing Army Entertainment’s budget, including the payment and contracts involved with
royalty agreements for individual Army community theaters, and video production. Kosby, who served in the Army early in the 2000s, was assigned to be a lighting and audio technician after she finished basic training. These skills were easily adaptable to a video technician position with the Soldier Show. When asked how her work with Army Entertainment has changed since she toured with the Soldier Show, Kosby remains motivated to produce work with artistic and community impact: “The office feels a part of it, but not as close...I’m very close to video because that’s what I do, and when I see the show and I see the performers and the video augments that show, it’s very elating. I get very fulfilled with seeing everything come together.” She continued to explain the recent inclusion of a tribute to fallen soldiers in the 2013 “Ready and Resilient” tour. Kosby worked with Survivor Outreach Services to secure permission and photos to use in a video montage during a solo number in the program, “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables,” from Les Miserables.

The key individual in this research project has been Tim Higdon, Program Manager of Army Entertainment Division, who is personally responsible for producing the U.S. Army Soldier Show and Operation Rising Star (an Army-wide singing competition in its ninth season). Higdon was one of the first contacts I made when beginning this study and he has facilitated several connections, interviews, and visits, as well as disseminating statistics, playbills, and marketing materials from AED’s more recent archives. (AED has an archive at the Performing Arts Library with New York Public Libraries that contains miscellaneous material from 1940s through 1970s). Though Higdon was out of town during my visit, I was able to conduct several phone interviews with him, as well as to conduct email exchanges to clarify points of information. Higdon’s
history with Army Entertainment spans more than two decades, and he does not minimize its impact on his career path and personal passion for the arts:

I’m kind of the end product of what Army Entertainment is all about: entertainment for the soldier, by the soldier. And it was because of experiencing it as a young soldier and then being involved as a soldier that has really kind of led me to my life’s passion. That’s significant for me. (Higdon)

As a young soldier stationed at Fort Knox, Higdon participated in several of the garrison’s community theater productions as actor, director, and designer, including the role of “Ariel” in The Tempest. While he was working at Fort Knox, Army Entertainment Division also resided at the installation. Higdon moved between the two theatrical units on post, with an official performing “slash” technician Soldier Show opportunity in 1988. He returned to Fort Knox after the tour and continued to participate in the Music and Theater program, even representing the Army at national and international theater conferences connected with the American Association of Community Theaters. Higdon’s involvement with the AACT conference involved his skills as a lighting designer and AED recruited his services for the next Soldier Show tour. Shortly after this second stint, Higdon completed his service with the Army. Fortunately, within months, Army Entertainment hired him as a full-time civilian employee. Since then, he has worked in a variety of roles for AED, including artistic director of the U.S. Army Soldier Show. In his current position as Program Manager, Higdon is responsible for hiring any outside civilian artistic staff necessary to produce the Soldier Show each year. He notes how historically the director of the Soldier Show has been someone with prior performance or technician experience working on the tour (most recent directors include Higdon, Victor Hurtado, Johnny Stewart, and Ron Smith).
Producing the U.S. Army Soldier Show is no small task and comes at no small price. Army Entertainment has always been able to offer its programming completely free of charge to troops and their families, including its biggest feature, the U.S. Army Soldier Show. Army Entertainment was granted an estimated budget of 1.6 million dollars in 2013, and like many government institutions, the money must be spent in order to justify the same size of budget the following year (“use it or lose it” in business code). In 2009, at the Military Resale and MWR Overview before the House of Representatives’ Military Personnel Subcommittee on Armed Services, Chief Operating Officer of the U.S. Army FMWR, Richard Gorman, reported on Army Entertainment’s financial and attendance health. On average, Gorman cites the Soldier Show reaching over 140,000 people and earning over $350K in commercial sponsorships each year (153). It is important to note that the bulk of funding for Army Entertainment’s budget comes from sponsorships which qualify as “non-appropriated funds.” This issue of funding has been more worrisome to leaders of AED in recent years, because of the recession and the government furlough of 2013. Because its funds are non-appropriated, Army Entertainment was able to continue its operations, with modified capabilities including shortened tour schedules which excluded the potential for destinations overseas. Such accommodations were seen in the abbreviated four-month tour schedule for the 2013 Soldier Show and in restricting access of the Fall 2013 season of the singing competition, Operation Rising Star, to online telecasts (as satellite television would be too costly). As one Army Entertainment staff member explained, such parsing down of AED’s typical production scale would avoid a public outcry of “you can’t afford to pay people, but you can put on a TV show.” Interestingly, after the “Ready and Resilient” 2013 Soldier Show began touring, word of mouth created an increased demand
for the production and AED extended the tour by one month; in order to accommodate requests, Army Entertainment Division helped to cover the costs if local MWR offices couldn’t fund the tour independently. While the Soldier Show invested in an LED wall in 2012 for $600K and spent $90K on its costume budget, the recent concerns with funding and general government spending has led AED to produce “smarter and more efficiently” (Higdon).

Though performances of the Soldier Show are free to attend, they do require an investment on the hosting garrison’s part to produce the event. This is estimated to be around $4000, to be supplied by the host MWR office. This money accounts for securing the performance venue (if the installation does not offer a large enough facility), lodging, marketing, and per diem meal stipend for the Soldier Show cast and crew. Because of its continuous success, most MWR offices request the Soldier Show to return every year, sometimes for multiple performances. Often, funds are provided by corporate sponsorships or donation of goods.

In 2011, Army Entertainment found a new home base at Fort Sam Houston, in San Antonio, Texas. Prior to that time, it had been situated for more than ten years at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, near Washington, D.C. (Prior to that, Fort Knox, Kentucky, was the location of Army Entertainment operations). The facilities at Fort Belvoir were deteriorating, and rather than remodeling the existing theater space, the Army relocated its Entertainment Division to Fort Sam Houston. In the heart of San Antonio, there resides one of six remaining stateside Army community theaters, the Harlequin Dinner Theatre (addressed in detail in Chapter 4). Beyond the Harlequin’s performance venue, there stands an old movie theater that is considered an historical landmark, the Fort Sam Houston Theater. Unable to demolish the old building and
design a brand new facility, Army Entertainment had to work within the existing structure to repair the old building and install new features and necessities without damaging the existing edifice. The entire lobby and house were renovated, as was the front lip of the stage. The stage was extended to meet the aforementioned AAFES dimensions and it was given an 80-foot fly loft. Army Entertainment’s needs are now all met within this remodeled building: offices, video editing rooms, sound booths, costume storage, green rooms, and rehearsal rooms. At a separate location on base there lies a 60,000 square foot warehouse facility which stores equipment, set pieces, and additional office space. Many of these spaces were upgrades or additions from the former Army Entertainment home in Fort Belvoir. With their brand new renovated venue, it is now possible to train soldier-technicians how to build and disassemble the truss and stage at the same time soldier-actors are in the rehearsal rooms working on choreography. Such luxuries were not afforded at Army Entertainment’s prior residence.

The U.S. Army seems to be fond of measurements and assessments when it comes to the training of soldiers for combat, and even in assessing that soldiers’ mental fitness for deployment. But very little data has been found in terms of the U.S. Army’s official measurement and assessment of any of its Army Entertainment endeavors, not even studies on its longest-running and most successful endeavor, the Soldier Show. Tim Higdon related AED’s practice of reaching out to the U.S. Army’s 250+ posts and garrisons worldwide every year for feedback. A brief three-question survey called an Operation Order elicits an individual U.S. Army installation’s desires to bring the Soldier Show to its community:

Q1: Does the Soldier Show add to the esprit de corps of the community?
Q2: Is the Soldier Show an appropriate tool to present the Army’s message?
Q3: If available next year, would you like to host the Soldier Show?
This simple assessment allows Army Entertainment to prepare for each year’s tour and its needs. Based on this estimated amount of performances and sites, Army Entertainment proposes the budget necessary to build and rehearse a Soldier Show that will remain free to the public by looking at the cost per spectator.

Tim Higdon estimates an average of 1000 people attend each Soldier Show performance. Using 2012 figures of 61 shows and 63,000 spectators to support this estimation, the Soldier Show has proven itself to be a continuously successful entertainment initiative financially and physically supported by the U.S. Army and its soldiers. In its current inception, the Soldier Show celebrated its 30th anniversary with their 2013 tour. With a reported 58 performances for 2013, it can be assumed a similar number of people were reached (see Table A). The success and evolution of the Soldier Show reflects the continuous support of the Army’s high command.

Table A: 2013 U.S. Army Soldier Show Tour Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOUR STATISTICS:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour Length (Days)</td>
<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locations Served</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performances</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Days</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Tour Miles Traveled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Days Off</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outdoor Performances</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RONs (Remain Overnight En-route)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every year 15-25 active duty soldiers are selected to participate in the Soldier Show, in the role of performer or technician. The level of talent is tremendous among these young
entertainers and their backgrounds are quite diverse. Soldiers’ motivations for participating in
the tour, previous training in the performing arts, and awareness of Army Entertainment prior
to their audition packet submissions are quite varied. A soldier is never allowed to perform in
the U.S. Army Soldier Show more than once, though they can re-apply to return another year as
a technician. Though being involved with Army Entertainment provides many advantages and
opportunities, it prevents a soldier opportunities for promotion or deployment. However, being
involved with the Soldier Show is still a coveted experience and getting cast to be a soldier-
actor or trained to be a soldier-technician is no small task. Interested active duty soldiers of the
U.S. Army, National Guard, and National Army Reserve are all invited to submit application
packets to Army Entertainment in the fall previous to the tour year. Application materials
include a letter from their commanding officer granting permission to take a leave from their
regular assignment for up to six months. Amy Kosby notes it has been more difficult to acquire
such permission since 9/11. Performers are asked to submit a video with their packet,
displaying their various talents that could serve the U.S. Army Soldier Show. Applicants are
surveyed for fitness: first as soldiers, then as people, and finally as performers. This initial
screening of interested applicants ranges from 60-100 interested soldiers and is performed by
4-6 senior officers who are determining the applicant’s overall aptitude. The number of
applicants is whittled in half with soldiers rendered ineligible for a variety of reasons. After
initial screening, video auditions are viewed by 8-16 artistic staff at AED to determine the
variety of talent and interest available to the upcoming tour.

With no red flags on their “jacket” and meeting all other standards of a model soldier,
approximately 25-35 applicants are invited to a live audition process at Army Entertainment’s
home base. Slightly more individuals than are needed are brought to San Antonio to ensure some selectivity. This live audition lasts one week, and soldiers are tested on their ability to learn choreography, perform songs, meet fitness levels, and fit the overall goals of that year’s theme. The days are long, lasting 12-14 hours, and the potential soldier-actors and soldier-technicians are never immune to the scrutiny of Army Entertainment staff: “[they’re] being evaluated every minute that they’re here, even on break” (Higdon). The week ends with a PT assessment and a four-minute, live audition. Sometimes, the talent and skills demonstrated at these final auditions inspire sequences in the eventual program of that year’s Soldier Show. For instance, SPC Millie Sneed had performed “Cups” from the movie Pitch Perfect, which combines hand percussion and rhythmic patterning while singing. A “Cups”-like moment was seen in the 2013 tour, when soldiers are gathering and singing as if in their barracks on deployment.

The size of the cast varies from year to year, depending on the theme and the needs of its coordinating production. The casting is never dependent upon a specific breakdown of “type” (i.e. male to female ratio, Caucasian to person of color ratio, etc.). They work with what they have, from year to year, based on the applicants who submit and meet all the pre-requisites mentioned above. As seen in the archival footage of past Soldier Show shows, the shape of the production is determined by the specific skill sets of the individual Soldiers cast. Approximately 12-15 soldier-actors, along with 5-10 soldier-technicians, are accepted into the Soldier Show and immediately begin an eight week process of rehearsing for the tour. This includes training both technicians and performers how to set-up and tear down the truss and stage efficiently, while respecting the sensitivity and cost of the equipment. Coppinger and Smith accompany the Soldier Show cast and crew for the first few tour stops to continue the
training process, ensuring everyone is comfortable with this aspect of Army Entertainment, which accounts for the majority of the soldiers’ time on tour.

From a survey of those who participated in the creation and production of the 2013 Soldier Show, I learned how many individuals were performers or technicians prior to their enlisting in the Army. Many had never even seen the Soldier Show in its entirety. Some specifically sought out the experience upon the start of their service careers, others happened upon it by chance. Although the work is difficult, everyone seemed motivated by their mission of entertaining the troops and their families. In fact, AED staff member Amy Kosby found her time working as a technician with the U.S. Army Soldier Show her most challenging time as an active duty Soldier: “This was the hardest job I ever had in the Army. It wasn’t going to Afghanistan, it wasn’t going to Iraq and being with my unit. It was Army Entertainment.” Kosby’s reflection takes into account the intense work schedule involved with producing the Soldier Show tour – “tech-in” for six to eight hours, one and a half hour performance, “tear down” for two to four hours, go to bed, wake up early to get on the road and “do it all again.”

Popular opinion among commanding officers in the Army is that such an assignment is frivolous, a way to slack off and take it easy, and therefore, it is less likely soldiers are granted permission to leave their regular duty assignments to participate in Army Entertainment. Kosby’s assertion regarding the difficulties of the Soldier Show reveals the endurance needed to produce a big budget, large scale, musical variety show nearly every day for four to eight continuous months.

Very few civilians are employed to work on the Soldier Show any given year. The few hired fill predominantly artistic positions: director, choreographer, musical director, and sound
designer. Many of these artists are also Soldier Show veterans. Interestingly, despite the Army’s typical hierarchical nature and the designation of artistic leadership positions, the Soldier Show seems to develop amidst a highly collaborative environment. While collaboration is key to successful theatrical endeavors, the approach taken by AED seems to reflect professional theater inexperience. The rehearsal process might include sound engineers giving the director staging notes. Coppinger and Smith struggle to balance their formal and professional theater knowledge and approach to productions with Army Entertainment’s more casual and informal tactics: “We want to teach them, ‘this is how you do it in the real world’ and there’s some resistance to that...they have their way of doing things which is not necessarily the most efficient way and they have so much money to do it with” (Coppinger). And while Smith and Coppinger technically outrank most of the soldiers they work with on the Soldier Show each year, soldiers are “not used to having civilians tell them what to do.” The co-existence of military rank structure and collaborative artistic practices creates a tricky environment to navigate for AED staff and soldier-actors alike. MSG Renee Hamilton commented on the confusion that started during the live audition week and has become part of her routine since being on tour:

It was different because [we are in] the military but we had to function like performers. So it was kind of hard for my brain to flip between the two sometimes. I couldn’t be like Master Sergeant, I had to be an entertainer like everyone else, even though we had a rank structure...I found [a balance], but initially it was weird because you couldn’t see a soldier and try to correct them or help them out. You had to let them be an entertainer and be a performer. So it took a good minute to learn how to balance it out and when to put either hat on.

While understandable, such back-and-forth likely complicates one’s artistic process. Confusing practices could lead to miscommunication during a very limited rehearsal period as the Soldier
Show is prepared and built at the Fort Sam Houston Theater. Coppinger tries to smooth out such confusions when theater hierarchy contradicts military hierarchy, “Our technical director is outranked by the guy who does the sound, but really the technical director is in charge of everything. We try to explain” [the hierarchy of the theater world]. While theater is a collaborative art form, Coppinger’s comment implies the necessity of leadership and structure for artistic vision to be fully achieved.

I attended a live performance of “Ready and Resilient,” the 2013 tour of the U.S. Army Soldier Show, at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, on July 4, 2013. The performance was the only outdoor tour stop in 2013. Such a unique quality helped to define my experience observing the performance. The stage was built up at the end of a large field, with the majority of the field being filled with food and drink stations, eating tents, carnival games and rides. The communal atmosphere on the lawn differed from the typical ambience Soldier Show attendees experience filing into a large auditorium with assigned seating. At Fort Leonard Wood, people brought blankets and lawn chairs, claiming space and conversing in anticipation of the show. Choosing where to sit and observe the performance was difficult. There was an area directly in front of the stage where soldiers still in basic training were congregated, on their feet, carousing and interacting as if it were a rock concert. Amidst lawn chairs, loud speakers, and large television projections, I found a “sweet spot” where I could hear and see the performance, but also remain aware of my immediate surroundings and how others were receiving the Soldier Show. Interestingly, throughout the performance, people were walking around the lawn, weaving around spectators, talking and socializing despite the loud music. The audience was made up of people of all ages, races, shapes, and abilities.
Because we were at an outdoor concert, the performance was dependent upon the weather. As it was July 4th and the day’s events were advertised to end with fireworks, the garrison commander had to make the difficult decision to interrupt the performance approximately two-thirds of the way through to skip ahead to the finale. With imminent storms heading our direction, the goal was to finish the performance in time to launch fireworks before rain or lightning arrived (not to mention needing to protect the expensive equipment on and around the stage). The announcement and abrupt halt of the momentum of the program was received with some boo’s and disappointed chatter. In less than two minutes, the ensemble came out on the stage, having changed to their dress blues, and performed the final song of the evening. It felt a bit anti-climactic, not in the spirit of a grand, patriotic finale. I was fortunate to view archival footage to witness the approximate 25 minutes of programming that was skipped on the night of July 4, 2013. Interestingly, two important new additions to the Soldier Show were missed at the Fort Leonard Wood show because of inclement weather - the inclusion of a SHARP sequence of songs and an announcement with accompanying song honoring the first women who would be eligible for combat assignments. Two significant messages about the role of women in the Army were skipped to ensure families could enjoy fireworks.

Prior to the start of the performance, I was able to interview several performers and technicians involved with the Soldier Show. They included SPC Joshua Theno, SPC Millie Sneed, SGT Quentin Dorn, MSG Renee Hamilton, SGT Ena Torres, SFC Hank Slaughter, SGT Elizabeth Lewandowski, and SGT Drake DeLucca. While the majority of those I spoke with had been in the Army approximately three or four years, MSG Hamilton and SFC Slaughter had both served more than a dozen years. SPC Theno was a magician/technician who entertained audiences
prior to the official start of the performance. SGT Lewandowski was invited to be a part of the Soldier Show as Wardrobe Supervisor, after “sewing” was found under skills on her AKO sheet (an online resource that contains profiles of every active duty soldier). SPC Theno and SFC Slaughter both applied as performers, but their abilities as technicians were observed during the live audition week. In fact, Slaughter had been promoted to NCOIC (Non-commissioned officer in charge) when the previous soldier had left the position. The leadership role is akin to a “road manager” on the tour. Slaughter coordinates the logistics of the performances, the set-up and tear down, the coordination with various host garrisons, etc. SPC Sneed had actually spent over a year singing for the 3rd Division Band before auditioning for the Soldier Show. Her time with Army Entertainment has spanned almost two and a half years in total. MSG Hamilton wanted to utilize her skills as a make-up artist while entertaining, recalling how “acting was my number one passion as a kid.” Similarly, SGT Dorn has a love of music and sought out the Soldier Show opportunity: “Music is my biggest passion...I saw an opportunity to both serve my country and do something I’m passionate about.” SGT Torres had intended to audition for the 2012 tour but her unit was being deployed to Kuwait and she did not want to miss out on that opportunity. Torres felt the delay was destiny, as she gets to perform in “Ready and Resilient” the role of Mary Poppins, her mother’s favorite film character. Everyone was gracious during my interviews, despite the hot summer weather, noisy air-conditioner in the cast trailer, and blaring pre-show entertainment (a local cover band). As representatives of the U.S. Army, the Soldier Show cast and crew are prepped by Media Relations in how to conduct themselves in interview processes. However, the interview responses felt truthful and heart-felt, and the soldiers seemed genuinely interested in my research on Army Entertainment.
SGT DeLucca’s involvement with the Soldier Show is different from the others. DeLucca is completing his third, and final, year with the tour as multi-media manager. His MOS (military occupational specialty) is multi-media illustrator, he works primarily on webpages and general education materials for the Army; it easily translated into his Soldier Show assignment. Prior to his time in the Army, DeLucca had worked with several cruise ships and professional summer stock theater companies as a technician. Similar to others I had spoken with, he found his role with Army Entertainment to be a true symbiosis of his experiences as both theater artist and soldier: “To be able to use the skills that I got in the civilian world in service to our service members is simply an honor.” DeLucca notes how that feeling is reciprocated each night after the performance when audience members shake performers’ hands with “tears in their eyes.”

** ** **

Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program

[Our mission is to] provide performance workshops to those U.S. Army garrisons that do not have an active entertainment program, or component thereof, and wish to engage their community in a family friendly event, by exposing participants to a broader knowledge base about successfully producing and executing theatrical and other entertainment events. (See Appendix F)

The one-week residency theatrical workshops offered to Army garrisons stateside and abroad are created, produced, and directed by the artistic team of Ken Freehill and Darryl Allara. These two gentlemen are professional, as well as personal, partners who have been working in the entertainment industry for approximately four decades. The two met while students at Arizona State University; Freehill was an undergraduate student in the Theater program when Allara was earning a Master’s degree in the same department. Moving to
Hollywood to further their performance careers, Freehill worked for the Screen Actors Guild while Allara worked for Actors Equity Association. The two began their own consulting firm, First Impressions Theatrical Services, which assisted smaller Los Angeles-based theater companies with box office, marketing, and press needs. Eventually, Freehill and Allara started producing the *Hollywood Murder Mystery Party* regularly around the Los Angeles area. The team used their own skills in marketing and business management to keep their production afloat in LA for several years before relocating to Dallas, Texas. The move was precipitated by a promotion opportunity for Freehill to serve as Regional Director for SAG. The dynamic duo has been together for more than thirty-four years and will be celebrating their one-year wedding anniversary in November 2014.

The couple’s involvement with Army Entertainment Division stems from Mr. Allara’s experience as a Vietnam veteran who sought out theater as a diversion from the atrocities (and boredom) of war. Allara served in the Army as a medic during the Vietnam War. Before being sent off to Vietnam, he was stationed at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, and participated peripherally in the base’s theater program. Once overseas, Allara felt the desire to do something for his fellow soldiers in an effort to boost morale and distract from the boredom between times of combat:

> Everyone with a college degree was horrified that we were cannon fodder and that we would die without seeing another play, without hearing another song, people were just shocked when that hit them, [it was just] so tragic [to have seen] these intelligent people, [with] years of school [who were] used to having a cultural outlet [face such a fate. So] we decided to start doing plays. (Allara)

Though Allara had limited experience with producing and performing theater, he utilized his connections with the Fort Sam Houston Theater to get play scripts shipped overseas. Thus he
began to produce play-readings, and eventually full theatrical productions near combat lines. The young soldier acquisitioned flat-bed trucks to serve as make-shift stages and jeeps to serve as stage lighting. Because of his single-handed Army entertainment operation, Allara earned a scholarship to get his bachelor’s degree, and eventually a master’s degree, in theater. This was made possible because of his connection with Margaret “Skippy” Lynn who ran Army Entertainment Division for more than three decades until her retirement in 1982. Skippy, one of the original twelve Civilian Actress Technicians sent to help entertain troops during the re-building of Europe after World War II, was impressed to hear of the young soldier’s initiative and found individual donors to fund Allara’s education.

Skippy Lynn would call upon Mr. Allara several times over the decades to assist Army Entertainment Division in various ways and he was always more than happy to come to her aid. Allara’s participation with Army Entertainment activities began as a solo endeavor, though his partner, Frehill, would accompany him when he travelled the globe. Eventually Freehill was also hired as an independent contractor with AED alongside Allara. Starting in 1982, on the request of Skippy Lynn, the duo represented Army Entertainment Division at the national conference of the American Theatre Association (ATA), building AED’s exhibit and presenting resume workshops. Ms. Lynn served as ATA’s executive director from 1982-1986; the national organization has since dissolved and been replaced by the American Association of Community Theatres (Daley 44). The duo has served as judges for the Festival of the Arts (an international Army competition of various theatre, music, and visual art entries from garrisons worldwide). Spanning the globe, the duo would visit individual installations’ Music and Theater programs to
judge musicals and plays, but also provide encouragement, constructive feedback, and professional advice to aspiring artists.

As the only two travelling entertainment directors contracted by Army Entertainment Division, Allara and Freehill identified a demand for live theater at those Army bases that did not participate in the Festival of the Arts. The duo set out to provide an outlet for soldiers, families, retirees, and civilians to have fun, meet new people, and use their imaginations; they created opportunities where volunteers from the Army community could choose to participate in the creation of, or simply attend, live entertainment. Allara and Freehill first proposed an initial tour of week-long improvisational workshops to Army Entertainment Division in 2000. Equipped with several years of successful producing and directing experience with their own improvisational piece, Hollywood Murder Mystery Party, the couple travelled to eleven bases in the first tour. Two of those eleven residencies took place at international U.S. Army locations. During the initial run of Hollywood Murder Mystery Party, the team was independently contracted by individual MWR offices and developed unique scenarios and dialogue inspired by each host installation. Some of the shows created during this tour include Miss Camp Bell at Fort Campbell in Kentucky, Easily Undone at Fort Lee in Virginia, and Passing the Buck at Fort Gordon in Georgia. Interestingly, both Fort Lee and Fort Gordon had an established theater company operating on post; however, the majority of garrisons served by Allara and Freehill’s theatrical workshop tours do not have the luxury of a resident Army Theater. The success of this first tour led to a multi-garrison tour of six European U.S. Army bases of a single improvised scenario, The Great American Game Show. This was one of the improvisational productions created by Allara and Freehill during their initial sequence of workshops. Starting with the
second tour, the artistic team was being contracted and financed by Army Entertainment Division, though individual MWR offices were still responsible for marketing and managing the workshops. The tour workshops always resulted in dinner theater performances; the addition of food and drink helped to create a casual, fun atmosphere and provided an entire evening of entertainment for soldiers and their families.

During the years between tours, Allara and Freehill continued to travel the globe as judges for the Festival of the Arts. In 2010, the duo proposed to Army Entertainment Division another tour based on a single scenario. The duo began a year-long, multi-garrison tour of 16 stateside U.S. Army bases in 2011. Having proposed an Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program to Army Entertainment Division, this tour produced *Murder 101* in week-long theatrical workshops on post. The scenario took place at a high school reunion where murders occurred and the murder mystery improvisational format was followed. AED agreed to sponsor an additional tour with Allara and Freehill during the first six months of 2013 to ten stateside U.S. Army bases. *Murder Two Point Uh-Oh!* was the production being toured and it followed a similar murder mystery formula as used in the previous tour, even carrying over a character, “Warren Oliver Ware.” Between 2000 and 2013, Allara and Frehill have produced and directed 54 performances in 43 week-long workshops throughout the United States and Europe on U.S. Army bases as independent contractors with Army Entertainment Division.

Each tour proposal was accepted under the condition that individual MWR offices would be responsible for organizing the co-directors’ residencies on or near base, arranging for marketing, ticketing, catering, and producing of the workshops and performance(s). For the 2013 tour to stateside U.S. Army bases, Joe Leavell, Director of Army Entertainment Division,
reached out to recreation programmers at MWR offices with detailed PowerPoint presentations that specified the organization and amount of funding such a tour would require of the installation’s MWR resources (including a steep $5,000 fee in case of cancellation) (Carlton). As explained by Brad Carlton, Recreation Programmer with Morale, Welfare, and Recreation at Fort Riley, Kansas, individual MWR offices would place bids on ideal tour dates and AED would send out a completed tour schedule which the local bases would have to accommodate. Ticket prices for workshop performances could be decided by individual MWR offices, based on the cost of catering, marketing, and general cost of living in the surrounding community. Marketing encompassed both selling tickets to the performance and recruiting potential volunteer actors from the local Army community. Aware of the thriving community theater scene in the nearby towns of Junction City and Manhattan, Mr. Carlton took the initiative to spread the word to the Junction City Little Theater two months in advance of the workshop. These Army Theatrical Workshops, designated as Category B programming, were produced solely with non-appropriated funding and the MWR offices’ goal was primarily to “break even” (Carlton). Fort Riley’s MWR office chose to produce only a single performance, reasoning it better to have one packed house than two half-full houses. Based on the attendance and participation during its first experience with the Theatrical Workshop tour, Mr. Carlton believes it likely that the MWR office would choose to put up two performances if offered the opportunity to host Mr. Allara and Mr Freehill on another tour.

In their years of developing these Theatrical Workshops, Mr. Allara and Mr. Freehill discovered strategies to ensure the rehearsals and resulting performances run as smoothly as possible. Depending on an individual MWR contract with the tour, workshops will last between
three and six days in length, including the performance(s). As part of its mission to bring entertainment and morale programming to an installation community, the program conducts all rehearsals on base. They are always held in the evening, and last between two and three hours. Depending on a pre-arranged contract between the individual base’s MWR office and AED, one or two performances cap off the workshop experience using banquet hall, service club, or theater facilities. Volunteers are sought in a number of creative ways and the recruitment doesn’t stop when rehearsals begin. Allara and Freehill continue their publicity for the performance all around the post throughout the time of their residency – at meetings of high commanding officers, on military radio stations, and at BOSS meetings (Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers). Typically, Mr. Allara and Mr. Freehill find few active duty or male volunteers participating in the workshops. DoD civilians and family members tend to be involved in the workshops, perhaps because they are seeking distraction from the situation of loved ones being deployed. This discrepancy in participation rates at many tour stops was disappointing to John Triplett, a DoD civilian participant from Fort Riley’s workshop in March 2013: “Ken and Darryl [said] that we had more active duty in this show than they had in some other places that they go to. And I thought, ‘well that’s kind of sad,’ because my viewpoint was ‘if you have soldiers, let them do it,’ because it’s for them as opposed to other people like me.” Official statistics on the number of participants in both the 2011 and 2013 tours can be found in Tables B-E.
Table B: 2013 *Improv Theatrical Workshops: Statistics on Participants and Audience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stateside U.S. Army Installations</th>
<th>Workshop Dates</th>
<th>Total Shows</th>
<th>Active Duty</th>
<th>DoD Civilian</th>
<th>Family Member</th>
<th>Retired Military</th>
<th>Civilian Volunteer</th>
<th>Total CAST</th>
<th>Total AUDIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ft McCoy, WI</td>
<td>1/27 – 2/1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Sill, Ok</td>
<td>2/10 - 2/14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lee, VA</td>
<td>2/25 - 3/2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Hunter-Liggett, CA</td>
<td>3/4 - 3/9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Riley, KS</td>
<td>3/18 - 3/23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Stewart, GA</td>
<td>4/8 - 4/12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAlester Army Depot, OK</td>
<td>4/21 - 4/26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD</td>
<td>5/28 - 6/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Campbell, KY</td>
<td>6/3 - 6/8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Bliss, TX</td>
<td>6/10 - 6/14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>175</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,276</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table C: *Comparison of Participation in 2011 and 2013 Improv Theatrical Workshop Tours*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2011 Tour - 16 workshops</th>
<th>2013 Tour - 10 workshops</th>
<th>% of Participation 2011 Tour</th>
<th>% of Participation 2013 Tour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Duty</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoD Civilian</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired Military</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Members</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian Volunteers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>161</strong></td>
<td><strong>175</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table D: *Percentage of Cast Participation at 2013 Workshops*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stateside U.S. Army Installations</th>
<th>Workshop Dates</th>
<th>% Active Duty</th>
<th>% DoD Civilian</th>
<th>% Family Member</th>
<th>% Retired Military</th>
<th>% Civilian Volunteer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ft McCoy, WI</td>
<td>1/27 - 2/1</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Sill, Ok</td>
<td>2/10 - 2/14</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lee, VA</td>
<td>2/25 - 3/2</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Hunter-Liggett, CA</td>
<td>3/4 - 3/9</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Riley, KS</td>
<td>3/18 - 3/23</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Stewart, GA</td>
<td>4/8 - 4/12</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAlester Army Depot, OK</td>
<td>4/21 - 4/26</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD</td>
<td>5/28 - 6/1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Campbell, KY</td>
<td>6/3 - 6/8</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Bliss, TX</td>
<td>6/10 - 6/14</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% Participation All Workshops 21% 26% 42% 2% 8%
Table E: Comparing Cast Size with Audience and Overall Participation in 2013 Tour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stateside U.S. Army Installations</th>
<th>Workshop Dates</th>
<th>Total Shows</th>
<th>Total CAST</th>
<th>Average AUDIENCE</th>
<th>% Audience Total</th>
<th>Ratio of Cast: Audience</th>
<th>% Total Cast Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ft McCoy, WI</td>
<td>1/27 - 2/1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Sill, Ok</td>
<td>2/10 - 2/14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lee, VA</td>
<td>2/25 - 3/2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Hunter-Liggett, CA</td>
<td>3/4 - 3/9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Riley, KS</td>
<td>3/18 - 3/23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Stewart, GA</td>
<td>4/8 - 4/12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAlester Army Depot, OK</td>
<td>4/21 - 4/26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD</td>
<td>5/28 - 6/1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Campbell, KY</td>
<td>6/3 - 6/8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ft Bliss, TX</td>
<td>6/10 - 6/14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>175</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,536</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When speaking about his continued involvement with AED over the years, Allara asserted the benefits of theater for participants, spectators, and producers:

I don’t have to be a psychiatrist to know that what I’m doing is a positive thing, or what we’re doing is a positive thing, for soldiers and their families. I can see it, I can feel it, I can touch it. [You know] what’s so cool is we work really very hard at what we do because we care so much about the end result, the impact, but we get paid back ten times more in terms of the energy, the enthusiasm, and the emotion of these people. (Allara)

The artistic duo is continuously motivated and inspired by the community they serve. They support Army Entertainment Division’s motto, “for the soldier, by the soldier,” equipping local Army community members with the skills to rehearse, produce, and perform live entertainment on post.

I discovered the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program after the 2013 tour of Murder Two Point Uh-Oh! was already under way. I sought the assistance of AED’s
Tim Higdon to connect with Freehill and Allara to arrange for a research trip. Depending on resources such as time, money, and location, I was hoping to attend the resulting performance of one of their workshops during the spring of 2013 and, if possible, to attend rehearsals to appreciate the process that led towards the finished product. Ultimately, I connected with Mr. Freehill via Facebook and was given permission to attend, observe, and, if I chose to, participate in the entire week of rehearsals leading up to the performance at the final 2013 tour stop, Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, during the week of June 10-14, 2013. Beyond serving as witness to these rehearsals and single performance, I was fortunate to have extended interviews with the co-creators of the tour, as well as abbreviated interviews with several participants in the workshop. Additionally, I spoke with a few individuals who had participated in the workshop tour that happened at Fort Riley near Junction City, Kansas, earlier that spring. I have also provided a small sampling of participant testimonials pulled from Allara and Freehill’s own archive of the 2013 tour of Murder Two Point Uh-Oh! (see Appendix G).

**Rehearsal Day One: Monday, June 10, 2013, 6-8 P.M., Banquet Hall**

At the first rehearsal, I counted eleven volunteers present, in addition to myself, Allara, and Freehill. There was a family unit of four – an active duty Non-Commissioned Officer, his wife, and two daughters; he was the only male volunteer present. Beyond the family unit, there were 7 other participants, all female.

The co-directors described how the week would operate and what committing to the workshop entailed – 1) attendance at all four workshop rehearsals, two hours each night, 6-8 P.M. after regular work day hours (with snacks and drinks provided), 2) attendance at the single
performance on the fifth day of the workshop, arriving one hour before the show began, assisting Allara and Freehill with seating guests and collecting guesses at the end of the performance, 3) a free dinner catered by Fort Bliss club services (tickets for the dinner theater performance were $35), 4) performing scripted dialogue (without any need to memorize the material) and “unscripted dialogue” when asked questions by the audience during the performance. Murder Mystery shows have been successful, according to the co-directors, because America was “crazy about mysteries” and people had a natural tendency to figure things out and solve puzzles. Mr. Freehill reminded the group, “every day you perform” (i.e. employee, parent, child, friend, spouse, or stranger).

The final 45 minutes of our first rehearsal were dedicated towards basic acting exercises designed to engage the participants in the fun of “play.” For the first exercise, Freehill walked around with a piece of paper with the letters “N-O” written on it. He asked people to take turns saying the word that those letters spelled, directing volunteers with different intentions and attitudes. He followed the same pattern with “W-H-A-T.” The next exercise had three or four volunteers stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder, playing the classic school-yard game of “Telephone.” The emphasis was on listening, receiving, and repeating, without hesitation or judgment. The final exercise of the evening was three-line scenes in groups of three. We were handed index cards with three scripted lines of dialogue and we were to provide a scenario and characters, choosing who spoke which lines (not every character had to speak and lines could be repeated). My scene partners were active duty non-commissioned officer Mike and active duty soldier Tiara. Freehill and Allara concluded the rehearsal with supportive and encouraging words, and asked volunteers to recruit even more participants for the remaining workshop
days. After rehearsal, Allara and Freehill invited me out to a late dinner on post. This was the first of two extended interviews I was able to conduct with the pair, learning more about their own theater backgrounds and their relationship with Army Entertainment Division.

Rehearsal Day Two: Tuesday, June 11, 2013, 6-8 P.M., Banquet Hall

Day Two started with the acknowledgement of several new faces in the room. Nine more volunteers were present, many of them male and/or active duty soldiers. Because of the large number of new participants, Allara and Freehill took time to rehash the responsibilities of a workshop volunteer and to review the structure and plot of the performance. After having repeated variations of the first day’s exercises of reciting written phrases and conducting a human “Telephone,” we were asked to create short scenes in groups of three or four. We were encouraged to have a clear beginning, middle, and end, as well as easily discernable setting and characters. We were provided with two lines of scripted dialogue and told we had the option to create a third line of dialogue, if so desired. I was partnered with two new participants – a young adolescent named Chyna and an active duty soldier named Shane.

That evening, Allara and Freehill had cast the show, having assigned everyone a role. Most roles were already designated and pre-written into their circus-wedding scenario (an outline which was written to accommodate as few as 12 and as many as 33 participants), though the youth in the Fort Bliss group needed specific character names and lines written for them. Additionally, there were two female active duty soldiers present who were identical twins, and Allara and Freehill were excited to accommodate such a boon in relation to their circus-themed show.
**Rehearsal Day Three: Wednesday, June 12, 2013, 6-8 P.M., Banquet Hall**

The third day of rehearsal was greeted with the presence of three new faces, all males – two active duty soldiers and one family member. The artistic duo made an announcement about ticket sales, encouraging volunteers to get their friends and family to reserve tickets ahead of time, as the workshop performances at previous tour stops almost always sold out. Immediately, Freehill asked the group to jump into another three-line scene activity, to get the actors warmed up. After presenting their scenes, which have gotten more playful and more specific as the days passed, the co-directors handed out index cards with the scripted dialogue portion of *Murder Two Point Uh-Oh!* Then the group was guided through the sequence of dialogue, the participants getting to practice their lines and figure out their characters for the first time. Now that the volunteers were assigned a role, it was easier for them to interpret and understand the structure of the show, and to make choices as to how to serve the plot. After reading through the “bounce around” portion of the show, the performers were asked to split into three groups and discuss back story. The group later re-convened to briefly outline plans for Thursday’s final workshop rehearsal and then sent on their way.

**Rehearsal Day Four: Thursday, June 13, 2013, 6-8pm, Banquet Hall and Ballroom**

The energy of the room was amped up as I entered the rehearsal space for day four. It was reflective of how theater brings people together at an exponential speed. Right at six o’clock, the duo hushed the crowd and explained the long list of things that would happen during this final rehearsal. We started with a faster-paced read through of the “bounce around”
There was a lot of energy and side chatter, requiring Freehill to remind the group “we only have one night, so cut the crap.” The “bounce around” continued and Allara chimed in to introduce the concept of “resting” while performing, waiting for laughter to die down before speaking again. He also wanted to empower them to feel free to breathe and repeat a line if an actor felt that it was drowned out by laughter.

Then, briefly, the group rehearsed the question portion of the show. Freehill reminded the cast about an eyebrow raising technique he offered up during rehearsal - if you were unsure of what to say when answering a question, raise your eyebrows, and he would assist you in responding. (John Triplett, a Department of Defense civilian employee and participant in Fort Riley’s Murder Two Point Uh-Oh! workshop who had previously participated in local murder mysteries found the body language a savvy stage trick to avoid overtly expressing anxiety or uncertainty when answering questions in an improvisational setting: “that’s a nice technique, I like that”). Freehill assured the cast it was acceptable to not know how to answer a question, given the limited rehearsal time and minimal structure provided around the plot line and connection of characters.

After this sequence, Allara and Freehill selected a handful of actors to audition for the role of the third murder victim who had a dramatic death near the end of the performance and was not made aware of his/her role until just before the show began. The volunteers playing “Kittee Litre,” “Wynona,” “Dr. Doolittle,” and “Sam’s Son” were asked to, all at once, act “as if” there were snakes in their pants and they were dying. They had two chances, as a group, to demonstrate their ability to make big choices and have fun. Allara and Freehill thanked them.
and then directed the entire group of volunteers to transfer to the ballroom where the actual performance would be taking place the following evening.

Energy rose again, as did the enthusiastic chatter, as we walked to the ballroom. The artistic duo quickly staged the “Oodles” death scene, with the wedding party encouraged to ad lib responses of shock and surprise. Upon hearing a random “Oh my God,” Freehill quickly corrected them to say “OMG” or “Oh my gosh” instead. Such a brief moment reminded me that we were performing on a U.S. Army base for a collective that might be more conservative, politically and religiously, than the theater audiences I am used to directing for. They ended their second round of “bounce around” dialogue right at the two hour marker and the artistic duo, clearly exhausted, sent the volunteers out and reminded them to meet an hour before the show, in costume (meaning something their character would wear to a rehearsal dinner). I also made plans to have lunch with one of the participants, Trecia “Tre” Wilson, on Friday to discuss her involvement with Army Theater in Europe and in the states.

Over lunch, Mrs. Wilson, 48, explained her history with the Army. Her family was stationed in Grafenberg, Germany, for a period and it was there she discovered a thriving Army Theater program. She began getting involved onstage and off, driving 90 minutes each way, in order to participate in her newfound theater family. Her participation with Army Theater in Germany was responsible for her previous interactions with Allara and Freehill, who served as judges of the Festival for the Arts. Mrs. Wilson praised Army Theater for providing her with an outlet: “It’s critical to have that environment because as a military spouse you tend to [isolate yourself].” She continued to describe how military spouses tend to only socialize with other
spouses from the same unit, noting how the presence of Army Theater “added another avenue for military spouses and children and military members, all of ‘em” [her emphasis].

When Mrs. Wilson’s husband was reassigned to Fort Bliss, Texas, she was disheartened to discover that an Army Theater program did not exist on post. She was proactive and sought out theater opportunities in the local community theater scene. When asked of any differences between the two experiences, Trecia noted that local community theater people have a “mindset that is not specifically military,” which she found refreshing. Mrs. Wilson believed strongly in the desire for diversion on post, saying kids, spouses, and soldiers not deployed all suffer from “not hav[ing] enough to keep them occupied.” It felt “very stagnant.”

Her final thoughts on stateside Army Theater echoed the words of Fort Carson military spouse Sabine Mann, who also experienced Army Theater while her husband was stationed in Germany (Mann is discussed in detail in Chapter 4). Both women recognized the Army’s over-population of MWR programming, particularly stateside when there were so many recreational opportunities accessible off post. Mrs. Wilson reflected on such discrepancies: “military can try to spread itself too thin on posts and try to have too many things for people to do and not enough funds to do it.” With her kids living away from home and her husband deployed, Trecia was very thankful to have this workshop opportunity which provided her a social and creative outlet.

**Performance Day: Friday, June 14, 2013, Call time 6 P.M., Show at 7 P.M.**

Having arrived in the adjacent ballroom where the cast was to meet for their call, I noticed the room buzzing with volunteers making last minute preparations. Freehill gave the
volunteers one final pep talk and reminded them of their pre-show responsibility of seating guests, their post-show responsibility of collecting guess-sheets, and the eyebrow raising technique to employ whenever a performer was at a loss for how to answer a question during the show, to simply “follow the logic of characters and logic of what is going on.” Both Freehill and Allara reminded the group to speak loudly and clearly, to take their time, and ultimately to have fun. Allara closed the pre-curtain pep talk by appreciating the cast and their participation during the week of workshops: “Thank you. It’s been a wonderful week. [We’re] so proud of you ... Active duty [participating in the workshops] helps us define the mission [of MWR and of the workshop tour],” leaving with a final nudge of encouragement, “Have a good time ... be as big as you possibly can. We won’t pull you back.”

During this pre-show time, I was able to conduct a number of brief interviews with participants, including four active duty soldiers and two Army spouses. My conversations with Master Sergeant Mike Zaring and his wife Julie Zaring shed light on the importance of Army Theater opportunities for family bonding. Being away from his family during the school year, MSGT Zaring commented on the benefits of participating in this creative activity together as a family unit. Both he and Julie reflected that they attended the first workshop primarily to provide a performance outlet for their daughters, but were energized, excited, and a little intimidated to participate fully in workshops themselves. Private Second Class Catin Downing, a young female soldier, 19, had come to the pre-show call with several potential outfits in tow, adorned in jewels, make-up, and a polished evening hairstyle. 2CL PVT Downing, who played “Bitsy Ross,” had performed in plays and musicals throughout her high school tenure and had a strong desire to continue pursuing performance opportunities both during and after her time
with the Army. Twin female soldiers, Specialist Sarai Eckblat and Sergeant Cassandra Eckblat, 26, sat with me briefly and spoke of their ongoing interest in performance. Though not serious performers, the sisters had participated in their youth in choir and plays at their church, and even acted in small roles in a cousin’s directing project in college. Katima Underwood, 29, had recently married an Army soldier and had relocated to Fort Bliss just before her husband was deployed. She found the workshop a nice distraction and an opportunity to interact with the community, having been “by [herself] with nothing to do.” Katima actually heard about Murder Two Point Uh-Oh! on a website devoted to military spouses at Fort Bliss and found the experience exceeded her expectations. After these brief conversations, I made my way to the performance space.

Before entering the ballroom, guests were asked to select a nametag from the table near the entrance. The nametags were all pre-written, displaying all sorts of pun-inspired names such as Carrie Oakey (read: “karaoke”), Anita Mann (read: “I need a man”), Seymore Butz (read: “see more butts”), and Oliver Clozov (read: “all of her clothes off”). These pun-tastic names were a way to include the audience from the very beginning of the evening, well before the performance began. The nametags were a great source of conversation once guests arrived to their seats, and set the spectators’ minds in motion as to what the evening would bring.

I walked into the ballroom and noted the colorful decorations. In addition to the “Big Top” look of the pink and white striped backdrop, there were also colorful, circus-themed center-piece decorations on each table. Each table had ten chairs, and many had seats tipped inward, to designate a claimed seat for performers who were busy seating guests. There were two cash bars, one outside and one inside the ballroom. My initial response to seeing the
presence of alcoholic beverages at the performance was unsettling because the event was advertised as a family friendly show. Allara and Freehill told me after the performance they fought to make sure the MWR office arranged for the cash bars to be available, in addition to the catered meal that was included in the ticket price. They recognized many in attendance had never been to live theater, let alone an interactive performance, and the alcohol would keep people in good spirits.

I found my tipped seat at a banquet table which was occupied by a group of seven patrons, most were active duty soldiers stationed at Fort Bliss. From our pre-show small talk, I gathered that the soldiers had not experienced live theater on post. Many of those sitting at my table seemed excited to be spending a Friday night out doing something different, enjoying a meal and entertainment at a reasonable price. Between my conversations with my table-mates, I reviewed the color printed program laying on my place setting which included a full volunteer list, designating rank and/or connection to the Army, and a separate list of characters. During this pre-show time, Allara and Freehill were moving around the ballroom, chatting with guests, and occasionally placing a sticker or marking symbols on individual nametags. These demarcations came into play during the performance. Again, this was another intriguing element that kept the audience members invested in the impending performance.

After everyone received their meal (a process which took some time, since the meal was served buffet style), the performance began with Freehill welcoming guests and introducing Allara, a Vietnam War Army veteran. After some applause, he continued to explain briefly how Allara brought theater to the front lines and his continued mission to bring theater to soldiers and their families. The actual show began with Allara speaking as “Johnny Mac,” the ring leader
of the circus. What followed was an introduction of all the characters, by the characters.

Audience members’ focus was directed throughout the ballroom to different characters at different tables; they read a few lines from their index cards, giving the audience a brief sense of their role in the wedding. Freehill was moving around the room during this time, assisting the passing of the microphone, helping to emphasize something a character said for the audience to make note of. After we met the cast of characters, the best man, “Doodles,” asked guests in the room with the following numbers on their nametag to rise and be recognized when called. Each number announced includes roughly four to eight audience members standing and the audience applauded for each group. Those designated with “1” on their nametags were the circus high wire artists, “2’s” were members of the equestrian team, “3’s” were bear trainers, “4’s” were bearded ladies (no one was assigned “4”), and “5’s” were the pooper scoopers.

The wedding party excused themselves into the hallway to prepare to rehearse the wedding march. Meanwhile, in the ballroom, “Sarah Bellum” performed a mind trick:

Think of any number between 1 and 10. Now take that number and multiply by 9. Now add up the digits of that number to give you a new number. Now subtract 5 from that number. Now take that number and pick the letter in the alphabet that corresponds to that number (A being 1, B being 2, so on and so forth). Now think of a country that starts with that letter. Now take the second letter of that word and think of an animal that starts with that letter. Now think of the color of that animal. Really? Gray elephants in Denmark? Only at the zoo.

For those in the audience who were able to hear the actor and keep up with her prompts, there was a slight gasp of surprise when she guessed what most were thinking. (It had a similar effect on me the first time I had followed along with her mind trick in rehearsals.)

The mothers of the bride and groom then re-entered and began handing out kazoo randomly at different tables in the room. Reverend “Celia Fate” asked the audience to help hum the wedding march as the wedding party practiced their entrance – instead, we heard a
popular circus tune. The wedding party entered wearing and wielding various circus paraphernalia, and struck their pose while the audience was invited to take pictures. While posing, maid of honor “Oodles” had her dramatic death scene and collapsed on the floor in front of the wedding party, with her feet raised in the air.

Upon seeing this comical death sequence, Freehill yelled “Freeze” and explained to the audience how the rest of the evening would proceed. He introduced himself as a local El Paso “Detective” who was investigating the murder of “Rip Tilian,” a dinner guest who never showed up. He broke the “Freeze,” and asked if there was a doctor in the house. The circus vet “Dr. Doolittle” pronounced “Oodles” dead and the transport team was called. Those audience members with a red sticker on their nametags (including two men from our table) had to help carry the body out of the ballroom. The audience began humming “Taps” with the kazoo. It was unclear if this was provoked by Freehill or was the expression of a natural instinct by a U.S. military community when one of their own has fallen.

The “Detective” led a round of questioning, asking characters about their whereabouts during the final hours of “Oodles.” Questions “bounced around,” each person accusing another, while Mr. Freehill helped to coordinate and clarify key plot points along the way. As a spectator, this sequence felt long and drawn out; I noticed several members from my table distracted and engaged in small talk or playing with items on our table. The “Detective” began to ask unrehearsed questions of various characters. The responses varied from concise and clever, to nonsensical and stumbling. At one point, Freehill quipped “I didn’t write that.”

Next, the audience was invited to begin asking the characters questions to clarify details in order to help solve the two murders. Freehill reminded the crowd that “characters won’t lie,
but need not tell the whole truth.” This little bit of information served well to keep the audience tuned into what the characters were saying and may have been withholding, and also protected the volunteer actors from feeling the pressure to answer correctly. The statement ensured an environment of inclusivity and agreement, two key elements to successful improvisation.

Amidst the free-form questioning, “Boom Boom,” the human cannonball, revealed himself as an Interpol agent, “William Richard Babcock,” who had been investigating the theft of millions of dollars-worth of jewels. From then on, the action became more sporadic and less easy to follow. “Dr. Doolittle” ran around the ballroom screaming and eventually collapsed. His death sequence was taking too long, so Freehill prodded “it’s only an hour and a half show.” Once the character finally died, it was discovered he died from snakes in his pants and the transport team was called upon once again to remove the body.

The “Detective” asked the audience to help him determine who committed the murders and the motive behind such crimes. The cast passed around guessing sheets and golf pencils to the banquet tables. In the following ten minutes, sheets were collected and brought to the stage where Freehill and Allara were sorting guesses into character piles and reading answers. Though seemingly uninterested in many portions of the performance, my table-mates invested time and energy in making their guesses. The way the scenario was written, any character could be justified as the murderer; Allara and Freehill never designated the same character as the murderer over the course of the ten tour stops.

Once all the guesses were collected, the murderer revealed himself and his motivations behind his actions. At the 2013 Fort Bliss tour, “Doodles” confessed to the murder, jealous of
“Rip Tilyan” and his relationship with “Oodles.” The other two deaths were explained by the “Detective” as accidental – peanut butter on the glass of highly allergic “Oodles” sent her into anaphylactic shock and, after the snake tank was broken during the murder of “Rip,” the wandering snakes found their way into the doctor’s pants. Freehill called upon the security team to escort the murderer out of the ballroom and two individuals with blue stickers on their nametags rose to fulfill their duties. The oldest, and possibly shortest, couple in the entire room was chosen to remove the violent criminal. It was a hilarious moment, made even more extreme by the height of the soldier playing “Doodles.”

After “Doodles” was removed, Freehill and Allara awarded small prizes to the top three answers of the night, based on accuracy and creativity. Then the cast was called to the stage, accompanied by much applause. The co-directors acknowledged the commitment and dedication of the volunteers, and they gave special recognition to the large number of active duty soldiers participating. Having introduced cast members one at a time, Allara and Freehill handed each volunteer a Certificate of Participation. As the audience cleared out, I assisted the duo in cleaning up the space and asked them to briefly assess the week’s outcomes. The co-directors felt the workshops and resulting show fell in line with past experiences along the tour. They were pleased with the show, the participants’ performances, and the audience’s engagement.

With such limited rehearsal time, it was interesting to see how Allara and Freehill chose to focus their time and attention. It was clear in my observations, and in my interviews with the co-directors, that their priority was to make the participants feel engaged as a community and have fun together while working towards a common goal. Indeed, over the course of the four
days of workshop rehearsals, I witnessed the participants developing connections and building trust, and it appeared the performance served to strengthen that foundation even further - they were “brothers and sisters in combat” who had faced the challenge of live theater together and survived to share their victory.

**Participant Impact**

Looking at reported statistics on participation and attendance from the 2011 and 2013 Army Theatrical Workshop Tours, there are some noteworthy comparisons to be made (see Tables B-E). While the 2013 tour reached only ten installations, compared to sixteen visited in 2011, there was an increase in the overall number of participants. In addition, the ratios of participation changed slightly between the two tours. The most important datum, according to the mission of MWR and by extension, the tour, was a 5% increase in the number of active duty soldiers participating in the workshops. Looking at statistics from individual stops on the 2013 tour, active duty participation was reported at percentages of 38% or greater for four of the ten bases. In comparison, eight of ten bases on the 2013 tour reported family member percentages of 36% or greater. In the After Action Report for the 2011 tour, Allara and Freehill were able to dissect the participation figures with reference to the amount of previous theatrical performance experience. Of the 161 participants in 2011, approximately half had no performance experience of any kind. The remaining half were split into three types of performance experience: limited performance experience, some performance experience, and consistent performance experience. While no such data is available for the 2013 tour, my
observations and conversations with participants at Fort Bliss and Fort Riley reflect a similar composition.

Though the show provides live entertainment for hundreds of soldiers and family members on post at every tour stop, the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program primarily serves the participants involved in the creation of the performance and the MWR staff who can observe, and hopefully re-create, the successful model of a dinner theater program. Examining the “process” of rehearsing, as opposed to evaluating the “product” of a production, this section will address the direct benefits of performing in, rather than merely, observing theater produced by and for the Army.

Given that Brad Carlton from Fort Riley’s MWR office, Denise Heller from Fort Bragg’s MWR office, Allara, and Freehill all briefly spoke of the educational and experiential effect of facilitating one week of rehearsals and workshops in building theater-producing skills, this study will utilize participant feedback regarding the benefits derived from these experiences. Rather than analyzing the possibilities of re-establishing regular theater operations at a given installation, I shall look at participant benefits in the light of the more realistic future of Army Theater in the form of national workshop tours.

The participants benefited from six to ten hours of private coaching and instruction from two theater professionals who have worked in the entertainment industry for over forty years. Through specifically chosen acting exercises, Allara and Freehill trained participants in skill-building techniques that could be utilized both in performance and in life. Covering essential abilities to listen and repeat, to speak loudly and clearly with specific intentions, and to communicate effectively with a group working towards a shared goal, the workshop rehearsals
equipped participants with the skills to adapt and interact in a variety of interpersonal circumstances. These applicable skills were not unnoticed by Master Sergeant Mike Zaring who reflected on the impact of the week of workshops. Zaring appreciated how Allara and Freehill modelled admirable behavior such as how “to learn patience [and] to deal with people.” Such reflections from someone training to become an even stronger leader should not be taken lightly.

When speaking with participants from Fort Riley’s Murder Two Point Uh-Oh! tour stop earlier in 2013, I gathered similar reactions in terms of skill-building. John Triplett, an active member of Junction City Little Theater and Fort Riley’s own Gaslight Theatre (before it shut down in the 1980s), noted how the co-directors constructed the workshop time: “rehearsal wasn’t so much [about] ‘what we were doing [in the show]’ but acting exercises, getting to know different people. It was a lot of fun.” In fact, DoD employee and military spouse Carolyn Lee Tolliver, who also participated in Fort Riley’s Murder Two Point Uh-Oh! tour workshop, noted how the rehearsals were her favorite part of the week-long experience: “Actually, I liked the rehearsals better than I liked the play because we got to really put all our parts together and see how the play was. [I think] I gained more from the rehearsal than I actually did from the actual performance.” Interestingly, she followed this comment with an assumption that such an experience was “really odd.” To her, there was a belief that the performance aspect of the workshop would be the most fun and thrilling aspect of the workshop. Such an opinion seems to be very “result” or “product” oriented, when the workshop experience that Allara and Freehill have crafted emphasizes the “process” of rehearsals and building community.
It was this emphasis on community and collaboration which seemed to have the most impact on the participants involved in the workshop tour. As Fort Riley’s librarian, Triplett found the experience to provide him new ways of interacting with the community and publicizing the resource his library provides on base. Tolliver highlighted the importance of community in her continued participation in the workshops. After a nerve-wracking first rehearsal, Tolliver chose to commit to the rest of the rehearsals “because of the camaraderie between all of us, I felt very comfortable and I said, ‘okay, I can go back another day and do this.’” She clarifies that it was because “we all seemed to have gelled together is what allowed me to go back a second time.”

Another benefit to being a performer in the workshop experience is the opportunity to portray a character on stage. For a few hours, the participant gets a chance to step outside of the daily stresses and pressures of being an active duty soldier, a family member of a deployed soldier, or DoD civilian employee. As John Triplett of Fort Riley put it, “being onstage allows you to be somebody that you’re not...they don’t have to be ‘Specialist Lieutenant Captain Whatever.’ They can be somebody completely different.” Private Second Class Catin Downing from Fort Bliss celebrated the opportunity to “give up who you are when you are onstage.”

Tolliver of Fort Riley relayed the importance of an extra-curricular activity that was easy and entertaining: “It was very light. It wasn’t very demanding...it was something fun to do.” In many conversations about theater produced by and for the Army, this recurrent theme of light and fun entertainment emphasizes the demand for diversion and distraction from the heavy and daunting daily stresses of living on an Army base as an active duty soldier or family member. As Trecia Wilson of Fort Bliss says, “sometimes you just need to have fun.” Though
both participants and spectators are entertained by the performance, it is the participants who walk away having enjoyed hours and hours of playful acting games, community building activities, and the opportunity to step out their daily role as soldier, spouse, child, or employee.

In addition to my own observations and interviews, Allara and Freehill offered access to testimonials collected from the 2013 tour that support my findings on participation benefits. Volunteers wrote of their increased confidence, their enjoyment, their new-found friends, and their welcome distraction from missing a loved one on deployment. Some even (re)discovered a love of acting and performing. According to these reflections, the MWR fulfilled its mission to enhance “quality of life” for soldiers and their families with this AED sponsored event. While it was hard to limit the assortment of testimonials from the 2013 Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop tour, a selection of reflections can be found in Appendix G.

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*BRAVO! Army Theater Touring Company*

This program is Army Entertainment Division’s newest national and international touring innovation. The “brain child” of AED Producing Director Tim Higdon, Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company began in 2000 and ended in 2006. Though its run was short-lived, the program is pivotal because it brought live theater to soldiers stationed stateside and overseas, including those deployed to the front lines of combat (also known as “down range”). Bravo’s successes and challenges serve as a great barometer for future incarnations of similar theater programming Army-wide.
Unlike the big budget entertainment of the U.S. Army Soldier Show, Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company was created to provide theater on a minimal budget for those soldiers deployed and those garrisons without their own entertainment programs. In his Army News Service article, “Soldiers to Incite Laughter from Troops at U.S. History’s Expense,” published online November 29, 2004, Tim Hipps explains that Bravo!’s purpose “is not only to entertain but to inspire commanders to establish and support music and theater activities for Soldiers on their installations.” Touring companies would consist of four to eight soldiers who made up the cast and crew of a given production. Performers and technicians had to submit video auditions to be eligible for live audition invitations. Similar to the intense schedule of casting the Soldier Show, Bravo! company members began rehearsing two days after they were cast (Hipps, “Soldiers to Incite Laughter”). The company rehearsed for twelve hours a day for one month before beginning their four- to six-month tours (Bodine).

Because of the small scale aspect of the company, not only were there a limited number of soldiers involved but there were minimal costumes, props, and set pieces. Bravo! Company members served as their own convoy guard when they traveled from location to location down range. Tim Higdon proudly distinguishes the tour from any other self-produced (AED) or outsourced (i.e. USO) touring experience: “We’ve had people go to the Middle East, but we want to get them to the small remote places where they can’t take contract civilian entertainers – take them on four-hour truck convoys into little camps” (Hipps, “Army Theater Group”). Joe Lier, Bravo! company manager during its 5th tour celebrated the troupe’s ability to get to every soldier who seeks recreation and diversion: “We are like the SWAT team of entertainment. We fly or drive to a venue, set up all of our equipment, rehearse, perform, and
then tear-down the equipment. We have some very long days” (Bodine). In contrast to the estimated 1,000 spectators per Soldier Show performance, Bravo! entertained only 50 to 100 soldiers at each show (See Appendix G). With no amplification and in such small venues, this newest Army touring offering provided an intimacy unlike any before it.

Tim Higdon proposed Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company in 2000 and within months he was organizing the first touring group of soldiers. Higdon directed the cast in an original musical about baseball, *Play Ball*. After its initial tour, Higdon delegated producing responsibilities to one of the actors from Bravo!’s initial tour and directing responsibilities to other Army community theater directors. In fact, the few remaining theater programs operating on Army bases were primary targets for seeking out interested “soldier-actors.”

Bravo! provided soldier-actors with the opportunity to return to their passion for performing. As Spc. Donnie George, one of the soldier-actors in *The Complete History of America (abridged)*, explained, “this turns out to be a win-win situation because I’m getting to do something that I really want to do and I’m getting to boost the morale of Soldiers” (quoted in Hipps, “Soldiers to Incite Laughter”). As with any Army Entertainment initiative, Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company carried on the mission Irving Berlin began during World War I, providing entertainment “for the soldier, by the soldier.” Spc. James Dreussi, also in *Complete Works*, professed: “I was excited to hear about BRAVO! I might not be the most comedic person in the world but if I can at least get [Soldiers’] minds off of what’s going on for the moment, I really feel honored to give them that opportunity” (Hipps, “Soldiers to Incite Laughter”). During the final leg of the *Pvt. Wars* tour in 2006, Sgt. Eric Bragg reflects on the dual role of the soldier-actor: “You don’t look at a soldier as being an artistic creature. But we’re drawn from the same
country that everyone else lives in. We just have a different job to do, so it’s nice to have an outlet like this” (quoted in Allington). Bravo! company members carry a great deal of pride and respect in their commitment to serve their fellow soldiers. NCO Lier boasts, “I really appreciate being a military entertainer” (quoted in Bodine). While reflecting on the cost-benefits of Bravo! and providing theater for those deployed overseas with limited access to other forms of live entertainment, Lier expresses the most valuable aspect of his mission: “The biggest benefit though is getting entertainment out to those who need it” (quoted in Bodine).

Some soldier-actors entered into Bravo! without any performance experience. Others knew about Army Entertainment Division and specifically enlisted with the purpose of serving as an entertainer for their fellow soldiers. Sgt. Eric Bragg had ten years of acting experience before joining the cast of Pvt. Wars as part of Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company’s final tour: “I came in specifically knowing that [AED] was here and that I was going for it” (quoted in Hipps, “Army Theater Helps Soldiers”). While experience levels differed greatly, the focus of Bravo’s mission was not lost. Private First Class Blake Boles believes his time with Bravo! “is the noblest thing that we as performers can do ... this, to me, is bigger than Broadway” (quoted in Hipps, “Army Theater Group”). The glitz and lure of big budget productions, whether Broadway or the Soldier Show, does not dull the satisfaction a Bravo! company member feels presenting theater for fellow soldiers.

Though Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company built on its success, bringing delight to Army communities who may not have had access to other Army Entertainment Programming, Higdon’s “brain child” held its final tour in 2006 due to budgetary constraints. Higdon continues to remain positive that Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company will be resurrected. More than
any other live entertainment programming AED offers, Higdon believes Bravo! best fulfilled the motto coined by Irving Berlin, “for the soldier, by the soldier”: “I think we take that interaction one step further and say: ‘I’m one of your own, and I’m taking my time and my holiday just to help you get away for 90 minutes’” (quoted in Hipps, “Army Theater Group”).

The final tour of Bravo! circulated the production of *Pvt. Wars*, by James McLure. Billed as a comedy by its publisher, Samuel French, Inc., the play takes place in a VA hospital where three soldiers are recovering from physical and mental injuries that resulted from their involvement in the Vietnam War. Tobin Atkinson, director of the play, found the comedy an effective format for communicating the play’s themes: “I think the humor [in this play] is really therapeutic” (quoted in Hipps, “Army Theater Helps Soldiers”). Despite such an endorsement, the material of *Pvt. Wars* made the tour for “mature audiences.” In the opinions of Ken Freehill and Darryl Allara, co-directors of *Murder Two Point Uh-Oh!*, the piece was a “brilliant script, but terrible for Army morale and not family friendly.” This tour didn’t align with typical family programming offered by Army Entertainment Division and the decision to perform *Pvt. Wars* likely impacted the number of audience members who might attend the performance. Despite the targeted adult audience, the soldier-actors involved felt the message was strong and served the active-duty community by openly addressing difficult topics such as mental health issues faced by those returning home after deployment. Sergeant First Class Robert Isom was impressed by the Army’s active engagement in the issues: “I think that’s the beauty of the military taking it on the road to bring them together to build one corps” (quoted in Hipps, “Army Theater Helps Soldiers”). Isom continued, explaining how the performance onstage acted like a mirror: “It allows that soldier to see himself ... or that person to see themselves. So I
think the [play is] letting them know that it’s ok, it’s ok to laugh, it’s ok to cry, we all have private issues...but there is hope” (quoted in Allington). Though the subject matter was darker in nature than previous farces that Bravo! produced, it is commendable that Army Entertainment made the effort to recognize the difficulties soldiers and their families face after a soldier’s homecoming.

The concept of taking scripted and staged, live theater to Army communities is something Ken Freehill and Darryl Allara, co-directors and co-creators of the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program, would like to expand upon. The two were in early talks in 2013 with Director of Army Entertainment Division, Joe Leavell, about possibly re-inventing Bravo! company with a new model. Their idea was to produce and direct two permanent actors in I Hate Hamlet (one would be Freehill and the other an active duty soldier), taking the tour to different installations, casting and rehearsing the remaining roles on location. They felt the model would be effective because the local community members are more likely to attend live theatre if their own friends and family perform on the stage.

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Having addressed these three unique theatrical tours, I can make some general observations. First is that there is a fascinating tension with respect to issues of power and authority. The Army, like any military branch, functions under a delineated hierarchy of ranked officers and soldiers who give or obey commands. However, in the rehearsal room and on the stage, soldier-actors are equals, working and performing together to create an entertaining show for their fellow soldiers and their families. How they shift from hierarchy to collaboration
is mind-boggling and fascinating. Another unique challenge in this invisible, yet always present, Army hierarchy is the role that Coppinger and her Technical Director husband, Steve, play in the rehearsal room. As civilians who’ve trained and worked in professional theater for more than fifteen years, they are responsible for educating and training the soldiers how to use, and respect, the equipment they’ll be building and performing on. However, soldiers are not equipped to take “orders” or instruction from civilians. Similarly, Army Entertainment civilian employees who once served in the Army, and in the Soldier Show, interact as if the hierarchy of command was still in place. Honor and respect are expected based on the ranks they held when they were discharged, rather than on their civilian employee status or theater production experience.

Another point of conversation in looking at the effectiveness of Army Entertainment Division’s national theatrical tours is the question of ambition. Is the theater produced by Army Entertainment on local and national levels of an amateur or professional level? Darryl Allara and Ken Freehill, co-directors of the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program, believe the Army’s indifference to these designations is detrimental to the potential longevity of the remaining Army community theaters and national theatrical tours. “The Army has never decided if it’s a professional theater or community theater... the command doesn’t understand the distinction” (Allara). They note that professional theatre vs. community theatre status is determined by who is directing, i.e. whether that person has professional training and experience. Allara and Freehill aren’t denigrating the values of community theater but believe the caliber of Army Theater productions has decreased over the years as professional entertainment directors have retired or passed away. It is noteworthy to recall Tim Higdon’s
experience acting in a play by Shakespeare during his Fort Knox Music and Theater days – currently, the few remaining stateside theaters struggle to stay afloat and produce mainly comedies, mysteries, and musicals to please their audiences. Similarly, the Soldier Show in recent years has become more centrally song-and-dance, with fewer opportunities to showcase performers’ non-musical individual talents.

Financial resources are directly connected to this identification as professional or community theater. During the mid- to late-1980s, as many Music and Theater Programs on Army bases across the United States were shutting their doors, the Soldier Show and other national AED touring entities were gaining momentum. The Army recognized the need to fill the gaps of entertainment access by increasing the size and spectacle of the Soldier Show to accommodate the increasing demand for Army Entertainment at local garrisons. Because national and international tours provide more positive publicity in mainstream media and impact can be assessed by tickets handed out or “butts in seats” (as Joe Patti refers to it in his arts management blog), Army Entertainment Division is better able to prove its case year after year for substantial NAF funding (along with sponsorships) to continue to match the production value and performance quality it is has established for itself. But this funding is not distributed equally among the three theatrical touring endeavors.

Bravo! subsisted on very small production budgets, with the cast hauling their own props, costumes, set pieces, and lighting equipment from tour stop to tour stop. Despite its minimal cost, the appeal of more traditional theater was limited. Also, reaching only 50-100 soldiers at a time versus the Soldier Show’s average of 1000 patrons per performance didn’t justify the cost of the Bravo! tour. The Army Theatrical Workshop tours operate more
autonomously, as Higdon refers to them more as “Ken and Darryl’s thing.” These workshop tours also serve as revenue building opportunities for local bases, so the supply versus demand model isn’t the sole determinant in its survival. The participant versus spectator benefits of Army Theater varies greatly between these theatrical tours. While the Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop Program tour involves more participants in a given year compared to the number of soldiers producing the Soldier Show, the annual audience numbers are exponentially greater for the variety show.

The uncertainty of Army Entertainment’s future lies in its inability to progress with the changing times. New technology, new equipment, and new facilities afford the opportunity to try new techniques, new staging, and new approaches to storytelling. Though it remains popularly successful, AED is run by the same people who once performed as soldiers in the Soldier Show in past decades. The positive effects of this reality are consistency within the leadership and vision of the Soldier Show from year to year. The negative effects are a static “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mentality that may lead Army Entertainment towards becoming irrelevant, dated, and insignificant if the performance content and quality doesn’t match trends in popular culture, technology, and live performance.

The new General who has been so involved in the reshaping and redefining of the Soldier Show’s presentation will likely be replaced in two years or so. Such is the way of the Army. On one hand, this indicates a lack of consistency in leadership and artistic direction in the Soldier Show; on the other hand, it ensures fresh perspectives on the overlying administration and facilitation of Army Entertainment’s most successful and longest-running performance endeavor. How can Army Theater sustain itself, let alone propagate itself, if the successful
production models of non-military community theaters and regional non-profit theaters aren’t followed or even studied? Theater artists are used to adapting to new and challenging circumstances as they arise during the collaborative process, but how adaptable can the Army be in accommodating new demands and expectations for live entertainment?
CHAPTER 4:

U.S. ARMY COMMUNITY THEATER

The focus of this chapter will be on the six stateside U.S. Army community theaters remaining operational in 2013: Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas; Fort Gordon near Augusta, Georgia; Fort Lee near Petersburg, Virginia; Fort Carson near Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fort Polk near Leesville, Louisiana; and Fort Campbell near Clarksville, Tennessee. The Entertainment Directors and Theater Specialists at each garrison participated in interviews regarding their theater program’s recent operations, including access to space, ticketing, auditions, season selection, and special events. A theater’s success has much to do with its post and the people it serves. Equally as important to the formula for success is the background of the garrison Entertainment Director. A brief history of each garrison will introduce the environment in which the six extant stateside Theater programs were established.

This chapter will conclude with an analysis of nationally operating Army theaters between 2008 and 2013, including statistics on attendance, participation, box office intake, and production runs. Alongside observations and experiences shared by past and present Entertainment Directors, Theater Specialists, and MWR Recreation Delivery Systems employees, these recent figures on the strength, both fiscal and participatory, of stateside Army theater programs relate an unrecorded history of the rise and fall of Army
Entertainment’s Music and Theater program. Comparisons of oral histories, statistics, and personal observations will be used to assess the potential fate of Army theaters further into the 21st century. Will internet technology and the changing tactics of warfare (i.e. extended deployments) impact the success of live theater on stateside Army bases?

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**Harlequin Dinner Theatre**  
**Fort Sam Houston**  
**San Antonio, Texas**

As early as 1845, the post at San Antonio was used by the Army as a regional headquarters. Designated Fort Sam Houston in 1890, the garrison continued to expand. These buildings, including those structures built in 1930, represent the Department of Defense’s largest collection of historic buildings. Together, they form the Fort Sam Houston National Historic Landmark. Once considered the “birthplace of military aviation,” the installation has more recently become known as the “home of military medicine” (Fort Sam website). The conglomeration of medical facilities and services on base were known as BAMC (Brooke Army Medical Center). Since 2005, Fort Sam Houston has become Joint Base San Antonio, serving all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Fort Sam Houston Theater was one of the first military post theaters in the United States. Built in 1935, the original post theater had been closed for decades when it was reclaimed by Army Entertainment Division in 2011. With a budget of $16.9 million, the structure was fully renovated to preserve its historical integrity while making necessary updates.
Harlequin Dinner Theatre has undergone a complete management shift in the last two years. Robert Olivas is the current Theater Manager and Shawn Kjos is the current Operations Manager. Both began to volunteer with Harlequin around five years ago. Neither of these men has ever served in the Army, nor any other military branch of service. However, both had come to the Harlequin with years of professional theater experience. Olivas began as a volunteer lighting designer for the Army community theater and was hired as the Assistant to the Theater Manager two years later. Almost a year before our interview, the Theater Manager quit and Olivas stepped into that role. Because he’d been serving as Assistant for two years, the transition was a smooth one. Kjos, who started with Harlequin as a musical theater performer, took a job two years ago at Fort Sam Houston in marketing. When the former Theater Manager left, Kjos was hired as the Harlequin’s Operations Manager. Both Olivas and Kjos are quite young compared to other Army entertainment directors and their knowledge and approach to theater being more relative to my own, it was easier to engage in more in depth discussion on creative challenges, new ideas, and navigating the military aspect of a theater company.

This last aspect is one that I am most intrigued by and will explore more in depth with the summative analysis of stateside U.S. Army community theaters. Robert Olivas summarized these specific challenges:

It’s been interesting to have to learn the military way. And to learn the way it functions. It doesn’t function as you would think a normal business would. There [are] a lot of steps to get things accomplished. So that was the biggest learning curve for me...I’ve learned the “hurry up and wait” term that’s very prevalent with the military. (Olivas)

The ‘hurry up and wait’ mentality Olivas finds prevalent on base seems to be similar to many other governmental offices, and, in my experience, academia; the sense of autonomy is hard to find when funding or permission for renovations must be requested, approved, and processed
before anything tangible may occur. However, this split between military operations and theater operations isn’t as severe as one might think. “When you’re working as a civilian, you’re not subjected to the soldier side of things,” Kjos affirms. Olivas corroborates, “Over here, we’re our own little entity…they’re hands off, they trust us, they see the theater’s doing well.” Clearly, the Harlequin has been autonomous for some time and even with no veterans on staff, the community theater has been able to maneuver within military expectations and theatrical aspirations. Even though the theater has maintained a healthy functional relationship with the Army, Olivas is cognizant of the uphill battles the Harlequin will continue to face at the installation: “I don’t know if it’s a global thing, but there’s a huge gap between younger employees and older employees that are at retirement age but still holding on. And those people are the ones who are still making decisions.” He passionately declares that Harlequin’s new management duo is “breathing new life” into the dusty, stagnant ways of yore. Though the idea of change “scares the hell out of [the Army], because this is the way we’ve always done it,” Olivas and Kjos seem fully committed to reinvigorating the longtime running dinner theater at Fort Sam Houston.

To create their agreeable relationship with the U.S. Army, the theater managers at Harlequin had to learn how to work in a military environment. “Theater doesn’t fit into a military box,” Kjos explained, “it’s hard for a non-theater person to understand.” Olivas echoed Kjos’ sentiments: “[it’s] hard for military to comprehend what we do.” He recounted a light design experience at Harlequin a few years ago when he was spending late evenings focusing lights for an upcoming production and the then-current theater manager naively asked him what he was doing: “don’t you just turn them on?” Such an innocent comment reflects the
experience of most Army Entertainment staff, making clear that the production values and expectations of theater on base are minimal. Access and previous experiences might account for that difference, but lack of funding and resources also limit what stateside Army community theaters can produce. Shawn Kjos explains the difficulties of down-sizing production expectations: “I was used to doing this on big, big scales [like] cruise ships, Six Flags, Sea World...to scale it down and do it here has been a challenge, but it’s worked.”

Harlequin Dinner Theatre is the second of two theater performance venues on base at Fort Sam Houston. Compared to the grandeur of the recently renovated Fort Sam Houston Theater (which is home to Army Entertainment Division headquarters), the Harlequin feels rather small and unimpressive. But walking through its doors and into the theater, it is clear looks can be deceiving. The structure in which Harlequin Dinner Theatre operates was built in 1910 to serve as an NCO (non-commissioned officers) club. A black and white photo discovered in Harlequin’s archives carries the caption: The Silver Whistle, Little BAMC Theater, 1957. This is believed to be evidence of the earliest days of the theater program on post. Not until 1972 did it become Harlequin Dinner Theatre. With such a rich history, it is not surprising to hear ghost stories. In fact, the Harlequin was host to many paranormal investigators who found significant evidence of multiple hauntings within the old NCO club, as was covered by a local San Antonio news station May 25, 2011 (paranormal website).

The Harlequin Dinner Theatre of 2013 has a raised proscenium stage without permanent wings. The venue seats approximately 100 dinner guests any given night. Just off from the entrance and box office area is a good-sized lounge with seating for roughly 30. This lounge, complete with a fully stocked bar, has a miniature performance area with sound and
light set-up for occasional cabarets immediately following Saturday evening performances. Backstage, there is an extension built in the 1970s shortly after the space officially became a dinner theater. This section is only large enough to accommodate smaller casts and does not include a separate “green room” for actors and crew to relax before a performance. Off to the left of the house, is a medium sized room which is utilized to serve the meals. Rather than meals being delivered to tables, at the Harlequin, patrons retrieve their meals buffet-style, a few tables worth at a time. Adjacent to this food serving area is a small, make-shift scene shop. Being so small, the space serves mainly as costume storage for quick-changes and tool storage for when set construction happens. Without a real scene shop, most sets are built on-site, on the stage.

There are several spaces on the second floor of the structure utilized regularly by the Harlequin Dinner Theatre. Again, I was surprised the facility even had a second floor based on my initial impressions looking from the outside of the building. There is a prop storage room, a costume storage room, a make-shift rehearsal space, and an old office which serves more as an archive of photos, playbills, prompt books, and articles. The rehearsal room sits just above the stage, and therefore it serves adequately for blocking in a similar playing space. However, the space does hold a fair bit of furniture, most of it being stored from past productions.

Because the Harlequin is fully operational year-round, it has complete access to the facility. Unlike some theater programs at U.S. Army bases, the Harlequin is not used during “off hours” for trainings or other Army functions. Interestingly, the Fort Sam Houston Theater which was renovated and now under the management of Army Entertainment Division is now the popular installation structure for holding meetings, trainings, and retirement ceremonies. While
the Harlequin Dinner Theatre management are understandably envious of the budget and amenities Army Entertainment claims, they are happy to have full access to their own facility.

The Harlequin Dinner Theater at Fort Sam Houston operates year-round, with six or seven shows each season. Included each year are a couple of musical revues and a January murder mystery, the latter being a “tradition” of Harlequin’s and the former being its biggest money-maker. Productions run Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights for five to seven weeks, with a period of two or three weeks between production runs. The community theater remains in operation because it understands its audience. Kjos directs the musical revues which often relate to a specific music era (for example, Doo Wop) and recalls how many customers thank him “for taking us back.” He explains how “they don’t like new, they want what’s familiar, they want their generational stuff.” Admittedly, the majority of their regular audience is more than 50 years old. That age affects experiences and expectations in the theater. “There’s stuff that I want to do, but I know my audience and if I did a show like that, like How I Learned to Drive...they would get up and leave,” Olivas laments. As a theater artist, he aspires to direct new and challenging works, but as a theater manager, he acknowledges his foremost responsibility when selecting shows each season is “to make sure they’ll appeal to fill seats.” This becomes especially important to the maintenance of its subscription audience, who Olivas fondly calls “family.” Many purchase season packages, making reservations for shows weeks, sometimes months, in advance. This dedication to and comfort with Harlequin extends as far as audience members “gunning” for select tables in the performance space. Table 3 is always the first to go, though both managers laugh at how limiting the sightlines can be (but the table’s location right next to the stage probably makes hearing the productions easier for the aging,
hard of hearing, subscribers). While Harlequin has a loyal fan base, one of the challenges Olivas and Kjos face are the expectations for hierarchical levels of respect based on retirees’ former rankings. Kjos grapples with their sense of entitlement: “even after they retire, they want you know this is what they were.”

The Harlequin Dinner Theatre actually attracts a number of retirees, in addition to active duty soldiers and family members, both on the stage and in the audience. Olivas estimates 67% of Harlequin’s audience is composed of active duty soldiers and retirees. Such a high figure supports the community theater’s assertions to MWR oversight that they “are providing a necessary service for troops.” Olivas also boasts about the involvement of active duty and retirees in almost every play he’s directed at Harlequin. He comments how these servicemen and women “have to get official okays” from their superior officers before committing to a show, after one is cast. Such an unusual and formal step in a typical theatrical process is a necessary approach in the U.S. Army because of the realities of such things as curfew on post. Many soldiers are expected back to their barracks as early as 8 P.M. Considering how most theater rehearsals last well into the night, these special requests from Army authorities are vital to ensuring Army entertainment is enhancing troops’ quality of life and not debilitating their primary function as soldiers. Interestingly, Kjos points out this requirement of permission or existing curfew restriction “depends on their ranking,” jokingly claiming “Navy people don’t have a curfew, they’re much easier to work with.” Though rehearsal schedules can be challenging outside of a military environment, the soldiers, family members, and retirees go out of their way to make time to rehearse for their upcoming Harlequin productions. Olivas and Kjos aim to get a typical rehearsal schedule of three hours per night, five nights per week, but
various factors conflict with that standard. Often, the managers themselves are busy performing or running crew for the show in production and must facilitate rehearsals around those conflicts, in addition to daytime employment conflicts. Luckily, Harlequin’s facility offers multiple locations for rehearsals, depending on the activity happening elsewhere in the building: upstairs rehearsal room, on the stage in front of any semi-permanent set pieces, and in the lounge.

Finding their casts hasn’t been much of an issue for Olivas or Kjos. The musical theater director casts primarily from a pool of former castmates. This is the reason why Kjos has yet to have an active duty soldier in his productions. For other shows, the Harlequin posts audition announcements in the San Antonio Theater Coalition online forum. In the past, they would post an announcement for each show but Olivas found only one audition round was enough for casting the entire 2012-2013 season. Both Olivas and Kjos reflect on the difficulties of getting actors to audition for an Army community theater. “It scares them, you have to show your I.D.,” Olivas explains the hurdle for anyone hoping to get on base for an audition. Kjos compares audition numbers on and off base, noting the “turn out is drastic[ally]” different. Only a handful will show up for a Harlequin audition (on base) when upwards of a hundred individuals will show up for another San Antonio community theater (off base). While the managers might struggle to get civilian actors on base to audition for their productions, they are clearly managing without them.

The Harlequin Dinner Theatre continues its operations, but how does the Army assess the success of the entertainment program? Beyond the obvious financial proof of its ability to stay afloat during even difficult economic periods, Kjos simply states the audiences “keep
coming back.” But this statement of pride came after his admittance, “I don’t know if there’s a true measurement.” These comments are not taken lightly, as they come from a musical theater director with a Master’s degree in Marketing Management who worked in the MWR marketing office at Fort Sam Houston for some time. The lack of formal assessment is indicative of a pattern seen across all stateside U.S. Army community theaters. It seems to be an unspoken, understood working mentality of “As long as you don’t call attention to yourselves, you can keep doing what you’re doing.” Olivas did mention the existence of ICE comments. These Interactive Customer Evaluations are made possible on individual installation websites and can address any MWR programming, among other operations on post. These comments are irregular, at best, and are likened to Yelp reviews, in that only the biggest champions or unhappiest clientele will share their experiences. Harlequin receives very little ICE feedback, perhaps, the managers theorize, because the majority of their audience might not have access or know how to use the internet at their age.

The Harlequin Dinner Theater selects its season to be family friendly. However, they don’t have a regular, year-round children’s theater program. But the Harlequin does offer a program for youth that coincides with the school calendar. Last year’s enrollment was approximately one-third military family members. Interestingly, the youth group has focused primarily on dancing and singing in past incarnations. Olivas and Kjos both agree that they hope to implement “more theater elements” to it in the future. Specifically, Olivas would like to offer more acting games and exercises to complement the emphasis on pop songs.

Harlequin Dinner Theatre is the second most profitable Army community theater stateside. Even with a recent shift in management, the theater program at Fort Sam Houston
continues to thrive. But financial concerns are always at the forefront of the managers’ minds. Olivas proudly declares “we sustain ourselves solely on the income we bring in. We receive zero compensation from the government.” Even the salaries of the five staff members at Harlequin are paid directly out of the dinner theater’s profit margin. Though they fall under the “MWR umbrella.” Kjos reiterates “we’re separate.” Wherever possible, corners are cut and creative solutions are made (for example, as previously mentioned, the managers often crew their own productions). Sometimes, the solutions might not be cheaper, per se, but more time-saving. Olivas provides an example relating to circumnavigating military protocol in attempts to manage a theater:

Last Saturday’s performance, one of our A/C units started leaking right as the show started, on the stage...this was at 8 something at night, there isn’t anybody on call to fix this so during intermission, I crawl my happy butt up there to try and stop this leak so we can continue the show...that should’ve been “call Engineering to look at that,” but it was at night.

Kjos was performing in that show and he commended his co-manager on his quick action in solving the issue by the second act of the revue. Such a story perfectly demonstrates “the show must go on” mentality community theaters are familiar with. Harlequin is also clever in how it utilizes the resources it has at hand. This is most notable in means of manpower. “We operate solely on volunteers,” Kjos esteems. The only paid staff members include Olivas, Kjos, a box office manager, a custodian, and a bartender. Volunteers are needed to perform, design, operate, wait tables, and take tickets at shows. Kjos fills in as costume designer, admitting they more often purchase clothes or pull from storage and hire a seamstress to make any necessary modifications. Olivas often serves as lighting designer. They have a regular volunteer who constructs their set pieces on-site, though it doesn’t sound like that person actually “designs”
anything. In the community theater circuit, it is common to hear of performers working for no pay, but it was surprising to hear Harlequin was able to secure stage managers at no cost as well. One of their stage managers also brings along her parents to volunteer as crew members on shows. The Fort Sam Houston theater program is definitely a family endeavor, in more ways than one.

Despite holding the purse strings taut, it is extremely important to Harlequin’s mission to keep ticket prices affordable. Kjos transparently admits “we make no money off the food,” when explaining how the dinner aspect of their theater program plays into its profitability. Clearly touched by his target audience’s needs, he explains “so many of them are on fixed incomes: we hear them talk about it, they tell us. So we try to keep our ticket prices as low as we can” (Kjos). Harlequin works with the Community Center on the installation to obtain its meals. With such efforts to keep costs to a minimum, tickets to attend the dinner theater at Fort Sam Houston only cost $30. Olivas and Kjos note the ticket price is similar to a community theater off-post that does not serve dinner.

Like other community theater at U.S. Army bases, Army Entertainment Division contributes in the form of royalty and script costs. Marketing and advertising, in theory, is covered by the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation division but Harlequin admits to utilizing that connection fairly irregularly. Instead, the dinner theater has established its own successful publicity campaigns, including a “mailer” sent out two or three weeks before a show opens, sent through the U.S. postal service because so many of its audience members don’t use email communication. Olivas excitedly reports new marketing innovations that are in the works for its upcoming production of The Bad Seed: “trying to make it very stylistic and modern, and I’m
gonna sell it like a live horror movie.” Both Olivas and Kjos mention their continued efforts to encourage more students to attend their theater, referring to the large number of trainees on base who might not take advantage of all the recreational programming the Army offers.

The co-managers of Harlequin are slowly modernizing the community theater’s operating strategies while maintaining its steady subscriber base. The fiscal viability of the dinner theater has secured Harlequin a recent $90,000 tech upgrade, which includes the purchase of new lighting equipment. The money was requested from the U.S. Army, which amortizes the loan. Over the course of the next ten years, the Harlequin will make payments towards this lump sum of funding. The fact that such a request was granted signals the financial health and success of Fort Sam Houston’s Harlequin Dinner Theatre.

Harlequin Dinner Theatre is effectively meeting the MWR’s mission of enhancing the quality of life for soldiers and their families. This is demonstrated by the presence of active duty soldiers at the facility, during and between performances. Kjos comments on the consistent participation of soldiers in the community theater at all hours of the day: “[they] wander in sometimes [asking] ‘can I do anything?’” The Harlequin serves as a creative and entertaining outlet for the soldiers’ daily stresses: “it’s a way for them to get away” (Kjos). While the dinner theater is grateful to the loyalty of their older subscription audience, Kjos and Olivas seem committed to find more ways to entice the trainees on base to attend their productions. One such success story was a soldier who had never seen live theater and enjoyed a musical revue so much that he returned four more times to see the same production, bringing new people (other trainees) each time. Olivas reflects how an increasing number of trainees are starting to attend Harlequin performances: “We have a lot of students who come, who just randomly stop
by...from there on, they’re hooked.” Both Kjos and Olivas seem passionate about bringing theater to new audiences:

The exciting thing is when we get people that have never experienced or never been to a show and they do come here and it just opens this whole world to them where they’re just grateful. “Thank you for exposing me to this, [I] can’t wait to come back again and see another show.” (Olivas)

Olivas recalls a similar rewarding experience with one of his volunteer ushers:

One of our ushers last year had to volunteer for one of the plays – she normally doesn’t, she just likes the musicals. She flat out told me, “I don’t like plays.” “Cool.” She sat through On Golden Pond, loved it, and then has continued to help out for the plays. She was like “that’s the first play I’ve seen, I didn’t think I was gonna like it. It was wonderful, you’ve totally changed my opinion.” That, for me, is everything. I’ve done my job.

The Harlequin Dinner Theatre is successfully maintaining a year-round season of shows which are attracting the attention of younger audiences while still satisfying the demanding expectations of an older generation of theater-goers.

**      **      **

Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre
Fort Gordon
near Augusta, GA

Our mission is to entertain, but also to provoke and to inspire. We believe that theatre is nothing less than a cultural force that has the power to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

This installation started as Camp Gordon in 1917 in Augusta, Georgia, as a training ground for the 82nd Airborne Division. In 1941, the Camp was approved for reconstruction by the War Department. During World War II, the installation played host to the 4th Infantry, the 26th Infantry, and the 10th Armored division and also served as a camp for prisoners of war.

One of its primary functions since the late 1940s has been to house Army Training for the Signal
Corps. In 1956, the site was renamed Fort Gordon. During the period of 1950s through 1980s, Fort Gordon served as a basic training facility. Since 1985, the installation has housed the U.S. Signal Corps, changing its official name to the U.S. Army Signal Center of Excellence & Fort Gordon. Very recently, the post was announced as the home of the United States Army Cyber Command. Approximately 30,000 military and civilian employees currently work at Fort Gordon.

The current Installation Entertainment Director at Fort Gordon is Steven Walpert, who has worked at the post for more than 35 years in total. He first arrived at Fort Gordon as a Second Lieutenant in 1970. Walpert, who earned a BA in Theater from Ripon College in Wisconsin, discovered the Fort Gordon Theater program by chance. His discovery of the performing arts opportunities on post for active duty soldiers altered his entire Army career: “[It’s] kind of amazing to have found this...I found an amazing community of people that I shared this common interest with...and my life really changed from that moment on in the Army” (Walpert). Though Walpert enlisted to avoid being sent directly into combat in Vietnam, the reintroduction of theater enhanced his quality of life immensely. The Entertainment Director’s experience is mirrored time after time in the personal interviews conducted as part of this research. After his term of service, Mr. Walpert worked in the civilian sector, booking commercial entertainment for international travel groups. Only a few years later, then-current Music and Theater program director at Fort Gordon invited Walpert to return to the base and establish a dinner theater. He returned as a civilian employee of Fort Gordon’s MWR division in 1978, bringing with him the “real world” experience of the entertainment industry: “[I] learned a lot about the demands of a high energy civilian enterprise” (Walpert). As Fort Gordon’s
Installation Entertainment Director, he has certainly put this experience to good use. Not only selecting each year’s season of shows, and coordinating special events in the theater, Walpert undergoes the task of directing “99% of the shows” in his tenure at Fort Gordon, though in the 1970s, the post had three full-time, paid Entertainment Directors to share the 10-show per season work load (Walpert). Any stage director could attest to the challenge of keeping current and coming up with fresh ideas when helming shows back to back in constant rotation. And yet, according to Walpert, he’s “planning to be here for awhile.” Exhaustion doesn’t set in, apparently, when one is continually inspired by the work one does.

When Walpert returned to start up a dinner theater at Fort Gordon, he initially worked with a 100-seat converted recreation center. Not too far into his residency, the structure was in distress and needing major repairs, so Walpert sought out an alternative space more suitable for the dinner theater experience. He went to the garrison’s Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which had two movie theaters on post. AAFES turned over its larger facility to the MWR, to be remodeled according to the specific requirements of Walpert’s theater program. The resulting Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre contains a proscenium stage with 275 seats.

Though Fort Gordon serves as both a school and a regular post, the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre has had the luxury of sole access to its designated performing space. Steven Walpert serves as both facility manager and Entertainment Director, but that management does not include scheduling outside Army events within the theater. This means rehearsals, auditions, and performances can occur on a more flexible schedule than other Army community theater programs might have to do. Such access ensures a high quality of entertainment; as Walpert
puts it, working on a production is “a real commitment, it’s not a party.” Rehearsals are five nights a week, plus some weekends.

Since its renovation early in its inception, the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre has been operating a consistent year-round, five show theater season for its community as well as youth programming and special events. A typical season includes one major musical, one “chills and thrills” play, and three comedies and farces. This breakdown was modeled after years of experience running the theater program on post. Walpert attests that the audience has strong opinions about what they want to see on the stage and in order to stay afloat in the commercial theater a smart artistic director listens to them. In his first season running the dinner theater, the young theater devotee directed a production of Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* and learned quickly what his audience did not want to see: “they rapidly taught me they would come to see shows they wanted to see and not shows that I wanted them to see.” Walpert continues, “In order to survive, in order to keep the seats filled, I have to do things that are entertaining and enlightening” [original emphasis]. Walpert adeptly maneuvers his season selection to appease his seasoned audience, half of which are over the age of 50, by his estimation. And he is demonstrably succeeding at it. According to Army Entertainment Division’s Amy Kosby, who tracks the financial and participation outcomes of Army Theater programs worldwide, Fort Gordon is by far the most profitable of the current stateside Army theater programs, reporting in 2013 more than three times the box office intake as the second most profitable stateside Army theater, Harlequin Dinner Theatre at Fort Sam Houston (see Tables F-H). This remarkable success could be attributed to the theater’s excellent customer service, as Walpert dotes “over half of our audience is returning, frequent customers.” He goes further to explain “if you treat
people well, they feel welcome. They want to come back and enjoy the experience again” (Walpert). Despite the challenges of satisfying his ever-aging audience, Walpert is proud of his theater’s diverse array of shows presented on the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre stage. Making it a point to rarely ever repeat shows, even decades apart, Walpert makes sure not to select “heavier dramas just because that’s not what’s going to sell tickets here” (Walpert).

Table F: A 2012 comparison of statistics demonstrating Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre’s impact on the success of Army Theater programming on posts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012 comparison</th>
<th>Number of Theaters</th>
<th>Number of Productions</th>
<th>Number of Performances</th>
<th>Box Office Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Gordon Dinner Theater</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>$277,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Stateside Army Theaters</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>$465,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All International and Stateside Army Theaters</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>$738,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table G: A comparison of stateside Army Theaters statistics, looking at output over a period of six years, 2008-2013 (data provided by Amy Kosby, Army Entertainment Division)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>comparison of 2008-2013 averages</th>
<th>Average Number of Shows</th>
<th>Average Number of Performances</th>
<th>Average Box Office Total</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
<th>Average Number of Cast/Crew</th>
<th>Average Military Volunteer Hours</th>
<th>Average Civilian Volunteer Hours</th>
<th>Average Total Volunteer Hours</th>
<th>Average % Military Volunteer Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Gordon Dinner Theater (Fort Gordon, GA)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>$305,942</td>
<td>8840.7</td>
<td>737.0</td>
<td>2805.8</td>
<td>10298.0</td>
<td>13103.8</td>
<td>21.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlequin Dinner Theatre (Fort Sam Houston, TX)</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>$105,395</td>
<td>6676.8</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>1907.2</td>
<td>6741.0</td>
<td>8648.2</td>
<td>22.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lee Playhouse (Fort Lee, VA)</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>$30,010</td>
<td>3821.2</td>
<td>168.2</td>
<td>2909.2</td>
<td>4794.3</td>
<td>7703.5</td>
<td>37.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showboat Dinner Theater (Fort Polk, LA)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>$19,284</td>
<td>1319.7</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>905.3</td>
<td>2655.0</td>
<td>3560.3</td>
<td>25.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Carson Performing Arts Center (Fort Carson, CO)</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>$4,930</td>
<td>799.0</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>3170.5</td>
<td>3238.0</td>
<td>2.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale Wayrenen Community Center (Fort Cambell, KY)</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>$1,242</td>
<td>209.7</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>165.7</td>
<td>214.0</td>
<td>22.59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table H: A comparison of stateside Army Theaters statistics from 2013 (data provided by Amy Kosby, Army Entertainment Division)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013 comparison</th>
<th>Number of Productions</th>
<th>Number of Performances</th>
<th>Box Office Total</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Cast/Crew</th>
<th>Military Volunteer Hours</th>
<th>Civilian Volunteer Hours</th>
<th>total volunteer hours</th>
<th>% Military Volunteer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fort Gordon Dinner Theater (Fort Gordon, GA)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>$277,007</td>
<td>6961</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>11964</td>
<td>13921</td>
<td>14.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harlequin Dinner Theatre (Fort Sam Houston, TX)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>$61,668</td>
<td>3072</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>1112</td>
<td>35.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Lee Playhouse (Fort Lee, VA)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>$26,679</td>
<td>3172</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>4087</td>
<td>4701</td>
<td>8788</td>
<td>46.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showboat Dinner Theater (Fort Polk, LA)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$6,628</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1548</td>
<td>1594</td>
<td>2.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Carson Performing Arts Center (Fort Carson, CO)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>$4,204</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3169</td>
<td>3241</td>
<td>2.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale Wayrenen Community Center (Fort Campbell, KY)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$790</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The audience make-up is approximately 40% military and families, 20% retirees, and 40% civilians from the surrounding community. Walpert boasts similar ratios in his participation statistics (including both those on stage and behind the scenes). In a recent production, the cast of eight was made up of one active duty soldier, one retiree, two family members, and four civilians with the back stage crew primarily active duty and family members. Obviously, the presence of active duty soldiers and their families is imperative to facilitate the MWR’s Army Entertainment mission of theater “for the soldier, by the soldier.” It was interesting to hear Walpert’s impression of theater collaboration and its role on an Army base:

We have that esprit de corps within our program, whether it’s working on sets, or working on stage...for example, onstage you might have a Major, and a Private, and like a bunch of civilians, and a Captain. In one of our plays, you know. They all work together as a team,
they all work together as equals in the show. When they’re out on the street, military protocol is back in order. (Walpert)

This interesting contradiction between the collaborative spirit of working as a group of equals and functioning in an environment reliant on hierarchy, codes, and structure will be explored further in the conclusion chapter of this study.

Not only does Walpert oversee a rigorous five-show season every year at Fort Gordon, he also facilitates non-income-producing special events as part of the Theater program such as the highly popular Holiday Safety Show. Harkening back to alternative educational techniques used by the Army’s V Corps Training Road Show of the Vietnam War era, this annual holiday production began approximately twenty years ago when the enlightened Lieutenant General Bob Gray requested the show, believing something “theatrical and dramatic” would be more successful than a formal briefing in preparing soldiers for their holiday vacations off post.

Walpert was tasked to write and produce a show within one week for all Fort Gordon soldiers to attend. Walpert’s Holiday Safety Show was created to “drive home the importance of safety during what they call Block Leave, or “exodus,” which is when all the trainees go home at Christmas time.” Incorporating safety videos and short skits, the Entertainment program at Fort Gordon puts up several performances of the show in a short period. “They say it has a big impact on safety statistics,” Walpert purports. Such a noticeable impact, in fact, the Army has produced the Holiday Safety Show at Fort Gordon every year since. The Holiday Safety Show, in all its incarnations across U.S. military bases, was the focus of conversation on the National Public Radio program “This American Life” in early March of 2015.

Walpert is one of three full-time staff for the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre, and by extension, Fort Gordon’s Entertainment program under the umbrella of Morale, Welfare and
Recreation. Besides Walpert as facility manager, artistic director, and stage director, other full-time employees include a technical director and a box office manager. In addition, there is one part-time staff member and three “flexible” employees that work for the theater. Beyond these paid staff, Walpert praises the contribution of a “great and dedicated group of volunteers who support us.” While Army Entertainment Division pays for production rights and scripts, as it does for all Army theater programs, Fort Gordon has held its own with competitive ticket sales. In fact, Walpert raves that “even in this tight economy, we sell out 75% of our performances.”

Their ticket prices compare with theater tickets in the local theater community where dinner is not included as part of the entertainment. The Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre delineates their ticket prices not only by military versus civilian status, but by rank as well: $43 for an adult civilian, $40 for officer, $35 for rank of E5 or lower. This pricing is laudable, and relates to professional theater companies’ recent marketing efforts which offer discount ticket opportunities for individuals 30 years old or younger (as E5 or lower tend to be younger enlistees just starting out in the service). Kudos to Walpert for recognizing the extra effort necessary to entice younger audiences to the theater. In its consistent ticket sales, Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre is a financially healthy, self-sustaining MWR entity of the Army. Despite its obvious success, Mr. Walpert is in the process of establishing a non-profit organization by the end of 2014 to help sustain the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre. This is the first time his theater has had to seek non-profit status, though Walpert applied and received an NEA grant in the 1990s to assist the theater as it transitioned from Category A to Category B funding.
Not only does theater serve to boost the morale of soldiers and their families, it can introduce the performing arts to a whole new spectrum of individuals. It could even foster future theater artists, according to Walpert’s admirable stance on Army Entertainment:

When a young soldier sees one of his peers up on the stage, it gives him the feeling like “I could do that,” and it’s something they never thought of doing...we’re introducing people to their first play experience or theater experience...sometimes they’re marched in. [But it’s] almost universal, they have a great time. And they might never have chosen to enter a theater in their lives if they hadn’t had this experience in the Army. (Walpert)

Walpert acknowledges the importance of building theater audiences for the future. But he also clarifies how the entertainment program serves more than just the spectator:

[It’s] not just for the people who came to see the shows, but the people who were in the shows...it teaches team building, character building, it gives you self-esteem, the ability to communicate in front of a group, it gives you so many things to add to your skill set or improve upon that can help you advance yourself in life or in the Army. (Walpert)

Walpert finishes this thought by recounting his numerous experiences with various drill Sergeants who approach him, telling him just how much theater participation had changed their trainees for the better. Like many other Army theater personnel I’ve interviewed, Walpert discusses the difficulty in piloting such an important program through an un-informed or judgmental environment. He is constantly working to educate garrison commanders of the benefits of allowing soldiers to participate on stage or behind the scenes of a theatrical production:

A lot of commanders have actually never been on an installation where they have an entertainment program...and if you haven’t seen the impact on the community and on community relations, which is a big factor, I think, in considering the value of a program like this. (Walpert)

Walpert recognizes the benefit of the theater program not only for soldiers and their families, but for the public opinion of the Army (and by extension the military). “The community looks at
this theater...as something really enlightened that the Army is doing. It’s kind of a consistent ‘good news’ phase for the military...we believe in culture...we offer more than rock ‘n roll’” (Walpert). It is clear that Walpert is proud of his involvement with the Entertainment program with the Army base at Fort Gordon. He was fortunate to find a career in the field he had majored in as a college student, helping a community he had always been dedicated to.

I have been proud since day one of my involvement with the Army Music and Theater program (Army Entertainment program), at how enlightened the Army was at the inception of this program, in recognizing this as a really valid form of entertainment and morale-building for soldiers and family members. The thing that is really vital to consider, other than just entertaining the audience is that this is initiated back in the day of Skippy Lynn...back in the day she was able to convince people of the validity of a program like this. (Walpert)

** ** ** **

Lee Playhouse
Fort Lee
near Petersburg, VA

Our mission is to enrich the Fort Lee military and surrounding communities by producing quality theater and engaging educational programs for all ages through cooperative efforts with civic groups, businesses and other cultural organizations.

Camp Lee originated in 1917 after the United States declared war on Germany. The government had a large expanse of property in the region and established a large training camp for young soldiers, the 80th “Blue Ridge” Division. It became one of the most populous “cities” in the state of Virginia. Training over 60,000 troops at its peak, the site closed by 1921 and all of the 1500 buildings on post were destroyed. By 1940, WWII was upon us, and the Army reinstituted the use of Camp Lee to train newly drafted soldiers. A surge of building occurred and, once again, the post was the third largest “city” in Virginia. During World War II, Camp Lee trained more than 300,000 troops. By 1948, the site had its first permanent brick and mortar
structure— the Post Theater. On April 15, 1950, the War Department made the site a permanent Army base, renaming it Fort Lee. In 2005, a major shift occurred and Fort Lee was approved for the construction of new facilities to establish the Sustainment Center of Excellence. These new structures were to house major training and operating entities from a number of nearby Army and Navy bases.

The Lee Playhouse has been providing entertainment for the communities of Petersburg, Hopewell, and Colonial Heights, known as the Tri-Cities of Virginia, since 1947. At the helm is Lee Farmer, who has been running the theater program on base for nearly 20 years. Farmer retired from active duty service in the Army in 1994 at the rank of Garrison Sgt. Major, and began working as a civil service employee at Fort Lee, serving in the role of Chief of Business Operations for the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation division. Not long after his involvement with MWR, he assumed the responsibility of the Lee Playhouse on a volunteer basis after the previous director left suddenly, taking all relevant files and information with her. Farmer admits to never having “been to a play in my life” prior to his rescuing the Theater program in 1995. The new theater management discovered Fort Lee’s existing theater facility was to be shut down without any concern for relocating the theater program. Farmer went to the garrison commander and was given a year to keep the theater running, with the stipulation that it would be self-sustaining. And thus, the 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, Theater Company at Fort Lee, was established to provide Farmer with much needed support. Even after his retirement from civil service in 2012, the devoted Farmer has continued to operate Lee Playhouse as a full-time volunteer. He admits that the theater wouldn’t be able to operate
without someone devoting just as much time because the base lacks funding for a paid
Entertainment Director (Farmer).

Farmer serves as facility manager of the converted old movie house. The 640-seat venue
is the largest facility at Fort Lee and is often used for non-entertainment activities. In fact, the
theater’s primary function is hosting training events, which occur on a daily basis at the post.
Army operations and MWR entertainment programming can co-exist because the facility
manager also runs the live theater programming, and it is available for rehearsals, auditions,
and performances to be fit into the schedule. The building houses a proscenium stage, costume
and prop storage, and a scene shop backstage. The structure underwent renovations in 2009,
which took over a year to complete. Updates included a new stage, new seating, and new
acoustic wall panels. Together, the Army and the Army Air Force Exchange Services (AAFES)
paid for the renovations, as the facility’s functions beyond theatrical presentations, including
daily Army trainings and weekend movie screenings. Building 4300, the official Army
designation of the space, is currently the one and only location for all rehearsals and
performances of the Lee Playhouse.

The Lee Playhouse produces a four-show season each year plus two children’s theater
productions, along with summer workshops. The theater program presents a mix of musicals
and plays, typically running three-show, three-weekend runs of a given production. KidKapers,
the youth theater program, is both for and by children (unlike some children’s theater
performed by adults). “Children entertaining children” similarly to Berlin’s soldiers entertaining
soldiers precedent, KidKapers is a launching pad for future theater artists and audiences,
providing “a wonderful training ground...get[ting] them exposed to theater” (Farmer).
According to Farmer, attendance at the mainstage shows is made up, roughly, of a 1:1:3 ratio—20% military (and family members), 20% DoD civilian employees, 60% off-post civilians. The involvement of military members is even less when discussing participants on stage or behind the scenes. Because Fort Lee continues to be primarily an Army training operation, the traffic and rotation of active duty soldiers on base is heavy and constant. Clearly, securing an individual to attend several weeks of rehearsal followed by three weeks of performances when one is only assigned to Fort Lee for eight weeks of training is nearly impossible. With casting so reliant on DoD civilians and off-post civilians, the Lee Playhouse holds open auditions for each show. Farmer smartly chooses his directors to ensure enough casting options, acknowledging “directors have a talent pool they bring in...if you’re a good director, people follow you.”

“None of our people are paid here...it’s community theater” (Farmer). Finances are always an issue when dealing with community theater, whether on post or off. Within the Army infrastructure, the entertainment programming that is still running is not supported to the extent it was prior to 1980. Upon threat of being shut down, the Lee Playhouse was afforded the opportunity to remain in operation by the garrison commander as long as it wasn’t a financial drain on the Army base. With the charge of being self-sustaining, Mr. Farmer established a non-profit entity to help assist him in running the theater season. The Theater Company of Fort Lee provides support in many areas. Most importantly, it provides manpower. Farmer serves in his role as managing director of the theater (not to mention facility manager of the space) completely in a volunteer capacity. He mans the box office phone during business hours and oversees the daily use of the theater as a training venue, but he understandably requires assistance during production runs. The non-profit organization provides playbills,
supported through company sponsorships, and maintains a concession stand. Any income garnered goes into the non-profit’s treasury, towards supplies for the theater and funding three annual scholarships. Started in 1998, the Lee Playhouse grants the Megan Lindsey Stoker Memorial Scholarship to three high school students who are “going to college to study the arts” (Farmer). The namesake of the scholarship began the KidKapers program at the ripe age of 6 years old. The fact that Fort Lee’s theater program not only provides entertainment to soldiers and their families, but encourages and financially invests in future artists speaks volumes for the Army.

However, the relationship between the Army and the non-profit in terms of management and operations is a complicated one. As Farmer attempted to clarify: “As much as possible, I separate Army from the organization...[we] don’t want to lose status as a private organization...[but] because it’s an Army program...it’s Army money...if they fold, all their assets go to the Army.” Farmer, and he alone, selects the season and runs the box office. The Theater Company at Fort Lee is merely a cooperative, supporting entity to ensure to continued operations of the Lee Playhouse. But Farmer acknowledges the vital role the non-profit organization plays in the survival of his Army community theater: “without them, it’s gone.”

Part of the constant financial worry stems from the theater’s (and by extension the MWR’s) commitment to providing affordable and accessible programming for soldiers and their families on post: “[it’s] very important on the military base to make it accessible for family entertainment” (Farmer). Ticket prices at any Army community theater are noticeably lower than off post community theaters and Fort Lee’s theater program is no exception. Tickets to the Lee Playhouse are $12 per adult, $6 per child, with an option for a $40 season ticket to all four
shows. The nearest off post theater charges $45 for a single adult admission, according to Farmer. Due to its limited resources, the Lee Playhouse has reciprocal agreements with five other theaters in the region to share supplies. Farmer also utilizes the surrounding community to vet his artistic team. Directors, designers, and choreographers are brought in on personal services contracts. The artists’ payment is merely a courtesy, equivalent to “peanuts” according to Farmer. Surprisingly, not much effort is devoted towards marketing the productions on base or in the local community. Newspaper releases and some TV announcements are made, along with brief mentions in the post’s newsletter. The lack of effort and funding in advertisements reflects not only on the theater’s allocation of funds and resources, but on the involvements and support of the post’s MWR office.

An attempt was made several years ago at an entertainment package of meal plus show. It was marketed as Sunday Brunch and the audience would first enjoy brunch at the officer’s club on post, then travel to the theater for a performance. This initiative lasted approximately four years, according to facility and artistic manager Lee Farmer. It was discontinued a few years ago because the officer’s club was no longer in operation on Sundays, due to budget cuts.

As part of MWR’s programming, it is important to examine how the Lee Playhouse is contributing to the morale and esprit de corps of the Army soldiers and their families. According to Farmer, the theater program is very important for the base because it allows soldiers and families to “keep pace with what’s in sync on the outside.” He goes on to say that “regardless of your problems, [you] get lost in the entertainment...just leave those troubles at the door.” This ability of theater to provide stress relief and an escape applies to both the Army community and civilian patrons who are devoted Lee Playhouse attendees. These patrons are
vital to the sustainment of the theater program and Fa...n his regular customers’ tastes: “the outside community is very vocal on this theater here at Fort Lee. Some of them have been season ticket holders for nearly 50 years.”

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Fort Carson Community Theater
Fort Carson
near Colorado Springs, CO

Our mission is to enhance the lives of Soldiers and Families on Fort Carson by giving them the opportunity to express themselves through the Performing Arts.

Fort Carson began in 1942 as Camp Carson when the city of Colorado Springs purchased land south of its borders and donated it to the War Department. Besides training hundreds of thousands of soldiers, the installation also housed prisoners of war starting in 1943. Activity greatly diminished after the conclusion of World War II. During the Korean War the post became the site for Reserve and National Guard to train before shipping out. In 1954, the camp was formally changed to Fort Carson. The “Mountain Post” has served as a training ground and operational home for more than a dozen infantry divisions.

The Fort Carson post theater, The Little Theatre, was previously managed by Retired Entertainment Director, Vic Colletti, from 1967 through the 1980s as part of Army Entertainment’s Music and Theater program. In 2009, Sabine Mann, military spouse who recently re-located to the Colorado Springs community with her family, began efforts to re-open the community theater on post.

Sabine Mann and her family have been stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado since 2009. She is a German citizen who met, and eventually married, a U.S. Army soldier when he was
stationed overseas in Germany. Married for twenty-four years with two children, Mann has dealt with the common struggles facing military spouses in the 21st century. Prior to their relocation to Fort Carson, Mann and her family were stationed in Bamberg, Germany. There, Mann’s two sons became involved with the installation’s Stable Theater, run by Jack Austin, after she took her family to see theater productions as part of a college course offered at the garrison. Mann gathered quickly the benefits of the performing arts: “What I [came to] realize – there was the impact it had on everybody involved. We had single soldiers there, we had married soldiers there, whole families were involved…and what it’s done for my boys while dad was deployed [was] huge.” She continues, explaining how “it helped us pass the time and take the focus off the worry because they could be somebody else, somebody different, and not have to worry about dad.” When Ms. Mann and her family arrived at Fort Carson, she was surprised to discover there was no existing theater company in operation at the installation. Not only did Bamberg’s Stable Theater provide a creative outlet for her sons, Mann noticed the importance of a social and creative outlet for active duty soldiers and their spouses, as well. In fact, Mann admits, “when I was thinking of this theater, it was never for the children,” citing the plethora of children’s programming offered through MWR at most bases worldwide. She wanted to provide “a little escape route for adults,” an opportunity to release the stresses and pressures of being a spouse or parent.

Mann quickly jumped into action, reaching out to the head of Fort Carson’s MWR division and connecting with the Theater program’s former Entertainment Director, Vic Colletti. Colletti was recruited by Mann as an advisor as she lacked any professional or practical theater experience herself. The office of Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) at Fort Carson advised
Mann to make the theater program a “special interest group” on post, therefore allowing it to receive some funding from MWR, including coverage for performance rights via Army Entertainment Division’s Headquarters. She began holding interest meetings on post, what she called “talent calls,” to assess how involved the Fort Carson community would be if Mann reignited the theater program. After two years, Sabine Mann reopened the Fort Carson Community Theatre with a six-performance run of *Christmas Chaos*.

Like many other theater companies operating on stateside Army installations, Fort Carson’s theater program utilizes a building originally intended for other purposes. Named after the original post theater, Fort Carson’s current Little Theater is a smaller venue than its namesake and it was initially used by the U.S. Army as a venue for military band concerts. The stage and design of the building aren’t the most convenient nor the most conventional for theater production purposes. The space is equipped with a diamond-shaped, modified thrust stage and seats 100. There are no curtains or fly space. The space had only been used for daily briefings until Mann secured shared access to the venue. Here, as with other Army Theater programs, the facility manager plays an integral role in the survival of the fledging theater program. Kevin Manning helped coordinate rehearsals and performances in the multi-purpose space on post at Fort Carson.

The new and improved Fort Carson Community Theater opened in December 2011 with *Christmas Chaos*. Mann secured a committee through her initial “talent calls” that assisted her in selecting the theater’s next show, by democratic vote. While they currently plan one production at a time, it is Mann’s hope to establish a four-show season each year. The theater company holds auditions before each show they produce. They have begun to build a regular
audience, based primarily on word of mouth about their light, fun musicals (including *Legally Blonde* and *Schoolhouse Rock*). According to Mann, the comical entertainment is important for the soldiers and their families who are in attendance: “with all the deployments and all the hardship that’s going on already, we don’t want to add to that.” This was proven with the new theater’s first “flop,” *Animal Farm*. It was darker material and advertisements for the show warned audiences it might not be family friendly. Mann felt confident that the Fort Carson community wanted to be entertained, it wanted to “keep it light” and her belief was reflected in the extremely low ticket sales for *Animal Farm*. The fledgling theater company lost a bit of its momentum after that production but reignited its prior success with *Legally Blonde*. Though Mann’s theater company is still too young to have solid statistics to share for this research, she notes the continued involvement of active duty soldiers both on stage and behind the scenes, including the contribution of wounded warriors. In addition, several family members and civilians in the community participate in the shows.

Similar to the Lee Playhouse at Fort Lee, Virginia, the Fort Carson Community Theatre established a non-profit organization to assist their operation. With their non-profit status freshly approved in June 2013, the theater company would now be able to keep all profits from their shows (rather than MWR keeping that revenue). With the recent non-profit development, the theater company is now led by a committee of active duty soldiers, retirees, family members, and civilians that will select the season of upcoming shows. The committee president is Frank Morales, a retired serviceman. The non-profit status does not interfere with the Army Entertainment Division’s covering the costs of royalties and scripts for Fort Carson’s theatrical productions. As a new entity at the garrison, the theater lacks the support of paid staff
members. Instead, it relies solely on volunteers for operations to continue. Because the theater is still working to re-establish itself on base, the attendance at shows has not consistently reached maximum capacity. With their very first production, *Christmas Chaos* in December 2011, word of mouth helped to sell out the final of six shows. By the time they did *Legally Blonde* in spring 2013, the houses were at least three-quarters full. With such an intimate space, these numbers might seem disconcerting until one discovers the limited marketing the Fort Carson Community Theater has at its disposal. Mann notes that their advertisements for upcoming productions include little more than a group page on Facebook and notices in the post’s newsletter. Clearly the MWR’s minimal involvement in promoting The Little Theater has not helped the fledgling company. Mann echoes the sentiments of another military spouse, Trecia Wilson, from Fort Bliss, Texas, when she bemoans there are “too many useless programs” offered by MWR which means they can’t market anything well.

Despite having housed a consistent theater program on post many decades ago, this new incarnation of the Fort Carson Community Theater is still in its infancy. While working out the kinks, founder Sabine Mann had a clear aim when she began the tedious work of re-starting the Theater program: “In the theater, they can step out of that soldier role, that spouse role, that mom role, they can be someone else, something else...while they are there, they forget everything around them.” Mann saw the desire for soldiers and families at Fort Carson to find an escape from the pressures of day-to-day life in a military environment.

She recalls the end of a performance of *Legally Blonde* when she had an epiphany about her perseverance and hard work. Having stepped aside for several months due to health reasons, she was returning to her budding theater company with fresh eyes. Mann admits, “I
cried like a baby [seeing] the people, the joy, the atmosphere.” An active duty soldier who was working as a crew member backstage approached Ms. Mann to see if she was okay. After revealing her identity as the founder of the new Fort Carson Community Theater, the soldier offered a simple “Thank you” to the overwhelmed Mann. Such a response was validation for why she began the theater program: “[This was] not for me, I don’t sing, I don’t act. [But] I have a passion for the soldiers and their families. Always have, always will.” Because of her health issues and the recent establishment of the associated non-profit organization, Mann is determined to take a step back. While other volunteers and non-profit committee members are fearful of the impending change, the theater company’s founder reassures them of their capability and of her initial hopes for the group:

It was never my intent to run this theater. It wasn’t. It was my intent to build it, to get people in place who have a vested interest in the theater, in the performing arts itself. My vested interest is in the people, not necessarily the performing arts. (Mann)

Her belief in her colleagues and collaborators is evidence of the theater company’s growth in such a short time.

Sadly, the company permanently shut down operations in January 2014. The news was advertised on the Fort Carson Community Theater Facebook page, citing lack of interest and participation. Such a sudden change of fortune for an upward rising venture in the Army Entertainment community is evidence of the fragility of the few remaining stateside theater companies that are still operating and of the extreme difficulty in properly establishing new programs.

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Established in 1941, Fort Polk was used as a training base for soldiers heading off to World War II. It was not until 1961 that Fort Polk became a permanent installation. On March 12, 1993, the base officially became the home of the Joint Readiness Training Center. Every soldier who was shipped off to Iraq or Afghanistan for Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom prepared for their duties at Fort Polk’s JRTC.

Thomas Watson has been the director of Fort Polk’s Showboat Theatre for 27 years. He is a civilian employee. The performance space, not an actual boat, can accommodate approximately 90 spectators. The Showboat Theatre recently celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2013.

The Showboat Theatre at Fort Polk produces a four-show season every year. The majority of the performances are dinner theatre experiences, with a select few shows designated without meals. Typically, a production runs three consecutive weekends. Auditions are announced on Facebook and through local community theater newsletters and are held before each production. In fact, though they average four shows per season, the theater does not have an announced season. The audiences, according to Watson, are a healthy mix of active duty soldiers and their families, retirees, and civilians.

While Watson has managed Showboat Theatre autonomously for most of his time in the position, recently he’s had to deal with more oversight from MWR. This change to more involved supervision was due to a recently planned production that was being advertised as “not suitable for children.” The show was then cancelled by MWR, despite being four weeks
into the rehearsal process. Now, Watson must submit scripts to Fort Polk’s MWR office for approval before official season selections can be made. This new inconvenience aside, Watson acknowledges the conservative slant of the majority of his audience on post, humorously noting: “we’re at the buckle of the bible belt.”

The Showboat Theatre operates primarily as a dinner theatre at Fort Polk, though the space is available to rent out for special events. The tickets for these performances are $30 for adults and $25 for children (with non-dinner theater tickets running $10 and $5 respectively). Ticket prices have recently been raised after profits were non-existent with the increasing price of food. Publicity is limited as an official Army entity on post. The Showboat is not allowed to reach out to local newspapers off-post and the Public Affairs Office won’t advertise upcoming performances. They utilize a mailing list and on-post newsletters, as well as local radio interviews to spread the word about their productions. A consistent tourist presence via a tour bus company from Alexandria, Virginia (an hour away) has helped to get “butts in seats,” the mark of success according to Watson.

Watson is the only full-time paid staff member currently working at Showboat Theatre. This past year, the theater underwent renovations during which time his fellow full-time staff member was “borrowed” to fulfill other MWR purposes and has yet to return to the community theater. There are occasionally “flexible” hires to assist Watson in the operations of the venue when necessary. My ability to re-connect with Watson after our initial phone conversation has limited the amount of detail provided in this case study.
Theater
Fort Campbell
near Clarksville, TN

Construction at Camp Campbell began in early 1942. By 1950, the installation was elevated to the status of a permanent base and renamed Fort Campbell. According to photographic postcards of Fort Campbell, there have existed multiple theaters on post in the installation’s 70-year history. Mann Theatre, which is identified as the Post Theatre, was a permanent, air-conditioned structure. In addition, Wilson Theatre occupied acreage on the base. Currently, Wilson Theater serves as Fort Campbell’s movie house.

A regular theater program is not currently running at Fort Campbell, even though Amy Kosby at Army Entertainment Division considers it one of the six remaining stateside U.S. Army community theaters that were active in 2013 because it utilized AED funds for royalties and scripts in the calendar year. Speaking with Bonnie Murphy from Fort Campbell’s MWR office, it seems a semi-regular theater program is being maintained on post. The main purpose for these productions is so Fort Campbell can participate in the Army’s annual international competition, Festival of the Arts. There is no designated theater facility which MWR utilizes for its theatrical productions. The MWR office aims to produce one or two shows each year, held in the Dale Wayrynen Recreation Center, which has a stage. Of course, the recreation center is used for a variety of other purposes when not being used for productions. Outside directors are hired to direct individual productions as they are scheduled, with Art Conn proudly claiming a 15-year history of directing productions for the Fort Campbell Theater program. My ability to reconnect with Murphy after our initial phone conversation has limited the amount of detail provided in this case study.
Having surveyed the only six remaining community theaters at U.S Army bases stateside in 2013, I can see several commonalities amongst the most financially successful. By far, the two most popular community theaters on Army bases in the United States in 2013 were the Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre in Augusta, Georgia and Harlequin Dinner Theatre at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. These two theaters share several aspects in common. Not only are they both dinner theater establishments, but they also serve a larger percentage of active duty soldiers and their families in both the audience and in the productions. Figure 1 displays the high level of involvement of active duty soldiers at the few Army theater programs still operating between 2008 and 2013. Another important distinction they share is in the area of leadership. They are the only two stateside Army theaters remaining that employ Installation Entertainment Directors with any professional theater experience. Harlequin’s Robert Olivas and Shawn Kjos both have worked in the local and regional theater scene while Fort Gordon’s Steve Walpert worked in the professional entertainment sector between his active duty and civilian Army days. These two successful dinner theaters also share the luxury of possessing sole access to their respective facilities. They are able to schedule and operate productions year-round which bring more opportunities for soldiers and their families to engage as a community as well as more potential revenue for the venues.
Looking further into leadership, it should be noted that only three of the remaining theaters have paid artistic management. In these instances, there is also funding for additional support staff. Two of the other theaters are maintained by full-time volunteers. The last operating theater programs are all run by civilian employees, though three of the Entertainment Directors hold past service records. (This was also the case during the height of Army Entertainment, as the fluctuation of active duty soldiers wouldn’t allow for a consistent and reliable theater program to be established on post). Overall, five out of the six stateside U.S. Army community theaters are run by people with previous experience working in or living in a military community: Fort Carson Community Theatre is led by an Army spouse; Fort Lee, Fort Gordon, and Fort Polk are all led by Army veterans, and Fort Campbell’s theater program is organized by an MWR employee.
When looking at Tables F-H and Figures 1 and 2 comparing these six stateside Army theaters’ box office totals, number of shows, and number of volunteer hours, there are drastic highs and lows. Fort Gordon Dinner Theatre is exponentially more successful financially than any of the other theaters. Looking at the 2012 reports of overall attendance, box office figures, and participation rates both stateside and internationally, Fort Gordon is a prominent contributor to the U.S. Army Entertainment program’s success. Worldwide, 22 Army community theaters produced 633 performances of 106 shows for a box office total of approximately $738,000. The seven stateside Army theaters, in that year, combined for 163 performances of 20 shows and ticket sales reaching $465,000. Singling out Fort Gordon Dinner Theater near Augusta, Georgia, this phenomenal entertainment program produced 35 performances of 5 shows for an intake of $319,000. According to these figures, Fort Gordon accounted for 43% of gross ticket sales but only 6% of the performances. Both Fort Carson and Fort Campbell struggled to maintain a regular performance schedule, signaling the importance of paid management and devoted performance spaces. Interestingly, half of these six stateside theaters operate a youth theater program. Fort Lee Playhouse produces two performances “for the children, by the children” every year with KidKapers, the most developed youth theater program of the three. Lee Playhouse also invests in a scholarship program for future theater artists. Unfortunately, Fort Lee Playhouse’s efforts towards developing the next generation of theater artists and audience members are not reflected in their box office numbers.
Another important element to the success or failure of these few remaining community theaters on post is the local community theater scene and the installation’s other MWR opportunities. Looking at the locations of the installations in the United States with operating community theaters reveals much about the potential for arts to thrive – Augusta, GA;
Petersburg, VA; San Antonio, TX; Colorado Springs, CO; Leesville, LA; and Clarksville, TN. Five of these locations are in the American South. Only one is located in a major metropolitan city. Most Army bases are within 30-45 minutes of more than one local community or collegiate theater. Additionally, most of these installations are headquarters or bases of operations for major soldier training and/or joint branch services. When comparing the variety of MWR programming these garrisons offer on-post, it appears none are lacking for recreational opportunities.

Part of the reason these few stateside theaters have continued to operate is because they are utilizing connections within and beyond their military communities. Both Fort Lee Playhouse and Harlequin Dinner Theatre emphasized symbiotic relationships with local civilian community theaters. Across all stateside theaters there is an undeniable truth: the majority of audiences are over the age of 50. While this age group provides reliable and consistent patronage to the Army community theaters, it also serves as a disadvantage to the entertainment programs. With such a loyal, stubborn fan base, Army theaters are limited by what types of shows they can produce. And with this built-in audience and its preferences, Army Entertainment Directors are unable or unmotivated to recruit younger viewers. Either through innovative marketing (such as social media campaigns) or creatively daring season selection (bringing in newer plays, edgier material, etc.), the stateside U.S. Army community theaters have the potential to thrive for decades to come.

The space issues facing many of these theaters reflect a recurring theme in Army theater endeavors: there is a lack of space, let alone funding, for consistent entertainment programming, not to mention rampant down-sizing and budget cuts Army-wide. It is no longer
possible to ensure a garrison entertainment program will be able to access and maintain a “base of operations” as the 1966 Operational Guide for the Army Entertainment Program advises. Theater programs must limit their offerings and ensure they are kept affordable, as soldiers and their families’ pocketbooks are extra lean. More cooperation with outside theater companies would benefit both the military and civilian communities. Sharing resources, facilities, and operating experience would help ensure a longer life for the few remaining theater companies on post in the United States. The facilitation or leadership of key individuals would enable Army personnel to establish, and maintain, an effective theater program while still ensuring the Army Entertainment motto of “for the soldier, by the soldier” is still in place.
CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation with the desire to discover the form and function of theater produced by and for soldiers and their families on stateside U.S. Army bases from 1983 to 2013. How did it originate? What purpose was it meant to serve? Has it proven successful? How do permanent Army community theaters compare to the Army’s national theatrical tours? Will Army Theater survive over the next thirty years? By reviewing the diverse array of entertainments produced for military personnel in the last century, I was able to dissect the differences between “self-produced” and “outsourced” entertainment and note the shifts in approaching such performances as the MWR’S mission has changed. Chapter 2 includes the history of Army Entertainment Division and the Army’s Music and Theater program. Exploring the impetus behind the formation of this programming allowed me to discern the change in the culture of entertainment then and now. In Chapter 3, I investigate the diversity amongst AED’s three national theatrical tours from the last thirty years. Case studies of six permanent, locally-situated stateside Army community theaters are presented in Chapter 4.

Some of the major questions that arose from this research include: How can Army Theater sustain itself, let alone propagate itself, if successful production models of non-military theaters aren’t followed or even studied? How adaptable can the Army be in accommodating new demands and expectations for live entertainment? Is it possible to keep true to AED’s
motto, “for the soldier, by the soldier,” if a non-DoD civilian is brought in to facilitate the maintenance and development of Army Theater on post?

Discoveries

By exploring the variety of ways in which military and entertainment have converged in the past century of American history, I was able to glean that no single method of entertainment is most efficacious. Over the years, depending on who was producing and who was receiving, military entertainment has been utilized with a diverse array of purposes to serve several different audiences. Entertainment in the U.S. military has served in a number of ways – as therapy, education, liberation, diversion, historical demonstration, and method of collective participation. The concern has not been “how does it serve?”, but “who was serving the entertainment and why?”

“Self-produced” entertainment for soldiers and their families has been at the center of Army Entertainment Division’s mission as it works to fulfill the MWR goal of enhancing people’s quality of life while they are a part of the Army community. The shared identity of performer and spectator makes the reception of entertainment a personalized experience; the quality of the performance is secondary to the intention behind the making of it. It is interesting to note the differences in soldier-initiated entertainment throughout history compared to those initiated by officers for the soldier population; the most creative and freeing performances appeared to come about without authority looming. Autonomy seemed to play a role in the success of many U.S. military entertainment endeavors, both those that are “self-produced” and those that are “outsourced.” This level of autonomy was achieved only after military
leaders had been educated in the value of the arts and chose to trust and respect the artistic activities of soldiers and their families.

Artistic autonomy is less common now than it was in the early years of Army Entertainment. More current “self-produced” offerings have included historical demonstrations, talent competitions, and strategic simulations, seemingly veering away from the mission of MWR. It has not been made clear what, or who, has caused this shift in the employment of “self-produced” entertainment. Interestingly, more recently “outsourced” military entertainment has taken a stronger step towards the MWR mission, focusing the arts on the rehabilitation of the soldier, the soldier’s family, and the veteran. With more research supporting the role of creative therapies in the mental health of military personnel, there has been a burgeoning movement of dance, visual art, music, and theater made for the soldier, facilitated by civilians.

This dissertation examined three national theatrical tours and six permanent installation community theaters produced and supported by Army Entertainment Division on stateside U.S. Army bases from 1983 to 2013. Though both tours and permanent installations distribute theater to an Army community, their tactics, budget, audiences, and effectiveness varied immensely. Despite obvious differences, they shared many of the same challenges. Both the national touring entities and the local Army community theaters competed for artistic autonomy, consistent leadership, qualified professional guidance, funding, and audiences.

Much like any arts organization, AED and its remaining local theaters have relied on an healthy relationship with Army management in order to run effectively. They had to operate a balancing act between collaborative processes and regimented hierarchal conditioning. Artistic
autonomy became more crucial for those Army Entertainment personnel who never served in
the military and, therefore, lacked the “street cred” of a veteran-turned-civilian employee. The
challenges of civilians making Army Theater point to broader issues of leadership. I discovered
that Generals, and all active duty soldiers and officers, were reassigned every two or three
years, leading to an inconsistency in upper management. While the civil service employees
remained longer, the consistency they provided was disadvantageous, as the model of theater
they promoted became formulaic and stagnant despite the changing climate of 21st century
entertainment. Tangential to this issue was one of artistic ambitions. There were very few
people involved in Army Entertainment in 2013 who possessed academic or professional
training in theater, leading to productions of a lower standard except when funding existed for
the hiring of civilian artistic team members.

Funding the continuing operations of community theaters and national theatrical tours
(apart from the Soldier Show) has been an ongoing concern. These endeavors were meant not
only to be self-sufficient, but also, in an ideal world, to build revenue as well. Such constant
money pressures influenced theater season selection, artistic direction, pricing of tickets, and
methods of marketing. AED was dependent upon the existing audience base and little effort
was made to seek out potential new audiences. It was intriguing to consider participant versus
spectator involvement in both the national tours and the community theaters. When evaluating
why theater was continually produced for and by Army personnel, the key question was “who
was gaining the most from the experience?” Should the focus have shifted more to the
participatory benefits? Has the MWR mission been carried out when audiences are
predominantly 50+ citizens?
Implications for Further Study

This research serves as the springboard for artists and scholars who want to delve into the world of contemporary entertainment produced by and for U.S. military personnel. There are limitless scholarly possibilities to explore with five military branches producing various forms of live entertainment that widely impact millions of American service persons and their family members. The popular image of military culture is that it is unusually controlled or constrained. It would be enlightening to see if that popular image is challenged or confirmed by untold stories and personalities embedded in the U.S. military’s history, present, and future.

One particular topic that I’d like to explore further is the experience of gay, lesbian, queer, and trans-identified civilians and soldiers who participate in “self-produced” military theater. Given the history of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and its fairly recent repeal, it would be interesting to inquire about individuals’ experience in the performing arts, a field known for its openness to sex and gender diversity, in a cultural regime with a history of pronounced sex and gender bias. Does the presence of theater, or more broadly, live entertainment, influence the climate of GLBTQI acceptance on military bases? Is the climate different depending on which region of the country the base is situated in? Is the cultural climate of an international installation different from a national one? I believe that continued investigation of military theater practice can help to focus and answer these questions.

Another topic I’d like to continue to dig into is the role of women, historically and contemporarily, in military entertainment. It was fascinating to discover that Army
Entertainment Division was started by a female civilian performer – “Skippy” Lynn – at a time where many fewer women were serving in the armed forces than is the case today. During my research for this dissertation, I met with strong, capable women but none were currently in leadership positions. Vanita Rae Smith was a dominant force in Army Theater from the 1960s through the 2000s, a contemporary of “Skippy” Lynn’s who retired a few years ago. Sabine Mann, the military spouse who re-ignited the Fort Carson Community Theater, was reluctant to own her title as artistic director or executive director (her reluctance due more to her limited theater experience than her comfort with responsibility). How open is the U.S. Army, or any military branch, to female leadership in entertainment programming? Is there a place for feminist approaches to creating theater on a military base?

I would also like to examine the culture of YouTube videos and more recent forms of “self-produced” entertainment made by deployed soldiers. Examples of such work are reaching a global public audience. It seems to be entertainment for the soldier and also for a general audience to consume. One can quickly find on YouTube dozens and dozens of videos made by active duty soldiers in the last five years; one can see flash mobs, music video parodies, group dancing, and informal, individual talent competitions. What are the benefits of these forms of entertainment compared to formalized Army Entertainment productions? How do these globally accessible entertainments impact the American public’s perception of the military? From a soldier’s perspective, is there any difference in the reception of entertainment?

Lastly, it would be compelling to investigate the form and function of Army Theater at international bases. Overseas, there are more professionally trained entertainment directors
and more financial support that enable theatrical production to be offered to soldiers and their families at a different level than they are in the United States.

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Where Do We Go From Here?

One of the difficulties in evaluating the evolution of Army Entertainment and its Theater program has been dealing with semantics. Darryl Allara and Ken Freehill call what they create “community theater,” but recall a time when theater performances being produced on stateside U.S. Army bases were of a quality and quantity more comparable to professional regional theater. As early as 1959, Robert Gard and Gertrude Burley defined the term Community Theater as “essentially theatre at the local level, amateur or volunteer in origin and spirit, yet not necessarily nonprofessional” (3). Scholarship has not always given community theater much respect as an art-making genre. Sonja Kutfinec addresses this current dilemma: “Community theater has an image problem […] where there’s an] implicit focus on the difference between good (regional, professional) and bad (community, amateur) art” (23). This image problem might derive from military theater’s MWR purpose. As Mark Fearnow notes, theater that is “carried out as part of a conscious program of healing is somehow cut off from, perhaps inferior to theatre carried out as ‘pure’ artistic expression” (58).

Fearnow’s remark points to a challenge at the heart of Army Theater. Commercial theater models emphasize the glitz of a polished theatrical “product” over the long and sometimes messy “process” of rehearsals, the careful and collective working-through that a group of artists requires to bring dramatic works forward for public presentation. Yet a theater
devoted more to process than product is likely to achieve Army Theater’s MWR mission. The Army’s 1966 *Army Entertainment Program Operational Guide* acknowledges the importance of process versus product to the benefits gained by participants:

In nonprofessional theater, the *process* of doing the production is of equal concern with the *end-product*, because one of the primary objectives of nonprofessional theater is to benefit the participants [who] *need* the opportunity; for them, it fills an important sociological requirement by increasing their self-confidence and making them feel that they “belong” to a group which is making a contribution to the community in which they live. [original emphasis] (58)

Speaking at the 2011 Topper Awards, the U.S. Army Garrison Entertainment Director at Weisbaden, Germany, Charlie Fontana spoke freely about the transformative experience soldiers and their families experience having participated in the creation of live theater:

Anyone who’s witnessed the affirmative effect that engaging in the performing arts has on participants knows the moments of self-discovery – moments when a soldier or family member makes a realization about his or her own potential as a performer, a team member, a creative entity, an individual with a place in this world. (quoted in Weisel)

These statements made by Army professionals are confirmed by recent performance studies research. Jan Cohen-Cruz, a scholar and practitioner of community-based theater, explains the active role of creating, not just receiving, a live performance: “The principle of *active culture* reflects the recognition that people frequently get more out of making art than seeing the fruits of other people’s labors” (*Local Acts* 99). Another benefit of active participation (as opposed to passive spectatorship) is explored in *Audience Participation: Essays on Inclusion in Performance* (2003). As Kattwinkel explains: “If citizens are participants in the art making, then the process will help guide their thinking in and out of the theatre” (186).

What would it look like if soldiers and their families actively participated in the creating and witnessing of live theater?
Greater active participation in a process-oriented theater would likely lead those involved to have a greater sense of ownership in the results. The topic of ownership is an important one when determining the future of U.S. Army Theater on stateside bases. Army Entertainment Division proudly bears the motto coined by Irving Berlin in 1917 when he wrote *Yip Yip Yaphank*, “For the Soldier, By the Soldier.” AED emphasizes how the reception of entertainment differs depending on who the performance is made by. There is a degree of awareness in outsourced entertainment of this distinctive separation. Bryan Doerries, founder of “Theater of War,” explains how the plays he uses, Ajax and Philoctetes, were myths “designed by and for veterans” (quoted in Goodwin). In another interview, Doerries acknowledged his need for assistance in adequately interpreting the material: “The play was written in a code that I as a civilian needed military audiences to translate for me” (quoted in Reed).

In much of the literature on community-based theater, the sense of ownership is central to a work’s success. Dani Snyder-Young explains how makers of community-based art create work using a variety of approaches, including “theatre made with a community, theatre made by a community, and theatre made for a community” [original emphasis] (5). Jan Cohen-Cruz shares the approach of fellow community-based scholar-practitioner Richard Owen Geer, who first described this emerging field in 1993 as “of the people, by the people, and for the people”; the three-pronged distinction emphasizes 1) who is producing the work – the community itself, 2) how it is produced – collectively, and 3) who is the intended audience (Local Acts 2). Cohen-Cruz summarizes, “destination and source are joined at the hip,” before addressing the complications of Geer’s definition two decades later (Local Acts 2). Instead, she settles on a
temporary definition: “community-based performance is thus a local act in two senses: a social doing in one’s particular corner of the world and an artistic framing of that doing for others to appreciate” [original emphasis] (13). Though the work is hard to delineate, its intentions are clear. The artist practitioner assists a community in finding its voice and creating performances which speak to the audience of its peers. Mark Fearnow uses a case study on prison theater to relate the importance of ownership in the creation of art within an institutionalized setting. A participant, Joe White, claims “The theatre is our property. We decide what it is and what it will do. It is created by and for us and for those we choose to share it with” [original emphasis] (68). A similar need for ownership could be found within the institution of the Army.

** ** **

The Future of Army Entertainment

Army Entertainment Division has been relying on a traditional model of theater production since its inception in the early 1960s. As new technologies, styles, and techniques have developed, the current practices of AED seem archaic and unyielding to contemporary shifts in the reception of and motivation to attend live theater. Over the past fifty years, Entertainment Directors with professional experience and academic training in the arts have retired and passed away, leaving a gap in the leadership and knowledge required to facilitate the continuance of AED as a thriving theater-producing entity. Harking back to Robert Edmond Jones’ warning against a “theatre whose natural condition is fear,” Gard and Burley note fearful conditions in Community Theater that continues to resonate today for those involved in Army Entertainment: “What seems to be lacking is an art consciousness strong enough to transcend
the fear of failure, which is the fear that really underlies Community Theatre production. It is a fear of financial failure, of community censure, of loss of prestige” (Gard and Burley 4-5). AED must look for a new approach to producing theater if it wants to continue its mission of boosting morale, maintaining resiliency, and enhancing quality of life for soldiers and their families in the 21st century.

What I propose is a new approach to using theater by and for U.S. Army soldiers and their families that is based on my field research and scholarly literature on the subjects of applied and community-based theater. I offer three models that recommend various levels of funding, artistic leadership, and soldier (and family member) participation. By not focusing on a single “solution,” we avoid discussing the current state of Army Theater as a “problem” to be solved. Instead, the three models outlined below provide encouragement and suggestions for any number of paths Army Entertainment Division could follow as it moves further into the 21st century.

The first model I propose is utilizing the systems already in place for Army Theater at the garrison, local, and national levels, improving upon the foundational work already established. More time, energy, and funding could be geared towards advancements in marketing and publicity, both on and off post. Equipping the installation’s media relations and public relations offices with the knowledge and tools to properly publicize theatrical events should be a top priority. Theater shouldn’t compete with television or film; its liveness, the opportunity for communion with others, should be highlighted when seeking out audiences. Most of the remaining community theaters on stateside Army bases reside alongside large training facilities and this young, new audience should be actively recruited for theater attendance. Additionally,
these community theaters should feel empowered to elevate ticket prices slightly in order to subsist into the next decade. Marketing theater as a family event or a fun date night would help justify the expense on a soldier’s limited income. In terms of the national theatrical tours, I believe Army Entertainment Division should support an annual comedy mystery workshop tour, making sure to encourage MWR offices that have not received a visit from Allara and Freehill to seize the opportunity to enhance the community building on post that they provide. Such investments of time and money are minimal compared to other installation programming, and the theater events that these improvisational week-long workshops create appeal to a wide range of audience members.

The second model I propose involves bringing in guest artist-educators who can provide more hands-on training and artistic leadership to soldiers and their families. Many individuals, both soldiers and family members, have stories to tell. Equipping them to tell their stories would provide an outlet for people to express themselves and disclose their own unique history of wounds, both visible and invisible. This project would require additional funding and involvement from the Army community. AED could seek out artist-practitioners to lead soldiers and family members in writing workshops. Perhaps more direct approaches to theatrical explorations through the voices of soldiers themselves would result in a greater number of theater practitioners, not just theater enthusiasts, after terms of service have ended. This approach would give soldiers and family members an outlet for sharing and listening; they could participate in theater-making on a deeper personal level than is afforded by the production of a published script. They would be leading their own storytelling while actively participating in community building.
Lastly, I propose a third model for AED to consider. Utilizing performance artist facilitators, Army Theater could embrace community-based techniques that emphasize *process* over *product* and *ensemble* over *actors*. Army Entertainment Division should amend its beloved Berlin motto to include an even more integrated philosophy on the use of the performing arts in enhancing soldiers’ quality of life: “*For the soldier, by the soldier, with the soldier.*”

The future of Army Entertainment looks bright in the light of a potential evolution. Such a model would rely on the cooperation of the Generals in charge of the U.S. Army, as well as the involvement and support of AED. A major factor in the successful operation of this new model would be the financial contribution of a benefactor who recognizes the value of theater on stateside U.S. Army installations and believes in non-traditional methods of boosting morale and enhancing quality of life. This donor could be someone who already publicly supports military entertainment endeavors, such as Jay Leno or Al Roker, who have recently toured with the USO and have assisted charity drives, or who have donated money and goods themselves. I also believe there is an untapped market of financial support from the regular subscription audiences that Army Theaters currently serve. Many of these patrons are veterans, family members, or lifelong community members who have engaged in Army Theater as a means to support the military. While a one-time large donation would be ideal for this inaugural run at a new model of theater, perhaps it is not unreasonable to pursue financial backing from within the community.

I believe an initial donation of $100,000 would be sufficient to foster the first year of development. This amount would cover the salary of an artist/facilitator, rental of on-post
facilities (including a rehearsal space and an office), marketing, communications, and public relations (beyond the limited services provided by the installation’s own media relations and PR offices), and the limited purchase of props, costumes, and technology to aid the ongoing creative activity of the ensemble. Funding would also provide for travel stipends for possible interns or volunteers from nearby colleges or universities with an interest in community-based theater techniques. The outside financial investment would alleviate the Army’s need to justify any appropriated or non appropriated funding from its budget.

In its trial stage, I would recommend a single base with an already active installation theater company to sponsor the inclusion of an artist/facilitator to initiate ongoing ensemble work. Also, partnering with one of the Army Theaters with an existing non-profit companion would make the regulation of outside funding within the Army’s organizational structure less complicated. For that reason, I propose the inaugural community-based theater work take place at Fort Lee, near Petersburg, VA, which has had a non-profit partnership in place for several years. Additionally, the community theater on post has already created its own identity as the Lee Playhouse, building up a children’s theater program and scholarship program, in addition to its regular theater season. The current entertainment director at Fort Lee, Lee Farmer, is nearing the age of full retirement and it would be crucial to have a new leadership presence that can facilitate a new ensemble-based program while keeping the regular Lee Playhouse operations running.

Community-based ensemble work relies on the consistent gathering of community members, providing a training and vocabulary that allows ensemble members to leave and return without anything lost in the interim (Kattwinkel 188-189). Because the work is rooted in
process, the need for actualized performance is determined by the ensemble’s desire to showcase their work and engage in dialogue with the larger Army community (Britton 28). Etienne Wenger, a theorist and practitioner, believes such “collaborative creative engagement as a ‘community of practice’ can achieve a shared identity and heightened sense of ownership in the process” of community-based theater-making (Britton 169). The approach to community-based theater allows for participants to create around any topic of their choice which affects the community as a whole, “rehearsing for real life” in a safe atmosphere as Augusto Boal championed (Boal 40). This open discussion and exploration of current issues facing soldiers and their families will assist the community in dealing with deployment, homecoming, and reintegration.

One of the difficulties faced by local, instillation-level entertainment activities is publicity and recruitment. It would be a major hurdle for the artist/facilitator to integrate into the Fort Lee community and the Petersburg community before any ensemble work could begin. Working with and for Fort Lee’s MWR office, the artist/facilitator would have to make efforts to connect with the numerous programs and services provided for soldiers and their families. Participating in theater can seem intimidating to many people, so it would have to be destigmatized by emphasizing the process aspect of the work. Creating a safe space on an Army installation where individuals feel free to speak about current community issues might be somewhat difficult (Vaughan 57; Cohen-Cruz 99). Given that many soldiers and their families live off-post in the neighboring community, it would not be unreasonable to consider renting space in a nearby community center to enable the most free and engaging dialogue possible
(Snyder-Young 60). Such a decision would be made after several weeks of initial networking with Fort Lee offices and leaders.

After a successful initial run of the Fort Lee Ensemble, it would be desirable to find more donors so more programs could be started based on this new model of theater “For the soldier, by the soldier, with the soldier.” Ensemble work is ideal for the Army community because short term projects can be created and left to float in the ethereal space of the rehearsal room after members leave for deployment or relocation. Alternately, new members to an installation could immediately join an existing ensemble because of the shared vocabulary and training taking place at various stateside U.S. Army bases (Britton 6). Community-based theater puts the citizens’ thoughts and feelings at the foreground; there is less attention on being entertained and more attention on using imagination to explore aspects of military life which are difficult to discuss; there is little attention on creating a polished product for an audience and more attention on embracing the process of ongoing understanding and exploration. Asking all who attend to participate ensures collaborative creation and collective learning, tenets subscribed by Augusto Boal, amongst others.

Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed and its techniques aim to empower the common person, who may feel unheard or unimportant in society. It would be thrilling to see the U.S. Army embrace and foster ensemble-based theater as a means to strengthen its community. While the origins of Boal’s work may be leftist in nature, the objective of the work in no way contradicts the MWR mission. By providing an outlet of expression and communion, the Army can evolve to entertain and educate, enhancing quality of life while engaging new forms.
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Olivas, Robert J. Personal Interview. 13 August 2013.


Slaughter, Hank. Personal Interview. 4 July 2013.

Smith, Vanita. Personal Interview. 13 June 2014.

Sneed, Millie. Personal Interview. 4 July 2013.


Taylor, Patric. Personal Interview. 21 June 2013.


Theno, Justin. Personal Interview. 4 July 2013.


Tolliver Lee, Carolyn. Personal Interview. 8 July 2013.

Torres, Ena. Personal Interview. 4 July 2013.

Triplett, John. Personal Interview. 8 July 2013.


Walpert, Steve. Personal Interview. 16 August 2013.

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Wilson, Trecia. Personal Interview. 13 June 2013.


Zaring, Mike. Personal Interview. 14 June 2013.
### Appendix A: Military Ranking System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pay Grade</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E1</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>PVT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2</td>
<td>Private 2</td>
<td>PV2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E3</td>
<td>Private First Class</td>
<td>PFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>SPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4</td>
<td>Corporal</td>
<td>CPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E5</td>
<td>Sergeant</td>
<td>SGT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E6</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
<td>SSG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E7</td>
<td>Sergeant First Class</td>
<td>SFC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8</td>
<td>Master Sergeant</td>
<td>MSG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E8</td>
<td>First Sergeant</td>
<td>1SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9</td>
<td>Sergeant Major</td>
<td>SGM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9</td>
<td>Command Sergeant Major</td>
<td>CSM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E9 Special</td>
<td>Sergeant Major of the Army</td>
<td>SMA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-1</td>
<td>Warrant Officer</td>
<td>WO1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-2</td>
<td>Chief Warrant Officer 2</td>
<td>CW2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W-3</td>
<td>Chief Warrant Officer 3</td>
<td>CW3</td>
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<td>Chief Warrant Officer 4</td>
<td>CW4</td>
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<tr>
<td>W-5</td>
<td>Chief Warrant Officer 5</td>
<td>CW5</td>
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<td>O-1</td>
<td>Second Lieutenant</td>
<td>2LT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-2</td>
<td>First Lieutenant</td>
<td>1LT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-3</td>
<td>Captain</td>
<td>CPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-4</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>MAJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>O-10</td>
<td>General</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>General of the Army</td>
<td>GA</td>
</tr>
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Appendix B: *Military Acronyms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAFES</td>
<td>Army and Air Force Exchange Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AED</td>
<td>Army Entertainment Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPEO</td>
<td>Armed Forces Professional Entertainment Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKO</td>
<td>Army Knowledge Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APF</td>
<td>Appropriated Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOSS</td>
<td>Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTCA</td>
<td>Commission on Training Camp Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMCOM</td>
<td>Installation Management Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MWR</td>
<td>Morale, Welfare, and Recreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(also FMWR or FMWRC, Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAF</td>
<td>Non-appropriated Funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>Non-commissioned Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORS</td>
<td>Operation Rising Star</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARP</td>
<td>Sexual Harassment and Assault Response Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USO</td>
<td>United Service Organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: *Glossary of military terminology, synonyms, etc.*

**Active Duty** - serves full-time in the active military service of the United States

**Civilian** - a person following the pursuits of civil life, especially one who is not an active member of the military, the police, or a belligerent group

**Deployment** - the movement of armed forces and their logistical support infrastructure around the world.

**Down Range** (aka Front lines of combat)

**Homecoming** – the initial return to an active duty soldier’s home installation, community, and family

**Morale** - the state of the spirits of an individual or group as shown by confidence, cheerfulness, discipline, and willingness to perform tasks

“**Outsourced**” **Entertainment** – produced for soldiers and their families by civilians

**Quality of Life** - the degree to which the experience of an individual's life satisfies that individual’s wants and needs (both physical and psychological)

**Reintegration** – the process of an active duty soldier’s returning to everyday routines after months or years on deployment

**Resilience** - the ability to withstand, adapt, recover and grow in the face of challenges and demands; the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity

“**Self-produced**” **Entertainment** – produced for and by soldiers and their families

**Theater** (aka Performance, aka Entertainment)

**Veteran** - any person who served for any length of time in any military service branch

**Well-Being** - a state of physical, mental, and social health
## Entertainment
Leisure, skill development, and group/mass entertainment activities that support customer needs for both active participation and passive program patronage as well as community cultural exposure and enrichment. Activities include elements of performance arts, music, theater, and multi-discipline special events, etc.

**Goal:** Support and enhance the degree of community satisfaction, cultural exposure and overall quality of life, by providing services to the Army family, comparable to the society they have pledged to defend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population*</th>
<th>Extra Small: 50-500</th>
<th>Small: 500 – 2,000</th>
<th>Medium: 2,000 – 10,000</th>
<th>Large: 10,001 – 25,000</th>
<th>Extra Large: 25,000+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilities** -- Multi-use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours*** -- minimum, mainly weekends, holiday, evenings; additional based on customer demand.</td>
<td>20 hr/week</td>
<td>40 hr/week</td>
<td>40 hr/week</td>
<td>60 hr/week</td>
<td>60 + hr/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff****</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Population is based on 100% Active Duty military plus 25% Active Duty family members and 10% DoD civilians and military retirees, including contractor personnel. OCONUS uses the same definition with the exception of using all US civilian strength including contractor personnel.

**Square footage of facilities based on program/demand requirements.

***Hours of operation based on program/demand requirements

****Installations above 25K population receive one additional staff for each 10,000 person increment in population.

*(document from 2002 provided by Tim Higdon, Producing Manager, AED)*
Appendix E: Installation Community Entertainment Program

FUNCTION: Community Recreation
Sub Function: Installation Community Entertainment Program
Job Position: Installation Community Entertainment Director/1001
NAF-04/GS 11-14

Work Related Tasks:

- Works under the general supervision of the Community Recreation Officer or Director.
- Supervises all of the music and theatre subprograms, facilities and assigned personnel in the district, area, or at the installation, and performs the same duties at these levels as those performed by the Regional Community Entertainment Director at those levels of command.
- Executes command directives regarding DA policies and programs pertaining to Army Community Entertainment Programs.
- Directs, administers, and supervises the Community Entertainment Programs within the district, area, or at the installation.
- Establishes plans, policies, and procedures for subprogram operations throughout the district, area, or installation including field operations for troops on maneuvers and at sites or outposts within its jurisdiction.
- Plans, supervises, and directs a comprehensive schedule of program activities on a commandwide basis in the four subprograms; music, theatre, unit entertainment and commercial and/or touring shows.
- Supervises the functions of each of the subprograms.
- Conducts a regularly scheduled in-service training program for music and theatre specialists assigned to the district, area, or installation Community Entertainment Program, and upon request, conducts clinics and workshops in theatrical and musical techniques for the major Army command and the Department of the Army.
- Requests copyright clearances on all musical and theatrical works produced within the district or area or at the installation regardless of who may be the producing agency; request use of audiovisual aids and educational films which are used in music and theatre programming; requests clearances, permissions, and licenses for use of sound recordings in music and theatre productions or events.
- Supervises and implements, on a district or area-wide or post-wide basis, all aspects of Community Entertainment programs.
- Conducts, advises on, and coordinates Community Entertainment competitions, play tournaments, theatre contests or showcases, festivals of the performing arts, displays, exhibits, and promotional projects of all types; plans and directs an information program by radio, TV, and all available military and civilian information media working through appropriate public and command information channels for maximum coverage.
- Maintains a complete and continuing record of all Community Entertainment activities produced or presented in the district, area, or at the installation. This will include all activities regardless of the producing agency (e.g., chapel choir concerts, Army Band
concerts, club system entertainment events, professional entertainment, and touring group of all types), in order that a complete resume’ of district, area, or post-wide activity will be representative and readily available.

- Establishes and maintains liaison with key individuals and professional groups in communities adjacent to the military establishment and makes maximum use of available local resources for the benefit of the Army Community Entertainment Programs. Supervises the orientation, training, and use of volunteers in Community Entertainment Program activities.
- Serves as technical adviser and supervises facility planning and improvements to include design recommendations, maintenance and repair, and selection of equipment and supplies; supervises budgetary planning.
- Directs musical and theatrical productions and activities of the Community Entertainment Programs at the district, area, or installation level.
- Participates in command and Army-wide level competitions, festivals, workshops and conferences.
- Conducts, directs, or advises on special event activities.
- When necessary, substitutes for other district, area, or post Community Entertainment Directors who may be sick or are on annual leave.
- Represents the command at meetings related to the Army Community Entertainment Program, its activities, needs, and services.
- Provides consultative services embracing broad subjects or programs of the headquarters concerned.

*(document from 2002 provided by Tim Higdon, Producing Manager, AED)*
Appendix F: Proposal from 2010 for Army Theatrical Comedy Murder Mystery Workshop

U.S. Army Creative Programming Concept:
Theatrical team-building performance workshop and resulting in
“comedy/mystery dinner theater” presentation

Mission: To provide performance workshops to those U.S. Army garrisons that do not have an active entertainment program, or component, thereof and wish to engage their community in a family friendly event, by exposing participants to a broader knowledge base about successfully producing and executing theatrical and other entertainment events.

Program specifics: Proposed theatrical workshop consists of a one-week course in the planning, preparation, and performance of an audience-interactive, “you solve it” comedy mystery where active duty military personnel, family members, DoD civilians, veterans, and community volunteers work together as an event production team to deal with venue, storyline, character and plot development, improvisational performance techniques, marketing and special promotions which result in a scheduled, ticketed event of optional multiple performances within the same weekend.

No prior performance experience is required and workshop participants will assume roles in a storyline while being guided through the improvisational performance process. Garrison youth may also be a part of the workshop cast provided they are under the direct supervision of a parent, guardian, or authorized adult representative, who must also agree to be a workshop participant. All participants shall agree to commit to the entire scheduled workshop week and be available to attend all sessions and performances. Additional workshop topics covered during the residency may include a brief overview of the professional entertainment industry, definitions, terms, contracts, job titles, union labor laws, theatrical traditions, and how interested participants may prepare future resumes, adopt marketing strategies, select audition materials and headshots, and build an entertainment business ledger.

Participants will be conducted in limited three-hour sessions over four to five days preceding a scheduled comedy mystery performance. Garrisons may schedule up to two performances. Admissions charges are encouraged and should include the appropriate value of the planned dinner as well as the entertainment and may also include incidental no-host bar expenses. Admission policies and other business related matters are the responsibility of the host garrison.

Two professional, theatrical workshop producing directors will be provided. The comedy mystery is a self-contained event in that the directors bring the storyline, clues, and properties with them. Site selection, room decorations, and additional enhancements are at the discretion of the program manager. Potential sites for this event may be recreation centers, special event centers, clubs, dinner theaters, or any existing theater facility. The workshop producing directors will be available to assist in the site selection for performances if necessary. Marketing
and promotions are the responsibility of the host garrison. Workshop producing directors will be available during the week to actively promote the event via television, radio, and/or newspaper interviews, school sites, or internal garrison organizations (i.e. commanders meetings, army wives club gatherings, BOSS meetings, etc.).
Appendix G: Participant testimonials from 2013 Tour of Murder Two Point Uh-Oh!

From Fort McCoy, WI, Jan 28-Feb 1, 2013
“As a single female soldier, I am here without a family. This week, I was surrounded by family and these wonderful memories will last forever. I have no idea why I volunteered to be a part of the program. I have never acted, nor have I ever wanted to, but I am very thankful that I did.” – Jennifer Fey

“I can’t frankly think of a better way to build the Army family. Productions that bring laughter and a sense of community are the hallmarks of our family, morale, welfare and recreation people that serve our families. Thanks so much for an enjoyable evening and a taste of what entertainment can bring to all of us.” – anonymous

“I cannot think of the last time we have had so much fun as a whole family, since my husband came back from his last deployment...well except in Disney World. Lol.” – Sepulveda family

From Fort Sill, OK, Feb 10-14, 2013
“Being a military spouse and traveling with my husband a lot it’s hard to find something to look forward to with losing friends, switching jobs and leaving family. This performance and the Soldier Show are the highlights of every year for me...I’ve already started the countdown to the next one. Keep it coming you guys. This is the BOMB!!” – LaTonya McLaughlin

From Fort Riley, KS, March 23, 2013
“This event made me realize I want to take drama when I leave the Army and go to college.” – Joshua Panico

“We had an amazing time. We have been to marriage retreats and not have this much fun. Please continue to do this for us.” – Steven Horne

From Fort Stewart, GA, April 12, 2013
“The week seemed to fly by, with all the laughs and meeting new people. Having this week to decompress all the deployment stress put me in a wonderful mood.” – Laura Gadbois

“This experience was very special for me and I feel that this might be a new calling for me as I leave the Army with this awesome and fun murder mystery!” – Jessica Marie Chase

“This week was fun and entertaining. Since my husband deployed my daughter and I have been bored and don’t do much. This was a great diversion from the norm.” – anonymous

“This week has been very fun and insightful for me. For this week has shown me (merely a little) of the commitment that it takes to put on a show. I hope that this is only the beginning of something that I will pursue with passion” – Greg C Hornbuckle
From McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, OK, April 25-26, 2013
“This was a great experience. There are those of us that have a love of the theater but never get the opportunity to bring out that thespian that is hidden in us. It was fun, entertaining, and I feel like I have made new friends.” – Jim Langley

From Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD, June 1, 2013
“It was a great first improv acting opportunity for me, and a blast doing my first acted “on stage” death. Thank you for the help in furthering my newfound love of acting and theater.” – Joe Werhoffer

From Fort Bliss, TX, June 14, 2013
“At first I was hesitant about coming out and trying new things. However, I don’t regret coming out and seeing if I liked it. This has been the best experience I have had in my six years in the military.” – Shane Bridger
Appendix H: *Summary of Bravo! Army Theater Touring Company Tours, 2000-2006*

1\textsuperscript{st} Fiscal Year (2000-2001)  
*Play Ball!* (Original musical on Baseball)  
90 performances  
4623 attendees  
1046 children  
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51 spectators/ performance

2\textsuperscript{nd} Fiscal Year (2001-2002)  
*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged*  
69 Performances  
5209 attendees  
1273 children  
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75 spectators/ performance

3\textsuperscript{rd} Fiscal Year (2002-2003)  
*Lift Up Your Hearts America* (original musical on American nostalgia)  
75 Performances  
5582 attendees  
1796 children  
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74 spectators/ performance

4\textsuperscript{th} Fiscal Year (2003-2004)  
*Farley Family Reunion*  
53 Performances (Deployed Outside Continental United States only)  
4143 attendees  
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78 spectators/ performance

5\textsuperscript{th} Fiscal Year, tour 1 (2004-2005)  
*The Complete History of America, Abridged*  
40 Performances  
4440 attendees  
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111 spectators/ performance

5\textsuperscript{th} Fiscal Year, tour 2 (2005-2006)  
*Private Wars*  
40 Performances  
4000 attendees  
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100 spectators/ performance