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Building Morale in a Soldier town: Home Front Women and the Gi in Columbia, South Carolina, 1941-1945

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BUILDING MORALE IN A SOLDIER TOWN:
HOME FRONT WOMEN AND THE GI IN COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1941-1945

by

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ABSTRACT

As the United States mobilized for war in 1941, cities and towns across America, especially those closest to military bases, were faced with an unprecedented influx of soldiers, airmen, and sailors. To cope with these waves of servicemen in their off-duty hours, particularly to provide for wholesome entertainment and lessen the emotional weight of wartime, Columbia, South Carolina solicited participation in morale-building programs from its residents. Community leaders recognized their responsibility for funding programs and providing buildings to meet the soldiers' recreational needs, but they relied on women's organizations and female students to build morale through meaningful social interactions with GIs. They were guided by government literature and worked closely with the nationwide United Services Organization (USO), but women actively shaped morale-building programs to reflect what they believed soldiers should experience in this southern city. For the duration, they established a temporary community focused on the needs of their visitors: a soldier town. This transformation had a great impact on the city. Columbia's response to the war was representative of many other cities near military bases across the nation. Columbia's story illustrates the crucial role of women and the USO club as bridges between the military and a civilian host community as the "Greatest Generation" of Columbia's women stepped up to fulfill their patriotic duty.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As the United States mobilized for war in 1941, cities and towns across America, especially those closest to military bases, were faced with an unprecedented influx of soldiers, airmen, and sailors. Each of these communities had to adapt to its temporary new role as a “soldier town” for the duration.¹ To cope with these waves of servicemen in their off-duty hours, particularly to provide for wholesome entertainment and lessen the emotional weight of wartime, each community solicited participation in recreational and morale-building programs from all its residents. In doing so they were part of a nationwide service movement, encouraged by the federal government and military which recognized these tasks as an essential part of the war effort.²

¹ The term “soldier town” is adopted from a contemporary article by Raymond Hoyer, a field recreation representative from the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services. For more on this concept, see Raymond A. Hoyer, “The Soldier Town,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 15 (April 1942).

² Most of the historiography on women in World War II focuses primarily on women’s changing roles and increasing job opportunities. For a national discussion of women’s roles and involvement in the defense industries and armed forces, see William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Susan M. Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond: American Women in the 1940s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982); Maureen Honey, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984); and Doris Weatherford, *American Women and World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). More recent works on women in World War II have had smaller, state-level foci. For regional case studies, including those of the South, see Mary Martha Thomas, *Riveting and Rationing in Dixie: Alabama Women and the Second World War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press: 1987); Fritz P. Hamer, *Charleston Reborn: A Southern City, Its Navy Yard, and World War II* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2005); and Courtney Tollison, *World War II and Upcountry South Carolina: “We Just Did Everything We Could”* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009). For the newest discussions of alternative experiences of women, including sexuality and femininity, see Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality During World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008) and Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). This study relates primarily to these two final works.

During the war more than 40,000 soldiers were stationed at Fort Jackson, the massive army training base adjacent to Columbia, South Carolina. In addition thousands of other servicemen trained at the Columbia Army Air Base, the Congaree Air Base, and the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at the University of South Carolina (USC). The call for civilians to assist in meeting the servicemen's social and psychological needs was answered with patriotic enthusiasm from all sectors of society, especially the women, a group essential to the success of the effort. Columbia women responded in a variety of ways. Whether they were white middle- and upper-class clubwomen hosting bridge games for white soldiers or African-American women coordinating events for black soldiers, whether they were young, unmarried college students attending dances or married women inviting servicemen into their homes for a holiday meal, women of the city were instrumental in creating an inviting, hospitable environment for servicemen stationed far from home.³

Community leaders, including some women in special morale-building government positions, recognized their responsibility for funding programs and providing buildings to meet the soldiers' recreational needs, but they relied on women's organizations and female students to build morale through meaningful social interactions with GIs. Some Columbia women, including those involved in the Woman's Club of Columbia, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), and USC sororities,

³ Communities provided many similar morale-building activities to the women who joined the WACs, WAVES, and other female branches of the military, as well as the wives of servicemen who moved with their husbands. However, because these women were far fewer in number and the prescriptive literature focuses primarily on the morale of unmarried servicemen, this paper does not specifically discuss the hospitality extended by the city's women to female visitors.

were already accustomed to community work; even before the United States entered the conflict they supported the war effort through such programs as “bundles for Britain.” After the US declared war and servicemen began pouring into their city, Columbia women recognized the need for creating a home away from home for the servicemen, many of whom were young, unmarried, and homesick. They were guided by government literature and worked closely with the nationwide United Services Organization (USO), but women actively shaped morale-building programs to reflect what they believed soldiers should experience in this southern city. For the duration, they established a temporary community focused on the needs of their visitors: a soldier town.

Although this full-scale transformation was unique to World War II, the mobilization of the community as a soldier town did not occur in isolation and was built upon historic antecedents. The activities of the government, military, national service organizations, and civilian population on the home front during World War I served as a model for the greatly expanded morale-building programs of World War II. During World War I, women’s organizations supported the war effort through the Red Cross, bond drives, and victory gardens, but also worked to improve the spirits of soldiers. The YWCA staffed hostess houses on domestic military installations which provided wholesome entertainment to soldiers and their wives, as a precursor to the USO club of World War II.⁴ Although American participation in the First World War was brief and home front activities had less time to develop, women contributed to the maintenance of soldier morale.

⁴ Cynthia Brandimarte, “Women on the Home Front: Hostess Houses During World War I,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 42 (Winter 2008): 216.

The soldier town also reflected contemporary society and many of the previous generation's social issues continued to negatively affect the experience of servicemen in the 1940s. Just as in 1918, racial segregation was the norm in both American society and the military. Although communities in the South welcomed servicemen from elsewhere, the downside of southern hospitality was separate recreational facilities for African-American soldiers. In Columbia, this limited African-American USO clubs to historically black neighborhoods and resulted in segregated camps at Fort Jackson. Despite the separate programs and spaces for African-American morale-boosting programs, the involvement of black women and the nature of these activities were essentially the same as they were for white servicemen.⁵ Building morale was therefore a goal of all members of society, who achieved it in a remarkably standardized way.

Columbia, though not unique among other cities which rallied to the cause, offers a prime example of the organized feminine war work of morale boosting. The city was greatly affected by World War II because of the many military installations that drew such a large number of servicemen to the area. Its story illustrates the crucial role of women and the USO club in building bridges between the military and the civilian host community. The "Greatest Generation" of Columbia's women stepped up to fulfill their patriotic duty. They boosted the spirits of young servicemen and contributed to the war effort in their own way. In histories of women's involvement in World War II, this volunteer war work of building morale has been neglected in favor of studies of their

⁵ Locating source material by African Americans about African Americans in Columbia is difficult. Most of the available information mentions only the "separate but equal" nature of morale-building programs. More research on the African-American experience in Columbia is needed.

participation in war industries, nursing, or the military. In addition this is a little known part of the story of Columbia during World War II. These women played a vital role, however, one very important to the war effort, and their story deserves more attention.

CHAPTER 2

BUILDING MORALE: A NATIONWIDE NEED

World War II touched every facet of American society, altering the experiences of all citizens, not just the men who went off to war. Nearly every home was affected by the service of a family member and most Americans were eager to do their part to bring the war to a speedy, victorious close. Patriotism was measured by self-sacrifice for the collective good of the nation and everyone was expected to contribute to the war effort. Propaganda promoted volunteer war work for its production of necessary war materiel, as well as improved spirits.

Early in the war, national political and military leaders recognized the need for building and sustaining morale at home as well as abroad. The importance of morale was emphasized in prescriptive literature written by private citizens and government officials who encouraged civilians to do their part to win the war and instructed them on how to do so. Guidebooks provided advice on how to be a good wartime citizen and articles in journals from a variety of academic disciplines from sociology to education discussed how best to maintain morale. *America Organizes to Win the War: A Handbook on the American War Effort*, a collection of essays on volunteer war work, was edited by President Franklin Roosevelt himself. The handbook was aimed at all citizens and addressed morale in chapters such as “How Can Individuals Keep a Healthy Morale in Wartime?” and “How Can Young People Help?” *Arms and the Girl: A Guide to Personal Adjustment in War Work and War Marriage* was written by a prominent female physician

and director of the New York YWCA. This guidebook provided advice to young women not only on war work and marriage to soldiers, but also on recreation and proper nutrition under rationing. An entire chapter was dedicated to building morale, with a list of suggested activities. As the pair wrote other guidebooks for women on employment, marriage, and attending college, the series was presumably popular among young women. Local newspapers and college newsletters adopted the language and patriotic themes in this nationwide literature, suggesting that even if these books and articles did not reach all American citizens, their ideas about morale certainly did.

Morale took on a variety of definitions, but was aptly defined in *Arms and the Girl* as a “superhuman quality of personal hardihood” which was both intrinsically part of “the temperament of a nation” and consciously created through hard work.⁶ Wartime propaganda encouraged all citizens to participate in this as a form of defense work, assuming the armed forces could win the war only if the civilian population was behind them and maintained a high level of morale themselves. In *America Organizes to Win the War*, Arthur Upham Pope, chairman of the Committee for National Morale, insisted that a soldier could “hardly be expected to face machine guns and dive bombers if he has evidence that the people he is fighting for are whimpering because they have less sugar than usual.”⁷ Civilians were expected to enter the war with patriotic enthusiasm and to

⁶ Gulielma Fell Alsop, M.D. and Mary F. McBride, *Arms and the Girl: A Guide to Personal Adjustment in War Work and War Marriage* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1943), 257-8.

⁷ Arthur Upham Pope, “How Can Individuals Keep a Healthy Morale in Wartime?” in *America Organizes to Win the War: A Handbook on the American War Effort*, ed. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1942), 253-4.

maintain it throughout the conflict. To boost their own morale, Americans were encouraged by propaganda to stay occupied, selfless, and focused on victory.⁸

Organizations and clubs in which women were heavily involved were valued for their ability to facilitate cooperation among those involved in the many tasks associated with creating the pleasant social environment required for the maintenance of high morale. Clubs offered their members recreation and rest from war work, but needed to serve a larger purpose than the entertainment of their own members during wartime.⁹ Most importantly, government leaders such as Pope encouraged participation in clubs “partly because they keep our way of life living and important to us, and partly because they keep our humanity warm.”¹⁰ This emphasis on maintaining a semblance of normalcy and humanity despite the full mobilization for war and the many sacrifices required became a crucial component of morale boosting across the home front.

Actively working to improve the morale of servicemen became a task embraced by all members of society, especially those in communities near military installations. Many young men were uprooted from their normal lives and sent across the country, and later across the globe, for military training and service. Their personal lives, dependent on family, friends, and the comforts of home, were suddenly disrupted when they joined the armed forces. The typical soldier felt isolated and cut off from civilian society. When he went into town from his base, he was often alone in an unfamiliar place.¹¹ In an article about the virtues of the USO in Columbia’s *The State* newspaper, one anonymous soldier

⁸ Pope, “How Can Individuals Keep a Healthy Morale in Wartime?” 262.

⁹ Charles H. Judd, “How Can Young People Help?” in *America Organizes to Win the War: A Handbook on the American War Effort*, ed. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1942), 311, 317.

¹⁰ Pope, “How Can Individuals Keep a Healthy Morale in Wartime?” 263.

¹¹ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 271-274.

wondered “what is the good of being on leave if there isn’t anything to do?”¹² Many servicemen felt bored and unappreciated, taken from normal society and placed in a separate, mobilized military community where they were strangers.

Americans realized their responsibility for caring for these lonely men in their off-duty hours. In *Arms and the Girl*, Dr. Alsop and McBride reminded civilians that “patriotism must be personified in actual men...in whole groups of men that have been entertained and sustained” and that “the morale of the very men themselves must be kept high by the interest of many people.”¹³ Just as recreational activities were required for the well-being of civilians, Alsop and McBride argued that a soldier’s “needs for entertainment [were] as real and as terrifying as would be his needs for food if none were forthcoming.”¹⁴ Many organizations dedicated themselves to entertaining the armed forces and communities across the nation, as soldier towns, provided for the unique and temporary needs of servicemen.¹⁵

All of the authors of the literature on morale-building recognized that women in particular were absolutely essential to the creation and preservation of morale and their efforts were crucial to the creation of meaningful social interactions with servicemen. *Arms and the Girl* noted that “the intangibles of morale have always been woman’s peculiar concern” as women had traditionally been the mechanism behind social life and customs in American society.¹⁶ Support from women showed soldiers that life was worth

¹² “United Services Organization Drive Begins Tuesday Night,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), June 1, 1941.

¹³ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 275.

¹⁴ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 271.

¹⁵ Hoyer, “The Soldier Town,” 497; Pope, “How Can Individuals Keep a Healthy Morale in Wartime?” 262.

¹⁶ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 263.

fighting for and that their service mattered.¹⁷ Women not only entertained soldiers, but also kept each one happy and made him feel as though the whole nation supported and appreciated him.¹⁸ *Arms and the Girl* summarized the essential role of women and morale boosting in its chapter on the subject:

This home front is essentially woman's work. Every girl with an evening's free time should do her part. For morale is not created by a blanket pronouncement but by a constant, ever-renewed series of small words and acts, and morale is not created in a nation but in the individuals of that nation. It is kindled from person to person. It is created one by one, by adding one kind word to another kind word, by hot coffee and doughnuts, by square dances, by laughter and smiles.¹⁹

The emotional connection provided by women made men more psychologically fit to fight and reminded them what they were fighting for. These social interactions boosted morale in ways the military itself could never achieve and gave soldiers a temporary home away from home. As the military was a masculine place, most young, unmarried soldiers wanted to meet and interact with local girls above all else in their free time.²⁰ Granting this simple wish to boys who would soon be facing the Axis armies quickly became one the most acceptable and important forms of volunteer war work for many American women.

Despite the call for patriotic duty from women, not all interactions with them were beneficial to soldiers and the threat of venereal disease was a constant concern for the military. Military leaders worried that in the quest for female company in their leisure hours, many soldiers and sailors were vulnerable to the charms of professional prostitutes and amateur pickup girls known as "victory girls." Geoffrey May, the deputy assistant director of Health and Welfare Services for the Federal Security Agent, considered

¹⁷ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 259.

¹⁸ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 275.

¹⁹ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 276.

²⁰ Hoyer, "The Soldier Town," 496.

syphilis and gonorrhea to be “just as damaging as direct bacterial warfare with foe.”²¹ Paul McNutt, director of Defense Health and Welfare Services agreed that venereal disease was “more dangerous to the community than a mad dog.”²² Despite efforts to close down houses of prostitution during World War I, the 338,746 men treated for venereal disease cost the army over seven million man days, as VD began to wreak havoc on a soldier’s fighting ability before he even shipped out for battle.²³ To avoid this loss of valuable manpower, the military launched a film and propaganda program to educate soldiers on safe sex and pleaded with local governments to forcibly remove prostitutes near military installations across the country.

Despite the success of the anti-VD campaign, servicemen still engaged in casual sex that damaged their physical and mental health. By the end of 1942, police had successfully shut down most commercial red-light districts and turned their focus to the non-professional victory girls and others who Charles P. Taft, head of the National Advisory Police Committee on Social Protection called “promiscuous with men in uniform.”²⁴ Many of the women comprising this new threat were young girls in their early teens who the committee suggested were “motivated by a misguided sense of patriotism” and who could be found at dance halls and bars.²⁵ While these young women may have thought they were doing their patriotic duty by raising servicemen’s spirits,

²¹ “Uncontrolled Venereal Disease Just as Damaging as Direct Bacterial Warfare with Foe,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), February 4, 1942.

²² “Government Drive Has Eliminated ‘Red Light’ Districts in Most Cities,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), December 27, 1942.

²³ “Uncontrolled Venereal Disease,” *State*, February 4, 1942; Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 244.

²⁴ “Government Drive Has Eliminated ‘Red Light’ Districts in Most Cities,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), December 27, 1942.

²⁵ “Government Drive Has Eliminated ‘Red Light’ Districts in Most Cities,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), December 27, 1942.

their actions were more harmful than they were helpful. The authors of the morale-building literature encouraged the interaction between local women and servicemen, but casual sex was not what they prescribed. As these non-professional women were harder to identify and prosecute, an alternative approach needed to be taken to protect the serviceman's health and the reputations of women who genuinely wanted to do their part.²⁶



Figure 2.1 Anti-VD propaganda poster. The military launched a propaganda campaign to discourage servicemen from casual sex with loose women. Image courtesy of New York Daily News, <http://www.nydailynews.com>.

²⁶ For further discussion on the government crackdown on prostitution, the military campaign against venereal disease, and other issues of illicit female sexuality during World War II, consult Marilyn E. Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackies, and Patriotutes: The Regulation of Female Sexuality during World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

The other danger of male-female interaction perceived by white government and military leaders in the South was the intermingling of races. Southern white men wanted to maintain the color line to assert dominance and to “protect” white women from interacting with black servicemen. They saw the physical proximity between black men and white women as unacceptable and many, such as an anonymous Louisiana congressman, asked “how can anyone...be a party to encouraging white girls into the arms of Negro soldiers at a canteen dance while singing ‘Let Me Call You Sweetheart?’”²⁷ Making sure white women and African-American servicemen were not pushing the sexual boundaries in a society in which interracial marriage was still illegal became an additional concern in southern soldier towns where Jim Crow laws were in full force.

Early in 1941, the dangers of casual sex caused by the massive concentration of single men in unfamiliar environments made the nation realize that recreational facilities were necessary. The vice president of the USO, John M. Schiff, noted on a trip to Columbia that unless morale-building programs were created immediately, “the morale of American troops was ‘bound to deteriorate seriously.’”²⁸ Offering alternative chaperoned activities to prevent servicemen from engaging in behavior that led to venereal disease and other moral shortcomings became an essential mission of the home front and its women. Schiff suggested the best solution to this unusual social problem was “giving the boys opportunity to meet respectable young women.”²⁹ In order to create

²⁷ Eileen Boris, “‘You Wouldn’t Want One of ‘Em Dancing with Your Wife’: Racialized Bodies on the Job in World War II,” *American Quarterly* 50 (March 1998): 87-91.

²⁸ “Vice Knocked Out of City, Schiff Finds,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), April 29, 1941.

²⁹ “Vice Knocked Out of City, Schiff Finds,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), April 29, 1941.

a safe and appropriate space for lonely soldiers and respectable, patriotic women to interact, the national standardized program for morale-boosting was formed: the United Services Organization (USO).

CHAPTER 3

THE USO: WHEREVER THEY GO

To provide wholesome entertainment and the female company craved by servicemen, six national social service agencies - the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA), the National Board of Young Women's Christian Associations (YWCA), the National Catholic Community Service, the National Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, and the National Traveler's Aid Association - came together to form the United Services Organization (USO) on April 17, 1941. The USO quickly became the center of morale-boosting activities and wartime society across the country. According to Julia Carson, who wrote an early history of the USO in 1946, its purpose was to "aid in the war and defense program of the United States and its Allies by serving the religious, spiritual, welfare, and educational needs of the men and women in the armed forces...and in general, to contribute to the maintenance of morale in American communities and elsewhere."³⁰

The USO served an important role as a liaison between the community and the military. USO clubs were not located on military installations, but instead in cities and towns near those camps. Although it ran under directives from the Army and Navy and its buildings and a small staff of trained personnel were provided by the federal government, the USO was essentially a volunteer organization maintained by voluntary

³⁰ Julia M. H. Carson, *Home Away from Home: The Story of the USO* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), xi.

contributions.³¹ The USO was neither a government nor a military operation, because Thomas E. Dewey, the National Campaign Chairman of the USO, argued that people did not want the “government to take over the private lives of American boys when they have a night off or a weekend off.”³² As a result, the American public contributed an astonishing nearly \$200,000,000 and 165,000,000 volunteer hours to the civilian partner of the armed services and the nation’s primary morale-raising organization. Before the war, there were just 25,000 volunteers in clubs, but at its peak in June 1943, the USO had over 739,000 civilian volunteers of all ages.³³ Americans across the country donated countless hours of their time at the USO as part of their morale-based defense work.

The USO ensured soldiers and sailors would have a decent, moral place to spend their time.³⁴ The club was run primarily by volunteer women, both “senior hostesses” and “junior hostesses,” who boosted morale through personal contact and companionship. Junior hostesses not only danced with servicemen and organized picnics, but were advised by literature such as *Arms and the Girl* “not to look for romance in USO clubs, but to be gracious and charming to all” and “make the clubs places of fun and good fellowship.”³⁵ Young women were encouraged to mingle with as many men as possible to avoid forming real and deep connections with men who might be killed or already married. They were also formally prohibited from dating any of the men they met at the

³¹ L.F. Kimbrell, *USO: Five Years of Service, Report of the President* (New York, United Services Organization, 1946), 25; Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 63.

³² “United Services Organization Drive Begins Tuesday Night,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), June 1, 1941.

³³ Kimbrell, *USO: Five Years of Service*, 25-28.

³⁴ Osborn, “Recreation, Welfare, and Morale of the American Soldier,” 55.

³⁵ Kimbrell, *USO: Five Years of Service*, 28.

USO, although many senior hostesses allowed it.³⁶ Junior hostesses were expected to be upbeat, to not share their own worries, and to remember that they were there for service, not for their own enjoyment.³⁷ While dances provided an emotional and physical outlet and the social activities were great fun for all involved, the ability of junior hostesses to place the needs of the soldier above their own was admired.

The strict rules of the USO ensured only “respectable” women would be in attendance and socializing with servicemen, in an effort to promote a clean image in the fight against casual sex and alcohol abuse. Junior hostesses were often drawn from college sororities, not only because they were the right age and had the free time to volunteer, but also because they could bring their friends. Service at the USO required two personal references and recommendations from a pastor or priest, and candidates were then interviewed by a senior hostess.³⁸ Only girls with a flawless reputation were accepted and anyone whose respectability was remotely questionable was quickly dismissed.

The spotless reputation of the USO, backed by established religious and service organizations like the YWCA, ensured young women could engage in officially sponsored events that did not bring their sexuality into question. Young women who volunteered at the USO embodied the ideal American woman that would remind soldiers what they were fighting for.³⁹ The USO’s stated goal was to make sure the girls in its clubhouses were similar to the ones soldiers remembered at home, which not only

³⁶ Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 100, 121.

³⁷ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 277.

³⁸ Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 47-50.

³⁹ Hegarty, *Victory Girls, Khaki-Wackees and Patriotutes*, 132; Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun*, 5.

protected soldiers from venereal disease but also helped them retain a sense of normalcy and humanity before leaving for the front.⁴⁰



Figure 3.1 “Willie Gillis at the U.S.O.” Magazine images such as Norman Rockwell’s cover of *The Saturday Evening Post* illustrated the temptation of promiscuous women and the warm respectability of the USO. Image courtesy of *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 7, 1942.

⁴⁰ Army Pictorial Center, “The Big Picture: United Service Organization (USO), Wherever They Go,” National Archives and Record Administration, film, <https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.2569724> (accessed October 26, 2013). For further discussion of hostesses, “good girls,” the USO, and the gendered war work of morale-boosting, please see Meghan K. Winchell, *Good Girls, Good Food, Good Fun: The Story of USO Hostesses During World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

The USO not only improved morale and provided women with a way to volunteer, but it also created a healthy and relatively normal bond between soldiers and the community. It relieved soldiers of the discipline of the military, gave them a place to take visitors and meet locals, and to engage in a normal social life.⁴¹ In its goal to create a home away from home for servicemen, the USO reminded them that they were still part of the community and civilian world, even if they were strangers or just passing through. The USO emphasized its neighborly role and as the narrating soldier of an Army Pictorial Center film stated, “home isn’t any further away than the USO club or lounge,” despite how far they actually were from their hometown.⁴² The USO, as a place created specifically for the interaction between servicemen and women in the soldier town, demonstrates the community bond forged in response to the arrival of World War II in American cities. While the USO was not the only place where these interactions and activities took place, most towns across the country established some sort of recreational club, operated by women, that was crucial to their role in the war effort.

⁴¹ “United Services Organization Drive Begins Tuesday Night,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), June 1, 1941.

⁴² Army Pictorial Center, *The Big Picture*.

CHAPTER 4

CIVILIAN CITY: COLUMBIA BEFORE THE WAR

In the months leading up to the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the residents of Columbia, South Carolina began mobilizing for a potential war in Europe but had yet to fully involve themselves in entertaining the increasing number of troops arriving at the area bases. While the area's military installations continued to expand at a rapid pace and the servicemen became more visible, soldiers and their recreational needs remained largely the military's concern. Women's clubs began assembling war supplies for the Allies in Europe through the "bundles for Britain" program early on, but by the beginning of the war their attention had not yet shifted to the growing number of soldiers in their own community. Only with the full mobilization of the American people for war and the official arrival of the USO through the construction of the Federal Recreation Building in the spring of 1942 would Columbia adopt its wartime role as a soldier town with patriotic enthusiasm. In the meantime, the soldiers at Fort Jackson suffered from the lack of a proper morale-building program typical of many other cities.

Fort Jackson was the primary source of servicemen needing morale-boosting services in Columbia. Originally named Camp Jackson, the base was established in June 1917 as an army training camp. Following the end of the First World War, the camp closed. In July 1940, the federal government regained control of the base and reopened it for military service, naming it Fort Jackson. Almost immediately, the base was enlarged

from 21,000 to 62,000 acres.⁴³ Within six months, the fort had expanded to hold 31,485 soldiers and over one thousand permanent buildings had been constructed.⁴⁴

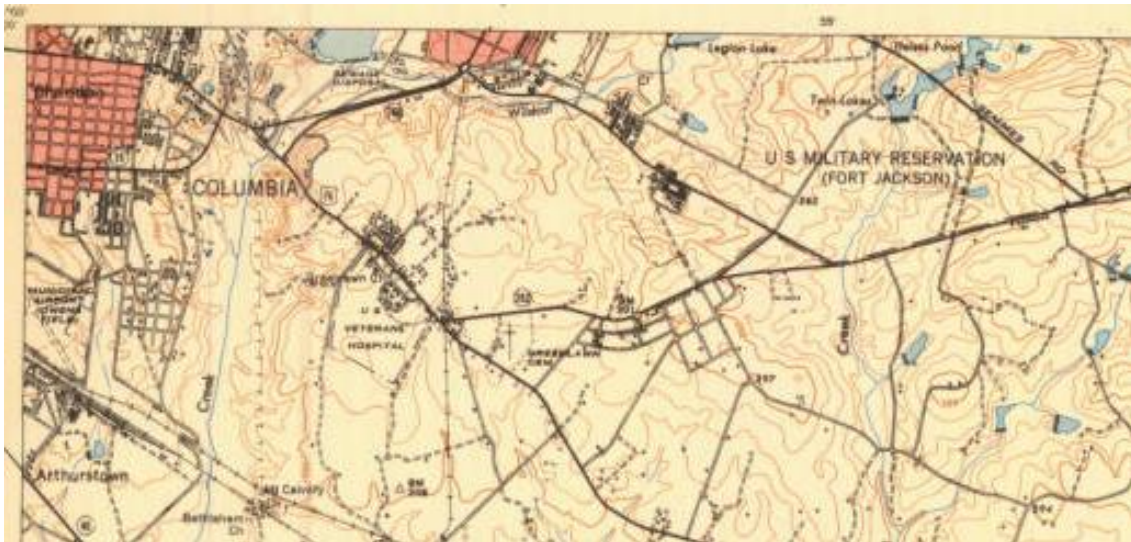


Figure 4.1 Map showing Fort Jackson's size compared to Columbia. Image courtesy of University of South Carolina, Thomas Cooper Library, Maps Department.

By December 1941, the fort's capacity increased to its wartime population over 42,000 soldiers.⁴⁵ Complete with over five thousand buildings, one hundred miles of road, a post commander as "mayor," full firefighting force, military police department, personal post office and telephone system, four theaters, a large hospital, and bus and taxi service into town, by August 1942 Fort Jackson was considered the second largest city in the Carolinas.⁴⁶ As a comparison, the civilian population of Columbia in 1940 was just 62,396 and increased to an estimated 70,000 by war's end.⁴⁷ Fort Jackson's soldiers constituted a whopping forty percent of the population of the greater Columbia area in the

⁴³ "Two-Year Old Fort Jackson is a Complete City in Itself," *The State* (Columbia, SC), August 15, 1942.

⁴⁴ "Fort Jackson Grows by Leaps and Bounds During Period of Last Six Months," *The State* (Columbia, SC), February 1, 1941.

⁴⁵ "Sixty Deaths Listed at Fort in 14 Months," *The State* (Columbia, SC), October 14, 1941.

⁴⁶ "Two-Year Old Fort Jackson is a Complete City in Itself," *The State* (Columbia, SC), August 15, 1942.

⁴⁷ Columbia City Directory, 1940; Columbia City Directory, 1945.

early 1940s, making Columbia a true soldier town with a great responsibility for the needs of its military guests.

In addition to the large population of Fort Jackson, other military installations in Columbia attracted constant waves of servicemen needing assistance. The establishment of military installations was cited by the Columbia Chamber of Commerce as the primary cause for the city's most rapid growth to date and was "further evidence of Columbia's usefulness for military purposes during that period."⁴⁸ Not only was Fort Jackson one of the largest cities in South Carolina, but it also became the largest infantry training post in the country.⁴⁹ The Columbia Army Air Base was created in 1941 as the Lexington County Airport and used for bomber pilot training at the outbreak of the war. At its peak in 1945, 7,800 pilots trained as crewmembers on B-25s and A-26s.⁵⁰ Owens Field, Columbia's municipal airport was used for military service and was the home of the Hawthorne Flying Service School for training US Navy Air Corps Reserve pilots.⁵¹ In the summer of 1940, South Carolina Senator James F. Byrnes also secured a Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps detachment program at the University of South Carolina, which filled up quickly and enrolled much of the male student body during the war years.⁵² Shortly before the outbreak of the war, Columbia already had quite a military presence which was unfamiliar to the community.

⁴⁸ Jane Kealhofer Simons, *A Guide to Columbia: South Carolina's Capital City* (Columbia: The Columbia Chamber of Commerce, 1945), 13.

⁴⁹ Jane Kealhofer Simons, *A Guide to Columbia: South Carolina's Capital City* (Columbia: The Columbia Chamber of Commerce, 1943), 68.

⁵⁰ Simons, *A Guide to Columbia* (1943), 84; "Columbia Army Air Base / The Doolittle Raiders Historical Marker," The Historical Marker Database, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=10680> (accessed October 29, 2012).

⁵¹ Simons, *A Guide to Columbia*, 1945, 37.

⁵² Henry H. Lesesne, *A History of the University of South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 20.

With the sudden and massive influx of servicemen into the Columbia area, the city, much like other soldier towns across the nation, was unprepared for the realities of the soldier's illicit activities in his off-duty hours. John Schiff of the USO warned that Columbia remained "too small to provide facilities for off-duty recreation of 30,000 soldiers, leaving the men with no entertainment outlets."⁵³ As early as January 1941, the military urged the local government to do something about the prostitution problem. Columbia police struggled to close the commercial houses of prostitution which were previously tolerated and began forcibly removing transient women from the streets. Police picked up sixty-seven women, forty-four of whom were infected with venereal disease. "Fly-by-night" women were particularly annoying to law enforcement, as they came to the base on payday then disappeared.⁵⁴ A social hygiene committee was formed in early 1941 to combat prostitution and Governor Burnett Rhett Maybank passed a law forcing any infected female to seek medical treatment at one of the one hundred forty-four free venereal disease clinics across the state.⁵⁵ The military and local and state government were determined to keep their fighting men fit to fight and away from the "wrong women."

Despite these preventative programs, casual sex with professional prostitutes and amateur victory girls was still happening across the city throughout the war. In February 1942, police arrested an additional one hundred women who were detained in the

⁵³ "Vice Knocked Out of City," *The State* (Columbia, SC), April 29, 1941.

⁵⁴ "More Police Held Need of Section," *Columbia (SC) Record*, January 9, 1941.

⁵⁵ "Committee to Work Against Prostitution," *Columbia (SC) Record*, January 9, 1941; "Venereal Law Will Be Passed," *Columbia (SC) Record*, January 11, 1941; "Uncle Sam Will Protect Army's Health - McNutt," *The State* (Columbia, SC), April 15, 1942.

Richland County Jail.⁵⁶ By early 1943, women who were arrested for transience were brought to the county health department and examined for venereal disease. If infected, they were transferred to a detention center at the old Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Pontiac for a five-day treatment and were held there until they were ruled to be “clean.”⁵⁷ Despite the city’s best efforts, without a clean and chaperoned place for soldiers to engage in proper recreational activities, soldiers remained at risk of acquiring venereal disease.

While the military and community realized the need for controlled places for soldiers to spend their leisure time, most early recreation centers were still either on base or for the exclusive use of men in uniform. These recreational facilities, like the military, were segregated with “separate but equal” amenities for African-American soldiers. In July 1941, Fort Jackson built one of the first segregated African-American service clubs on a base in the nation. At the time, there were only twenty-seven segregated recreational facilities on base in the whole country. African-American units were kept separate from white units and their recreation centers were located in the “colored area” of the camp.⁵⁸ The new \$5,000 facility offered services comparable to those given to white soldiers, including basketball, handball, and badminton courts, libraries, kitchens, lounges, and a

⁵⁶ “More Raids Await Vice Houses Here,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), February 2, 1942.

⁵⁷ “Detention Homes to Offer Women Five-Day Treatment,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), January 7, 1943.

⁵⁸ For more information on the segregation of the military and the camps of the armed forces, please see E.T. Hall, Jr., “Race Prejudice and Negro-White Relations in the Army,” *American Journal of Sociology* 52 (March 1947):401-409 and P.L. Prattis, “The Morale of the Negro in the Armed Services of the United States,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 12 (1943):355-363.

concrete terrace for events.⁵⁹ Female students from Allen University and nurses from Waverly Hospital were occasionally brought to the camp for recreational events and dances, as they would continue to be for the duration of the war, but were not yet consistently involved.⁶⁰ The military was increasingly unable to provide adequate recreational activities for all of its servicemen and would soon rely on the assistance of the community and its women to maintain their morale.

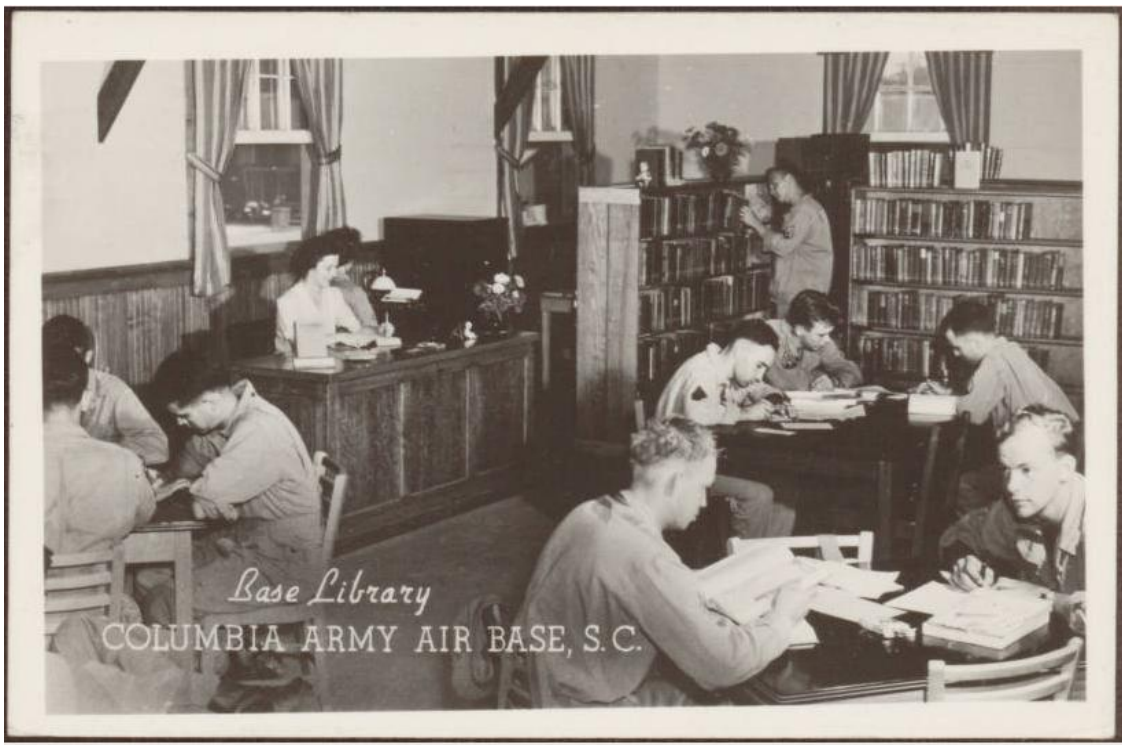


Figure 4.2 Base library at Columbia Army Air Base. Recreational centers on military bases provided activities for servicemen in their off-duty hours. Image courtesy of South Carolina and World War II Collection, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library.

⁵⁹ "Service Club for Negro Soldiers at Fort Jackson," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), July 19, 1941; "Service Club Being Built at Fort for Negroes," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), July 3, 1941. "Recreational Facilities for Negro Troops at Fort Jackson," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), April 10, 1943.

⁶⁰ "Negro Service Center is Opened with Dance," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), October 26, 1941.

CHAPTER 5

SOLDIER TOWN: THE WAR COMES TO COLUMBIA

As the United States officially entered World War II, things changed rapidly. The war's arrival in Columbia had a major impact. While Columbia sent its young men to the army and navy, even greater numbers of men from elsewhere flooded into the city, seeking entertainment and female companions. Since these men needed a boost in morale but were only temporary residents in the area for military training, the city had to create a program to make the mass of short-term visitors feel like valued members of the community. Not only did Columbia leaders fund and provide places for recreational activities, but they recruited many of the city's women to volunteer their services. Women also played an important role in planning the programming at the government and organizational level. The establishment of morale-boosting activities and the widespread participation of women in them transformed Columbia from a city near a military base into a true soldier town.

Columbia's city government, including women in specialized morale-building positions, took on an active role in providing a diverse selection of activities for servicemen. The Works Progress Administration guided the city's recreation program until its dissolution in 1943, when the local government adopted the responsibility of providing morale-boosting events to both servicemen and the wider civilian population. This opened up new city government positions for women, including some who had previously worked under the WPA, who served on advisory councils for soldier

recreation. Edna Woody Gentry, the former state supervisor of WPA recreation, served briefly as the city's supervisor of soldier recreation in 1943. Isabel Whaley Sloan, the daughter of prominent Columbia mill builder W.B.S. Whaley, became the supervisor of the city's dance program and hosted dozens of dances for servicemen and their dates. Christine Ruff supervised the city's white recreation program and Charlotte Jones supervised the African-American recreation program. While women did not dominate the city government, they did hold a significant number of the morale-related positions, suggesting their expertise on the subject.

Women were involved not just in the city recreation program, but also held high positions in the USO. Mrs. Arney R. Childs, the Dean of Women at the university, head of the Women's Service League, and the first chairman of the Laurel Street USO Board of Management, served as the Columbia representative to the National USO Council.⁶¹ Ethel Bowers from the National Recreation Staff led a soldier recreation institute in 1942 and two women from the national USO came to Columbia to develop a recreation program for Fort Jackson in late 1941.⁶² While women were recruited to volunteer for morale-boosting activities, they also had an important, specialized, and active role in determining the shape of these programs in Columbia.

The city recreation program, guided partially by these women, invested money and infrastructure in creating a city of high morale. Led by the director of the city recreation program, W. H. Hart, the city spent an initial \$51,810 on converting seven city

⁶¹ "City Hires 43, Gets \$25,000 for Recreation," *Columbia (SC) Record*, March 22, 1943; Kimbrell, *USO: Five Years of Service*, 36; "One of Nation's Largest USO Clubs Opened Here May 3," *The State* (Columbia, SC), April 26, 1942; "Laurel USO Names Board for New Year," *The State* (Columbia, SC), December 14, 1943.

⁶² "Miss Bowers to Lead Recreation Institute," *The State* (Columbia, SC), February 24, 1942; "Two U.S.O. Workers Arrive Here," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), September 27, 1941.

parks into recreational spaces, creating city recreation centers, and sponsoring dances at Fort Jackson.⁶³ By 1944, regular dances and junior hostesses had entertained 150,000 servicemen at the Elks Patio.⁶⁴ In that same year, the city recreation program had entertained a total of 1,305,930 people, including 574,000 soldiers since its creation. Of the city recreation program's \$110,000 appropriation, \$56,000 came from the federal government, \$41,700 from the city, and the remainder from local churches and the Elks Club.⁶⁵ Although recreation was not its primary mission, the city government recognized its importance and continued to fund the program in small increments throughout the war.

Columbia's downtown churches, already accustomed and well-suited to community service and fellowship, also provided popular and respectable morale-boosting activities for enlisted men. First Presbyterian Church was particularly involved in the entertainment of soldiers and offered space to the Columbia chapter of the YWCA, since the organization did not have an adequate building for entertaining servicemen.⁶⁶ The church was the site of the YWCA's Thursday night dances and also held its own dances on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. It had an art department, basketball courts, shuffleboard, and chess, and held a Sunday afternoon coffee hour.⁶⁷ Washington Street Methodist Church and Shandon Presbyterian Church were also heavily involved in recreational activities. Twenty-thousand soldiers a month took advantage of the

⁶³ "New Soldier Recreation Program Planned by City," *Columbia (SC) Record*, February 17, 1943.

⁶⁴ "Elks Center Here Entertains 150,000 Servicemen at Patio Since Recreation Plan Begun," *The State* (Columbia, SC), July 9, 1944.

⁶⁵ "Columbia Recreation Program Entertains 1,305,930 in '44," *The State* (Columbia, SC), January 27, 1945.

⁶⁶ Minutes of the Young Women's Christian Association, 1943, Records of the Young Women's Christian Association (Columbia, SC), South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁶⁷ "Thousands of Soldiers Are Entertained by Church Here," *Columbia (SC) Record*, March 17, 1943.

recreational facilities at these churches in 1943.⁶⁸ Churches were not the primary source of morale-boosting activities, but they were important places for appropriate recreation and respectable female interaction. They also reflected the national institutional religious interest in the well-being of the visiting soldier.

By far the most popular and influential places for morale-boosting activities for both servicemen and female volunteers in Columbia were the various USO clubs across the city center. At the war's peak, Columbia had six different USO clubs concentrated in the downtown area. Although the national USO was created in April 1941, the movement to bring an official USO club to Columbia did not begin until after the start of the war. A statewide meeting in April 1942 voted to raise \$143,000 for a USO program, with Richland County contributing \$19,000.⁶⁹

The Federal Recreation Building on the southwest corner of Laurel and Assembly Streets opened in May 1942 and was considered by many to be the most elaborate, most beautiful, and largest USO building in the country.⁷⁰ This club had the highest number of visitors and greatest prominence in the community. The club featured an incredible assortment of regular recreational activities: a snack bar, eight ping pong tables, two badminton courts, a music room with radios and the latest records, a library with over two thousand books and magazines, a lounge, a work room, showers, two porches, a dark room for photography, an exercise room, spaces for religious services, the largest

⁶⁸ "New Soldier Recreation Program Planned by City," *Columbia (SC) Record*, February 17, 1943.

⁶⁹ Scrapbook, 1942-1943, Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce, Records of the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce (Columbia, SC), South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁷⁰ Scrapbook, 1942-1943, Chamber of Commerce, SCL; Simons, *A Guide to Columbia* (1943), 52.

auditorium in the city, and a Traveler's Aid section that provided directions and information about recreation, travel, and housing.⁷¹



Figure 5.1 Federal Recreation Building. Built in 1942, the Laurel Street USO was the largest and most popular USO club in Columbia during World War II. Image courtesy of John Hensel Photograph Collection, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library.

Just as the recreational facilities on bases were segregated, the morale-boosting activities in Columbia were also separate. These activities took place in the Waverly community, a historically black neighborhood adjacent to Allen University and Benedict College containing many of the city's African-American churches. Black soldiers, who

⁷¹ Scrapbook, 1942-1943, Chamber of Commerce, SCL; "15,000 Visit New USO Club During Sunday," *The State* (Columbia, SC), May 4, 1942.

were generally excluded from the city's white society, were welcomed in the two African-American USO clubs on Harden and Taylor Streets. These clubs had a similar, if less impressive, choice of activities for black soldiers and were equally important places in their community. The city opened segregated recreational facilities in the Allen-Benedict Court social room and the old Howard Community Center. These centers provided cultural programs, wholesome entertainment, and spaces for dancing, tennis, horseshoes, reading rooms, and games.⁷² Although the spaces for white morale-boosting activities excluded African Americans on the basis of race, African Americans created their own separate but equal black spaces. These duplicative spaces reflected not only the desire to provide the same experience to black soldiers, but also the strong value of community in a segregated society. Columbia may have been a soldier town, but Waverly became the true soldier town for African-American servicemen.⁷³

These USO clubs provided over two million servicemen with all the material leisure activities and distance from military life they could possibly need. Columbia residents seemed quite proud of them. *The State* newspaper argued that if any soldier "is experiencing difficulty in passing away his leisure hours, then it is because he has not gone to social centers established here purely and simply for his convenience and enjoyment."⁷⁴ Despite the immense value of these places and recreational outlets, they alone did not accomplish much more than the recreational centers on base. What made

⁷² "Citizens Contribute to Party for Soldiers at Recreation Center," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), March 8, 1941; "City of Columbia Recreation Program Opens Two Centers for Colored Soldiers," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), March 27, 1943.

⁷³ For more information on the architecture of segregation and the spatial analysis of place, please see Robert R. Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past," *The Public Historian* 27 (Fall 2005): 11-44.

⁷⁴ "War Bonds Given as 2,000,000th Soldier Enters," *The State* (Columbia, SC), June 16, 1945; "Columbia and the Soldiers," *The State* (Columbia, SC), July 28, 1942.

the city recreation centers, church functions, and the USO clubs so successful at boosting morale was the widespread and enthusiastic inclusion of the city's respectable female volunteers and the social interactions they gave at dances, teas, and bridge parties. The community may have provided the chaperoned places and funding for recreation, but women were what made the programs actually build and preserve soldier morale.

CHAPTER 6

“WOMEN’S PECULIAR CONCERN”

While the city government and institutions took the lead in providing the infrastructure for soldier recreation, building morale and the success of the USO program depended heavily on the involvement of women of all races and backgrounds in the city. The war readjusted the community service mission of many women’s clubs and organizations to focus on issues of soldier morale and recreation. Some of the most active women’s groups included the Woman’s Club of Columbia, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of South Carolina, and the Columbia Garden Club, each with different backgrounds and goals. While most clubs worked closely with and participated often in the USO’s events, many also coordinated their own morale-boosting services for soldiers and sailors independently of institutionalized recreation programs. As a whole, the women of Columbia made building morale one of their primary wartime defense tasks and made thousands of lonely soldiers feel at home.⁷⁵

Columbia’s female clubs and organizations were composed largely of middle- and upper-class women, but had a surprising amount of diversity in their membership requirements. In May 1925 ten of the most prominent women in the city, including the wives and daughters of businessmen, lawyers, doctors, and college professors established

⁷⁵ For further discussion of the history of women’s clubs and gendered community work in South Carolina, see Stephanie E. Yuhl, “Susan Pringle Frost: Historic Preservation in Charleston and Gendered Identity in the Emerging New South,” in *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

the Woman's Club of Columbia. While these women were not the elite of Columbia society, they did have the time and money to participate in club activities and were considered upper class.⁷⁶ However, in 1925, this was the only women's club in town not limited by ancestry and by 1930 had become a middle-class group.⁷⁷ Membership in the Columbia Committee of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of South Carolina required proof of colonial ancestry and was more exclusive than the Woman's Club.⁷⁸

In contrast to the guidelines of many women's clubs, the YWCA was by its own definition democratic and open to all women and girls of the community.⁷⁹ Annual fees were low and those seeking board membership were only required to have sufficient free time and to represent different parts of the city and "different walks of life."⁸⁰ The Columbia YWCA operated a separate branch for African-American women and a program at the university.⁸¹ While equally respectable, the YWCA was less exclusive and had members from all parts of Columbia society. Despite the class and race differences in each of Columbia's women's clubs, their involvement in World War II was an equalizing experience.

⁷⁶ Dorothy Louise Brown, "A History of the Woman's Club of Columbia: 1925-1945" (master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1992), 13.

⁷⁷ Brown, "A History of the Woman's Club of Columbia," 5, 21.

⁷⁸ "Constitution of The National Society of Colonial Dames of America and By-Laws of the NSCDA in the State of South Carolina, 1944" National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, South Carolina Columbia Committee, Records of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, South Carolina Columbia Committee, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

⁷⁹ Minutes of the Young Women's Christian Association, 1941, Records of the YWCA, SCL.

⁸⁰ Minutes of the Young Women's Christian Association, 1944, Records of the YWCA, SCL.

⁸¹ For further discussion on the African-American YWCA in South Carolina, see Heather Jean Erskine, "This Fellowship without Barriers of Race: The Desegregation of the Young Women's Christian Associations in Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston, South Carolina, 1946-1970s" (master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1998).

Women's clubs engaged in a variety of morale-building activities and worked closely with the officials at Fort Jackson and the USO to meet soldiers' needs. The Woman's Club escorted groups of young women to socialize at Fort Jackson every Tuesday night and held evening tea dances for the soldiers. Its newly constructed clubhouse became a popular place to entertain soldiers and the club often sponsored dances and events for the servicemen at Fort Jackson. Events at the clubhouse could entertain up to two hundred men at a time and provided both refreshments and music for dancing. The appreciative USO asked that entertainment be provided as frequently as possible and the Woman's Club voted to hold events for soldiers at Fort Jackson often.⁸² Women frequently served as hostesses at the USOs, of which the clubs were extremely supportive. The president of the Woman's Club presided over the organizational meeting of the USO Service League and in mid-1942 the Woman's Club publicly endorsed the new USO building on Laurel and Assembly Streets. Clubwomen pledged they would "aid in all ways possible...to bring about this desired and needed" benefit for both the servicemen at Fort Jackson and Columbia's civilians.⁸³

During the war years, the women of Columbia's various garden clubs boosted morale in their own way by decorating Fort Jackson and the USO. They took floral arrangements to the base hospital at Fort Jackson and to the USO club on a regular basis.⁸⁴ The thirteen gardening clubs in the city donated flowers to the various USO clubs nearly every day and the continuous display of mood-lifting floral arrangements was,

⁸² Woman's Club, Minutes, 1941-1942, Records of the Woman's Club of Columbia, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

⁸³ Minutes, 1941-1942, Woman's Club, SCL.

⁸⁴ Virginia G. Meynard, "A History of the Columbia Garden Club, 1926-1996" (master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1996), 5, 27.

according to the USO club, “a source of great satisfaction and enjoyment to the countless numbers of people who enter our club.”⁸⁵ The Dogwood Garden Club, which broke away from the Columbia Garden Club in 1936, also supported the morale-building movement by donating arrangements to the USO building.⁸⁶



Figure 6.1 Scene from a USO dance. Women’s clubs recruited young women as dance partners for servicemen and worked closely with the USO to provide a variety of activities where men could meet young women. Image courtesy of South Carolina and World War II Collection, University of South Carolina, South Caroliniana Library.

⁸⁵ “13 Garden Clubs Furnish Flowers for USO,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), November 5, 1942; Edward Kakenmaster to Mrs. W.A. Boyd, August 15 1942, Mary Keller Boyd Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

⁸⁶ Meynard, 5; Dogwood Garden Club, Scrapbook, 1942-43. Records of the Dogwood Garden Club, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

African-American women's involvement in promoting morale within the segregated society and military reflected essentially the same goals and roles as white women and recommended in the national literature. The Harden Street USO held regular coffee hours on Sunday mornings to allow servicemen to meet citizens and for civilians to understand the USO program.⁸⁷ The *Palmetto Leader* reported that "there is hardly a dull night at the Harden Street USO these days, what with the several hostesses always on hand, and a varied program, those who drop in always have a good time."⁸⁸ Young women, many of whom were students at Allen University or nurses at Waverly Hospital, helped entertain soldiers at dances, both at Fort Jackson and at African-American service centers.⁸⁹

Despite being excluded from mainstream American society, African-American women felt an equivalent sense of patriotic duty for improving the morale for their own men. Most women volunteering at the black USOs agreed that "for what affects America, affects our group, and we must of necessity carry our part of any load that our city and county is called upon to carry."⁹⁰ African-American soldiers may have been prohibited from participating in the activities at the white USO clubs and citywide recreation centers, but could rely on the local black community and African-American women to boost their morale. The widespread sense of boosting morale was therefore not limited to white upper-class clubwomen, but extended across American communities.

⁸⁷ "Harden Street USO Holds Open House Each Sunday During Coffee Hour," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), January 9, 1943.

⁸⁸ "Harden Street USO News," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), July 10, 1943.

⁸⁹ "Negro Service Center is Opened With Dance," *The State* (Columbia, SC), October 26, 1941; "Negro Service Club to Open on October 24," *The State* (Columbia, SC), October 18, 1941.

⁹⁰ "Richland Co. Chapter American Red Cross," *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), December 20, 1941.

Young women in Columbia played perhaps the most important role of all in the boosting of troop morale, as they were the fresh, feminine faces servicemen wanted to see on their dance partners. One of the most significant contributions to the morale effort was the mobilization of young females to act as hostesses. While women consistently volunteered, there was a constant shortage of females and the ratio of servicemen to hostesses remained imbalanced. Young women's clubs, such as the Spinsters' Club, an organized group of about eighty unmarried girls, set up a program where members could "fill in" at events where there were more men than women. This plan allowed recognized organizations and clubs to secure additional dancing partners, hostesses, card players, and dinner partners for their entertainment of servicemen. Designed as a "service and fun" program, the unmarried Spinsters considered their mobilization as volunteers an important war service.⁹¹ Dancing and spending time with pretty girls lightened the heavy mood of wartime society and made everyone feel at times that life was normal again.

The University of South Carolina also played a major role in morale-building efforts, not only of the university, but also of the whole community. As at most colleges and universities, there were already established student organizations that catered to the social needs of young, unmarried people. These, including coed clubs and sororities, helped meet the needs of soldiers and airmen in the community and of the NROTC students who made up a large portion of the student population. The mirrored experience of university women both on campus and in the city demonstrates the widespread effect

⁹¹ Sarah Graydon McCrory, Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, Sarah Graydon McCrory Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

of the war on society and expectations of females to focus on the morale of others, even as they created new opportunities for themselves.

With the transformation of the school into a training facility for naval officers, the experience of university women became militarized; much like Columbia, they were creating a soldier town. College students therefore took on the dual role of caring for the recreational needs of the servicemen on campus and in the city. In the fall semester before the war, student enrollment was 1,117 men and 617 women.⁹² A year later, there were more female students, but fewer junior and senior male students.⁹³ Sarah Leverette, a law student at USC during the 1940s, recalled that “there weren’t too many males...all the boys were gone. There were no men except there were eight in my class when I graduated. One of them was, his health was too bad, another one was crippled...the only ones that were left were the ones that didn’t qualify for service.”⁹⁴

By July 1943, however, the large number of V-12 naval candidates arrived and campus was full of young men again. According to a columnist in *The Daily Gamecock*, everywhere she looked there were “whites, khakies, more whites, and more khakies.”⁹⁵ By the end of the year, the student enrollment had climbed back up to an unprecedented high, with 646 coeds, 388 civilian men, and 655 naval students.⁹⁶ As college boys became soldiers, girls began writing letters to servicemen out of duty and pleasure. Another female student columnist noted that “letters to the boy who lived next door, and to last year’s lab partner can do a lot to raise morale. Of course Miss Carolina is doing a

⁹² *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), September 26, 1941.

⁹³ *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), October 2, 1942.

⁹⁴ Sarah Leverette, interview by author, Columbia, SC, June 12, 2013.

⁹⁵ “War Situation Is Boon to Dateless Coed at Carolina,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), August 13, 1943.

⁹⁶ “Number Students Enrolled Reaches Unprecedented High,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), November 19, 1943.

big job of morale building for the man in her life, but she's helping him win the war in more ways than one."⁹⁷

One of the major ways "Miss Carolina" helped men win the war was by participating in dances and social events both on campus and at the city's USO clubs. In late 1943, coeds were granted an extended curfew to 12:30 on nights of registered parties since the naval recruits only had one free night each week.⁹⁸ Female students were encouraged by Mrs. Arney Childs, the Dean of Women and member of the National USO Council, to do something related to war work, especially to volunteer in the USO. By 1944, Dean Childs eased the curfew even more, allowing coeds to go out at any time without an escort, as long as they "call on soldiers at the fort frequently just to keep up the soldiers' morale" and "spend at least three or four nights a week at the USO and the Officer's Club."⁹⁹ Sororities sent one hundred girls a week to the USO and coeds did their part by making weekly trips to the USO.¹⁰⁰

Dancing at the USO not only supplemented the disrupted normal collegiate social calendar, but was considered both a pleasure and a duty for female college students. Tina Cannon, a university serial columnist, noted she spent so much time at the USO that she had "practically been living in the place...My spirit is sad, my feet are aching, my arches are fallen, but my heart is full of patriotism, and I continue to dance at the USO. I regret

⁹⁷ "USO, Nurses Aide and Knitting are Chief Occupations," *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), October 2, 1942.

⁹⁸ "12:30 Permission Granted Girls on Registered Parties," *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), December 3, 1941.

⁹⁹ "Childs States New Regime," *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), April 1, 1944.

¹⁰⁰ Tina Cannon, "1001 Nights at the USO," *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), February 26, 1943.

that I have but two feet to give to my country.”¹⁰¹ Sarah Leverette recalled that she and her friends also “went to the USO pretty regularly...it usually was done in groups at the university...for the most part everybody kind of went into it because it was patriotism, it was a very patriotic thing to do.”¹⁰² Service at the USO was just one of many morale-building activities younger, single women engaged in as part of the larger female organizations they were part of. It was an important part of making servicemen feel at home, but not the only part. Soldiers not only wanted to meet beautiful young women who could dance and play bridge, but they also craved a more motherly, homelike interaction. The final group of Columbia women fulfilled this crucial mission of home front morale.

¹⁰¹ “USO, Nurses Aide and Knitting are Chief Occupations,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), October 2, 1942; Tina Cannon, “1001 Nights at the USO,” *The Gamecock* (Columbia, SC), February 26, 1943.

¹⁰² Leverette, interview.

CHAPTER 7

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The young women who attended parties and dances were not the only women in Columbia committed to raising the morale of servicemen in the area. Aside from interactions with respectable, fun, single girls, many servicemen also craved home-cooked meals and the comforts of home. Married women and mothers embraced the hospitality component of morale building, inviting servicemen to their holiday activities and hosting them at their homes. A commitment to hospitality, which *Arms and the Girl* argued “springs from the belief that the stranger must be welcomed and fed [and] depends on the essential brotherhood of man,” meant home hospitality programs became an integral role of women in the soldier town.¹⁰³ This program quite literally extended the comforts of home beyond the USO or a clubhouse and made servicemen feel like family.

Columbia’s women invited servicemen into their homes in a variety of ways when they learned about soldier loneliness.¹⁰⁴ As early as July 1941, African-American women began a home hospitality program for black soldiers, in which three hundred soldiers were taken to local African-American churches. The African-American War Mothers club operated a monthly home hospitality visit complete with a home-cooked meal.¹⁰⁵ In

¹⁰³ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 268.

¹⁰⁴ National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, South Carolina Columbia Committee, Scrapbook, 1936-1946, Records of the NSCDA, SCL.

¹⁰⁵ “Negro Soldier Hospitality Sunday, July 20,” *The State* (Columbia, SC), July 17, 1941; “Harden Street USO News,” *Palmetto Leader* (Columbia, SC), August 28, 1943.

September 1943, Sarah Graydon, a law classmate of Sarah Leverette's, officially started the Home Hospitality group, a program that gave parties for white officers and soldiers and offered girls the chance to help "Uncle Sam's boys" at Fort Jackson.¹⁰⁶ Members of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of South Carolina often opened their homes to servicemen and their families. Soldiers were also invited to afternoon teas and parties at members' homes through the home hospitality programs of many women's societies.¹⁰⁷

Columbia's women were especially eager to open their homes during the holiday season. They realized that denying holiday gatherings to servicemen because of the war was cruel and made every effort to include lonely soldiers in their festivities.¹⁰⁸ Fort Jackson, the air bases, and the NROTC program issued special passes to soldiers to attend Christmas dinners and parties and those with family in town were allowed an overnight pass.¹⁰⁹ Women invited soldiers to their homemade Thanksgiving turkey dinners. The Graydon family entertained ten enlisted men in 1943.¹¹⁰ The Columbia Garden Club hosted a Christmas party at the Moore home in 1941, to which the Red Cross transported two hundred convalescent guests from Fort Jackson.¹¹¹ Women's clubs and church groups were instrumental in making the "Christmas colored by the khaki of the Army" a

¹⁰⁶ Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, McCrory Papers, SCL.

¹⁰⁷ Scrapbook, 1936-1946, Records of the NSCDA, SCL.

¹⁰⁸ Alsop and McBride, *Arms and the Girl*, 268.

¹⁰⁹ Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, McCrory Papers.

¹¹⁰ Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, McCrory Papers.

¹¹¹ Columbia Garden Club, Scrapbook, 1941-1943, Records of the Columbia Garden Club, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

reality, as members could place invitations directly through the home hospitality program or the president of their group.¹¹²

Newspapers urged civilians to “Give a Serviceman a Merry Christmas in Your Own Homes,” by highlighting the men’s loneliness and inability to be with their own families on the holiday.¹¹³ More heart-tugging efforts were made to get soldiers into civilian Christmas celebrations, by suggesting “maybe your club could have a similar party for some of the others,” appealing to the guilt that there could never be enough soldiers served.¹¹⁴ These types of morale-boosting activities recreated an actual sense of home for servicemen, by inviting them to family gatherings as though they were a friend’s son. Celebrating the holidays in the comfort of a civilian home, with a home-cooked meal and the company of a family no doubt had a tremendous effect on the morale of the troops stationed in Columbia.

South Carolina women incorporated a special brand of southern hospitality in their entertainment of the troops. The home hospitality program offered what a local newspaper called “an old-fashioned ‘plantation party’” for twenty-five convalescent “Yankee” Columbia Army Air Base men at a country home overlooking Lake Murray. As hostesses at this so-called “plantation” were twenty-five “southern belles” to give them a “touch of real southern hospitality.”¹¹⁵ Although this event was abnormally explicit in its portrayal of southern culture, according to the *South Carolina Magazine*, a large number of soldiers from across the nation had deep “a personal experience of

¹¹² Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, McCrory Papers, SCL.

¹¹³ Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, McCrory Papers, SCL.

¹¹⁴ Scrapbook, 1941-1943, Columbia Garden Club, SCL.

¹¹⁵ Scrapbook VII, 1942-1944, McCrory Papers, SCL.

southern hospitality.”¹¹⁶ Many servicemen were impressed by the hospitality and friendliness of South Carolinians and some planned to return after the war.¹¹⁷ In response, *The Columbia Record* reported that the city took “to her heart the young men in training at Fort Jackson and made them realize the true meaning of Southern hospitality.”¹¹⁸

While many of the morale-boosting activities in Columbia were standardized and common in soldier towns across the country, visiting soldiers received a unique experience in the homes of this southern community. Even if only temporarily, many servicemen were invited into civilian homes and treated as not only a soldier needing entertainment, but also as a young man far from home. Through the home hospitality program, women made soldiers feel the most human and reminded servicemen that they were still part of a community: a soldier town.

¹¹⁶ Osborn, “Recreation, Welfare, and Morale of the American Soldier,” 55.

¹¹⁷ Harry Clark, “South Carolina After the War,” *South Carolina Magazine* 6 (Winter 1942): 6.

¹¹⁸ “No Letup in Work at Big Post,” *Columbia (SC) Record*, August 16, 1943.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Columbia was transformed into a soldier town for the duration. Women in particular were caught up in the efforts to accommodate the needs of soldiers and keep up their spirits. Building upon antecedents from World War I and reflecting the region's contradictory image of southern hospitality and racial segregation, morale-building programs operated primarily by women were common across the city. Though intense, these programs were short-lived. The USO and other morale services were established as temporary, war-related organizations, focused entirely on war-related goals, which expected to be demobilized shortly after the war's end.¹¹⁹

While the USO remains today an important organization supporting the armed forces and their families, it has returned to its original military-based function, largely out of the civilian eye and without the mass involvement of the public. Columbia continues to play host to the large military population of Fort Jackson, but has not seen the full mobilization of American society since 1945. Columbia was therefore only a true soldier town completely devoted to morale-boosting by the entire community, especially its women, for a brief moment in time.

When asked if the citizens of Columbia did their part during World War II, Sarah Leverette answered, "that was [a war] that everybody rose up and supported it...I think

¹¹⁹ Kimbrell, *USO: Five Years of Service*, 31.

we in Columbia did well, we did our part. We went into the whole thing with a feeling of patriotism and service and that kind of thing. I felt we did real well on that.”¹²⁰ Following the examples set by the national morale-boosting literature and USO movement, Columbia is an excellent example of the soldier town and reflects both the nationwide trends and regional preferences of this form of defense work. In this way, Columbia, like other cities which rallied to the cause, was crucial in winning the war from the home front.

¹²⁰ Leverette, interview.

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