

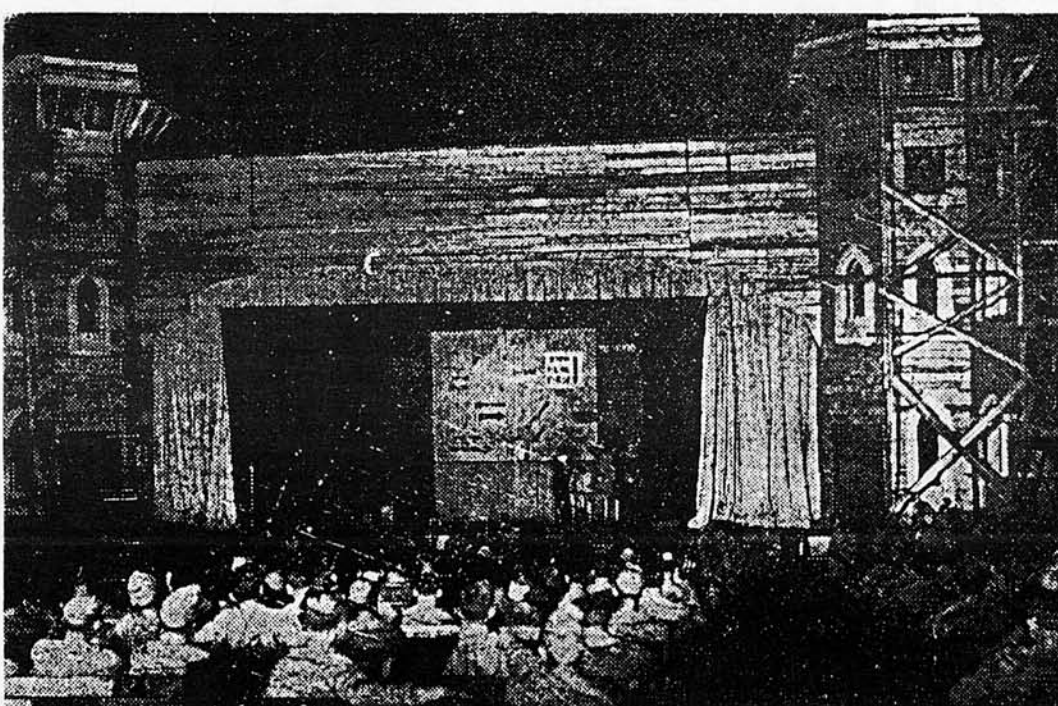
FORT HOLLYWOOD

Many famous entertainers came to entertain the troops during World War II in shows held at the Engineer Replacement Training Center Theater. The theater of the Engineers was born way back in 1941 when two New York playwrights, a stage and radio actor, a Walt Disney artist, and an arranger for Artie Shaw's band found themselves based at Fort Leonard Wood. This five man talent team cooked up the post's first original music show, "Let's Be Buddies."

The cooks were Pvt. Stuart Warrington, later technical sergeant in charge of the engineer center theater project. Private Bob Meskill, actor, and a staff sergeant at Fort Leonard Wood, Pvt. Don Gallagher, famous Hitler imitator, and an officer assigned to special overseas service, Pvt. Bob Douglas, artist, assigned with the Air Corps, and Pvt. Jack Hayes, assigned as staff sergeant in the engineer band at Camp Abbott, Oregon. Hayes, from Hollywood, California, had arranged musical scores for Deanna Durbin, Artie Shaw's band, and The Fibber McGee and Mollie show. Fort Leonard Wood commander Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant III commissioned Hayes to write the official "ERTC March." The presentation of "Let's Be Buddies" and its immediate successors played the rec halls as an off-time activity. The actors were engineers by day, stagehands and thespians at night.

Their efforts bore fruit and won the interest and encouragement of Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant III, commanding the training center at that time. By November, 1941, the "Theater of the Engineers" was a distinct reality.

Two "Little Theater" actresses, Martha Jensen and Marjory Tilton, were imported from St. Louis for four weeks of "Petticoat Fever," a comedy which ran nightly in rec halls and was then taken to St. Louis for a two night stand for the entertainment of Jefferson Barracks soldiers. In March, 1941, Martha Jensen, and three other St. Louis actresses (Eileen Murphey, Jean Bristow and Betty Harsh) came to appear in "Personal Appearance" in which two veterans of the original group, Meskill and Pvt. First Class Frank Soares, shared honors. Originally scheduled for Station Hospital and two weeks in the 30th Engineer Training Battalion rec hall, this latest Warrington directed comedy rang the bell again, and was given a three day run at Service Club No. 4 for the 8th Division and returned to the rec hall



Carpenters' saws and hammers were laid aside temporarily last week in order that "Ready On The Firing Line," the post's Army Emergency Relief production, might move in for several free showings in the ERTC's new open-air theater on Minnesota Avenue east of M Avenue. Note the design of the structure, which will be surfaced with stucco to become a replica of the engineer's castle. The proscenium is 45 feet wide and 18 feet high, nearly as large as those in post theaters.

for more showings. In 20 performances, it played to more than 6,000 people.

By this time, the "talent team" had lost Douglas and Hayes, but new talent had appeared out of the constantly changing training battalions. The group next embarked on the soldier masterpiece, "Ready on the Firing Line," written, produced, staged and acted entirely by soldiers. With a cast of more than 100 engineers, artillerymen, infantrymen and medics. "Ready" was the first all soldier show given in a major city for Army Emergency Relief. It played five performances at the Municipal Auditorium in St. Louis and grossed over \$20,000 for the relief fund. Then it came back to the ERTC to play two weeks in the nearly completed open air "Theater of the Engineers" on Minnesota Avenue east of "M" Avenue. The ASFTC Theater of the Engineers' seating capacity was 1,800. The theater was designed as a replica of the Fort Leonard Wood engineer's castle. The proscenium was 45 feet wide and 18 feet high and nearly as large as those in post theaters.

In August, 1942, "Petticoat Fever"

was revived in the new show house with more than 1,200 trainees on hand for the opening night. Margaret Fullerton of New York made her debut in this comedy and remained to become a "regular" of the ERTC players group. "Personal Appearance" was next revived, then the psychological murder mystery "Night Must Fall" was presented. By this time, Gallagher had gone and Cpl. Sam Fertig, also destined to become a popular member of the troupe, had taken Gallagher's place.

Gone now were the "tent show" days of dressing in the little rooms behind rec hall stages and making up in service club washrooms. No longer did the actors carry scenery from one rec hall to another, set it up, fix lighting, and then retire to dress for the performance. The Theater of the Engineers was now a going concern, an important feature of the special service division of the ERTC. During the winters the group's productions was given in theaters and in the summer the shows went on in the open air theater where trainees sat under the stars and enjoyed vicariously the efforts of the GI actor in civvies making love to



Pvt. Elroy Davis sings "The Hills of Home" as his contribution to the show.

Old Settler's Gazette

the leading lady.

By the winter of 1942-43, the list of engineer hits was becoming impressive, including such Broadway successes as "Room Service," "The Man Who Came to Dinner," "Arsenic and Old Lace," "The Bishop Misbehaves," "Blithe Spirit," and "Blind Alley." That summer saw the production of "The Eve of St. Mark" which proved to be such an effective portrayal of human sacrifice in the war going on at the time that, by the request of Brig. Gen. Creswell Garglington, commanding general of the center, it became a part of the orientation program for new troops.

That summer program also included "My Sister Eileen," "Post Road," and revivals of "Petticoat Fever" and "Personal Appearance" and "Ready." The 1943-44 winter season, with previews at the ERTC Officers' Club and regular productions at Theater No. 4, opened with the very popular "bundling comedy" "Pursuit of Happiness" and included "Angel Street," ("Gaslight" in the movies) "You Can't Take It With You," "Kiss and Tell" and "Three's a Family."

Attendance figures for all productions show that the engineer's players group entertained more than 125,000 people in 207 performances of 26 productions.

There was a virtual parade of Hollywood stars that visited Fort Leonard Wood during World War II. Rowdy, cut up, comedienne Martha Raye was the first feminine movie star to visit the post in March of 1942. Through an arrangement with the Hollywood Victory Committee of the Screen Actors Guild, Raye made a three day schedule of personal appearances between movie making jobs. The renowned Condos Brothers three man dance team, who appeared in "Sun Valley Serenade" with Carmen Miranda and Betty Grable, headed the supporting cast. USO Camp shows brought other notable stars including the "oomph girl", Ann Sheridan in the "Funazfire" variety production. Both actresses were to make special appearances at the Red Cross building for station hospital patients as well as informal appearances at service clubs and elsewhere on post. Other entertainers who appeared on the base during the war were Ella Fitzgerald, The Mills Brothers, Zero Mostel, Jerry Lester, Carol Bruce, and Eddie Bracken. Although she did not appear on the base, Judy Garland did send an autographed photo "With sincere good wishes for the boys at Fort Leonard Wood, Judy Garland."

An estimated 10,000 soldiers watched World Heavyweight Champion, Joe Louis in a three-round exhibition bout on Friday, October 1, 1943. Louis as a sergeant in the army at the time. Fort Leonard Wood was the first post in this service command (nine states) to see the champ. Cpl. James A. Romanowski, writing for the Fort Wood News, reviewed the champ's visit saying, "Louis had no call to turn loose his killertactics against his ex-sparring partner, George Nicholson, but the thousands of soldiers went away happy that they had seen one of the most devastating punchers who ever held the World's Heavyweight Championship." "Sugar" Ray Robinson appeared on the same card. Robinson was a marvel and just what the crowd had come to see. Jimmy Edgar, his opponent and the seventh ranking welterweight in the world, was an excellent match for Robinson's three round exhibition. Robinson's flickering fists were always in Edgar's face and many times Edgar had a hard time laying his lightning left on Robinson's bobbing puss as the welterweight champ refused to use his gloves or arms to guard himself. Edgar was so good himself that until Robinson really warmed up it was difficult to determine who landed the most of the scores of blows.

"California Jackie" Wilson, third ranking welterweight in the world, was also with the troupe and refereed the Robinson exhibition. In addition to the two exhibition bouts there were 12 scraps between the fort's soldiers. Lou Seprodi, the popular MP who was featured in many fight cards trimmed lanky Mel Turnbow of Company B, 290th E.T. Battalion. The only knockout of the show was amazing in its swiftness. Nathaniel Baker of Calvin Littlejohn's 33rd Battalion stable flattened Tommy Cowan of the 28th E.T. Battalion in 38 seconds of the first round.



FORT WOOD NEWS

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JOE LOUIS HERE OCT. 1

GENERAL McNAIR LAUDS DIVISION'S TRAINING AGENDA

AGF Head Praises Rain-or-Shine Plan

Praise for the 75th Infantry Division's training program, described as "being conducted along strenuous, effective and practical lines", was expressed by Lieut. Gen. Lesley J. McNair in a report received at division HQ from the Army Ground Force commander last week following his recent inspection trip here.

General McNair lauded the "no inclement weather schedules" policy inaugurated by Maj. Gen. W. S. Paul, former commanding general, who continued by his successor, Brig. Gen. Fay H. Prickett. The 75th's insistence that schedules be followed, rain or shine, "has contributed, it is believed, to the excellent physical condition of the troops."

(Continued on Page 8)

McNair

Coming To Post



JOE LOUIS

POST TO STAGE BIG RING SHOW

Champ To Appear In Exhibition; Seprodi May Meet Ray Robinson

The Fort Wood News learned this week that Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis, now a sergeant in the army, will make his long-awaited appearance here in an exhibition bout on Friday, October 1. The date was announced tentatively by the Seventh Service Command, special service office in Omaha, Neb.

Louis is scheduled to appear at Scott Field, Ill., near St. Louis, on September 30, and probably will come here following that exhibition. Fort Leonard Wood is scheduled to be the first post in this service command (nine states) to see the champ.

Lieut. Fred M. Urech, post athletic officer, said plans are under way for a complete boxing card featuring local talent, to precede the bout between Louis and his old sparring partner, First Sergeant George Nicholson. Louis and Nicholson customarily fight three two-minute rounds in their army camp appearances.

Simultaneously, the fort's fight-in' MP, Sergt. Lou Seprodi, will meet Ray Robinson.

(Continued on Page 7)

JOE LOUIS

OZARK PUBLISHERS IN CONCLAVE HERE

One of the busiest weeks in Fort Leonard Wood's history was to be climaxed today with the arrival of 100 members of the Ozark Press Association, editors and publishers of daily and weekly newspapers in Central and Southern Missouri, for a two-day session that will combine business with an informal "inspection" of the post. Over half the delegates are women who took over operation of newspapers when their husbands were called into military service.

On the editors' schedule is an opening session this evening at the Civilian Club, where they will be welcomed by Col. A. R. Duvall, post commander, and Lieut. Frank P. Omorati, post public relations officer. Lieut. Col. Robert Reed, chief of the public relations branch of the Seventh Service Command, also will be present.

(Continued on Page 1)

PUBLISHERS

Cadet Board Moves

The Fort Leonard Wood Aviation Cadet Board has moved to new offices in Post Headquarters. The office will be closed nights and on Sundays.

Medics Dance At Rolla

The 290th Infantry's medical detachment will hold a buffet dinner dance tonight at Rolla, Mo., with Pte. Al Velasco's regimental Special Service Orchestra providing music.

15,000 See Cardinals Play Here



THE LARGEST CROWD IN FORT LEONARD WOOD HISTORY WATCHES THE ST. LOUIS CARDINALS PLAY THE POST ALL-STARS

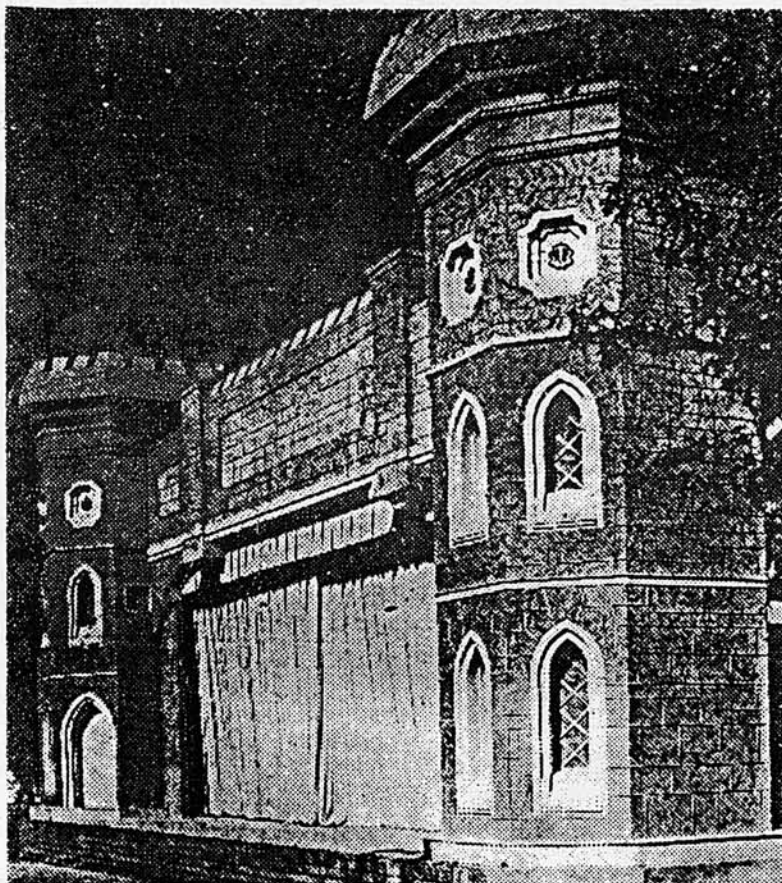
15,000 people, one of the largest crowds ever, watched the St. Louis Cardinals and the Post All-Stars play baseball at Fort Leonard Wood. In a game at St. Louis' Sportsman's Park, a soldier from Fort Leonard Wood batted against Dizzy Dean and nicked "Diz" for a base hit. Private Byron Herbert of the Public Relations Office, and a former newsman with the St. Louis Globe Democrat, was playing in the fourth annual baseball game between St. Louis radio announcers and writers when he got the hit. Dizzy, a sports announcer for KWK in St. Louis, allowed five hits and struck out Len in the five inning game which the broadcasters won 4 to 2.

Several live nationwide radio broadcasts originated from Fort Leonard Wood during World War II. The popular NBC Radio Show, "Spin and Win with Jimmy Flynn," was presented from Theater No. 2 on Saturday, August 23, 1941. Soldiers quizzed at the mike won cash prizes for the best answers. A dozen privates could pit their knowledge against questions drawn from a huge fishbowl by "Little Egypt," a pulchritudinous dancing girl. Fourteen hundred of their buddies could offer moral encouragement from the audience while seeing their first network broadcast. Jimmy Flynn is the barker, assisted by "The Wild Man from Borneo," who serves as time-

keeper in addition to the gorgeous "Little Egypt." Depending on the spin of the huge carnival wheel, each contestant could receive from 30 seconds to two minutes to answer the questions "Little Egypt" draws. For every correct answer he receives a monetary reward. At the end of his allotted time, the soldier could retire with his winnings or "Shoot the Moon" which meant they could triple their money by answering one more question within 30 seconds. If he failed, however, he forfeited all winnings except one dollar. Several soldiers won \$42 which was comparable to two months military pay. The show was heard over NBC's Blue network. CBS Radio came



Ft. Wood's Theater of the Engineers



Home of the ASFTC Theatre-of-the-Engineers is this open-air playhouse on Minnesota Avenue, where the soldier-actors have presented a score of stage hits. Seating capacity of the open-air theater, 1,800.



Singing screen star Judy Garland sends autographed greetings to "the boys at Fort Leonard Wood."

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to Fort Leonard Wood's Service Club No. 1 in April of 1942 to broadcast "Fall Out for Fun" over the 24 station hookup of the Columbia Broadcasting System. WBBM in Chicago aired the program as the first of a series of network army shows from Seventh Corps Area posts. The program consisted of variety entertainment by soldiers with Ann Sheridan as well as the opportunity to win cash prizes.

Fort Leonard Wood also was on the air in September 1941 over KMOX in St. Louis in broadcasts of the weekly "Youth Answers the Call" radio series. The broadcast featured an interview with Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant III. Written in dialogue form by soldiers, and about soldiers, the program was transcribed at the base by a mobile unit of KMOX. Privates Stuart Warrington and Robert Meskill, New York playwrights, and Donald Gallagher, stage and radio actor from Chicago wrote the show. A band number and selections by a glee club and black spiritual group were also featured.

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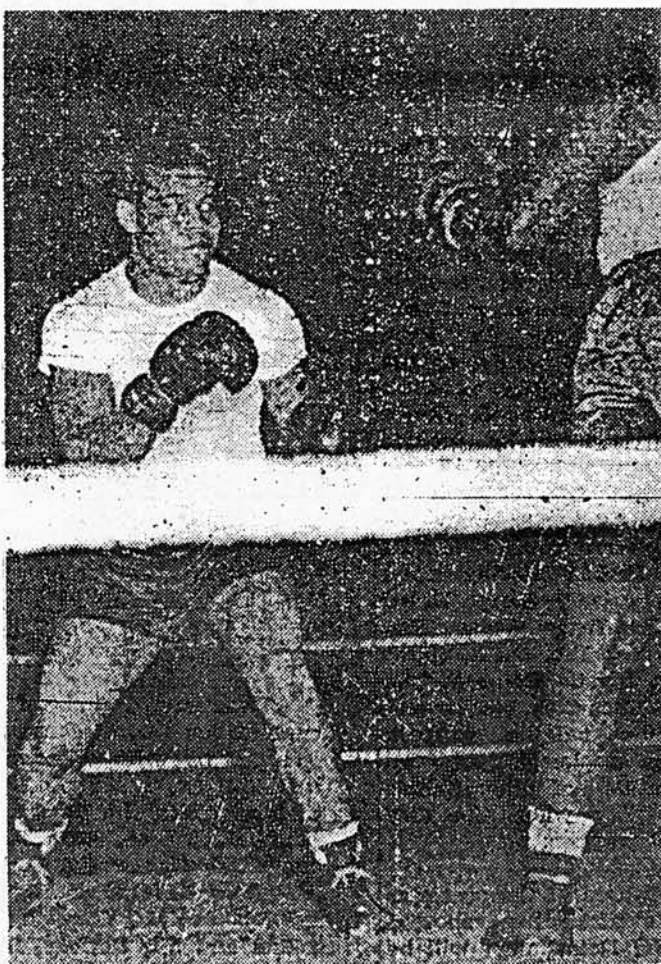
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Heavyweight Champion Joe Louis, wearing his accustomed deadpan expression, moves in on his sparring partner, First Sergt. George Nicholson, during their exhibition match at the open-air arena near Theater No. 1



Brig. Gen. U.S. Grant 3d and KMOX announcer Bob Dunham at the microphone as the St. Louis station transcribed a half-hour program at Service Club No. 3.

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