Sounding Southern:
Music, Militarism, and the Making of the Sunbelt

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Abstract

"Sounding Southern" traces the ways in which the Defense Department and the country music industry created an economic relationship that would benefit the growth of the genre's commercial power while also helping to encourage enlistment in the Cold War military. Using music industry archives, oral histories, and military records, this project examines how the Pentagon sponsored country music radio and television programs aimed at enlisting the music's predominantly white fan base. At the same time, this relationship gave Music Row, Nashville's neighborhood of publishing houses and recording studios, a promotional outlet to sell their products and expand their audiences around the globe. The military also helped boost country music's image from a genre associated with rural ignorance to a music appropriate for the postwar middle class. In the process, Nashville's musical-military partnership taught white southerners to accept unprecedented levels of government growth in the form of defense spending and altered the construction of southern identities and the national political culture over the first twenty-five years of the Cold War. This study argues that Nashville's military-musical alliance also pushed the country music industry to the political right, as unflinching support for the warfare state and veneration of masculine individualism emerged as rallying cries for political conservatism.

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Introduction

"Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue"

Shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, country music artists went to their studios to wrestle with what it meant to live in a newly vulnerable America. Country music had long held a reputation as a particularly patriotic genre, from the Vietnam-era backlash hits like Merle Haggard's "Fightin' Side of Me" to the Cold War nationalism of Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." Beginning in 2001, many of its artists took the opportunity to record songs that voiced support of the troops and the government during the first months of the War on Terror. As U.S. servicemembers deployed to the Middle East, country radio promoted a string of 9/11-inspired songs, including Alan Jackson's "Where Were You (When the World Stopped Turning)," Darryl Worley's "Have You Forgotten?" Aaron Tippin's "Where the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle Fly," and, perhaps most notoriously, Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)." Even the Dixie Chicks earned a war-themed number one hit with "Travelin' Soldier" in early 2003. But the band's success took a nosedive, after lead singer Natalie Maines denounced the war and George W. Bush from a stage in London, England on March 10, 2003, shortly before the invasion of Iraq. She claimed to be "ashamed" of sharing her home state of Texas with the president before playing "Travelin' Soldier" to a cheering crowd. Country radio stations responded by boycotting the group for what they perceived as unpatriotic speech.[1]

The radio industry's reprimand of the Dixie Chicks suggested that the group had crossed a political line within country music. Many of the genre's disc jockeys and some of its fans

[1] Calvin Gilbert, "CMT News Special Explores Maines-Keith Controversy," *CMT*, June 20, 2003, http://www.cmt.com/news/1473071/cmt-news-special-explores-maines-keith-controversy/.

demanded that artists profess flag-waving support for the troops and the government officials who made the hard decisions to send servicemembers off to fight. By the early 2000s, that kind of embrace of U.S. militarism seemed engrained within country music's traditions. Two months after the Dixie Chicks fallout, *Billboard* magazine asked members of the country music industry about the particular bond between the music, the fans, and the military. Dennis Hannan, senior vice president of Nashville's Curb Records, admitted that "It's a fine line that you have to walk," between showing real patriotic feeling and appearing to capitalize off the most recent war. He believed that country songwriters penned patriotic songs as authentic reflections of the average American in flyover country, not as an opportunistic money grab. In Hannon's estimation, country writers knew how to speak for the "silent majority that typifies the country consumer. Country music has never been driven by the East Coast or West Coast. It's driven by middle America, the heartland. That's where the more conservative approach comes in; the more patriotic approach." Daryl Worley trusted that "People that listen to country music are hard-working, working-class American people, and they … tend to back us guys when we put out something pro-America [or] pro-military." As for the specific role of musicians, Aaron Tippin put country artists' relationship to militarism even more bluntly: "We're the cheerleaders."[2]

When giving their responses, those record executives and artists echoed the political and racial genealogies that academics and journalists often cite when writing about country music's association with militarism. The common historical explanation posits that, in the late 1960s, as the left-leaning counterculture defied the authority of the government to wage the war in Vietnam and as the black freedom struggle notched landmark victories, a white Silent Majority cleaved to the allegedly all-American virtues of white supremacist law and order, evangelical

[2] Phyllis Stark and Deborah Evans Price, "Country Acts Feed Fans' Hunger for Patriotic Tunes," *Billboard*, May 3, 2003, 74.

Christianity, and patriarchal social values. This constituency heard their feelings expressed in country music songs like Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee" and "The Fightin' Side of Me," songs that earned Haggard an invitation to the Nixon White House. The political views of these songs, along with country music's historical association with white southerners, appeared to offer cultural validation for Nixon's "Southern Strategy" that began in the late 1960s. Ever since, country music has delivered patriotic anthems from Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the U.S.A." to Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue."[3] There is a bio-cultural argument embedded within that interpretation, like an evolutionary process stamped twangy jingosism onto the genetic code of white southerners.

"Sounding Southern" challenges the narrative that naturalizes this conflation of race, politics, and genre. Country music's relationship to U.S. militarism is more complex than artists acting as "cheerleaders," and it did not spring fully formed from the Silent Majority's simmering indignation. "Sounding Southern" traces the ways in which the Pentagon and the country music industry created an economic relationship that benefited the growth of the genre's commercial power while also encouraging the music's primarily white fanbase to enlist in the Cold War military. I refer to this reciprocal relationship between the Defense Department and the genre as "country music militarism." This term helps to describe the personal, economic, and symbolic connections between a genre usually associated in the popular imagination with white southerners and the expansion of the Cold War defense state that delivered a financial boon to their region. Using music industry archives, oral histories, and military records, I show how this

[3] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), 115-116; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*. (New York: New Press, 2010), 167-176; Bill C. Malone and Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music, U.S.A.*, 3rd rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 373, 431, 477.

partnership transformed country music into the sound of white allegiance to U.S. militarism throughout the first twenty-five years of the Cold War.

My work forwards three main arguments that cover the development of the country music's connection to the Pentagon. First, I show how the genre's entrepreneurs latched onto the expansion of the Cold War military as a way to help grow their businesses during the birth of the genre's industry. Beginning in the early 1950s, the Defense Department sponsored country music radio and television programs aimed at recruiting the music's predominantly white fan base. This relationship gave Music Row, Nashville's neighborhood of publishing houses and recording studios, a promotional partner to sell their products and a distribution network to expand their audiences around the globe. The Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) aired thousands of hours of country music programs for military and foreign civilian listeners during the Cold War, giving Nashville's white artists a free promotional outlet to push their records and expand their audiences around the globe. Additionally, the global network of installations maintained by the U.S. Armed Forces acted as a de facto tour route for country music artists looking to increase their audience. These installations also housed Post Exchange (PX) stores, where record companies could sell their products to servicemembers in need of entertainment. Soldiers steadily increased the number of country music records they bought over the 1950s and 1960s. By 1968, the European PXs sold more country records than any other genre, giving Music Row's artists more than 65 percent of the soldier market share.[4]

Second, I argue that country music militarism helped white southerners see the expansion of the military as a part of their regional culture rather than intrusion of state power into everyday life. Because of its themes of masculine individualism and working-class pride, country

[4] Omer Anderson, "Country Wins Europe GI's To Tune of $4.2 Mil. Yearly," *Billboard*, January 13, 1968, 1.

music provided the populist cover for white southerners who joined the military to receive federally funded benefits through the G.I. Bill. As those white southerners flocked to the military, they began to request more country music on AFRTS, and some began using the armed forces as a space to explore their own talents for playing the music. Dozens of country musicians, including future stars like Faron Young, Johnny Cash, and Mel Tillis, used their time in the ranks to hone their craft. Many of these men took advantage of the armed forces' Special Services, the division in charge of troop morale and entertainment, as a springboard into a civilian music career once they left the military. In doing so, artists who had served in the military established personal connections between the genre and armed forces, making military service seem like a natural part of the country industry and, by extension, white southern culture.

My third argument asserts that Music Row aligned with political conservatism during the Vietnam War, not because of some inherent ideology within its artists and fans, but because of the lucrative partnerships it had established with the Pentagon in the 1950s. The expansion of the defense state had enjoyed bipartisan support during the early years of the Cold War. Yet, as debates over Vietnam fractured that consensus, an unflinching commitment to militarism became a central tenet of conservative politics. Conservatives claimed the mantle of America's most steadfast supporters of the military in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, painting those on the left as something less than patriotic in the process. Music Row's support for the armed forces turned country music into a soundtrack for those voters and politicians, often Republicans and the conservative southern Democrats, who supported hawkish foreign policies. Those policies, in turn, assured a demand for more soldiers. More soldiers meant steady government pay, G.I. Bill benefits, and the creation of private defense contractor jobs in the civilian sector to supply those troops. Those soldiers would then buy more country records and demand it be played on the

AFRTS. The Pentagon could use more country music in its recruitment and entertainment strategies. Simply put, militarism was good for the country music business.

This analysis offers a new understanding of country music's class politics and partisan alignment. Since its emergence as a commercial genre in the 1920s, country music has chronicled the expressions and experiences of the nation's working class, particularly the white working class. Country music historian Bill C. Malone has claimed that, since its beginning, the genre has "asserted its working-class credentials by concentrating on the particularities of the day-to-day lives and experiences of working people—job insecurities, marital relationships, family fragility, and mere survival."[5] Yet historians have largely overlooked the connections between country music and the job opportunities and political economy created by Cold War defense spending. The military offered well-paying, stable government employment in the postwar South at a time when the region's economy lacked other comparable options, and white southerners flocked to those government jobs. "Sounding Southern" corrects this blind spot in the literature by considering how working for the defense state impacted country music's fans, artists, and industry.

My work also examines how the economics of Music Row drove country music to the political right. Historian Diane Pecknold has traced the rise of country music from its roots in the 1920s into its alignment with conservative politics of the 1970s. She argues that the Country Music Association, the professional organization in charge of steering the genre's business direction within radio and the record trade, promoted an image of country music based on all-American, rustic authenticity even as it steadily built the economic power of Nashville's modern

[5] Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 30; Aaron A. Fox, *Real Country: Music and Language in Working-Class Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 31, 43-44.

music industry during the 1950s. By the late 1960s, Republican strategists recognized country music's downhome image as a tool to help form the alliance of "traditional conservatives, populist-conservatives, and new suburban wealth" that created Richard Nixon's Silent Majority. According to Pecknold, country music's move to the political right was not inevitable, but it did serve as a fitting metaphor for the "southernization" of conservative politics during the rise of Nixon.[6] But country music was more than a metaphor for the party realignment of the 1970s or a political tool to woo those voters who might be swayed by its cultural populism. The country music industry had a business interest that bound the music to the U.S. Armed Forces. As Republicans claimed support for the military as a platform for their party, they claimed country music as their soundtrack.

"Sounding Southern" also adds new perspectives on the racial history of the genre. Much of my work highlights how the white-dominated country music industry benefited from its connection with the Cold War military in ways that other genres did not. The recording industry has long branded country as a genre almost exclusively associated with white performers and fans, often from the U.S. South and Southwest, despite its actual regional and racial diversity.[7] Historian Karl Hagstrom Miller has shown how record labels and academic folklorists imposed their ideas of racial essentialism onto southern musical cultures during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They segregated southern working-class musical cultures into two categories with hillbilly, or what we now call country, classified as white music and the blues as

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[6] Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 219.

[7] Recent scholarship has documented the interracial and transnational roots of the genre with productive challenges to the assertion that only white, rural Americans have performed the music. See Diane Pecknold, ed., *Hidden in the Mix: The African American Presence in Country Music* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); John Troutman, *Kīkā Kila: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Laurent Dubois, *The Banjo: America's African Instrument* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016).

black music. This musical color line did not reflect the actual repertoires played by musicians, nor did it reflect the way southerners listened to music. Instead, the record industry divided the market in a way that reproduced the white supremacist divisions of people and cultures in Jim Crow America.[8]

Because of country music's reputation as music for and by white Americans, the Defense Department's use of the genre in its recruitment campaigns reveals the contradictions of the military's racial integration policies following World War II. President Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948, and that directive took effect during the Korean War. This newly integrated military emerged as one of the most diverse institutions in the nation thanks to the peacetime draft. Yet black servicemen continued to experience racism at the hands of white enlistees and civilians.[9] Likewise, country music recruitment campaigns branded the U.S. Armed Forces as an institution that favored white volunteers. I do not mean to suggest that all, or only, white southern soldiers loved country. But when the Pentagon used country music to convey its recruitment message, it imagined its audience, and therefore its volunteer military, as white.

The government's investment in Nashville's white southern music industry echoed the infusion of military spending that had transformed the South's economy. Beginning in the 1940s,

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[8] Karl Hagstrom Miller, *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). Other recent works have put the lie to the idea that country music has been a genre exclusively for white artists and fans. See Pecknold, *Hidden in the Mix*; Charles Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). For more on how record labels and promoters have sold country music as the authentic sound of rural, white America for nearly a century since the birth of the recording industry, see Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[9] Robert M. Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the US Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969); Morris J. McGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1981); Andrew H. Myers, *Black White, and Olive Drab: Racial Integration at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Kimberley L. Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?: Black Freedom Struggles and the U.S. Military* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

the warfare state delivered an unprecedented level of economic growth to the South. White southern legislators in Congress used their positions of seniority within their respective Armed Services Committees to channel federal defense spending to the region. For the military and its contractors, the South offered cheap land, a temperate climate suitable for year-round training, and an underemployed workforce who lacked a sustained history of strong unions. For the region's conservative Democratic leadership, defense spending delivered financial uplift to the South, while skirting the tinge of socialism carried by New Deal programs.[10] This military Keynesianism boosted the U.S. South at disproportionate levels, as defense spending delivered both military installations and private contractors to the region. In 1951, southern states received around 8 percent of the military's prime contracts. By 1970, that amount grew to more than 25 percent.[11] Companies like Lockheed in Marietta, Georgia, Raytheon in Huntsville, Alabama, and Ingalls Shipbuilders in Pascagoula, Mississippi remade the region's economy.[12]

The expansion of military spending in the postwar South disproportionately benefited white men and families in the region. U.S. Representative John Rankin of Mississippi had designed the distribution of veterans' benefits like the G.I. Bill to discriminate against black

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[10] Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1910* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), viii; Ann Markusen et al., *The Rise of the Gunbelt: The Military Remapping of Industrial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3, 6, 244. Scholars have debated whether the impact of defense spending actually delivered a disproportionate benefit to the South. Economic historian David Carlton has disputed Bruce Schulman's argument about regional disparity, specifically regarding the number of installations and arms contractors. For the purposes of my work, I believe it is sufficient to say that the Pentagon invested an unprecedented amount of money in the South, which transformed the region's economy, transportation infrastructure, institutions of higher learning, and residential landscapes. For disputing Schulman's claims, see Carlton, "The American South and the U.S. Defense Economy: A Historical View," in *The South, the Nation, and The World: Perspectives on Southern Economic Development*, eds., David L. Carlton and Peter A. Colcanis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

[11] Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 109, 140; Stephen Daggett, "Cost of Major U. S. Wars," *CRS Report for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, June 29, 2010, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22926.pdf; Brad Plumer, "America's staggering defense budget, in charts," *The Washington Post*, January 7, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/01/07/everything-chuck-hagel-needs-to-know-about-the-defense-budget-in-charts/?utm_term=.6bb142d6eb58.

[12] James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

veterans. Defense contractors in the region added to this racial inequality by operating under local control, meaning that their hiring and promotion remained rooted in the region's practices of Jim Crow segregation.[13] Through these discriminatory practices, defense spending helped turn pockets of the Deep South into islands of white Sunbelt prosperity.[14] "Sounding Southern" shows how country music experienced an analogous benefit from the federal government by building key components of its industry and infrastructure through Cold War defense spending.

The first chapter explores the roots of that business relationship through Connie B. Gay, a New Deal agriculture advisor who discovered the entrepreneurial potentials of country radio in the postwar period. During the 1950s, Gay built a country music empire based in Washington, D.C. by purchasing radio and television stations and managing country musicians. Thanks to his location and experiences of working with government institutions during the Great Depression and World War II, he established a partnership with the Pentagon to promote his radio stations and the artists he managed to U.S. servicemembers around the globe. By the end of the 1950s, Gay had pioneered the use of military recruitment radio shows that used country music, amassed a multi-million-dollar fortune based in the ownership of radio and television stations, and served as the founding president of the Country Music Association.

The second chapter explains how and why country music emerged as such a power tool for military recruitment campaigns in the 1950s by using the story of Faron Young, an eventual

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[13] Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005); Theda Skocpol, "The G.I. Bill and U.S. Social Policy, Past and Future," *Social Philosophy & Policy* 14, no. 7 (1997): 95-115; Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003); Kathleen J. Frydl, *The GI Bill* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[14] James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*; Matthew D. Lassiter and Kevin Kruse, "The Bulldozer Revolution: Suburbs and Southern History since World War II," *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009): 691-706; Kari Frederickson, *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2013).

Country Music Hall of Fame member who received an early-career boost by being drafted into the U.S. Army. The army put Young to work as a voice of entertainment and recruitment, booking him on radio and television programs where he could play his songs and tout the economic benefits of armed service. I argue that this pairing of genre and recruitment worked so well because of the popular conception of country music at the time as a style for unlearned amateurs who represented modern linkages to an American folk music past. With their cultivated image of folksy charm, country musicians appeared as simple, everyday people who just so happened to play music with a talent that naturally occurred within them. When the military began using those musicians to recruit white men into the service, it gave a familiar, downhome face and sound to the U.S. Cold War military, one of the largest bureaucratic institutions in the world.

Some of those young men who joined the military in search of a better life, or who were snagged by the draft, also used their time in the service to woodshed their musical skills and broaden their artistic pursuits. The third chapter examines the white southern musicians who served in different military branches and coalesced in Memphis in the early 1950s to create a new style of country music called rockabilly. Almost all of the songwriters, producers, and musicians who shook up Music Row gained their professional start in music by playing with fellow servicemembers through the U.S. Army and Air Force Special Services Division or in more informal settings around the barracks. Not only did the military's relationship to country music create a space for these men to pursue their talents, but service in the racially integrated Cold War military opened their ears to new sounds and artistic influences. Those influences came together to make rockabilly and eventually the style of rock and roll popularized by Elvis Presley.

Presley's trajectory differed from his rockabilly peers in that he did not serve in the military until after he was famous. My fourth chapter explores how his musical and military careers impacted the racial politics of the 1950s South. I argue that racial integration on southern military installations and rockabilly's black influence within country music represented internal threats to the southern racial order. For southern white supremacists, military and musical integration represented a two-pronged attack on Jim Crow launched by a communist conspiracy to subvert American power by eroding the armed forces and the dominance of white culture. Elvis Presley began his career as a symbol of that racial threat, yet, by the time he had completed his military service from 1958 to 1960, he had become a matinee star and pop music idol stripped of his threatening image. In this sense, military service did for Presley what it promised to do for thousands of other working-class white men across the South. It opened a path to middle-class decency for someone who had grown up at the edge of respectable white southern society.

I close with a chapter that knits together the threads of money, race, and Cold War politics that are woven throughout the project. By ending this story in the Vietnam era, I show how Music Row profited from the wartime buildup of the nation's military. As historians have noted, the deployment of U.S. troops around the globe during the 1960s and 1970s also meant the proliferation of mid-century consumer culture through the spread of the PX stores.[15] The PXs provided the necessary infrastructure for the U.S. music business to export musical products around the world and built a global community of listeners for American music, particularly country music. AFRTS played more country music than any genre besides pop, and

[15] Meredith H. Lair, *Armed with Abundance: Consumerism and Soldiering in the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Jennifer Mittlestadt, *The Rise of the Military Welfare State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 52.

servicemembers bought more country records than any other genre at the European PXs. This infrastructure produced a global community of fans, artists, and industry actors, all while the military continued using the genre in its recruitment campaigns. When support for the war in Vietnam became a rallying cry for political conservatism, the country music industry could not afford to break with this profitable distribution partner, even when individual country artists did not agree with the war or the goals of U.S. militarism.

My concentration on country music is not meant to obscure the way other genres and their artists intersected with the U.S. government's Cold War missions. The Pentagon also used pop music to achieve its recruiting goals, while the State Department used pop and jazz to portray the United States as a nation of racial inclusiveness in the face of communist propaganda that pointed to the hypocrisy of Jim Crow rule in a democratic nation.[16] Throughout the work, I have offered comparative analysis of the way black pop, jazz, R&B, and blues artists served and wrote music about their time in the armed forces.[17]

"Sounding Southern" focuses on country music because no other genre used the military to build its business like Music Row did. Just as Defense Department spending laid the foundation of the U.S. South's postwar industrial economy, it also helped create one of the region's most recognizable cultural economies. The Pentagon's partnership with Music Row created country music militarism and gave a boost to an ostensibly all-white musical genre and its intensely segregated industry. From a vantage point in the early twenty-first century, country

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[16] Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

[17] This project does not attempt represent all of topical music about the military created by black artists. Other authors have noted the numerous songs about military service and Cold War foreign policy written by black artists in R&B and soul, the two genres that are closest to African American equivalents to country music in terms of class affiliation and popularity. See Guido van Rijn, *The Truman and Eisenhower Blues: African-American Blues and Gospel Songs, 1945-1960* (London: Continuum, 2004).

music holds what seems like a naturally occurring affinity with hawkish patriotism. We expect country musicians to back the troops, or, as Aaron Tippin suggested, be the “cheerleaders” of U.S. militarism. “Sounding Southern” denaturalizes those presumptions. It shows that white southern men supported the military as a key to class mobility in the postwar era. It was support for the armed forces as an institution, rather than any particular foreign policy agenda, that helped lead those southerners into the Republican Party. Country music made the military seem like a part of white southern culture, something familiar, something that sounded like home. If the music of jingoistic patriotism has a southern accent, it is because Music Row spent decades cultivating a business alliance with the Pentagon.

Chapter 1

Big Government Country:

Connie B. Gay and the Roots of the Country Music Industry's Military Alliance

Connie B. Gay used country music to build a media empire in the 1950s. His ascent began with a job as a radio announcer in 1946 on station WARL in Arlington, Virginia and a hunch that listeners in the Washington, D.C. suburbs might tune in for what the music business then called "hillbilly" music. He ended the 1950s as the founding president of the Country Music Association, the owner of dozens of radio stations, the producer of television shows on national networks, and a multi-millionaire. Performers like Jimmy Dean, George Hamilton IV, Patsy Cline, Roy Clark, Johnny Cash, Andy Griffith, the Stoneman Family, and Grandpa Jones all received early career boosts from Gay's network of media and concert promotions based in the capital metropolitan area. Even *Grand Ole Opry* stars like Eddy Arnold and Minnie Pearl traveled to Washington, D.C. to appear on Gay's radio and television programs like *Radio Ranch*, *Gay Time*, and *Town and Country Time*. Others, including Elvis Presley, toured through Washington to play his "Hillbilly Cruise" aboard a yacht that sailed more than 2,000 concertgoers up and down the Potomac River.[1]

Gay's biography reads like a testament to entrepreneurial drive. In 1971, the *Washington Post* featured a frontpage profile on Gay, then 56-years-old. The headline told how "He Rose From Hardscrabble Farm to King of the Hill," and the writer described him as "country music's media magician." An accompanying photograph showed Gay, along with his second wife, an ex-

[1] Interview with Connie B. Gay by Douglas B. Green, October 18, 1974, Nashville, Tennessee, OH62, Country Music Foundation Oral History Project (hereinafter CMOHP), Frist Library and Archive of the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (hereinafter FLA), Nashville, Tennessee.

model who was twenty years his junior, and their two small children. They posed on a verdant lawn in front of the family's white, four-columned Colonial Revival home in the affluent Washington, D.C. suburb of MacLean, Virginia. When pressed about how much wealth he had accrued through this magic, Gay coyly told the paper, "Just say it's millions . . . Enough to make sure it won't run out as long as I live."[2]

Country music carried Gay a long way from his humble origins. Born on a dirt farm in North Carolina in 1914, Gay struggled out of poverty to earn a college degree, worked as a New Deal agricultural advisor during the Great Depression and World War II, and taught himself about the radio business just in time to take advantage of America's postwar appetite for pop culture entertainment. He transformed country music's artists, producers, and record labels into an industry over the course of his career, having organized the Country Music Disk Jockey Association in 1953, co-founded the Country Music Association in 1958, and helped establish the Country Music Foundation in 1964. He even provided the first $10,000 donation to build the Country Music Hall of Fame.[3] Although he never made Nashville his fulltime residence, scholars agree that Gay earned a reputation as a founding father of the industry that gave the Tennessee capital its nickname, Music City, U.S.A.[4]

The characterization of Gay as an independent and visionary entrepreneur offers a compelling story, but he owed much of his success to his de facto business partner, the United States Department of Defense. Beginning in the late 1940s, Gay cultivated a country music audience made up of government workers and Pentagon employees by producing live concerts

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[2] Hank Burchard, "The Country Boy From Lizard Lick Was Always Tuned In," *The Washington Post*, February 18, 1971, 1.
[3] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[4] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 137, 141, 187; Margaret Jones, "Connie B. Gay," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, ed. Paul Kinsbury (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 196.

and radio programs in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Gay, like thousands of other natives of the rural South, as well as other regions, had moved to the capital during World War II for wartime government employment. The location of the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia meant that this influx of military personnel and defense contractors remained in the capital area after the war. Gay recognized the potential to market country music in Arlington, sold the genre to this influx of government workers, and discovered some of the biggest stars of the twentieth century when they were still working for the Cold War defense state.

Gay formalized a relationship between his country music businesses and the U.S. military in 1951 when he booked Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren on a tour of military bases in Japan and the frontlines of the Korean War. This tour generated a publicity boon for Gay's radio station back home in Arlington, as listeners tuned in to hear his reports from the battlefront and country music's role in the fight against communism. Gay parlayed this success into a position as an entertainment advisor for the Department of Defense, a role which he used to book country artists in the U.S. military's network of Cold War installations around the globe. As the Pentagon established the indefinite presence of U.S. soldiers in Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean, Gay made sure that those troops, essentially a captive audience of young men, heard the latest stars of country music live and in-person during the 1950s.

Country music was not the only branch of entertainment to intersect with the U.S.'s early Cold War mission. Pop stars, comedians, and movie stars toured bases around the globe and visited the troops stationed in Korea while the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) played pop and swing jazz music more than any other genres during the decade.[5] African American R&B and blues musicians wrote about military service and the racial inequality still present in the

[5] Harry Mackenzie, comp., *The Directory of the Armed Forces Radio Service Series* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999).

ranks despite President Truman's Executive Order 9981 issued in 1948, which had mandated the eventual integration of the U.S. Armed Forces.[6] But where white country artists used the linkages between Nashville and the Pentagon to build their stardom, black artists confronted the predatory business practices of the recording industry. Only the white entrepreneurs of the music industry could use the military to promote its artists and records. The realization of that commercial success for country music began with Connie B. Gay.

U.S. soldiers had demonstrated their fandom for country music going back to World War II. The AFRS had attempted to address the soldiers' desire for the genre during the 1940s with the country music show *Melody Roundup*. In the early 1950s, the network produced original country content with the programs *Redd Harper's Hollywood Roundup* and *Carolina Cotton Calls*. Additionally, the stars of radio station WSM's *Grand Ole Opry* began touring U.S. military installations in Europe, and the AFRS aired the show for soldiers around the globe beginning in the late 1940s. However, where those efforts represented marginal attempts to meet the soldier's demand for country music, Gay made it the driving tenet of his business model.

The connection Gay established between country music and the Cold War military ushered in three important changes for the genre. First, his concerts and radio programs in the Washington, D.C. area elevated country music's class status. He booked country performances in Constitution Hall, staged shows on a chartered yacht, and named his radio program *Town and Country Time*, all in an effort to sell the genre as the sound of a rising postwar middle class. Second, Gay's use of military bases as country music concert venues helped popularize the genre among U.S. troops and disseminated the sound of country music to international audiences. Last, the connections Gay established between country music and the military paved the way for the

[6] Van Rijn, *Truman and Eisenhower Blues*; Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*.

Pentagon to use the genre as a recruitment tool. Over the course of the 1950s, Gay brought country music, a genre predominantly associated with white, southern, working-class artists and fans, to the U.S. Armed Forces and made it a central part of the military's Cold War culture. Gay's political experience as a lifelong Democrat and former New Dealer had taught him how to think about the federal government as a source of economic opportunity. In Cold War America, that meant hitching the emergent country music industry to the most robust aspect of the state, the U.S. military.

Connie B. Gay: From Lizard Lick to Washington, D.C.

Connie B. Gay followed an unpredictable path to becoming one of the most powerful businessmen in country music, and he repeatedly found ways to use the federal government to boost his financial prospects along the way. By his own admission, Gay was not a musically talented man. "I can't pick a note and can't sing a song to save my life," he conceded readily, "never have been able to." Gay compensated for his lack of talent with a shrewd understanding of the music business, a willingness to capitalize on government assistance, and an understanding of country music's mass appeal.[7]

Born on August 22, 1914 in Lizard Lick, North Carolina, Gay came of age in a family of ten children during the Great Depression and endured the typical hardships of rural southern poverty, including intense farm work, little healthcare, and hunger. His family farmed and, for a short time, owned a general store. But prosperity eluded them. His native area of North Carolina experienced such impoverishment during the 1920s and 1930s, he recalled, that "you'd have to sit on a sack of fertilizer to raise an umbrella."[8]

[7] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[8] Ibid.

Like thousands of other young men of his generation, Gay wanted out of the drudgery of manual labor. "We lived from hell to breakfast in those days, and there was always that damn mule waiting for me back home and 16 hours a day in the tobacco fields," he told a reporter in 1968.[9] "I was tired of following a mule," he recalled later. "I figured if I got a college education, someday I could get away from that stinking mule."[10] As a poor white child in the U.S. South during the first decades of the twentieth century, his opportunities remained limited by a lack of local government investment in education.[11] However, Gay found a path to advancement by following an agricultural track through high school and into college. He later recognized this opportunity as a benefit of the Smith-Hughes Farm Vocational Education Act of 1917.[12] This legislation had developed educational programs for rural schools in order to aid students who planned to pursue a career in agriculture.[13] After high school, Gay continued his education at North Carolina State College, where he paid his tuition by working at a dairy barn, busing tables, and serving as a driver, booker, and announcer on radio station WPTF in Raleigh. There, he received his first exposure to radio, and that experience planted a desire for more. He graduated with a degree in agricultural education and got a job with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Soil Erosion Service (later the Soil Conservation Service). This government work provided a source of job security and $150 per month in the middle of the Great Depression. Gay also

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[9] John Sherwood, "Connie B. Gay Reminisces," *The Evening Star*, January 29, 1968, B-2, Box 5, Clippings, Connie B. Gay Collection (hereinafter Gay collection), FLA.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 45-46, 412-420.
[12] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[13] Christopher P. Loss, *Between Citizens and the State: The Politics of American Higher Education in the 20th Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 60-61; Wayne D. Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa University Press, 1989); Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

worked as an advisor to a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Yanceyville, North Carolina and, in this way, remained connected to the people in the rural communities of his native state.[14]

Gay left his government post for a brief time in the 1930s to pursue a radio career and returned to WPTF as the station's farm program director. With early morning and noontime slots, Gay hosted a commentary show on the issues facing the farmers of North Carolina's piedmont region. The station also aired hillbilly music acts in between the farm programming. Live performances by the Monroe Brothers, the Delmore Brothers, the Swingbillies, and the Tobacco Tags filled WPTF's airwaves in the mid-1930s, delivering the newest sounds in white string band music and the close vocal harmonies that would help define postwar bluegrass and country duet singing.[15] These performances kept listeners tuned in to the Raleigh station while Gay kept them informed of the latest agricultural news. It also made Gay aware of the powerful combination of radio technology, hillbilly music, and the distribution of news of interest to working-class southerners.

Following a brief stint as a traveling salesman during the Depression, Gay returned to the Department of Agriculture as a county supervisor for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in late 1941. He held a deep admiration for President Franklin Roosevelt and the humanitarian aspects of the New Deal. Gay described the FSA's mission as "the finest concept of humanity of its time, and for all times, in my book, because we were out there to help those who had no way of helping themselves." He took pride in his role "helping tenants, sharecroppers, the black, [and] the poor" and valued the Roosevelt administration's willingness to use governmental power to do so. He ascended through the ranks at the FSA, quickly becoming a regional

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[14] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[15] Bob Carlin, *String Bands in the North Carolina Piedmont* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2004); Connie B. Gay interview; Robert Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

supervisor in North Carolina. Rather than drive around the state promoting New Deal programs like the Farm Tenancy Act, Gay began broadcasting to farmers from radio stations in Charlotte to spread what he called "the virtues of the New Deal." "I found out by the use of the radio I could reach 1,000 people in a day or 10,000 people in a day with a New Deal farm philosophy that it would take me a year or two to reach with my old Chevrolet."[16]

Beyond reaching tens of thousands of listeners, Gay also knew how to create radio content that would resonate with his southern audiences. One of his FSA radio spots, titled "Just Call Me Lu!," tells the story of a North Carolina widow named Lucinda, whose "man had died back in Hoover days," "had four young'uns to feed," and suffered from "Confounded kidney trouble." Suspicious of government interference in her fledging tobacco farm tenancy, Lu finally acquiesced to the advice of the local vocational agriculture and home economics teachers regarding the FSA's rehabilitation program. The FSA equipped Lu with a new lease, a budget, farming advice, cooperation with local doctors for her family's medical needs, and a pressure cooker, along with instructions in canning her crops. Not only did Lu prosper with this new arrangement, but listeners learned that she had a son stationed in the Pacific and explained that it "Must have been the canned goods and fresh vegetables and milk and medical care and all that. But he passed the Army's examination in nothing flat."[17] Consisting of equal parts Erskine Caldwell, hillbilly schtick, and New Deal propaganda, Gay's radio play delivered an allegorical southern character on the road from apprehension to full-throated endorsement of government action. In return for the government's assistance, Lu promised her son to the defense of the nation-state.

[16] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[17] Connie B. Gay, "Just Call Me Lu!" Box 14, Folder 14-4, Gay collection, FLA.

After the war, Gay combined his understanding of the white southern radio market, his agricultural expertise, and his experience with hillbilly music into a new entrepreneurial career in the private sector. In the mid 1940s, he began delivering agricultural news on the *Farm and Home Hour*, which broadcast over the Blue radio network. "We went on the air at noon every day," he remembered. The network paired Gay's agricultural news reports with musical accompaniment but never gave much thought to genre. Gay did. "I noticed . . . that if we played music on the *Farm and Home Hour*, if the orchestra played anything with a rural flavor, we'd get mail. And I mean tons of mail. But if they just stuck to the old regular *Farm and Home Hour* type of music, you know, nothing happened. So it had given me an idea." It was one of the most profitable ideas he would ever have.

Gay used what he learned to start the first hillbilly radio program in the Washington, D.C. area. When station WARL in Arlington, Virginia came up for sale in late 1946, some of Gay's business associates bought it. Gay offered to serve as the announcer, working strictly on commission of advertising sales, if the owners would let him play what he wanted. The owners agreed, and the station went on the air November 6, 1946 with Gay playing hillbilly music. He recalled the immediate positive response. "The phone started ringing. People said 'Lord, have mercy. Why hasn't somebody done this before?'"[18]

Gay Time: Building the Hillbilly Cultural Capital

No one had done it before, in part, because the hillbilly industry had just begun to realize its full commercial potential in the late 1940s. Gay simply stumbled upon the right combination of medium, demographics, and genre at the right moment. He also recognized the role of the federal government in creating a market for the music. Arlington's WARL emerged as the home

[18] Ibid.

for hillbilly music in northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland, where thousands of people from the rural South and elsewhere had migrated during the war for defense-related jobs. As James T. Sparrow has argued, nothing symbolized the complete transformation of northern Virginia's landscape and political economy like the location of the Pentagon building in Arlington. Construction began on September 11, 1941 and ended January 15, 1943. From that point on, the Pentagon pioneered "the decentralized urbanism that the defense economy would help foster in northern Virginia, and in so many metropolitan areas around the nation." With fifty acres of parking lots, thirty miles of feeder roads, a dedicated bus station, and its own zip code, the Pentagon functioned as the "nerve center" of U.S. militarism. New apartment cities, a $15 million shopping center, and a population boom of 50 percent in Arlington County between 1940 and 1943 transformed the once small town into a sprawling metropolis. The new Arlington represented a new South, even as Robert E. Lee's mansion that gave the town its name looked on from its hilltop along the Potomac River.[19]

As military personnel and civilian defense industry employees mixed along the freshly paved suburban streets, they tuned in daily to hear hillbilly records, as well as the live music show on Gay's programs he named *Radio Ranch* and *Town and Country Time*.[20] In the late 1940s and early 1950s, before Nashville had established its hold on the commercial aspects of hillbilly music, hundreds of live-performance radio shows, recording studios, fan magazines, and honky tonks distributed country music throughout the nation. Audiences could tune into shows like WLW's *Midwestern Hayride* in Cincinnati, the *Village Barn* on NBC from New York City, Chicago's WLS *National Barndance*, or, beginning in 1951, *Town Hall Party* on Los Angeles's

[19] James T. Sparrow, "A Nation in Motion: Norfolk, the Pentagon, and the Nationalization of the Metropolitan South, 1941-1953," in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, eds. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 177, 178-180.
[20] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.

WXLA.[21] Of course, WSM's *Grand Ole Opry*, broadcasting from the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee remained a fan favorite, and the station's powerful transmitter meant that it reached more of the rural South than other shows.[22]

Because of the *Opry*'s reach, Nashville claimed its title as the capital of hillbilly music, but the industry had not yet centralized there. The genre's press consisted of a few magazines like *Country Song Roundup* and *Hoedown: The Magazine of Hillbilly and Western Stars*, published in Derby, Connecticut and Cincinnati, Ohio, respectively. In the pages of these publications, readers would learn of the hillbilly happenings by region, in California, the Midwest, New England, and even Canada. Gay worked to make Washington, D.C. the center of the hillbilly music world. When he discovered the overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception for the genre on WARL, he looked for ways to capitalize on the music's mass appeal. Gay's successes multiplied as he learned how to raise the stature of the genre from something associated with the rural, white ignorance of a character like Lu to something more befitting the rural, white transplants who had moved to the city during the war boom.

On October 31, 1947, almost one year after first taking the air on WARL, Gay scored a cultural coup for the genre and profits for himself when he booked a hillbilly show at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. As a public trust managed by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Constitution Hall represented the staid confines of what passed as high culture in the U.S. at mid-century. The DAR usually hosted classical and opera performances, genres that functioned as proper soundtracks for their claims to atavistic Americanism. However, Gay partnered with Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry* to hire the biggest

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[21] Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States*, Third Edition (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2012), 54, 93, 101.
[22] Charles K. Wolfe, *A Good-Natured Riot: The Birth of the Grand Ole Opry* (Nashville: Country Music Foundation and Vanderbilt University Press, 1999).

names in the business to headline the show, including Minnie Pearl, Eddy Arnold and His Tennessee Plowboys, and the Willis Brothers. He also showcased his developing stable of local talent with Pops Stoneman and the Stoneman Family. Presenting country music in this hallowed hall bordered on sacrilegious. But regardless of this uneven matching of genre and venue, no one could deny the event's popularity. Gay and company sold out two shows that night and raked in $22,000, a record for Constitution Hall at that point.[23] The previous record belonged to Polish classical pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski, who earned a mere $12,000.[24]

Gay turned that one night's success into a standing engagement at Constitution Hall initially set for 52 Saturday nights beginning on April 17, 1948. Meanwhile, the negotiation of cultural power between the insurgent hillbilly genre and the pearl-clutching DAR played out in the press. Fred Hand, the manager of the hall, told the *Baltimore Sun* that "There is some sort of revolution going on," in reference to the debut of the hillbilly acts at the revered concert venue.[25] And this revolution meant enormous profits, as both the DAR and Gay stood to benefit financially from the booking. For their trouble, the DAR intended to make between $30,000 and $40,000 in rental fees for Gay's use of the space from 8-11 pm every Saturday night for the next year, while Gay hoped to replicate the initial success with his Halloween show. Gay broadcasted the show, which he called *Gay Time*, on WWDC-FM. According to *The Washington Daily News*, Gay wanted to make the program more popular than the *Grand Ole Opry*, basing his ambition on the fact that Constitution Hall's "seats will be softer" than the Ryman Auditorium's and his estimate that about 35 million radio sets would be sold by 1950.[26] And the DAR need not have

[23] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[24] Robert W. Ruth, "Hillbillies Take Over Saturdays At D.A.R.'s Hall in Washington," *The Baltimore Sun* (morning edition), April 8, 1948, 4, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.
[25] Ibid., 1.
[26] Milton Berliner, "A Revolution at Constitution Hall," *The Washington Daily News*, April 7, 1948, 13, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.

worried too much about the reputation of their hall. The *Evening Star* relayed that Gay "refers to his productions as concerts of folk music, rather than hillbilly programs."[27] By describing the music he promoted as folk, Gay skirted the more pejorative designation for the genre and, by extension, its fans.

Despite the class prejudices harbored by the DAR, the women's group could rest easy knowing that Gay only booked white artists for the show. The DAR insisted that Constitution Hall remain a space for white artists to perform. The group's Jim Crow standards had caused serious public relations problems only a few years before Gay brought his hillbillies to town. In 1939, the women enforced their segregationist policy against Marian Anderson, refusing to allow the renowned black opera singer to perform because of her race.[28] The *Daily News* announced that "In keeping with DAR policy, Mr. Gay will not be allowed to use Negro singers, altho [*sic*] spirituals will be an important part of his program."[29] *Gay Time* might bring the city's suspiciously recent transplants, but Gay's show benefited from the record industry's marketing of hillbilly music as the genre of white artists and fans, a necessary stipulation to enter the refined space of Constitution Hall.

An all-white cast and audience not only conformed to the DAR and the city's Jim Crow laws, but it also inadvertently enabled Gay to take the show to the new medium of television. *Gay Time* made its television debut in August 1948, after sixteen weeks of sell-out Saturday night shows at Constitution Hall. The *Washington Post*'s Sonia Stein reported that Washington,

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[27] "Saturday Night Hill-Billy Shows Start Soon in Constitution Hall," *The Evening Star*, April 7, 1948, B-10, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.
[28] Marian Anderson, *My Lord, What a Morning: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking Press, 1956); Raymond Arsenault, *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert That Awakened America* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009); Robert Darden, *Nothing but Love in God's Water: Black Sacred Music from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014), 94.
[29] Berliner, "A Revolution at Constitution Hall," 13, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.

D.C. hoped to emerge as "a big TV center" and noted that media outlets had discussed "televising tourist meccas around town" like monuments and museums. With a good-humored sense of irony and a bit of surprise, Stein asked "what is now being fed to the NBC network for the folks in Boston, New York and other points along the coaxial cable from this cosmopolitan community, this reservoir of culture [?] Hillbilly music!"[30]

In a span of four months, Gay had extended his show's reach from local radio to national television on NBC's early forays into the new medium and earned a reputation as one of the leading men in the business. Gay, along with his cast and crew, made only $750 per broadcast from NBC.[31] But combined with his collection of the ticket sales at Constitution Hall and the sponsorships from his WARL radio shows airing three times a day, Gay emerged as a commercial force in the national hillbilly scene. The *Washington Post* noted that, despite the cornpone humor associated with *Gay Time* and hillbilly music in general, "Nobody kids the 'Gay Time' show . . .. Possibly that's because one million dollars a year makes even chin whiskers and nasal twangs seem like very serious matters."[32]

Gay flooded the Washington airwaves with country music thanks to his ever-growing stable of performers, which continued to mix local talent with artists from other hillbilly shows like the *Grand Ole Opry*. Most importantly for the creation of country music militarism, Gay collaborated with Louis Marshall "Grandpa" Jones at a pivotal moment in both of their careers. Jones had joined the *Grand Ole Opry* in 1946 but left after two years. He had recorded several successful sides for King Records and landed a residency on Richmond, Virginia's *Old*

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[30] Sonia Stein, "*HillBilly Music Shows Way on Television*," *The Washington Post*, August 1, 1948, 1L, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA. NBC had picked up the show in an attempt to compete with ABC's *Hayloft Hoedown*.
[31] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[32] Stein, "*HillBilly Music Shows Way on Television*," 4L, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.

Dominion Barn Dance radio show in 1949.[33] Gay had welcomed the rising hillbilly talent on his show for occasional appearances throughout the late 1940s, but he planned a new kind of gig for Jones in 1951.

When the U.S. joined the fight against North Korea and China, Gay saw an opportunity to expand his brand and endear himself to the soldiers stationed in the Pacific. Using his personal connections to officers in the Pentagon, he booked Jones for a 3-week tour of Japan and the frontlines of the Korean War. In turn, Gay furthered Grandpa Jones's career, boosted WARL's reputation, and cultivated an audience for hillbilly music among the nation's soldiers. This tour helped establish a pipeline for country artists to tour military installations around the globe and laid the groundwork for an increased demand for hillbilly music in the ranks. Thanks to the popularity of the genre among soldiers and the music's presence on the AFRS airwaves, the music industry and the military had noticed soldiers' desire for country music going back to World War II. Many soldiers entered the military as fans of the music, while others discovered the music after serving in the ranks. In this way, Gay had tapped into a market that had emerged organically during the 1940s and eventually used soldier fandom to build his media empire.

Locating the G.I. Hillbilly Market

The War Department officially created the AFRS in May 1942 as a part of the Morale Services Division of Army Special Services. The network established its headquarters in Los Angeles, where it took advantage of the city's concentration of talent and recording facilities. The AFRS recorded their own line of 78-rpm records called "transcriptions" that contained original content produced by the network, rebroadcasts of civilian network programming, and collections of music. It then shipped these discs to G.I. stations around the world for

[33] Louis M. "Grandpa" Jones with Charles K. Wolfe, *Everybody's Grandpa: Fifty Years Behind the Mike* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 124-125.

broadcasting. Wartime programs included officially produced shows like *Command Performance*, *Hymns from Home*, *G.I. Journal*, and *Sports Round-Up*.[34] Each week from 1943 to 1945, AFRS studios created 126 programs, totaling 21,000 transcriptions, which the War Department shipped overseas to the 306 stations in 47 different countries around the globe.[35] This programming included the show "Melody Roundup," a quarter-hour of popular hillbilly artists that aired four to five times per week from 1942 to 1949, in order to slake the demand for what was then a niche market genre.[36]

The AFRS's music and news provided state sanctioned entertainment and current events to the troops at home and abroad. This network also cultivated markets for American music and radio programming that led to what *Billboard* magazine described in 1944 as "Global Americanization." Reporter Lou Frankel made an analogy between this sonic Americanization process and the colonial expeditions of past empires, describing how "In the lush and lusty days of the past, it was trade and desire for virgin territories that made for empire, that carried the flag, any flag, across continents and around the world." "Today, as everyone knows," Frankel's history lesson continued, "the same chore of flag carrying is being, and has been done, by radio."[37] As the U.S. Armed Forces spread across the globe to fight fascism, their radio network colonized the ears of the foreign listening publics. AFRS spread the sound of U.S. democracy, all wrapped in the tantalizing sounds of popular music.

Frankel noted the potential in using soldiers as test markets and compared the programming available on AFRS with the content of stateside commercial networks. He also

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[34] Lou Frankel, "AFRS Global Americanization," *Billboard*, February 5, 1944, 12.
[35] History of Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, press release; Historical: 'On the Air' Articles, Histories, Reports, and Program Records, 1942-1992; Historical Materials; Box 5; Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Record Group (RG) 330; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (NACP); Frankel, "AFRS Global Americanization," *Billboard* February 5, 1944, 12, 19.
[36] Mackenzie, *The Directory of Armed Forces Radio Service Series*, 14.
[37] Frankel, "AFRS Global Americanization," 3.

commented on a creeping preference for hillbilly music in the listening tastes of the soldiers. Pop music dominated the percentages played on both kinds of networks with the AFRS using pop for 44 percent of its original programming, while the domestic networks used it for 35 percent of daily material. Hillbilly represented the next most popular form of music on AFRS, registering 11 percent of original programming. The domestic commercial networks' hillbilly programming accounted for only 6 percent, while light concert music provided almost 16 percent of airtime. According to Frankel, this spike in hillbilly programming represented an answer to soldiers' requests for the musical style and the genre's absence from the civilian network programs issued for the troops. In his opinion, this design for radio offered a lesson for stateside networks. He suggested that "There should be a thought or two here for the network and local station program managers, for if the men overseas want more hillbilly music maybe the networks at home should give their audiences more cowpoke music."[38]

The military demand for hillbilly music continued after the war as well. The AFRS responded with a prerecorded hillbilly radio show hosted by Redd Harper, a singer and star of cowboy films. Harper recorded his show called *Hollywood Roundup* in Los Angeles. The AFRS then shipped transcriptions of the program to its stations around the world for the network's disc jockeys. William T. Allen, editor and publisher of the fan magazine *Jamboree*, highlighted Harper's efforts to bring "folk music" to the military through the AFRS. Allen, writing as a veteran of World War II, praised Harper's efforts and remembered "how hungry we were for Folk Music Entertainment news while overseas" and "how the fellows on my ship used to sit

[38] Ibid., 12.

around the mess hall 'Battling-the-breeze' about the Folk Music Entertainment World" only a few years prior. "Yep," Allen concluded, "you're doing something really worthwhile, Redd."[39]

Redd Harper's show offered soldiers a mixture of Western-themed music, cowpoke humor, and Christianity. Each episode of his *Hollywood Roundup* began with an introduction song played by Harper's backing musicians, the Saddle Kings, who sang their promise to "roundup some songs for you / Maybe a laugh or two." The Saddle Kings played the accompanying music on accordion, fiddle, steel guitar, bass, and rhythm guitar while Harper cut in with the welcoming message: "A Hollywood howdy to you neighbors. This is your old corral pal Redd Harper bringing you a full half hour of cowboy and country music the way you like to hear it, featuring those sweet singing cowpokes the Saddle Kings." In a typical episode, Harper dedicated his first song to an individual serviceman. "Right now," Harper told the AFRS audiences, "I want to fill a special request from Jim White and all of his buddies up there in the navy hospital in San Francisco, with Tim Spencer's famous song 'Room Full of Roses.'" Other songs included "San Antonio Rose," "In My Little Red Book," "Hawaiian War Chant," "Yellow Rose of Texas," and "Your Green Eyes."

The episode closed with Harper sending out a gospel song to two British soldiers who were fans of the show: "We have a typical cowboy gospel number for you folks today and we'd like to dedicate it to British Corporal Tommy Lee over in Korea and also to John Perry down there in New South Wales. It's the ever-popular cowboy hymn and prayer 'Lie Low Little Doggies, Lie Low.'" The song included a recitation in which a cowboy thanks God for being his

[39] Wm. T. Allen, "The Editor's Tally Book," *Jamboree*, December 1948, 2, Printed Materials, Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/ref/collection/Printed/id/3187; George Sanders, "Hollywood Hoedown Lowdown," *Country Song Roundup* (April 1950), 16, Box 3, Country Music Magazine Collection, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection).

"boss" and ponders the theodicy of why God allowed a coyote to kill a prized calf. Harper ended the show by encouraging his listeners to "Go to any church you please, but please, go to church."[40] Harper went on to record a string of Christian country songs directed at children in the 1950s. "I'm a Christian Cowboy," for example, reminded boys that attending Sunday school did not make one a "sissy." He also starred, along with songwriter and AFRS artist Cindy Walker, in the 1951 film *Mr. Texas*, which Billy Graham referred to as "the first Christian Western."[41] With these religious segments, Harper helped define military service by tapping into the white gospel traditions of country music and tying those themes into the U.S.'s Cold War antagonism with atheistic communism.

The stars of the *Grand Ole Opry* brought country music to the troops through tours of military installations during and after World War II. In 1949, the show's biggest names had recorded two broadcasts of the *Opry* for the troops while on a tour of the U.S. Air Force bases in Germany. Tobacco giant R.J. Reynolds sponsored the hillbilly performers, including Roy Acuff, Hank Williams, Red Foley, Minnie Pearl, comedian Rod Brasfield, and Little Jimmy Dickens, at the Berlin Opera House for the *Prince Albert Show*. Billy Robinson, a steel guitarist on the *Opry* staff, traveled with the stars as part of the backing band. Years later, he remembered that "the most beautiful part about the whole thing was the way that the air force, the soldiers, the enlisted men and people just took us right into—it was unbelievable, the response we got from those people." The *Prince Albert Show* portion of the *Opry* aired every Saturday night over the AFRS, so the men were already familiar with, if not fans of the music. Robinson believed that the *Opry*'s visit represented something deeper than entertainment. "[I]t was home. Here the show

[40] *Redd Harper's Hollywood Roundup*, NCPC 03530, sound disc 1, 33-1/3 rpm, Armed Forces Radio and Television Service, X AFRTS (16-inch) EN-81 238, Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter LOC).
[41] "First Christian Western," *Time*, October 8, 1951.

that they'd been listening to every Saturday night, all of a sudden was right in front of them, and, boy, you couldn't believe the response. I mean they wouldn't stop applauding."[42]

Media scholar Susan J. Douglas has written about the communal experience of radio listening as opposed to other forms of media consumption. She argues that through the radio, listeners were "tied by the most gossamer connections to an imagined community of people we sensed loved the same music we did, and to a DJ who often spoke to us in the most intimate, confidential, and inclusive tones." She also suggests that "what radio really did (and still does today) was allow listeners to experience at the same time multiple identities - national, regional, local."[43] That constellation of identities can also include membership in a genre-specific community that could feel more like a family than marketing demographic. For servicemembers stationed around the globe, listening to country music on the AFRS and reading about it in the genre's fan magazines offered a way to participate in both real and imagined communities that tied them to home.

The *Opry*'s stars continued making appearances at installations around the world in the early 1950s, demonstrating to the troops and to civilian fans the genre's connection to the soldiers. Minnie Pearl, Rod Brasfield, and Red Foley returned to Germany in 1950, with Pearl providing her cornpone commentary on the trip for *Country Song Roundup* as a "Furrin' Coorespndent."[44] Roy Acuff and Hank Williams also played Air Force bases in Alaska and Germany. *National Hillbilly News* noted how "Opry entertainers all are anxious to make the Air Force troops, but the number going has to be 'rationed,' so as not to take too many of them away

[42] Interview with Billy Robinson by John W. Rumble, November 23, 1998, OHC242, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.
[43] Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos 'n' Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 22, 24.
[44] Minnie Pearl, "Up in the Air with Minnie," *Country Song Roundup* (August 1950), 12, 29, Box 3, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.

from millions of listeners back home at one time."[45] Whether during war or peace, country music stars traveled away from their regular gigs to tour the bases of the Cold War military, endearing themselves to the troops in the process.

Grandpa Jones Invades Korea

Connie B. Gay wanted to reach those same military audiences and saw the U.S. involvement in the Korean War as an opportunity to build his brand. On March 4, 1951, Gay, Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren, which consisted of Jones' wife Ramona and fellow *Old Dominion Barn Dance* star Mary Klick, began their trek to the war-torn Korean peninsula. The journey began when U.S. Army flew the four-person group from Washington, D.C. to Japan for a two-day tour.[46] On March 10, the army fitted the group with G.I. uniforms and delivered them to the AFRS station Radio Tokyo for an on-air performance. Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren then began an intense schedule of personal appearances over the next 36 hours, playing hospital auditoriums and giving bedside performances for soldiers convalescing at the Tokyo Army Hospital and the 361st Station Hospital.[47] They then joined a Special Services' country band known as Western Jamboree to play a free show for all Allied personnel at the Far East Armed Forces' theater in Tokyo on March 12. Soldier newspaper *Stars & Stripes* promised the concert would offer "the greatest aggregation of western talent ever seen in Japan" and alerted readers the AFRS would record and rebroadcast the show.[48]

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[45] "WSM Grand Ole Opry Takes Off for Alaska," *National Hillbilly News* (March-April 1950), 42, Box 57, Folder: "Feuding, Hillbilly, Honky Tonk," Sam DeVincent Collection Ephemera, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter NMAH Archives Center).
[46] " 'Barn Dance' Stars Leave For Far East," *Richmond News Leader*, Monday, March 5, 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.
[47] "Grandpa Jones Celebrity Unit" memo, General Headquarters, Far East Command, Special Services Section, Recreation Division, 10 March 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.
[48] "Hillbillies Play FEAF Theater," *Stars & Stripes* (Pacific), March 12, 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.

The transcription aired on the AFRS program "Jamboree" hosted by Rusty Knight, who introduced Gay as "the maker of hillbilly and western stars." Taking advantage of the massive reach of AFRS, Gay wasted no time in plugging radio stations back home before introducing Grandpa Jones. "We're a powerful long way from station WRVA in Richmond and station WARL in Arlington but powerful glad to be here," Gay began. "Let's get things started by bringing out the 'old coon hunter,' a man featured on the *Old Dominion Barn Dance* at present, no, featured at present out of Tokyo, then back at the *Old Dominion Barn Dance*. You used to hear him on the *Grand Ole Opry*. He's the 'old coon hunter' - Grandpa Jones!"[49]

Only 37-years-old at the time, Jones performed his geriatric character, complete with banjo, a false bushy grey moustache, and wire-rimmed glasses, for the live audience and the mix of soldiers and civilians listening over AFRS across the Far East network. The crowd cheered as Jones stepped to the microphone to say, "Thank you, I'm awful proud to be here, too, just like Connie. We hope we can do a little good over here." He then launched into his mixture of cornpone humor with his latest releases on King Records. Jones jokingly introduced the first song title as "Son, Get Up and Light the Lamp, I Think I Done Knocked One of Your Ma's Eyes Out" before correcting himself and playing his hit "Mountain Dew," a tribute to the glories of moonshine liquor.[50] The remainder of the show featured more of Jones' humor and duets with Mary Klick, along with the gospel number "I'll Fly Away."[51]

Grandpa Jones likely felt at home singing to the soldiers. He had joined the U.S. Army in 1944 and served for two years in a Combat MP battalion in Germany. While overseas, he found

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[49] "Grandpa Jones and his Grandchildren in Tokyo - Part 1," 1951-03-10, Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/2270/rec/7.
[50] Ibid.
[51] "Grandpa Jones and his Grandchildren in Tokyo - Part 2," 1951-03-10, Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/2271/rec/8.

success on the AFRS playing on a live radio program with four other soldiers, going by the name The Munich Mountaineers.[52] The band played for five months on the radio, receiving an overwhelmingly positive response from Americans and Germans alike. Jones remembered that the Munich Mountaineers "started getting stacks of fan mail from lonely GIs who hadn't been able to hear any real country music since they got overseas; most of the military music was brass bands, and the touring show troupes consisted of pop singers like Al Jolson." Their success on the radio turned into demand for live performances, and the Munich Mountaineers performed at the Red Cross Hall and at beer gardens around Munich.[53] Fan magazine *National Hillbilly News* reported in its May-June 1950 issue that Jones "still receives mail from ex-GI's who remember his broadcasts 'over there.'"[54] He had experienced modest success before the war, serving as a regular performer on an Akron, Ohio radio station's "Friday Night Special." However, his time on the AFRS prepared him for even more postwar success as a recording artist for the King label and as a member of the *Grand Ole Opry* in 1946.[55] Performing for so many soldiers could yield big results, and Jones and Gay looked to make the most of their volunteer trip to Korea.

On March 15, 1951, Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren, along with Connie Gay, flew from Japan to Taegu, South Korea. There, they joined the men of the Eighth United States Army, Korea (EUSAK), with whom they would spend the next two weeks. They played their first show to 400 patients at a field hospital only an hour and half after landing and followed that performance with another later that night at the EUSAK theater.[56] Official reports relayed that

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[52] "Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren" press release, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA; Jones, *Everybody's Grandpa*, 90.
[53] Jones, *Everybody's Grandpa*, 90-91.
[54] Arlie Kinkade, "This, That, 'n' the Other," *National Hillbilly News: The Entertainer's News*, May-June 1950, 12, Sam DeVincent Ephemera Collection, NMAH Archives Center.
[55] "Musical Mountaineer," *Country Song Roundup*, February 1951, 8, Box 3, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.
[56] Daily report; Special Services Section, Staff Section Report, March 1951; Eighth U.S. Army Special Services Section; Staff Section Reports, 1950-58, Declassified (EUAK Special Services Reports, Declassified); January 1950

"Many stood outside the doors of the theater just to hear the music."[57] Gay wasted no time in his role as concert promoter and radio personality in finding ways to connect the men in the field with the radio listeners back home. Thanks to a telephone connection to WARL, Gay brought the war to his Washington, D.C. area listeners on his second day in the country. "Hello, friends. How are you? I'm speaking to you from somewhere in Korea, where I'm with the Eighth United States Army," he related back to the states. "With me, of course, are Grandpa Jones and the Grandchildren and whole lot of your G.I.s . . .. Out a few feet from where I stand are hundreds of fighting men, waiting for our show to start and incidentally, they've been going wild over it." Gay wanted listeners, particularly the parents of the soldiers, to know that these men appeared in good health and spirits—and that they loved hillbilly music. The U.S. Army simply had an errand to complete, and then they would return home in one piece. "They've got a job to do over here, and they're doing it well," he assured eager audiences back home. "That job, of course, is killing communists."[58]

Despite Gay's assurances otherwise, Americans worried about the soldiers in their families. Army officials tried to assuage these worries by sending letters and pictures to parents during basic training. Appreciative parents wrote back to the army to let them know how much they cared for their sons. After receiving one such update, the grateful mother of Private William H. Wirth wrote to an army official that "Like any mother feels, I do have a wonderful Son, he has always been good . . .. He has never been away from home, which makes me very lonesome

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to October 1951; Records of U.S. Army Operational, Tactical, and Support Organizations (World War II and Thereafter), RG 338; NACP; First Lt. Stewart N. Powell, "Grandpa Jones Tour of Korea 15-29 March 1951" memo, Headquarters, Eighth United States Army Korea, Office of the Special Services Officer, 23 June 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.

[57] First Lt. Stewart N. Powell, "Grandpa Jones Tour of Korea 15-29 March 1951" memo, Headquarters, Eighth United States Army Korea, Office of the Special Services Officer, 23 June 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.

[58] "Connie B. Gay interviews Eighth United States Army Korean War Soldiers," Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/2273/rec/4.

for him, as he is the only child I have."[59] Gay did his part to connect parents and soldiers, as well. "I run into a lot of wonderful fellas from WARL land," he told his radio listeners and proceeded to interview six soldiers from northern Virginia and Maryland stationed in Korea. Speaking with Private Eddie L. Bowman from Baltimore, Gay asked if the soldier wanted to deliver a message for the folks at home. "Tell my mother that I'm alright," Private Bowman replied. Gay and the soldiers also took the opportunity to express their distaste for the Korean peninsula. When Gay asked Sergeant Charles P. Franks, a tank commander from Alexandria, Virginia, what he thought of the place, Franks answered, "Well, I think it stinks . . .. Korea is the latrine of the world." Incidentally, the sergeant mentioned that his 20-year-old sister worked at the Pentagon, and Gay got in a plug, telling him to write the folks back home and tell them that WARL had visited.[60]

The tour continued until the end of March, totaling 34 performances in 14 days in venues ranging from combat division encampments, corps headquarters, and field hospitals to service commands and airfields. Before Gay and Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren departed the peninsula, the hillbilly troupe had performed for more than 38,000 soldiers.[61] Their impact remained even bigger when considering the intercontinental reach of the AFRS, where soldiers and civilians could hear transcriptions of their show. Meanwhile, Gay's broadcasts of the tour updates over the WARL airwaves relayed to the folks back in the Washington, D.C. area that he and Grandpa Jones had experienced the war firsthand.

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[59] Mrs. Sawyers letter, January 23, 1951; 330.11 1951, Jan.-Feb.; Box 216; General Correspondence, Jan. 1951 - Jan. 1953; Office of the Secretary of the Army, RG 335; NACP.
[60] Connie B. Gay interviews Eighth United States Army Korean War Soldiers, Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/2273/rec/4.
[61] First Lt. Stewart N. Powell, "Grandpa Jones Tour of Korea 15-29 March 1951" memo, Headquarters, Eighth United States Army Korea, Office of the Special Services Officer, 23 June 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.

Before returning to the U.S. at the end of March, Gay sent one last message back to Arlington that displayed the racism he harbored towards the Asian people he had encountered. Sounding like a battle-scarred vet after his two weeks with the EUSAK, Gay told WARL listeners, "I have just returned from the frontlines of Korea. I can assure you that I never want to go there again. Of all the Godforsaken places on earth, Korea is it. It's dirty, filthy . . .. It's the only country on earth where I could not find someone to say anything nice about it." But he delivered a positive assessment of the battle operations, believing that "Our boys are doing a magnificent job in Korea. They're killing more Chinese than Carter's has little liver pills," a reference to the patent medicine popular with rural customers since the nineteenth century.[62] That folksy reference signaled Gay's insider status to the other white, rural-to-urban transplants listening to his station, letting them know that one of their own had checked in on the servicemembers in their families.

Gay and the music he booked had succeeded in its mission of selling country music to the soldiers and it paved the way for even more. "Our hillbilly entertainment has been like a gift from heaven to the GIs," he told his home station, and he vowed, "When I get back home, I'm gonna go hogwild to get more of the stars to come over here for a visit . . . Red Foley, Hank Snow, Eddy Arnold, and so forth. By golly, they deserve the best."[63] Hank Snow and Ernest Tubb, both of whom were stars on the *Grand Ole Opry*, did tour the Pacific in 1953, playing for

[62] "Connie B. Gay Korean tour report," Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/2272/rec/5.
[63] Connie B. Gay Korean tour report, Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/2272/rec/5.

more than 75,000 soldiers in Japan and Korea.[64] An official report of the tour by the Eighth U.S. Army Special Services remarked that "response to this type of music is overwhelming."[65]

With this first Korean tour, Gay had linked hillbilly music to patriotic service for his Washington, D.C. listening public and for the men and women serving in the Far East. A favorable article in the *Washington Post* described Gay as "probably the only entertainer who prides himself on how small some of his audiences are . . .. The audiences of two and three to which the four-man Gay troupe played with pleasure were crouching in foxholes and behind Sherman tanks on the front lines of Korea." The *Post* reporter made it clear that, while Gay had spent $3,000 to take Jones and his band to Korea, the positive publicity had made the trip worth it. "The army was so pleased with the results that it has now hired two small troupes of hillbilly talent to play to the boys," including a return by Mary Klick.[66]

Other artists from other genres had toured Korea, but none had exposed themselves to the dangerous conditions experienced by soldiers in the same way as Jones' group. Pop singers and comedians like Al Jolson, Bob Hope, and Jack Benny gave camp shows for the men and women stationed in the Pacific. These entertainers required large entourages and piano accompaniment and did not travel to the foxholes like the less famous Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren. Grandpa Jones and Connie Gay succeeded and made hillbilly fans out of soldiers because the sheer portability of the genre's instrumentation, a banjo, guitar, fiddle, and voice, meant that these artists could travel light and extend their tour far into the Korean zone of conflict.[67] Jones

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[64] "Plea For More Country Music Brings Op'ry Stars Half-Way 'Round World To Korea; 75,000 United Nations Men Entertained By Tubb, Childre, Snow," *Pickin' and Singin' News: The Nation-Wide Country Music Newspaper* (Audition Edition), 1, 8, Box: Oversized (J8b19), Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (hereinafter Southern Folklife Collection); "Breakfast at the Opry," Part 1, Digital Archives, FLA, http://digi.countrymusichalloffame.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/musicaudio/id/529/rec/1.
[65] Daily Activity Reports; March 1953; EUAK Special Services Reports, Declassified; RG 338; NACP.
[66] Sonia Stein, "He's Gay in Foxhole or Foyer," *The Washington Post*, July 22, 1951, Section IV, 1, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.
[67] Ibid.

and his band had performed on the back of army "lowboy" trucks, which usually carried heavy artillery. A report from the Far East Command's Public Information Office described how these makeshift stages used "nothing but Korea's drab hills pitted with foxholes and gun emplacements as a backdrop." Colonel Dennis Moore, regimental commander of the 15th Infantry, U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division, awarded Jones and his Grandchildren the division's "Can Do" award, usually bestowed upon individual units.[68]

When the U.S. Army recognized that sacrifice, a government institution recognized hillbilly music as a respectable form of labor and entertainment. The army valued the genre's contribution to the war effort. Major General Edward F. Witsell, the Adjutant General of the Department of the Army, wrote to Gay, letting him know he had received numerous reports of the tremendous reception Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren had received in Japan and Korea. "It is a proud record," he told Gay and heaped praise on his willingness to perform "within 200 yards of the front lines." Likewise, Witsell expressed his admiration for Gay and Jones' ability to entertain the diverse ranks of United Nations forces, who hailed from England, Australia, Greece, France, and the U.S. "May I, therefore, officially and personally express the appreciation of the Department of the Army to you, and to Mr. Louis Jones, Mrs. Ramona Jones and Miss Mary Klick for your rare contribution to the welfare and morale of our Armed Forces."[69] Connie B. Gay and Grandpa Jones and His Grandchildren volunteered their time and risked their safety to entertain the troops. They earned the soldiers' respect and fandom in the process.

Racial Disparities in Military Musical Culture

[68] "Grandpa Jones Group Given "Can Do" Awards" press release, General Headquarters, Far East Command, Public Information Office, 28 March 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.
[69] Major General Edward F. Witsell to Connie B. Gay, 26 April 1951, Box 14, Folder 9, Connie Gay collection, FLA.

The popularity of country music with U.S. soldiers created more reasons for the AFRS to play the genre on its airwaves and more chances for the music's artists to tour the military's global network of installations. This reciprocal relationship inherently benefited the genre's white musicians and promoters. Country music never was the exclusive dominion of white artists and fans. Yet, since the early twentieth century, the record industry has segregated the genre and marketed it as music most associated with the white working class.[70] When the military catered to the tastes of its country music fans, the government gave an implicit financial endorsement of that musical segregation.

Country music tours and AFRS programs also encouraged soldiers' demand for the genre. Elton Britt, following the success of Jones' tour, visited the troops in Korea in late 1951. Fan magazine *Country Song Roundup* praised Britt for his willingness to make the trip, where he appeared in formal venues and "hundreds of makeshift open-air platforms, in all kinds of weather and under all sorts of conditions, playing to more than 80,000 soldiers." Britt testified to the soldiers' appreciation, telling the magazine, "I never saw anything to compare to those soldiers, with their rifles on their backs, jammed all around the little stages we set up." The country singer knew from experience how an association with wartime patriotism could yield real profits. Britt's WWII-era release "There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere" had produced one of the biggest hits of the 1940s, crossing over into the pop charts where it secured the number one position for months in 1942. And following Jones' trip to Korea, Britt recognized the power conveyed in a narrative about a white musician who risked his own safety to entertain the troops.[71]

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[70] Pecknold, *Hidden in the Mix*; Miller, *Segregating Sound*.

[71] "Elton Britt Brings Folk Music to the Troops in Korea," *Country Song Roundup* (December 1951), 5, Box 3, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection; Louis Hatchett and W.K. McCeil, " 'There's a Star Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere': The Story Behind Its Success," in *Country Music Goes to War*, 33-42.

In 1952, *Country Song Roundup* reported that country music had swept "the European continent like a prairie fire" and that as the "Music of America," country music "draws people like a magnetic force to their radio sets." European civilians and American soldiers alike could tune into the AFRS broadcast from Frankfurt, Germany six days a week to hear Sergeant First Class Bill Carrigan host the program *Hillbilly Gasthaus*. Carrigan, who went by the name "Uncle Willie" on the air, was from Columbia, Tennessee, "where he learned to love hillbilly and country music," worked as a disc jockey in Nashville, and became "personally acquainted with many of the stars of the Ryman Auditorium's Grand Ole Opry." Besides spinning records on the AFRS, Carrigan hosted soldier bands, including one called The Country Boys and another called Seven Texans and a Yank. *Country Song Roundup* printed a photograph of The Country Boys, who posed in uniform with their instruments in front of a Confederate battle flag.[72]

AFRS also aired the program *Carolina Cotton Calls*, starring hillbilly chanteuse Carolina Cotton, a native Arkansan known for her near-white, blonde hair and dazzling yodeling abilities.[73] Born Helen Hagstrom, Cotton had honed her talents in California's Western swing bands, singing with Spade Cooley and Bob Wills in the West Coast honky tonk circuit, along with USO tours during WWII. Throughout the Korean War, Cotton recorded radio transcriptions of her show for the AFRS, which highlighted her fellow Western Swing collaborators.[74] She toured Korea in January 1953, visiting hospitals, making promotional recordings for the AFRS, and playing 14 performances for nearly 14,000 soldiers in 5 days.[75] Her Jean Harlow-like hair color had earned Cotton the nickname "The Yodeling Blonde Bombshell." This combination of

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[72] "Europe Goes Hillbilly," *Country Song Roundup* (June 1952), 16, Box 60, Folder F, Sam DeVincent Collection - Ephemera, NMAH Archives Center.
[73] "Show Biz," *Army Times*, October 25, 1952, 10. Cotton also toured U.S. installations in Korea as part of an AFRS roadshow in December 1952. See *Army Times*, December 20, 1952, 1.
[74] Ivan M. Tribe, "Carolina Cotton," in *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 79.
[75] Daily Activities Report of 'Carolina Cotton Show,' 1 February 1953; January 1953; EUAK Special Services Reports, Declassified; RG 338, NACP.

physical appearance and musical ability satisfied two soldier desires at once. By 1953, the Eighth U.S. Army Special Services had honed in on the fact that soldiers went wild for country music, and as one report noted, the "men want leg shows above all."[76] With Carolina Cotton, they received a bit of both.

Like Redd Harper, Cotton's show followed a pattern of solider dedications, scripted cornpone humor, Western-themed music, and Christian messaging. Her backing band, the Rhythm Riders, included some of California's hottest country and Western Swing players, including Joe Maphis, Slim Duncan, George Bamby, Darol Rice, and Mike Barton. After a brief musical introduction, Cotton jumped in with a cheerful greeting of "Well, hi there fellas and gals. This is Carolina Cotton with 15 minutes we've roped and tied, so you just hold that corral gate open wide while we brand a few musical mavericks for you." On one episode, the Rhythm Riders delivered a dedication of the gospel song "Steal Away," which Cotton announced was requested by Airman Second Class Albert Hollingsworth, adding, "and he said the hymn was his favorite and his family's favorite so could we beam it out to him about now?" And like Harper, Cotton also encouraged more requests, telling fans to write to her in care of the Armed Forces Radio Service, Hollywood, USA. She closed her appearances with the benediction "Bye now, and may the good Lord keep his arms around you."[77]

Carolina Cotton Calls broadcasted an implicit racial message within its explicit packaging of country music and Cold War Christianity. Her show, as well as contemporaries like Redd Harper and the *Grand Ole Opry*, inherently infused the AFRS airwaves with the sounds of white musical culture from the U.S. South and Southwest. And while the U.S. Army broadcasted white hillbilly musicians on Armed Forces Radio, the military minimized the presence of African

[76] Daily Activity Reports; October 1951; EUAK Special Services Reports, Declassified; RG 338; NACP.
[77] *Carolina Cotton Calls*, 83 (AFRTS16-10900), Recorded Sound Division, LOC.

American culture on their airwaves. AFRS had catered to black soldiers during World War II with shows like *Jubilee* that featured Duke Ellington, Lena Horne, and other top African American artists of the day but had discontinued production in 1949. The AFRS reinstated *Jubilee* from 1952 to 1953, yet the new episodes produced during this brief resurrection for the Korean War featured only white performers like Merv Griffin and the Andrews Sisters, greatly diminishing its appeal to black troops.[78] Ironically, the U.S. Army had emerged as the nation's most integrated space. Beginning with President Truman's Executive Order 9981 in 1948, the military began its incremental march towards desegregating the ranks which accelerated during the Korean War.[79] The military wanted black labor and could always acquire more black soldiers through the draft. But over the course of the 1950s, the Pentagon closed the paths for African American culture to claim a space in the U.S. Armed Forces. The AFRS simply replicated the color line of the civilian music industry, while the Pentagon pushed a progressive racial mandate well ahead of the nation's civilian racial policies.

The AFRS did play some black artists. Jazz remained one of the most heavily featured genres on the network. Yet the type of jazz programmed for soldiers tended towards the retro sounds of Dixieland, including the shows *Kid Ory, Mostly Dixie,* and *Basin Street Jazz*, or the mainstream swing favored by whites on *Navy Swings*. Blues and R&B remained largely absent from the AFRS transcriptions until the network began rebroadcasting the CBS program *Camel Rock 'N Roll Party* in 1957, although the use of the Count Basie Orchestra as the house band made this program little more than a swing show rebranded for the times.[80] AFRS also featured

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[78] Lauren Rebecca Sklaroff, *Black Culture and the New Deal: The Quest for Civil Rights in the Roosevelt Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2009), 191.
[79] Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the US Armed Forces*; McGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*; Myers, *Black White, and Olive Drab*; Neil R. McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South*, intro. Morton Sosna (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997); Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For*?; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 137.
[80] Mackenzie, *The Directory of the Armed Forces Radio Service Series*, 182.

black choirs. The program *Fisk Jubilee* starred the choir from Nashville's Fisk University, while the program *Negro College Choir* relied on a rotating cast of singing groups from different historically black colleges and universities. Although these shows offered exclusively black content, they hardly represented the current trends in black popular music. Instead of showcasing the latest releases in blues and R&B, the AFRS played black music that conformed to what white network programmers imagined as suitable content for the morale and wellbeing of the troops.

Nor could wartime music experience translate into postwar success for African American artists the way it did for someone like Grandpa Jones. Cecil Gant, a black pianist and singer from Columbia, Tennessee, had linked military service and the uncertainty of long-distance romance to score the biggest hit of his brief career. Billing himself as "Private Cecil Gant" and wearing his army uniform on stage, Gant embodied a musical expression of the Double V campaign. Launched by the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1942, the Double V campaign sought to leverage African American service in World War II to deliver civil rights advances long denied black soldiers and civilians during previous wars.[81] To emphasize this sound and service connection, Gant called himself the "G.I. Sing-Sation," playing piano in a style that drew comparisons to Fats Waller and singing in a baritone that split the difference between Louis Armstrong's gravelly tones and Nat "King" Cole's husky smoothness.[82]

This combination of vocal delivery and piano performance scored Gant a hit in 1944 with the ballad "I Wonder," which proved so popular that by February 1945, Louis Armstrong, Louis Prima, Roosevelt Sykes, Warren Evans, Dan Grissom, and a copycat with the sobriquet Private

[81] James G. Thompson, "Should I Sacrifice to Live 'Half-American?': Suggest Double VV for Double Victory Against Axis Forces and Ugly Prejudices on the Home Front," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942.
[82] "Author of Juke Hit Finds Legal Trouble," *Billboard*, September 2, 1944, 62; "Private Cecil 'I Wonder' Gant," *Billboard*, November 10, 1945, 36; "Apollo's Feature," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 1, 1945, 25.

Lloyd Thompson had released their own versions.[83] Private Gant sang "I Wonder" in plaintive tones, seemingly resigned to the loss of his love and accompanied himself on the piano. "I wonder my little darling / Where can you be tonight / While the moon is shining bright / I wonder." Without being near, Gant could only speculate about his lover's whereabouts. "Baby I've been through, I've been through lovers' lane / I've been making life just the same / I've been traveling for miles around / Trying to find the one I love, come on / I wonder well, well, well, little baby / Will you think of me everyday?" Gant makes clear in the last words of the song that it is he who has traveled away from his love, with the devastating tag, "Though I may be a million miles away / I wonder."[84]

In the middle of the massive social disruption caused by World War II, Gant's sentiment undoubtedly resonated with military personnel of all races who experienced separation from their partners. The sparse production of this tune, solo vocal and piano with only the natural reverb of the room, matches the resignation in Gant's voice and lyrics. Heard as such, the titular refrain, "I Wonder," came off with a sardonic, almost sarcastic tone. Gant knew his love was gone. He knew that, in his absence, another had taken his place. Perhaps because he met his beloved the same way, taking the place of another soldier shipped overseas to win the Double V. Regardless of these circumstances, Gant betrayed an acceptance that his woman had already gone to another man. Domestic bliss, like racial equality, remained in the realm of fantasy for many soldiers who were deployed or recently returned home in the wake of a world war.

While Gant began playing in Nashville and would end his career there, "I Wonder" first hit in Los Angeles, where the army had stationed the Tennessee native. The initial response in

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[83] Tony Russell, "Cecil Gant," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, eds. Tony Russell et. al, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 213; *Billboard*, February 3, 1945, 16.
[84] Pvt. Cecil Gant, "I Wonder," Gilt-Edge Records 500 CG1, 1944, 78 rpm.

1944 proved so great that Johnny Otis (best known for his 1958 hit "Willie and the Hand Jive") recalled how he heard Gant's tune "on the jukeboxes all over Central Avenue" in Los Angeles. "I Wonder" generated unparalleled sales and jukebox plays while awakening the West Coast record industry to the need for labels targeting black music and audiences. Gant did experience enormous success in the race records market, spending 28 weeks in the top ten of *Billboard*'s "Harlem" Hit Parade. [85] But Private Cecil Gant could not translate his martial image into a lasting career. Nor did he embark on tours for the military crowds that had initially boosted his success.

Gant spent the late 1940s building Nashville's reputation as a force in the recording industry, cutting more than 100 songs for Bullet Records, the first recording company in the city. Bullet recorded a mixture of country and R&B artists, and owner Jim Bulleit recalled that the country music records his label released failed to make much of a splash in the immediate postwar years. He recorded white country artists like Minnie Pearl, Pee Wee King, Sheb Wooley, and Clyde Moody, an artist in Connie Gay's stable, but never sold these records in large numbers. The label "had a good sale if we got between 25,000 and 50,000" on a hillbilly record Bulleit remembered years later. "That didn't amount to much." He struck gold with R&B artists Wynonie Harris and Cecil Gant. Bulleit could always bank on selling at least 100,000 copies of a Gant record and could more than recoup the costs because, according to his recollection, artists like Harris and Gant only wanted payment as a one-time, flat fee rather than receive royalty checks on their records. This arrangement meant that Bulleit and the label would collect money on all the records sold from these artists in perpetuity. Bulleit described how the label made a

[85] Russell, "Cecil Gant," 213.

"killing" on these artists, revealing that for "Cecil Gant, we paid $60" for each session "and then the two sidemen $30, which was $120, and we always made money on Cecil."[86]

These predatory business practices extended to encouraging Gant's alcoholism. Bassist Ernie Newton recalled how he would join his fellow session musician Owen Bradley and producer Paul Cohen in plying Gant with booze and listening to him improvise blues songs. Gant would "make them up as he went along," Newton claimed. "He'd tell Paul, he'd say, 'Pour me some more words.' Cohen would pour him some more booze in a glass and he'd sit up there and drink it. He'd make those things up as he went along." Clearly enamored with Gant's abilities, Newton enthused "boy, you talk about playing the blues. Man, we played just exactly what we wanted to play, and Cecil sang and played the piano, played great."[87]

On March 28, 1948, Nashville's white newspaper *The Tennessean* featured a profile of Bullet records, noting its position as the first record company headquartered in Nashville, its role in establishing the first record pressing plant in the South, and the importance of Private Cecil Gant to the label's success. The paper described Gant as Bullet's "most prolific recorder and top individual artist." The profile noted the popularity of his recordings "Nashville Jumps" and "Boozie Boogie" while perpetuating the common story that Gant could sit down at the piano and spontaneously compose dozens of songs. "Bulleit and Gant never discuss what tunes he is to record," the reporter claimed, "and Gant, whose formal musical education doesn't go much further than an ability to distinguish the white keys from the black, just sits down at the piano, messes around a little, and comes up with a tune." The report also described that Gant sold so

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[86] Interview with Jim Bulleit by John W. Rumble, OHC47, May 9, 1983, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA; Martin Hawkins, *A Shot in the Dark: Making Records in Nashville, 1945-1955* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press and the Country Music Foundation Press, 2006).
[87] Interview with Ernie Newton by Douglas Green, OH136-LC, September 24, 1974, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.

well because so many of his songs conveyed a "morbid, 'Gloomy Sunday' like fascination for Negroes, who customarily buy two copies of it at a time. It seems that they play them over and over, to induce melancholy—when one is worn out they start on the second."[88] In the space of a few lines, this reporter managed to devalue Gant's talent by ascribing it to an inborn gift rather than the outcome of years of labor on the road while essentializing his appeal to African American audiences as the result of a bio-cultural hardwiring for sad songs. The white press could demean black talent, labor, and taste even in its attempts to praise a black man who helped build Music City, U.S.A.

Besides cutting bankable sides for Bullet Records, Gant contributed memorable piano work to a few of the songs by white artists recorded in Nashville's growing number of studios. He logged work as a session pianist for Red Foley, taking driving piano breaks on the songs "Hobo Boogie" and "Paging Mister Jackson."[89] But while Foley enjoyed success as a member of the *Grand Ole Opry* and toured the world through the network of military bases, Gant struggled as a black road musician in the Jim Crow South. A life of self-abuse hastened his demise. Just as he prepared to leave Nashville for a gig in Clarksville, Tennessee, Gant died suddenly of either a heart attack or complications from pneumoia in February 1951 at just 38 years-old. His family buried him in the veterans' section of Highland Park Cemetery in Cleveland, Ohio.

Connie B. Gay Gets Rich

In October 1951, only six months after his return from Korea, Gay took another group of country music performers on a 21-day tour of installations in the Caribbean, playing shows on Puerto Rico, Cuba, Trinidad, and across the sea in Panama's Canal Zone. The Armed Forces Professional Entertainment Branch of the Special Services Division and the USO Camp Shows

[88] Bill Holder, "Bullet Hits the Bull's Eye," *The Tennessean*, March 28, 1948, 70, 71.
[89] "Cecil 'I Wonder' Gant Dies of a Heart Attack," *Chicago Defender*, February 17, 1951.

sponsored the trip. The press for the tour touted Gay's recent tour of Korea, where he and Grandpa Jones "went from Pusan to the foxholes, [and] entertained UN troops all the way."[90] Gay opted not to take Jones on this run of the island bases. Instead, he assembled a new group that included guitarist Billie Grammer, fiddler Chubby Wise, square dance caller Ralph Case, and an accordionist-comic named Jimmy Dean.[91]

At the time, the young Dean's stage attire included oversized torn pants, suspenders, a ragged hat turned to the side, no shoes, blacked out teeth, and the stage name "Screwball" Dean.[92] Connie Gay would help change all that. Gay remembered discovering Dean in a Washington, D.C. beer joint, where the performer was "doing rube comedy and playing an accordion."[93] A native of Plainview, Texas, Dean joined the air force in 1946 and served for three years. During that time, he entertained his fellow airmen by playing guitar, piano, and accordion and was stationed at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington. Encouraged by the reception he received on base, Dean formed a musical group with a few air force friends and began playing in the local bars. Gay saw artistic and commercial potentials in the unpolished comedian and singer and tutored him in the entertainment business. Dean swapped his buffoonish costume for a tailored cowboy suit, and Gay booked him on a tour of military installations throughout the Caribbean in 1951 and a tour of bases in Europe in 1953. Dean soon emerged as the star of Gay's *Town and Country Time* radio show on WARL, backed by the band Gay hired for him, the Texas Wildcats.[94] When Gay decided to turn his radio program into a

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[90] "Top Hillbilly Impresario And Troupe Scheduled Here For Show Oct. 14," *Caribbean Breeze*, October 6, 1951, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.
[91] "Connie B. Gay & Troupe Caribbean Tour," press release, 19 September 1951, Information Branch, Special Services Division, Department of the Army, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.
[92] "Hillbillies Sweep Isthmus," *The Nation*, October 19, 1951, Box 17, Scrapbook, Gay collection, FLA.
[93] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[94] George Forsythe, "Service Gave Jimmy Start," *Boston Traveler*, May 2, 1957, Section B, 50, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.

syndicated television show, he chose Dean as its star.[95] By 1956, the new show aired on 40 television stations across the country and its audio was transcribed for broadcast over nearly 2,000 radio stations thanks to sponsorship by the U.S. Defense Department.[96]

In March 1957, Dean's television exposure led to a deal with CBS, where he hosted the network's national morning program, called *The Jimmy Dean Show* to compete with NBC's *Today*.[97] Three months later, the *Jimmy Dean Show* landed the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* promoting the "Festival of the Fleets" in Norfolk, Virginia. This event brought together 115 other ships from 18 nations. The cover photograph showed Dean and his band on the deck of the Portuguese ship *Corte Real*. Black sailors from the Dominican ship *Generalissimo* played saxophones, tubas, and congas, while Dean and the Texas Wildcats, in their cowboy attire, played acoustic guitar and fiddle, creating what must have been a pioneering sound in interracial, global musical collaboration. The *Times* reported that "some 54,000 sailors who—despite the barrier of language—mingled, had fun and became friendly through receptions, dances and festive entertainments on ship and shore."[98]

Dean spent the week telecasting from the decks of the *USS Valley Forge* and performing shows for sailors aboard individual ships.[99] By the fall of that year, Dean's show displaced *Today* in the ratings thanks to his mixture of downhome charm, telegenic looks, a rotating cast of country musicians, a ventriloquist, and co-host Jan Crockett, Miss Florida 1951.[100] Throughout this meteoric rise, Dean, under the tutelage of Gay, used his association with the armed forces to

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[95] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[96] June Bundy, "C&W. Music Holds Line in Video Battle," *Billboard*, March 3, 1956, 63.
[97] Lawrence Laurent, "The Came the Dawn: CBS Finds Corn Field," *The Washington Post* and *Times Herald*, April 9, 1957, B15, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA; Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[98] "Festival of the Fleets," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 16, 1957, 4, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.
[99] "TV and the Naval Review: Jimmy Dean and Arlene Francis Shows Come to Area for Network Telecasts," *Norfolk Ledger-Portsmouth Star*, Television Guide, June 8, 1957, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection.
[100] "The Joy of Corn," *Newsweek* 1957, 46, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.

promote and validate his brand whenever possible. One headline in Boston read simply, "Service Gave Jimmy Start."[101]

This association between country music and militarism brought tremendous profits for Gay and Dean. In a matter of 6 years, Gay had turned a rube comic into a national television star in a stunning display of class and status ascendancy, aided in no small part by the exposure afforded Dean and Gay through tours of the nation's military installations. When Dean went national with his television show, Gay sold the show's rights to CBS, while holding onto Dean's personal contract.[102] This shrewd move enriched Gay even more than his then-growing empire of radio stations. A *New York Times* profile of Gay in 1957 divulged that he owned 22 television shows in Washington, D.C., 3 country music radio stations, a car dealership, real estate, and that he earned "about a $1,000,000-a-year traffic in country music," making him "the largest individual promoter of country music in the nation."[103] According to an assessment of his finances by the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1960, Connie B. Gay Broadcasting Corporation and Subsidiaries was worth more than $3 million—not bad for an ex-New Dealer from Lizard Lick, North Carolina.[104]

The *Times* recognized the centrality of the military to Gay's success. The reporter began the article by joking that "Anyone who has ever, in the democracy of war, shared a barracks with a knot of fiddle-scraping wahoos from the swamp country will probably not be an instant admirer of Connie B. Gay." The *Times* took it as common knowledge that legions of "wahoos," meant to imply working-class white southerners, had overrun the ranks of the U.S. military. Gay

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[101] George Forsythe, "Service Gave Jimmy Start," *Boston Traveler*, May 2, 1957, Section B, 50, Box 5, Clippings, Gay collection, FLA.
[102] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[103] McCandlish Phillips, "Country Stylist, Connie B. Gay Discusses Lucrative Formula," *New York Times*, September 8, 1957, X17.
[104] Form S-1, Connie B. Gay Broadcasting Corporation, Securities and Exchange Commission, Washington, D.C., Box 2, Folder 6, Gay collection, FLA.

credited the Selective Service for the growth of country music. In his words, the draft "took a little country boy from Georgia and put him in Paris and it took a lad from New York and moved him down to Georgia and that was it." He then explained the genre's appeal in exemplary downhome fashion—through a food metaphor. "It's like bread," he told the *Times*. "All the lad from New York ever had was store-bought bread. He never had any home-baked hot biscuits. But some little Georgia girl takes him home to mother for hot biscuits and pretty soon he gets so he likes them."[105] Gay had learned the profitability of those "biscuits," and he never lost sight of the military's role in his success. Specifically, he understood that the draft created new audiences for his product. What he did not mention was that the military also actively used country music to create that those audiences through the use of the genre in its recruitment programs. Nor did he mention how he had earned money from the relationship between genre and militarism.

All of Gay's volunteer touring had started to turn a profit in October 1955, when Dean and fourteen of his *Town and Country* castmates embarked on a ten-week tour as the first contract-paid group to entertain troops in the Pacific. Walter A. Bouillet, chief entertainment officer for the Far East Command, and entertainment branch officer Col. Joseph F. Goetz negotiated the deal with Gay.[106] Bouillet, the son of a French immigrant chef, had served as an officer in the Foreign Legion during World War II and managed the hotels used for rehabilitation on the French Riviera after the cease fire. After a short return to civilian life, he received a reactivation notice to deploy to Korea, and the army placed him in charge of Special Services for the Far East. He spent eight years in this position, booking entertainment, including Gay's tours of Japan, the Korean peninsula, and the occupied Pacific islands.[107]

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[105] Phillips, "Country Stylist," X17.
[106] "Gay Jamboree For Military Jaunt Abroad," *Billboard*, October 15, 1955, 17.
[107] Bob Freund"Four Saints Really Five," *Fort Lauderdale News*, November 20, 1964, 61.

This contract represented a new policy of paying for soldiers' entertainment. Before Gay's deal, the United Service Organization (USO) had arranged for entertainers to donate their time and labor for the good of the men. However, the USO lacked the funds to send entertainment to the Far East. According to a *Billboard* report, the Far East Command, under Bouillet's and Goetz's directions, used " 'non-appropriated' moneys derived from the profits of post exchanges and theaters in the Pacific area to finance the military junkets."[108] This deal proved so successful for all involved that Gay and Bouillet went into business together the next year, following the latter's departure from the military. Nashville-based trade magazine the *Country Music Reporter* informed readers that the men had organized a new firm "whose aim is to expand programs of country music to a world wide [*sic*] basis including possible tours overseas" and that the men had established an office in Arlington, Virginia. The paper stated that Bouillet had "supervised and produced a Navy Recruiting program here known as 'Country Hoedown' which starred Jimmy Dean (Mercury) and his Texas Wildcats." Bouillet also promised Chet Atkins, Jim Reeves, and Red Sovine for the show to fulfill an order of 52 episodes of the program.[109]

The navy's *Country Hoedown* was neither the first or the last country music show used in a recruitment campaign. The Pentagon had discovered that the country music programming on the AFRS airwaves, as well as Gay's tours of installations around the world, provided a blueprint and an infrastructure to use country music as a way to entice recruits, particularly white men into enlisting. What began in the 1940s as the military's gradual recognition that soldiers enjoyed country music emerged in the mid 1950s as a conscious strategy to bring even more men, presumably white country music fans into the ranks. The creation of country music recruitment

[108] "Gay Jamboree For Military Jaunt Abroad," *Billboard*, October 15, 1955, 17.
[109] "Bouillet Joins Gay To Take CW Tunes to World," *Country Music Reporter*, October 20, 1956, 1, 20, FLA.

campaigns over the 1950s signaled the formalization of a relationship between the genre and the armed forces, a relationship cultivated by the Pentagon, country music promoters, artists, and fans in the ranks of the nation's military.

Chapter 2

A G.I. Bill for Country Music:

How Music Row and Military Recruitment Merged in the 1950s

On the afternoon of Wednesday, April 16, 1958, Tennessee's Governor Frank G. Clement testified before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications in defense of country music. Although he claimed to love the genre, Clement made his impassioned plea, not as a fan, but as "the Governor of a State which counts the music business as one of its most important local industry [*sic*]." "Nashville," he told the Senators, "today is one of the major music capitals of the world. More records are actually cut in Nashville than anywhere else in the United States—and I suppose that would mean in the world; except New York." He estimated the combination of record and sheet music sales, along with the performance fees earned by Nashville's artists, brought in $50 million every year to the state. That industry faced a political and economic attack from a piece of legislation called the Smathers bill, an amendment to the Communications Act of 1934 that would prohibit song publishers from owning radio and television stations. In essence, the Smathers bill accused Broadcast Music, Incorporated (BMI), the performance-rights organization (PRO) most associated with collecting royalties for country music, of a conspiracy to push its products on radio and television to the exclusion and financial detriment of pop music and its PRO, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). Clement attempted to explain the genre's popularity based on its sheer mass appeal and moral goodness, not on a plot hatched by Nashville and BMI.[1]

[1] U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Hearings on S. 2834, 478; John Ryan, *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry: The ASCAP-BMI Controversy* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1985); Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 106-111.

Faron Young, one of the biggest country artists of the day, offered the subcommittee a different explanation for country music's popularity and BMI's success, an explanation based in the nation's Cold War global military expansion. Although Young did not make the trip to Washington, D.C., Governor Clement read the singer's testimony to the Senators. Young began by acknowledging the accusations facing his genre: "People have told you that country music is heard a lot on the air these days because BMI and the broadcasters are pushing it to the public." He then offered a material explanation for the genre's popularity that both acknowledged the labor of country entertainers and the assistance they had received from the Cold War defense state. "I don't know how far this conspiracy is supposed to go to force country music on the public," he told the politicians, "but if there is a conspiracy maybe the United States Government is a part of it, because I and a lot of other country performers have been sent by the Government to entertain thousands and thousands of troops with our kind of music."[2]

Young understood firsthand how the federal government had developed a unique relationship with country music's artists and promoters. The connection between the U.S. military and country music that had started with Connie B. Gay, Grandpa Jones, and the *Grand Ole Opry* had become a formal strategy by 1953 when Faron Young, recently drafted, began serving as the voice of recruitment and entertainment for the U.S. Army's Third Infantry Division. Thanks to this arrangement, Young toured installations, appeared on television and radio programs, and sang on Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry*, where he plugged the U.S. Army from the stage of the Ryman Auditorium to compulsory applause elicited by the *Opry*'s emcees. His career soared as a result. He received billing as the "singing soldier" and enjoyed multi-page profiles in country and western fan magazines. That type of press coverage complimented the

[2] Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Hearings on S. 2834, 490.

Pentagon's broader recruitment strategies. During the 1950s, the army expanded its country music enlistment campaigns, including live performances, television programs, and radio shows hosted by Connie B. Gay. The navy and air force joined in with this musical strategy, too, creating radio shows that aired on both military and civilian networks. These programs branded military recruitment with Nashville's sounds of southern whiteness while pitching armed service as a path towards well-paying jobs and education for country music fans. Country music promised to benefit the armed forces by catching the ears of young white men at a time when military could use all the help it could get.

Tracing the growth country of music recruitment demonstrates one of the ways that the U.S. military addressed the personnel crisis it faced in the early 1950s. The Pentagon had slashed the numbers of soldiers following the Allied victory from 8 million in 1945 to about half a million only a few years later. The outbreak of the Korean War had sent the Pentagon scrambling to field a force worthy of combat, as the Defense Department sobered to the reality of its military vulnerability. Conscription slowed the depletion of the ranks, but leaders preferred recruits, not draftees, to fill out its fighting force. Selective Service remained in place during the last year of World War II and the first year of peace, but veteran status, marriage, and school deferments kept many desirable men out of the ranks. President Truman even ended the draft in 1947 in hopes of boosting enlistment. Yet postwar civilian job growth had improved so much that volunteering for the military simply did not appeal to young men with better prospects. With no waves of mass enlistment, Truman reinstated the draft in 1948 while the Pentagon searched for ways to entice recruits.[3]

[3] Brian Linn, *Elvis's Army: Cold War GIs and the Atomic Battlefield* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 16, 27, 22; George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 98-103.

The U.S. Army and Air Force Recruitment Service (RS) attempted to fill this need by inserting their messages about the economic benefits of military service, like the G.I. Bill, within the growing number of postwar pop culture outlets. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, clicking on the radio or the television likely meant encountering an advertisement for the military. The RS rolled out docu-dramas, talent contests, live concerts, and musical entertainment programs, inundating pop culture with their cattle call for enlistees. The U.S. Army and Air Force Service Bands provided much of the music for these shows. These bands, with their traditional instrumentation of brass, woodwinds, and orchestral percussion, played patriotic and pop fare to rouse the nation's young men to the call of duty, or at least economic opportunity. Civilian guest stars appeared on these programs to lend their star power to Cold War recruitment. Pop singer Eddie Fisher even served as the voice of recruitment from 1951 to 1953 after the army took him away from his recording career. These campaigns cast a wide net for recruits with little thought to musical genre. They simply relied on what the service bands could perform and the mass appeal of pop stars like Fisher.

When Faron Young took over for Eddie Fisher in 1953, he signaled the RS's growing investment in country music as a recruitment tool and the country music industry's willingness to cooperate with the Pentagon's Cold War personnel mission. Facilitating military recruitment tracked well with the country music industry's desire to brand itself as the sound of wholesome American culture. During the 1950s, Tennessee's Governor Frank G. Clement embarked on a multi-year campaign to sell country music as America's music. It helped that country music remained extremely popular within the ranks. While the nation's Cold War defense strategies scattered country music's fans and performers around the world, U.S. soldiers created a global community of listeners in uniform. These listeners wrote to their favorite country music

magazines and radio hosts, searching for personal connections with likeminded fans and singing the praises of their favorite artists. The military created that global audience for the genre, even as, and perhaps because, country's promoters branded the music as the sound of America.

By creating recruitment campaigns with country music, a genre long associated in the popular imagination with white southerners, the U.S. military made a statement about who it wanted in uniform. The music attracted a demographic that was a prime target for military recruitment. In exchange, an association with the military provided the emergent country music industry with legitimacy, coding it as a genre appropriate for patriotic, all-American listening. For millions of U.S. enlistees in the mid twentieth century, particularly white men, providing labor to the Department of Defense opened up access to economic advancement through the benefits of the G.I. Bill, a message they heard repeated constantly through the Pentagon's recruitment campaigns. The country music industry entered into an analogous bargain with the Pentagon and received a government-sponsored way to grow its market reach, elevate its cultural status, and increase its profits. Country music militarism gave Music Row its own version of the G.I. Bill, government funding for the building of white wealth in exchange for military service.

Drafting Faron Young and the Growth of Country Music Recruitment

As a teenager in Shreveport, Louisiana, Faron Young held little ambition to be a country music singer and zero interest in joining the military. He came of age working on his family's dairy farm on the outskirts of town and attending Fair Park High School, where he chased girls and tried out for the football team. Young's small stature almost kept him off the team until he struck a deal with the coach. If allowed on the team, Young agreed to sing with the coach's country band during their weekly gig at the Southern Maid Donut Shop in Shreveport. Blessed with perfect pitch and a strong tenor, Young quickly earned a reputation as a powerful vocalist in

the thriving Shreveport music scene. In 1948, the city's KWKH radio station had launched *The Louisiana Hayride*, a barn dance program modeled after the *Grand Ole Opry*. The *Hayride* ensured that a steady stream of local and national country talent came through the city, and Young quickly ascended from singing at the donut shop to fronting professional country bands on the show.[4]

The musically gifted Young joined honky tonk singer Webb Pierce's band in 1951 as a singer and rhythm guitarist while completing his senior year of high school. Pierce, who was also a native of northern Louisiana, began his country recording career in the 1940s and enjoyed a featured spot on the *Hayride* by the time Young joined his group. Young's ambition soon outgrew his role as a sideman in Pierce's band, and he made his solo *Hayride* debut on October 13, 1951. He began cutting records for independent record label Gotham Records a month later. Young then hit the road promoting those records with his backing band the Southern Valley Boys, featuring future famed Nashville session man Floyd Cramer on piano. He also made weekly appearances on the *Hayride*. In the span of a few months, Faron Young had transformed from high school student and sideman to fronting his own honky tonk outfit and touring the beer joints of the postwar South.[5]

By January 1952, Young had signed a management deal with country music promoter Hubert Long and a recording contract with Capitol Records. Six months later, at the age of twenty, he packed what he called his "Alabama cardboard suitcase" and achieved the biggest moment of his career up to that point by performing on stage at the Ryman Auditorium in

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[4] Faron Young interview, Cradle of the Stars, Louisiana Hayride Interview, 1984 FV.2012.2018, FLA.

[5] Faron Young interview, Cradle of the Stars, Louisiana Hayride Interview, 1984 FV.2012.2018, FLA; Diane Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard: The Faron Young Story* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 18, 19.

Nashville, Tennessee as part of the *Grand Ole Opry*. Hank Williams, Young's professional idol at the time, greeted him backstage at the Ryman and congratulated him on a job well done. Williams then promptly stole the new star's girlfriend, Billie Jean Eshliman, the same night and married her four months later.[6] A mixture of good and bad fortune would come to characterize much of Young's career, particularly in his first months of real fame.

The next bit of misfortune came when, shortly after playing his first *Opry* shows, Young received his draft notice. Devastated, Young later recalled how he "cried like a rat eating a red onion." He desperately did not want to go to the army and tried to convince a doctor he had heart trouble. The doctor reportedly replied, "Yeah, son, I can hear it breaking." Inducted on November 16, 1952 and assigned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for basic training, Young quickly fell in with other musicians, spending their days entertaining fellow troops in the servicemen's club and generally shirking any kind of military responsibility. Never one for deference to authority, Young remembered laying out of duty as long as possible before "one day somebody got wise and said we got to train this boy. Give him a gun and put him in the mud."[7]

Young's time in the mud would be brief. On January 10, 1953, his song "Goin' Steady," a single he had recorded for Capitol before entering the service, broke onto the *Billboard* charts and quickly ascended to number two.[8] Unwittingly, the army had drafted a rising country star. The commanding officers at Fort Jackson soon put him to work entertaining the men instead of toting a gun. One report stated that Young's performances at Fort Jackson "resulted in a corps of

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[6] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 23.
[7] Quoted in Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 26.
[8] Joel Whitburn, comp., *Joel Whitburn Presents Hot Country Songs Billboard, 1944 to 2008* (Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin: Record Research, Inc., 2008), 484.

admirers who tune camp radios to parade-ground volume when one of his records is played by local radio stations, and who cheerfully help Young open his 2000 fan letters each week."[9]

Recognizing Young as a potential resource for the promotion of military service, the army put him to use. In May 1953, his commanding officers sent Young to New York City to compete on the new network television program *Talent Patrol*, a contest show hosted by Steve Allen and Arlene Francis on ABC and used to boost army recruitment by showcasing the diverse skills of enlisted men. According to television historian, J. Fred MacDonald, *Talent Patrol* highlighted the stories of individual soldiers in order to personalize the armed forces and portray "the military as a 'a bunch of regular guys' rather than a powerful institution with its own direction and self-interest." Young and his band from Fort Jackson won the contest and embarked on an army career that combined entertaining current soldiers and recruitment campaigns to lure others into the ranks.[10] With Young and country music, the military found an artist and a genre with populist, working-class bona fides and a respect for patriotic service. Even better, Young appeared to be an amateur plucked from obscurity and thrust into economic success through his service to the state. In the early 1950s, the Pentagon could use a few thousand more men willing to give their time, labor, and talents to their nation in exchange for a career boost in the civilian sector. Music emerged as a useful tool in convincing potential recruits that economic security lay just on the other side of a tour of duty.

Musical Recruitment and Celebrity Soldiers

The *Talent Patrol* show that gave Young his first television appearance represented just one of the dozens of pop culture experiments that the RS launched in the early 1950s. In May

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[9] Johnny Havlicek, "Faron Young Finds Army 'Variation on Old Theme," *The Tennessean*, April 15, 1953, 25.
[10] "Singin' Soldier, Faron Young," *Country Song Roundup*, March-April 1954, 13, FLA; J. Fred MacDonald, *Television and the Red Menace* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1985), 114.

1950, the RS began a campaign of one-minute recruiting messages on 1,400 radio stations in 1,100 cities across the nation. These ads targeted high school and college-aged young men, particularly college graduates who might qualify for the Aviation Cadet Pilot and Navigator Programs. The RS placed the messages during sports broadcasts in hopes of hitting their target demographic. Likewise, the RS inserted ads in national and local newspapers, store window displays, direct mail, and magazines like *Popular Mechanics*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Look.*[11] The Pentagon adopted early television technology as well, filling a slot every Sunday evening on the NBC with *The Armed Forces Hour*.[12] With this broad appeal, recruiters hoped to enlist the most qualified and willing recruits to defend the nation against the ever-present threat of destruction at the hands of the Soviet Union and the conflict in Korea. The RS implanted its messages everywhere a young man might look or listen for entertainment in the early 1950s.

The music provided by the U.S. Army or U.S. Air Force Service Bands played an essential role in the RS's efforts to increase enlistment in the early 1950s, and these brass and woodwind ensembles recorded the soundtracks for live radio and television recruitment shows. The RS live shows included the radio programs *Air Force Hour*, which aired on Friday nights on the Mutual Broadcasting System, and *Time for Defense*, featured on ABC every Tuesday night. The RS also created transcriptions of dramatic and documentary radio programs that they distributed to thousands of stations around the nation. *Proudly We Hail* provided stories of patriotic service and heroic bravery narrated by film and radio stars of the day meant to inspire young men to join and fulfill their masculine duty to their country. The musical program *Stars on*

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[11] "More Than 1400 Radio Stations To Share RS Spots," *Recruiting Journal of the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force*, June 1950, 1; April to August 1950; Monthly Publication "Recruiting Journal" with Related Source Material, 1950-1954, (Recruiting Journal Files); Military Personnel Procurement Division Publicity Branch; Records of the Adjutant General's Office (TAGO), RG 407; NACP.

[12] "Publicity 'Props'," *Recruiting Journal*, June 1950, 16; April to August 1950; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

Parade presented civilian pop singers fronting one of the service bands to blend recruitment messages with what the RS determined as attractive music to potential recruits.[13] In each program, the military relied on its in-house talent to provide accompaniment to visiting stars, show theme songs, and background music for its pitches to join the military. Yet these musical efforts remained constrained by the instrumentation and training of military service bands. The RS simply presented patriotic tunes and the pop music of the day adapted for brass and woodwinds with little thought to their audiences' tastes.

Recruiters also used music for shorter radio advertisements and live performances. One campaign featured the jazz stride pianist Johnny Guarnieri providing the backing music while the Satisfiers, a pop harmony quartet, chanted the slogans, "The Army has a career for you" and "The Air Force has a career for you." The Guarnieri/Satisfiers spots paired this musical jingle with what the RS called "selling' dialogue," which told the details of how to enlist and the benefits of armed service.[14] Service bands also gave live performances for local recruiting efforts. The air force band stationed at Fort Mason outside of San Francisco performed a series of outdoor concerts for area high school students during the final two weeks of classes in the summer of 1950. Six thousand students attended the shows thanks to the cooperation of their principals, and the RS distributed over 2,500 pieces of recruitment literature to this audience.[15] These types of shows occurred throughout the country during the early 1950s as the RS struggled to boost enlistment numbers and capture the attention of America's best and brightest recruits. Service bands likely provided professional and pleasing concerts and accompaniment, but their

[13] Ibid.
[14] "Chanted Jingles Added to Radio Spots," *Recruiting Journal*, June 1950, 16; April to August 1950; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[15] "Fort Mason Band Aid to Recruiters," *Recruiting Journal*, August 1950, 10; April to August 1950; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

styles remained hamstrung by the traditional instrumentation of military bands. Their selections also had to conform to the armed forces' branding as an institution of patriotism and moral decency, which limited their repertoires.

In the summer of 1950, Captain Joseph Gigandet took over the radio section of the RS and began to change the service's musical strategies. Gigandet held experience in military radio broadcasting dating back to World War II when he had produced a soldier radio show at Camp Tyson, Tennessee, as well as the music shows *On Target* and *Serenade in Khaki* for the AFRS. After the war, the army transferred him to West Germany, where his radio work continued as the executive director of the AFRS in Europe and the Military Amateur Radio System. Gigandet managed stations in three West German cities, including Munich-Stuttgart, site of the most powerful AFRS station in the world with a 200,000-watt transmitter capable of pushing a signal hundreds of miles.[16] These jobs provided Gigandet with firsthand knowledge of soldiers' musical talents and their love for radio, and he applied that understanding to his role as the director of radio recruitment.

By early 1951, Gigandet attempted to update the sound of recruitment by introducing a radio series featuring the U.S. Army Dance Band. The dance band show broadcast from their home station in Fort Myer, Virginia and received distribution on the Liberty Broadcast System every Saturday evening.[17] Next, Gigandet began producing a television program called *Front and Center* to showcase the array of service bands, including the U.S. Army Band and the U.S. Army Field Band, that provided soldier entertainment and the musical accompaniment of recruitment. The *Recruiting Journal* reported in the spring of 1951 that the show would also

[16] "New Radio Officer Joins Publicity Branch," *Recruiting Journal*, September 1950, 1; September to December 1950; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[17] "Army Band Dance Group In Network Radio Show," *Recruiting Journal*, February 1951, 17; January to April 1951; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

incorporate "Former professional entertainers now in the Army and top names in show business will perform on the series each week" along with a soldier emcee to guide the program. ABC aired the show every Wednesday for a half-hour at 8 pm Eastern Standard Time as a public service announcement.[18] With these efforts, Gigandet sought to attract attention to careers in the army for men and women while relying on the time and talents of soldier musicians to create the public sound of armed service.

Gigandet broke new ground when he launched a music recruitment program called *At Ease with Pvt. Eddie Fisher*, starring the titular pop star who was then serving as a vocalist for the U.S. Army Band.[19] Fisher had earned a moderate amount of success when he received his draft notice in 1951, but like Faron Young after him, the army made him a star. Born in 1928 to Russian Jewish immigrants, Fisher had grown up in poverty and as one of seven children in Philadelphia. He discovered his talent for singing at a young age and won *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* while in elementary school. Crooner Eddie Cantor mentored the aspiring singer, and Fisher enjoyed a contract with Paramount Records and regular appearances on television shows like the *Milton Berle Show* when he received his draft notice. "How could they do that to me?," he wrote in his memoir years later. "I was Eddie Fisher. I had hits on the *Billboard* charts! How could they stop my career just when everything was starting to pay off?" He entered the service as Private Edwin Jack Fisher on April 11, 1951 and was assigned to basic training at Fort Hood, an installation outside of Killeen, Texas that would serve as the site of Elvis Presley's basic training seven years later.[20]

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[18] "New RS TV Show Set for Early June," *Recruiting Journal*, May 1951, 16; May to August 1951; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[19] "'Songs By Fisher' Aired on ABC," *Recruiting Journal* July 1952, 17; June to December 1951; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[20] Eddie Fisher, with David Fisher, *Been There, Done That* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 41.

Fisher endured the rigors of basic training at Fort Hood alongside soldiers from southern states like Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas, many of whom Fisher believed had never seen a Jew or spoken to a northerner. He bonded with these southerners, but the army separated Fisher from his fellow enlisted men just before the end of basic training, transferring the singer to Special Services duty with the U.S. Army Band at Fort Myers.[21] The transfer brought accusations that the army was coddling the star. A Senate committee began investigating the alleged preferential treatment that celebrities seem to enjoy in the service. In his defense, Fisher claimed, "I did everything in camp that every other guy in basic did. . .. I didn't ask for the job. . .. I was ordered to go by my superiors and obeyed orders like every soldier does."[22]

Fisher received a boost to his career because of his service in uniform, not in spite of that time in the army. As *Billboard* noted, "Eddie Fisher, who in civilian life hadn't quite reached the point where he could boast a radio show of his own, oddly enough achieved this goal of most singing actors by getting himself drafted."[23] While stationed at Fort Myers with the army band, Fisher lived in a private apartment in Washington, D.C. and spent his time singing for radio and television programs, blood drives, and recruitment campaigns like *At Ease*. Within eight months of joining Special Services, Fisher appeared on over 150 television and radio programs and on stage at Carnegie Hall, the Philadelphia Music Festival to a crowd of 90,000, and at a July 4th celebration at the Washington Monument for more than 250,000. Additionally, he spent 46 days touring Korea, playing to soldiers in foxholes and to large crowds around the peninsula, totaling audiences of more than 150,000 United Nations soldiers and went on to tour installations in Europe.[24] For these appearances, Fisher sang a mixture of his hits and requests from the crowd

[21] Ibid., 42-43.
[22] "Eddie Fisher Denies Army Coddled Him," (AP) *Detroit Free Press* May 7, 1954, 6.
[23] "At Ease With Pvt. Eddie Fisher," *Billboard*, September 22, 1951, 11.
[24] Fisher, *Been There, Done That*, 43.

before leading the troops in community singalongs.[25] He even found time to complete his high school equivalency degree while working for the RS. "I felt like I'd become an adult," he remembered after receiving his discharge in April 1953, "And an even bigger star."[26]

The pop culture press recognized the army's role in Fisher's success, too. In 1954, Hollywood reporter Bob Thomas asked "How do you figure a success like Eddie Fisher's? . . . His take may reach a million dollars this year. All this without having been in a movie! How has he done it?" Thomas credited Fisher's full voice, his relationship with Eddie Cantor, and the savvy handling by his management. Fisher credited the military: "I think my Army service helped me too. I look back on them as two of the best years of my life. I got to troupe [tour], which most young people don't have a chance to do these days. I sang before all kinds of audiences all over the world." To ward off potential accusations of coddling and emphasize the rigors of incessant performances, Fisher added, "I was a GI like the rest of them, but I was on a spot too."[27] The benefits Fisher received from his army service continued after his time in the ranks ended in 1953. The army sponsored the singer's radio show into the mid-1950s, using the affiliation with one of the nation's biggest pop singers to sell young men and women on a career in the armed forces.

Musical Recruitment and Musical Amateurism

Captain Gigandet and the RS recognized the appeal of showcasing celebrity soldiers in uniform like Fisher, but they also wanted to highlight the entertainment chops of the amateur enlisted men and women as a means of boosting recruitment. In late 1952, the RS began planning a televised talent show for soldiers to be hosted by a civilian celebrity and produced in

[25] "Pfc. Eddie Fisher on Far East tour; Sings for UN Troops in Korea," *Recruiting Journal*, September 1952, 17; June to December 1951; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[26] Fisher, *Been There, Done That*, 46.
[27] Bob Thomas, "Eddie Fisher Credits Army With Helping His Career," *The Indiana Gazette*, June 29, 1954, 11.

New York City. The *Recruiting Journal* noted that part of the plan was to show the diversity and abundance of entertaining talents among soldiers, suggesting that "the various acts for 1 week would be from one Army post, the following week from some Air Force base, until the country has witnessed on their TV screens the wide variety of talent available from the servicepeople."[28] By January 1953, this contest show, now named *Talent Patrol*, made its debut on Monday evenings on ABC. Steve Allen, the comedian and musician who had also guest hosted *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Hour*, served as the master of ceremonies. Allen's time on Godfrey's show made an appropriate introduction to the format of *Talent Patrol*. *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Hour* had propelled hundreds of performers out of obscurity, first as a radio show and then on television, by exposing amateur talent to a wider audience who could then vote on their favorites. The first run of *Talent Patrol* shows highlighted talents from the Fifth Army, with the winner chosen by the television audience just as it was on Godfrey's program.[29] Arlene Francis joined the show that summer, and the RS continued the broadcast into the fall of 1953.[30]

When *Talent Patrol* featured the skills of the Third Army in the spring of 1953, Faron Young made his television debut. *Billboard* reported how Young, the "Capitol country warbler," had won on the contest. The victory meant that Young would make appearances on the country recruitment shows and appear on the Prince Albert portion of the *Grand Ole Opry* on NBC to promote the army.[31] Gigandet traveled to Nashville to "study country handling" and direct Young on the recruitment appearances.[32] Country music newspaper *Pickin' and Singin' News*

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[28] "New Television Show Planned for Recruiting Service," *Recruiting Journal*, January 1953, 3; January to July 1953; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[29] " 'Talent Patrol' New Army and Air Force TV Show," *Recruiting Journal*, February 1953; January to July 1953; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[30] " 'Talent Patrol' to Continue Through the Fall," *Recruiting Journal*, August 1953, 14; August to December 1953; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[31] "New Recruit Wins Contest," *Billboard*, April 11, 1953, 43.
[32] "Folk Talent and Tunes," *Billboard*, May 2, 1953, 48.

reported that "Young was so satisfactory on the big TV show that his Uncle Sam is transferring him from Ft. Jackson to Washington, D.C." In the nation's capital, Young aided the enlistment effort by recording transcribed programs to be aired as public service announcements for radio stations around the country. "Rather than be exploited Young is getting a real break in his career even in military uniform," the *News* told readers.[33] Young had reason to rejoice. He had just embarked on an 18-month promotional tour for both the army and himself, performing in front of thousands of soldiers in personal appearances and over the radio, all at the expense of American taxpayers. The U.S. Army and the country music industry recognized overlapping interests in the market of young men aged 18-26 created by Cold War military service, and they went into business together.

Not only did Young possess the sound and the timing to win the hearts of country fans, but his apparent enthusiasm to serve his country further endeared him to the country music press. The country magazine *Hoedown* featured a picture of Young in his uniform, complete with helmet, and holding his guitar in a section called "Hogtied," in which the soldier-singer described his favorite food, color, and cowgirl singer.[34] *Pickin' and Singin' News* wrote admirably that "Some with lesser courage and philosophy might have decried the interruption of a budding career by Uncle Sam's beck and call, but not Pvt. Faron Young." Instead, Young put a cheerful spin on his situation, telling the paper "I'm lucky! It will give me a chance to meet people from all over America, and at the same time to do something worthwhile." The *News*

[33] "Pvt. Young's Art Pleases Army Brass; On TV," *Pickin' and Singin' News: The Nation-Wide Country Music Newspaper* (Audition Edition), 1, 4, Box: Oversized (J8b19), Southern Folklife Collection.
[34] "Pfc. Faron Young, Hogtied," *Hoedown: The Magazine of Hillbilly and Western Stars* (October 1953), 26, Box 16, Folder 10, De Vincent Collection - Ephemera, NMAH Archives Center.

could not have agreed more. "That's the American spirit and the attitude of most Country Musicians," they concluded their profile of the up and coming star.[35]

While other artists struggled for press and radio airplay, Young likely could not have bought the kind of exposure that the army provided. Commenting to *Country Song Roundup*, Young stated that the army tours were not "the easiest job on earth. We were doing two and three and four shows a day and traveling a thousand miles a week in GI vehicles, but it was worth it." Young could hardly argue with the results of this kind of government-sponsored publicity. "The men in the Army had always been mighty nice to me as a civilian, but when they saw that I was just a private, too, they were even nicer. I'm just glad that I could give them a little entertainment." The *Roundup* interview included a six-page profile of the "Singin' Soldier" with over 30 pictures of Young, many of which showed him in dress uniform or fatigues, guitar in-hand and in mid-song, reminding readers of the connection between the singer and themselves or their loved ones serving in the Cold War military. With a carefully crafted image of a clean-cut, country-singing soldier deployed for recruitment, readers could believe that Young "was 'just another guy' after all," and yet "a GI blessed with the kind of voice you hear once in a generation."[36]

Country music made the perfect genre for this story about the common soldier, plucked from obscurity based on his natural talent, and given an opportunity for economic and social advancement through service to the nation-state. Beginning in the early twentieth century, tastemakers and the pop music industry of Tin Pan Alley did not consider country music worthy of consideration as a professional style of music. According to the metrics of the pop industry,

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[35] "Pvt. Young's Art Pleases Army Brass; On TV," *Pickin' and Singin' News: The Nation-Wide Country Music Newspaper* (Audition Edition), 1, 4, Box: Oversized (J8b19), Southern Folklife Collection.
[36] "Singin' Soldier, Faron Young," *Country Song Roundup*, March-April 1954, 15, 13, FLA.

professional musicians read music, performed songs written by professional songwriters, and belonged to the American Federation of Musicians. By contrast, the pop industry assumed that country musicians did not read music, and country artists often wrote and performed their own songs instead of relying on the output of Tin Pan Alley publishers.[37] The pop industry also refused to include country writers, as well as black blues and R&B artists, in their royalty collection and licensing organization ASCAP. Beginning in 1914, ASCAP held contracts that dominated an ever-evolving music media, from sheet music, vaudeville, and nickelodeons to radio and jukeboxes. By the time radio emerged as the most popular medium in the 1920s and 1930s, ASCAP enjoyed an almost complete monopolization of music licensing. ASCAP demanded exclusive contracts with radio stations to play the music it licensed. This meant that if listeners heard recorded music on their radio, the station was legally bound to pay the PRO for the rights to air these tunes.[38]

The music licensed by ASCAP skewed heavily towards the songs of Tin Pan Alley, leaving many race and hillbilly artists—those working in genres most associated with the South––without a mechanism to get their records played on radio. ASCAP considered those genres and their artists as amateurs who labored outside the prescriptions of the pop music industry. The ASCAP monopoly and its exclusionary financial practices shattered on December 31, 1940, when thousands of stations boycotted its material and formed BMI with a catalogue of previously ostracized genres and artists. This boycott temporarily removed the entire collections of songwriters like Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, and George Gershwin from the air. Sociologist John Ryan has argued that music from Latin America, Stephen Foster songs, and "most

[37] Michael James Roberts, *Tell Tchaikovsky the News: Rock'n'Roll, the Labor Question, and the Musicians Union, 1942-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
[38] Ryan, *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry*, 16-30.

importantly for the future of popular music, prime-time radio broadcasts now contained the previously devalued genres of 'hillbilly' music and 'race' music."[39] The music of those genres, previously considered the domain of amateurs, now flooded the airwaves and opened a path for those artists to collect mechanical royalties. Ten years later in 1950, following the enormous success of Patti Page's country to pop crossover cover of Pee Wee King and Redd Stewart's "Tennessee Waltz," ASCAP accused the amateurs of country music of invading and nefariously taking over the record market.[40] ASCAP maintained those accusations until finally bringing legislation against BMI in the form of the Smather's bill in 1958, which forced members of the country music industry, including Faron Young, to defend their style of music to U.S. lawmakers.

Young's ascent from "amateur" musician and soldier on *Talent Patrol* to the national airwaves and the stage of the *Grand Ole Opry* tracked with what military recruitment campaigns promised to do for any soldier: professionalize them in their given trade and place them on the track for economic success. In 1953, the army transferred Young to Fort McPherson outside of Atlanta and bought his army band new instruments and tan business suits with the Third Army insignia, the letter A inside of a circle, sown on the pocket. The band took the name the Circle A Wranglers, creating a double entendre that stacked military nomenclature on top of what sounded like cowboy lingo for a cattle brand. Young and the Wranglers made several appearances on the *Grand Ole Opry* during their time in the ranks, and the singer "always concluded with the

[39] Ryan, *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry*, 1. For more on the importance of the ASCAP/BMI rivalry and its relationship to country music, see Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 106-111.
[40] Ryan, *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry*, 109-125.

announcement that he 'appeared on the show through the courtesy of the Commanding General, Third Army.'"[41]

The Circle A Wranglers stayed busy playing for active troops and hitting the airwaves for recruitment campaigns. They toured installations throughout the South, including Fort Bragg, where they entertained thousands of troops stationed there for a large-scale atomic training program called Exercise Flash Burn in April 1954.[42] They also played for special events organized for the Third Army. In August 1954, Faron Young and the Circle A Wranglers joined with other musicians stationed at Fort McPherson to perform at an event called "Southland Panorama" at Atlanta's Chastain Park. *Army Times* stated that the Third Army Special Services designed this event to "recall the grandeur and charm of the old South." A "Civil War atmosphere will prevail," the paper predicted of the event, which featured a narrative portion that would include "a soldier of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston's Army telling the saga of a growing Southland with all its spirit and proud heritage."[43] Capitol Records continued to release singles throughout Young's time in the ranks, including "I Can't Wait (for the Sun to Go Down)" and "A Place for Girls Like You," both of which hit the *Billboard* top ten.[44] By September 1954, Young starred in *The Faron Young Show* produced by the Third Army and broadcast throughout the formation's recruiting district.[45] These musical recruiting efforts aided the Third Army's boom in recruitment. Commanding officer Lt. General A.R. Bolling commended the unit's

[41] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 30. The Circle A Wranglers would continue at Fort McPherson even after Young's discharge. They went on to enlist then Pfc. Roger Miller as a fiddle player, giving him his first gig as a professional country musician.
[42] "3d Army Shows to Entertain on Maneuvers," *Army Times*, April 17, 1954, 29.
[43] "Third Army Show, Aug. 27, To Recall the Old South," *Army Times*, August 21, 1954, 22.
[44] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 30, 35.
[45] "Third Army Area Producing Six Radio Shows for Army Recruiting," *Recruiting Journal*, September 1954, 16; July to December 1954; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

personnel procurement officers for the achievement of securing 137 percent of their recruitment quota from July 1953 to June 1954.[46]

Young's emergence as a voice of recruitment marked the beginning of a new sound for enlistment pitches. That same year, the army and the air force borrowed the name *Town and Country Time* to produce the first country music recruitment program.[47] A writer in the June 1953 edition of *Recruiting Journal*, the Recruiting Service newsletter, enthused, "In the planning state since the first of the year, now it can be told! A new program series, 'Town and Country Time' is the newest recruiting vehicle for the airwaves, and features top-notch country music." Connie B. Gay, "an authority on folk music whose fans already number in the thousands in the Washington area," remained at the helm as emcee of the show, which the Recruiting Service distributed to 2,200 radio station around the country.[48] The Radio Section of the U.S. Army Publicity Branch produced the show as 15-minute transcriptions of the "top stars of WSM's 'Grand Ole Opry which emanates from Nashville, Tenn.,'" playing their "folk and Western" hits with a pitch to join the service alongside the tunes. The impetus for the show emerged when the Military Personnel Procurement Department of the Adjutant General's Office discovered "through reports that the largest percentage of Army enlistees came from the Southeastern States where country music is very popular."[49]

The army recognized a regional discrepancy in the location of its enlistees. White southern men seemed to flow on a personnel pipeline into the military. Country music, the

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[46] "Commendation for Third Army Recruiters," *Recruiting Journal*, September 1954, 17; July to December 1954; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[47] "Featuring Town and Country Time Folk Music Style," *Recruiting Journal*, August 1953, 15; July to December 1954; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[48] "Folk Music Production Town and Country Time Radio Series Begins This Month," *Recruiting Journal*, June 1953, 15; January to July 1953; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[49] "Featuring Town and Country Time Folk Music Style," *Recruiting Journal*, August 1953, 15; August to December 1953; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

recruiters reasoned, could keep that pipeline moving. In return, the country music industry received an unprecedented boost in exposure. With the initiation of the *Town and Country Time* recruitment show, Gay received his first nation-wide distribution while the military created a new way to entice potential recruits, namely white recruits, into the ranks. Between the successes of Faron Young, Connie B. Gay, and Jimmy Dean, the U.S. military had emerged as the single biggest booster for country music in the world. The Pentagon essentially acted as a publicity arm for the genre, pushing its artists and its sounds as the sound of armed service and, by extension, patriotic devotion to the nation.

Faron Young's career facilitated the military's embrace of this genre as a recruitment tool. His involvement established a direct connection between army promotion and Nashville's country music industry. Fan magazine, *Country & Western Jamboree*, profiled this phenomenon in an article titled, "The Army Goes Country and Western." "Take some good country music, mix it with a dash of sophistication," the writer enthused, "and you have a formula for a popular network radio show." Young's successes on *Talent Patrol*, later renamed *Soldier Parade*, made the army realize that it needed more country music recruitment programming. It did not take long to correct this oversight. Besides *Town and Country Time*, the army created another new country music recruitment show called *Country Jamboree*, which aired on the Mutual Radio Network. It featured emcee Mark Hamilton and music by country stars of the day like Young. In a testament to the seduction of musical recruitment, Hamilton, a former radio announcer on Connie B. Gay's WARL in Arlington, Virginia, had joined the army himself after meeting Eddie Fisher during a radio interview. Seeing the opportunity to fuse military recruitment with country music, Hamilton based *Country Jamboree* off the format of *Town and Country Time*.[50] With a roster of

[50] "The Army Goes Country & Western," *Country & Western Jamboree*, July 1955, 17, author's collection. Interestingly, *Town and Country Time* featured a young multi-instrumentalist named Roy Clark who landed in the

country stars and the support of the U.S. Army Recruiting Service, *Country Jamboree* joined the effort to reach out to America's young men with a conflation of patriotism, militarism, and country music.

Even Young's departure from the army earned publicity and praise. The city of Atlanta, Georgia proclaimed Wednesday, November 17, 1954 as "Faron Young Day" in recognition of the country and western singer's recent career accomplishments. To mark the occasion, Young appeared on the city's television station WSB's *Today in Georgia* hosted by anchor Don Elliot at nine that morning, where local and national authorities met the rising country star with handshakes and words of honor. Lee Evans, President of the Board of Alderman, presented the singer with a letter of commendation. Young then received a certificate of achievement from the Third Army's Commander, Lt. General A.R. Bolling, commander of the United States' Third Army Division. Glenn Wallichs, president of Capitol Records and the director of the Boy Scouts of America participated as well, thanking Young for all he had done in the past two years.[51] Young continued to celebrate his namesake day with concerts in Atlanta that night and left for Nashville the next day, where the adorations continued. Tennessee's Governor Clement greeted Young with a scroll that heaped more praise on country and western music's favorite son of the moment.[52] Young would turn this heightened notoriety into lucrative advancements in the entertainment business, including acting roles in westerns like *Hidden Guns* and *Daniel Boone - Trailblazer*.[53] Young's music-to-military-to-film trajectory set a pattern for Elvis Presley to

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D.C. area thanks to his father's job at the Washington Naval Yard and would go on to host *Hee Haw* with Buck Owens. See Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*.

[51] "Elliot to Welcome Faron Back from Army," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, November 17, 1954, 16; Dave Dexter, Jr., "Glenn E. Wallichs - A Fond Farewell," *Billboard*, January 8, 1972, 3, 46.

[52] *Country & Western Jamboree* (March 1955), 10, Box 62, Folder N, De Vincent Collection - Ephemera, NMAH Archives Center; Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 36.

[53] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 42-43.

follow: serve in the army, gain publicity and respect from that service, and turn that new status into a film career.

When the army chose Young, it moved away from the musical branding associated with Eddie Fisher's crooning and the swing music that constituted much of the early 1950s pop genre. Fisher's music harkened back to the artists preferred by the urban working class of the Great Depression and WWII, artists like Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, and Ella Fitzgerald.[54] Swing and pop coded as urban, northern, ethnic, and potentially non-white.[55] By contrast, country music coded as rural, southern, and white, despite the actual racial and geographic diversity of the genre's fans, artists, and influences.[56]

The use of Faron Young and country music as tools of recruitment also reflected a shift in American labor and racial politics as well. Deindustrialization of northern and midwestern manufacturing cities had begun as early as 1945, aided by the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1946 that gutted the strength of unions. Much like the mushrooming of the nation's military installation, industrial employers headed south to the Sunbelt. By the early 1950s, white workers began their abandonment of widespread unionism as a relic of the previous decade and embraced the postwar suburban prosperity that funded white flight from what would become the cities of the Rustbelt. Places like Atlanta, Phoenix, Dallas, Houston, and the bedroom communities of Orange County, California displaced Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia as the nation's economic boomtowns.[57] Likewise, southern politicians ensured that military growth benefited

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[54] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1997); George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).
[55] Joel Dinerstein, *Swing the Machine: Modernity, Technology, and African American Culture Between the World Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).
[56] Miller, *Segregating Sound*; Pecknold, *Hidden in the Mix*.
[57] Thomas J. Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago: The

their states, bringing more defense contractors and soldiers to the region than ever before. Country music and Faron Young created an appropriately southern soundtrack for this move.

The use of country music in recruitment campaigns signaled the genre's growing commercial power and the centralization of the industry in Nashville. Historian Diane Pecknold has described how Nashville's system of studios, record labels, performers, and songwriters made the city "the closest equivalent to Tin Pan Alley to survive the midcentury passage to fully realized mass culture." In 1953, WSM, the radio home of the *Grand Ole Opry*, helped enable this consolidation of power by gaining control of the Country Music Disc Jockey Association, an organization founded by Connie B. Gay. The station located the disc jockey's convention in Nashville and renamed it the WSM Disc Jockey Festival, essentially conflating all country music with WSM and, by extension, the *Grand Ole Opry*.[58]

Country music's popularity began to grow thanks to increased coverage in national trade magazines and newspapers. This boost began in 1952 when country radio gained more notice in *Billboard*'s new column "Folk Talent & Tunes." The death of Hank Williams on January 1, 1953 and the creation of the Jimmie Rodgers Memorial festival later that year, designed as a tribute to the "father" of country music, propelled the genre into national headlines just as the Nashville industry ramped up its production.[59] Williams' death also created an increased demand for recordings of his songs, which enriched the publishing firm Acuff-Rose, a company owned by two of Music Row's most powerful men, Fred Rose and Roy Acuff. Fans wanted to buy records by artists who *sounded* like Hank Williams. This phenomenon undoubtedly helped Faron Young's 1953 breakout single, "Goin' Steady," which sounded so much like a Williams

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University of Chicago Press, 2006); Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Space, Place, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[58] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 66, 71.

[59] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 71.

composition that other performers accused Young of plagiarism.[60] Pecknold describes these leaps in notoriety for the genre as "a series of events that combined to propel the country music industry into the biggest promotional windfall it had experienced in its short history."[61]

Yet the windfall found in the combination of professional organizations, press coverage, and celebrity death could not compare to the boost in publicity that country music earned through its association with the military. It had propelled Connie B. Gay and Jimmy Dean to national stardom and transformed Faron Young into a Nashville star. In return, the Pentagon received a boost in its profile. The RS relied on country music to sell careers in military service at a time when it desperately needed recruits. It noticed a steady stream of enlistees from the South and put its resources into keeping that stream flowing. Soldiers did love country music. They hungered for it when stationed overseas and begged for news of their favorite stars. For soldiers and sailors listening in the 1950s, country music offered them the sound of home. Country music not only enticed its fans into joining the military, it provided the soundtrack to their service.

Soldier Fandom and Musical Professionalization

The AFRS acted as an essential tool for country music's promotion since the late 1940s, and it only increased its importance as the popularity of the genre began to grow in the early 1950s. *Country & Western Jamboree* reported on the demand for the genre among both U.S. soldiers and foreign civilians in Germany. "American-style music has become as much a part of the average European's listening habits as have the familiar melodies from Stateside to the American either at home or stationed overseas," the magazine claimed in the summer of 1955. Country music proved particularly popular with civilians. As the *Jamboree* stated, "Here in

[60] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 27.
[61] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 71.

Germany, a large majority of the listening audience . . . is composed of the native European 'eavesdropping' to hear what this 'American music is all about.' Needless to say, country-style music is considered a large item on the music agenda here." Both military and civilians wrote letters to the AFRS, with many letters coming from the U.S. requesting that a song be dedicated to a soldier. Three programs produced by U.S. soldiers stationed in West Germany obliged these requests and helped spread the sound of country music on the continent, *Hillbilly Gasthaus*, *Western Swing*, and *Stick-Buddy Jamboree*.[62]

These radio broadcasts, along with the Special Services concerts and country tours booked by Connie B. Gay and the *Grand Ole Opry*, kept soldiers entertained with the sounds of home and provided a path for the newest country music to reach audiences overseas. Groups like the Roadside Ramblers, made up of eight soldiers from the 9th Infantry Division stationed in West Germany, performed benefit concerts for German orphanages, hospitals, curious civilian concertgoers, and soldiers at the army's service clubs. The Ramblers had risen in popularity thanks to winning a service club talent contest. They went on to win their regional talent show, which awarded them the chance of appearing on the AFRS for two half-hour programs. In explaining the German's interest in the music, Pfc. Harry L. Reckhart, leader of the Ramblers, suggested that "Music is an international language" that transcended cultural differences. "Although most Germans don't understand the words," Reckhart contended, "the tempo and melody of American folk songs are just as novel to them as German folk songs are to us in America." Two members of the Ramblers hoped to turn their military musical experience into a

[62] "C&W Goes Big in Germany," *Country & Western Jamboree*, June 1955, 11, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

civilian profession when their hitch ended, a recurring theme for the country musicians who received their start in the armed forces.[63]

While live music and radio programs kept soldiers and civilians tuned into country sounds, the growing country music press kept soldiers stationed around the globe informed of the latest releases and news about their favorite artists. One airman, who referred to himself as Ed (Tiny) Tims, worked as a disc jockey in Laurel, Mississippi before joining the service. The air force stationed him on Misaswa Air Base in Japan in 1955, and the *Country & Western Jamboree* kept him up to date on the latest country music news. He wrote to the magazine to praise their coverage. "I just read the April and May issues of your new magazine and think they are just a shade above terrific. I especially enjoyed the stories on Carl Smith and Hank Thompson." Country music helped Tims maintain his connection to his friends and his profession back home in Mississippi. His letter to the *Jamboree* included how he had heard "from back stateside that Jimmy Martin and the Osborne Brothers have made themselves quite a place in the country field with their recording of *Save It! Save It!* Certainly would like to see a write-up and pics of the boys."[64] Tims wrote back three months later to compliment the magazine's reviews of new music. "Many thanks for publishing my letter," he told the *Jamboree* publishers, adding "Your record review column sure keeps me posted on ordering my records. You sure have a magazine that's here to stay, and by far the finest in its field."[65]

Other servicemembers used the pages to make connections with other musicians and with the country music industry. Cpl. Anthony Warrenfelt wrote to the magazine to request an article

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[63] "GI Hillbillies Prove Germans Dig Hoedowns," *Army Times*, September 4, 1954, 17.
[64] Ed (Tiny) Tims, *Country & Western Jamboree*, August 1955, 4, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[65] Tims, *Country & Western Jamboree*, December 1955, 31, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

on Connie B. Gay and his *Radio Ranch* in Arlington, Virginia, which he claimed "used to be my favorite program when I was home." He also wanted to know the whereabouts of Buck Ryan, a champion fiddler whom he had heard was working in Baltimore.[66] U.S. Air Force Staff Sergeant M.V. Hinorn wrote to the *Jamboree* to ask an array of questions about breaking into the country music business. "Man, am I ever glad to subscribed to your fine magazine," Hinorn told the editors. Besides wanting to know about the careers of particular musicians, Hinorn asked a series of questions about breaking into the business: "How do I go about getting songs copyrighted and published?," "Is it possible to purchase transcriptions from radio stations or networks?," "Could you give me the names and addresses of the a&r chiefs in the c&w departments of the following recording companies: 1. Capitol 2. RCA Victor 3. Mercury 4. Decca 5. Columbia." He closed by telling the editors how their "publication is in itself the answer to a great need."[67]

The *Jamboree* did address a growing need shared by many aspiring country musicians in the army like Hinorn. Namely, how does one become a professional musician after their time in the service? These men had every right to think that such a move was possible. They had witnessed the success of Faron Young who, in a matter of a few months, had risen from virtual unknown to undisputed celebrity. Just as other servicemembers used military service and the subsequent benefits of the G.I. Bill to professionalize in trades ranging from radio technicians to auto mechanics, others wanted to use their time in the ranks to professionalize their musical skill. They knew that the military could provide a springboard into the country music business. Meanwhile, the Pentagon knew that country music could help push potential volunteers into the service. In the late 1950s, the RS embraced the combined tools of television and country music

[66] Cpl. Anthony Warrenfelt, *Country & Western Jamboree*, August 1955, 4, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[67] M.V. Hinorn, *Country & Western Jamboree*, October 1955, 4, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

to maintain the pipeline of country music listeners entering the military with dreams of economic advancement.

The Sights, Sounds, and Gender of Country Music Recruitment

The *Talent Patrol* show that shot Young to military stardom represented just one of the dozens of pop culture outlets influenced by Cold War militarism and anticommunism. Television, in particular, offered a powerful new medium for the soft power propaganda made under the direction, or at least with the approval, of the Pentagon during the 1950s. Spy shows, military documentaries, and sit-coms and dramas with military settings proliferated on civilian networks during the decade. These shows cast the U.S. Armed Forces, and the nation itself, as the authorities of upright morality and democratic freedom in the global struggle against fascism and atheistic communism. NBC led the way with its series *Victory at Sea*, a 26-episode documentary that aired from 1952-1953 and covered the Pacific Theater during World War II. *Victory at Sea* ran in 206 television markets, won both an Emmy and a Peabody, and included a soundtrack written by Richard Rodgers for the NBC Orchestra. Beyond these portrayals of American military might, television humanized and endeared the armed services to audiences with sit-com characters like Sergeant Bilko on *The Phil Silvers Show* (1955-1959) and light dramas set at service academies called *Men of Annapolis* (1957-1958) and *The West Point Story* (1956-1957), all of which aired dozens of episodes in the late 1950s.[68] These types of shows also relied on Pentagon officials as advisors to maintain the accuracy of their military lingo, marching formations, and on-location scenes. This dedication to detail delivered real returns on the DOD's investments. Enrollment rose at both academies as a result of the television series based in Annapolis and West Point.[69]

[68] MacDonald, *Television and the Red Scare*, 111-113.
[69] Ibid., 119.

The RS wanted to use the medium to meet its quota of volunteer enlisted men as well, and televised country music offered promising potential to reach the kinds of audiences they wanted. Following the pattern of Young's radio recruitment spots, *Town and Country Time*, and *Country Jamboree*, the U.S. Army began filming a television series in Nashville, Tennessee called *Country Style, U.S.A.* in 1957. This television version served as a continuation of a radio program of the same name and format that the RS began airing a few years before from its headquarters on Governor's Island, New York. The television program, however, placed army recruitment square in the heart of the country music industry, filming right on Music Row in Nashville, Tennessee. Each 15-minute, live segment featured a top name in country music as a master of ceremonies, while private first class and former Milton Berle Show co-host Charlie Applewhite served as its first announcer.[70] Applewhite also worked as an announcer for Gigandet's *Front and Center* pop music recruitment show, giving him cross-genre experience in selling armed service as a career path for the nation's young men and women.[71]

Although originally slated for thirteen episodes, the Army Special Services eventually created fifty-two, a testament to the successful collaboration between Nashville's thriving music industry and the Cold War demand for young men, particularly white men, to join the ranks. The lineup included artists like Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Rod Brasfield, Faron Young, Little Jimmy Dickens, and Jim Reeves.[72] Nashville newspaper *The Tennessean* reported that the *Country Style, U.S.A.* episodes "are said to be the first of their kind featuring country musicians" and that the show would be distributed to "television stations over the nation by recruiting office as a

[70] "New Army TV Show to Aid Recruiting," *Army Times*, June 15, 1957, 34; *Country Style, U.S.A.*, Season 1 liner notes (1957; Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2007), DVD.
[71] "Your United States Army presents transcribed 'Front and Center,'" MCed by Charlie Applewhite, featuring Bob Dini on vocals, 2478554-3-1, Recorded Sound Division, LOC.
[72] "New Army TV Show to Aid Recruiting," *Army Times*, June 15, 1957, 34.

public service."[73] With this roster of country stars, the army capitalized on country music fandom. Furthermore, *Country Style, U.S.A.* made the connections between the military and country music more concrete thanks to the use of Owen Bradley's studio. Bradley, the legendary producer behind Patsy Cline, Willie Nelson, and Johnny Cash, also produced the army's television show in his Nashville studio, a former U.S. Army Quonset hut that sat next door to Columbia's Studio A.[74] The infrastructure of the warfare state literally, if inadvertently, provided the infrastructure of Music Row.

Every episode of *Country Style, U.S.A.* kicked off and ended the same way, with a chorus of the western swing standard "Stay All Night (Stay a Little Longer)," which Bob Wills and Tommy Duncan had written and sent to number three on the *Billboard* country & western charts in 1946. The *Country Style, USA* house band played the Wills-Duncan tune, while square dancers clapped and danced to the music. This opening sequence played out in front of a scene of constructed rusticity. Bales of hay, piled behind the band and scattered around on the floor, added the three-dimensional prop to the flat, painted barn on the backdrop, where the guest emcee would stand, guitar in-hand to sing his songs. And it was always *his* songs. *Country Style, U.S.A.* featured a male performer as the emcee on every episode, while the show would cut away to a featured female performer who sang one song before the cameras returned to the male hosts.

A typical episode featured Marty Robbins as emcee. He kicked things off with two of his 1956 releases "I Can't Quit" and "Singin' the Blues." He then welcomed Applewhite, who, donning his dress uniform, alerted viewers to the "new career fields open in the United States Army." "And you know," Applewhite reminded the audience, "in the army, artillery is a career that starts with a bang!" The scene quickly cut to footage of soldiers firing a 280-millimeter

[73] "Bradley Film Studios Get Army Contract," *The Tennessean*, January 29, 1957, 19.
[74] Robert K. Oermann, "Owen Bradley," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 50-51.

atomic canon, and a voiceover stated how the skills gained in the army would transfer to the private sector.[75] Here, in one fifteen-minute segment, the army made its intentions and cultural allegiances known. Framed between the soaring glissandos of a steel guitar and the roaring cacophony of an atomic missile, the army invited young men to join the peacetime ranks in a promise of economic advancement and armed adventure, all set to country music's latest hits.

Country Style, U.S.A. also made its pitch for young women to join the Women's Army Corps (WAC). In a different episode hosted by Robbins, the singer invited another of the army's announcers, Jody McCrae, a private and an actor in a series of teen beach movies who had replaced Applewhite, to introduce a segment directed at women. "Tell me, you've really got something important for all these young ladies that are college graduates, is that right?," Robbins prompted McCrae. "Yeah, I really do, Marty," McCrae replied, "It's something real special." The camera then cut to a segment called "Fashion News for College Graduate" with a female voiceover, describing the latest styles in uniforms for the women's corps. "You'll look your best as an officer in the Women's Army Corps. Look at this chic taupe uniform by one of the country's foremost designers, accentuating smooth flowing lines," a female narrator intoned. "It compliments your responsible army job, for as a WAC officer, you'll start as an executive with a truly important job." With promises of traveling the globe in your dress uniform, the army offered adventures in exotic locations to young American women, all while maintaining their feminine image. The army also presented the prospect of heterosexual love when the narrator reassured viewers that "for those enchanted evenings at the officers club, you're free to wear your own frothiest gown."[76] Plagued by rumors of lesbianism in their ranks, WACs needed to

[75] *Country Style, U.S.A.*, episode 8, featuring Marty Robbins and Joyce Paul (1957; Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2007), DVD.
[76] *Country Style, U.S.A.*, episode 34, featuring Marty Robbins and the Anita Kerr Singers (Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2007), DVD.

dispel any misgivings Americans might feel about women in the otherwise masculine attire of an army uniform.[77]

Pop music had long functioned as a recruitment tool for the WACs, particularly since Gigandet had taken over the radio section of the RS. He had begun reaching out to potential Women's Army Corps (WAC) recruits with the show *The WAC on Parade*, which he produced for the radio's Mutual Broadcasting System beginning in 1951. The show featured a message from the Secretary of the Army, several testimonials from active WACs, and the sounds of official WAC musical groups: the Bar-B Sharps vocal quartette, the WAC chorus, and the WAC Dixieland group.[78] In the summer of 1951, the RS also produced a special episode of the radio series *Stars on Parade*, starring pop star Rosemary Clooney. This show celebrated the ninth anniversary of the WAC's founding and a recent call for 30,000 new women recruits. Clooney joined musicians in The Army Blues, the army dance band at Fort Myer, Virginia, to record a selection of her hits, including Cole Porter's "From This Moment On" and George Gershwin's "S'wonderful."[79] Patti Page, who had experienced an enormous career boost in the early 1950s thanks to the success of her pop cover of the country tune "Tennessee Waltz," filled in for Eddie Fisher on his show *At Ease* in the fall of 1952 with a special message for potential WACs. "I've always been fascinated with these bright young women . . . with the way they wear that pretty uniform . . . the way they tackle every job with real zest!," she told her listeners. Page testified how, "I've seen with my own eyes how the WACs have taken hold and learned how to be real technicians . . . skilled in hundreds of jobs." She then made her pitch to join the WAC, relaying

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[77] Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); Bettie J. Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990).
[78] "Pace, Hallaren on Mutual Network Broadcast for WAC Recruiting," *Recruiting Journal*, May 1951, 17; May to August 1951; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[79] "WAC Honored in Special 'SOP' Radio Show' New Program: 'March Time Down South,'" *Recruiting Journal*, August 1952, 18; June to December 1952; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

that the corps could do even more for the country "if only more of you young women would take advantage of the chance to be a WAC. . . . There are so many benefits waiting for you, believe me!"[80]

The combination of television and country music offered yet another path to reach white female fans. Service as a WAC promised a semblance of independence for young women in the 1950s. The RS embedded that message of personal freedom in the slogan, "Get choice, not chance, from your Army Recruiter," a phrase coined during the Korean War to attract career-oriented soldiers. In a 1958 episode of *Country Style, U.S.A.* hosted by Faron Young, the army made another pitch to young women on this promise of career choice. As Young finished a version of his 1957 tune "Vacation's Over" he thanked his quartet of back-up singers the Southlanders, as well as his band the Country Deputies, before segueing into the recruitment spot. "We have more fun when we get to work for the army, I'll guarantee you," Young suggested, reprising his role as a recruitment leader. He then lamented that "we don't get to mention the girls enough" on *Country Style, U.S.A.*, "So right now, we'd like to get Charlie Applewhite to tell you girls how you can keep up with the boys in the army by choosing a career for your future, too. Charlie?"[81]

Applewhite introduced the clip, which was accompanied again by a female voiceover. The camera pans over the Arc de Triomph. "This is the Champs Elysees, the loveliest street in Paris," the woman's voice told the audience. "And here's the loveliest thing on the Champs Elysees, Sally Brown, American." A young brunette woman in a suit-dress holds a translation book while happily talking with a Parisian police officer, who gives her directions. The narrator

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[80] "Patti Page Compliments WACs," *Recruiting Journal*, December 1952; June to December 1952; Recruiting Journal Files; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[81] *Country Style, U.S.A.*, episode 19, featuring Faron Young and Skeeter Davis (Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2007), DVD.

then described how Sally had achieved a level of independence to which many working- and middle-class women could only aspire, as a "world traveler at 22 and a very important person to her country." "During business hours, she's Corporal Sally Brown, Women's Army Corps," the voiceover told listeners, "an expert army photographer. Assignment: Europe." The narrator made clear that Sally earned this glamorous independence because of the opportunities provided by the army, reminding viewers that "life wasn't always this interesting and neither was Sally." The camera cuts to Sally in civilian dress, folding clothes in a department store and explaining how, "grinding away at her routine job, feeling rather routine herself."[82]

The civilian Sally Brown resented the drudgery of working in the postwar nation's service economy, where she struggled with the boredom of low-skill labor. The narrator told viewers how "The Women's Army Corps changed all that. Her army recruiter helped plan her career," and that "She chose from twenty-six exciting courses in photography, medicine, radio, and many more." As the scene faded, Sally walked along on the arm of a male soldier, while the narrator conveyed that should "you want to be like Sally, see your army recruiter now. Learn how you too can enjoy life in the Women's Army Corps." Faron Young then delivered one more pitch before introducing Skeeter Davis, the episode's female guest star, saying, "And remember girls, now more than ever before you get choice, not chance in the United States Army."[83]

The country music press raved about the program. *Country & Western Jamboree* described *Country Style, U.S.A.* as "probably the 'best' Country Music television films ever made." Colonel Vernon Rice and Major Jim Hickman, two RS officers, previewed the series backstage at the *Grand Ole Opry*. Minnie Pearl served as hostess for the RS officials during their Nashville visit, and the article declared how the show "won acclaim for fine singing, good music,

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

and strikingly simple production features coupled with excellent technical work done by Owen Bradley and his studio staff."[84] From the perspective of the country music industry, the mission behind *Country Style, U.S.A.* did not warrant a mention beyond the RS officers who screened the films. What mattered to Music Row was that *Country Style* provided Nashville's stars with an unprecedented reach into new television markets and the chance to spread the music to more consumers.

Both the AFRS and civilian radio networks continued broadcasting country music recruitment shows during the late 1950s to address the perpetual need for young men in the ranks. Connie B. Gay and Walter Bouillet had sold the U.S. Navy on the program *Country Hoedown* in 1957 and used it as a tool to promote Jimmy Dean. *Country Hoedown* relied on a rotating cast of country artists as the hosts and guest stars, including Faron Young, Tex Ritter, Jimmy Dean, and Ernest Tubb. Similar to *Country Style, U.S.A.*, these radio shows began with a string band performing a square dance tune while a caller announced, "It's the *Country Hoedown*!" In a 1957 episode hosted by Faron Young, the singer greeted listeners like old acquaintances, "Well, greetings friends and neighbors this is the Young Sheriff Faron Young, presiding over the doings here at the Country Hoedown."[85]

Young could speak to them in this way because he was, in fact, a familiar voice to many of them, having donated his time and talent to military recruitment for nearly five years at that point. He encouraged his listeners on civilian networks and the AFRS to "throw your cares away, and join in on the fun 'cause we have plenty of music and song coming right at you." Ernest Tubb then joined Young for a bit of cornpone humor about the hardships of growing up in rural

[84] "Army's Country Style Television Series Assists in Bringing Music to the People, *Country & Western Jamboree*, August 1957, 18-19, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[85] *Country Hoedown*, 11, Recorded Sound Division, LOC.

poverty. Tubb claimed that his family was so poor that his mother used sand instead of talcum powder, while Young joked that he had twenty-eight siblings because his parents could not get along and his father wanted to "get lost in the crowd." To complete the show, Young and Tubb traded turns playing songs, Tennessee Ernie Ford gave a Bible reading (as he did on each episode), and an armed forces spokesperson encouraged listeners to continue their educations while in the service by enrolling in a telecourse. The spot ended with Young reminding listeners that the *Country Hoedown* was sponsored by the U.S. Navy.[86]

All episodes of *Country Hoedown* took the basic form and content of this particular one hosted by Young. The show followed the pattern of its contemporary country music shows like Connie B. Gay's *Town and Country Time* and Owen Bradley's *Country Style, U.S.A. Country Hoedown*'s content revealed the usefulness of the genre as a recruitment tool and why the RS relied so heavily on country music and its stars. Both Young and Tubb sang songs in their signature styles. They did not alter their repertoire for the show. Tubb went first with a version of the tune "Last Blue Yodel (The Women Make a Fool Out Me)," a song recorded by his musical idol Jimmie Rodgers in 1930. "I love the women," Tubb draws, "I love them all the same / But I never loved nobody well enough to change her name," followed by the song's titular refrain "The women make a fool out me." Young delivered the next song, his 1955 release, "It's a Great Life (If You Don't Weaken)," co-written by wife and husband team Audrey and Joe Allison. "Well, I don't guess I'll ever make a million / I just want enough to get by," Young sings with a wink to the listener, setting them up for the punch delivered in the next line. "I like a checking account at two or three banks / And a yellow Cadillac to drive." "To go sportin' around with two or three redheads / And maybe take a blonde along," he sings before hitting the refrain, "It's a

[86] Ibid.

great life if you don't weaken / But who wants to be strong?" The song echoed the theme of Young's first number one hit, also written by Joe Allison, "Live Fast, Love Hard, Die Young," and helped cement his image as a raucous, hell-raisin' good ol' boy. Likewise, Tubb's rendition of the Rodgers tune bragged about a record of hard living and promiscuous sex, themes that asserted a heteronormative, albeit rebellious, version of masculinity.[87]

As Tubb's cover of a 1930 record suggested, country music had long traded in these tropes of masculine virility and hedonism but never without tempering its reported decadence with repentance and Christian devotion. Historian Bill C. Malone situates these themes in the southern culture of bad man braggadocio that runs from folk songs like "Wild Bill Jones" to the Outlaw movement of the 1970s to the alternative country rebellion of the 1990s.[88] Young and Tubb's performances relished in the working-class rowdiness that Music Row would silence only a few years later with the Nashville Sound that, as producer Billy Sherrill described, was made for "the housewife washing dishes at ten a.m. in Topeka, Kansas."[89] Yet *Country Hoedown* also made time for a Bible lesson. Tennessee Ernie Ford read a verse for these shows and offered a brief homily. On the Young/Tubb episode, Ford quoted from 1 Kings 3:9, stating, "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad." The takeaway from this passage, according to Ford, was that "While you're getting to know folks, getting to know the good and the bad in them, they're doing the same with you, yes sir. When it comes to getting along with folks, having an understanding heart is mighty

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[87] Ibid.
[88] Bill C. Malone, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). See Malone's chapter "When the Lord Made Me, He Made a Rambling Man," 117-148.
[89] Quoted in Diane Pecknold, "'I Wanna Play House': Configurations of Masculinity in the Nashville Sound Era," in *A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music*, eds. Kristine M. McCusker and Diane Pecknold (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 86.

important."[90] When coupled with economic advancement and military duty, the religious and gender messages of shows like *Country Hoedown* and *Country Style, U.S.A.* sold country music as an all-American soundtrack to Cold War patriotism.

The Politics Music Row Militarism and Musical Amateurism

Tennessee's governor Frank G. Clement tirelessly promoted country music as American music in the midst of these recruitment campaigns in the 1950s. Clement, a Democrat, served as governor from 1954-1959 and again from 1963-1967. His administrations sought to improve the state's public reputation by developing industrial growth and encouraging racial moderation. He even commandeered the mic during a broadcast of *Grand Ole Opry* to announce the activation of National Guard troops to enforce integration in Clinton, Tennessee when violent white supremacists terrorized the town from 1956 to 1958.[91] Clement promoted his state's public image, in part, by touting country music as a cultural industry and the genre's commercial potential. He viewed the music as a natural resource for the state, something that sprang organically from its people over generations and had modernized to meet the tastes at mid-century. Clement made a habit of appearing alongside country musicians at events, ranging from the *Opry* to the Jimmie Rodgers Memorial Concerts in Meridian, Mississippi, all in an attempt to equate Nashville, and Tennessee in general, with country music and country music with America itself.[92]

Governor Clement took his promotional campaign to New York City in 1956, delivering the keynote address and appearing alongside stars of the *Grand Ole Opry* at a luncheon for the

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[90] *Country Hoedown*, 11, Recorded Sound Division, LOC.
[91] Lee Seifert Greene, *Lead Me On: Frank Goad Clement and Tennessee Politics* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); June N. Adamson, "Few Black Voices Heard: The Black Community and the Desegregation Crisis in Clinton, Tennessee, 1956," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 53 (1994): 30-41.
[92] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 72, 80.

Radio and Television Executives Society held at the Hotel Roosevelt. "There are three things we folk in Tennessee take seriously," he began, "our politics, our religion and our country music." Although he admitted to not being a historian, Clement claimed to understand the genre's atavistic roots and asserted that "today's country music has captured and held the melodies our forefathers sang as they trudged through the tall rhododendron-covered Smokies. . . This was the music of the pioneers . . . It told of their sorrows and joys." Clement also acknowledged that "New York's Madison Avenue" did not always understand the music's popularity, and he tried explaining the music's attractiveness as simply as possible. "Country music is the music of the people. It's the spontaneous musical outburst of the events in their daily lives—their joys and hopes and fears," he told the crowd. He also pushed his belief in culture as a natural resource, maintaining that "Country music has always been with us . . . It is one of the great resources of a people, of an intelligent, neighbor-loving, God-fearing people, steeped in folk tradition and folk culture." He closed with a conflation of personal taste, country music, and American cultural identity, claiming, "I love country music because when I hear it, I hear America singing."[93]

In 1957, the governor returned to New York City, where he addressed 350 of the city's civic and business leaders in the Rotary Club. He again recounted the genre's roots in pioneer folk culture and continued to mesh country music with Americanism in an attempt to boost the genre's image. Country music, Clement insisted, "speaks of God and faith—it sings of courage, honor, and a fundamental decency." "Thus," he continued, "I am not at all abashed or ashamed to stand before this Rotary Club of New York to some of whom even the mention of the words *Grand Ole Opry* might bring smiles of derision—and say that I like Country Music and shall help promote it." The country industry had grown steadily over the past decade, and Clement

[93] "Country Hoedown on Madison Avenue," *Country & Western Jamboree*, August 1956, 28-29, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

cited statistics that *Opry* performers made a record high of 3,225 personal appearances in 1956 and that 25 million people had paid admission to hear these stars. Based on those numbers, Clement concluded that country music "is big business" and had "established itself as a permanent asset of the American way of life because it lays no claim to being anything else but the people's music."[94]

Clement rooted country music's Americanism and its commercial success in its association with the military and *Opry*'s stars willingness to perform for the troops. In the summer of 1957, Clement spoke on a telecast celebration of the country music for *Opry* appreciation week in Nashville. He gave his usual assessment of country as the music of pioneer stock and referred to the unprecedented commercial success it enjoyed at the time. Clement then explained its success because country music was "just plain good for the people of Tennessee, the nation and the world." Without mentioning Connie B. Gay, the governor recalled how "When our boys fought for us and risked their lives and shed their blood in Korea or in Germany, we found *Grand Ole Opry* stars going at no expense of the doughboy, to bring the message from home—in words and music—to the front lines where America's homes were being defended." He credited this patriotism and moral goodness with boosting country music's profile and reputation. Clement noted how "over the past few years a revolution has taken place . . . . Those who once looked down upon what they thought was something from the hills . . . now realize that there was gold in these hills—not just of the monetary type, but of spiritual, moral, and mental values." The governor called performers like Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl, Hank Snow,

[94] "Country Music Is A Way of Life," *Country & Western Jamboree*, June 1957, 21, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

and Jim Reeves by name, complimenting them for their willingness to entertain the troops and calling them "public servants in the truest sense of the word."[95]

Clement's effusive praise for country music and its artists informed his defense of the genre during the battle between ASCAP and BMI. In April 1958, Clement arrived in Washington, D.C. to defend BMI. Country performers and music business actors joined Clement in providing testimony before the Senate committee on communications, including former Louisiana governor and country singer Jimmie Davis, song publisher Wesley Rose, producer Sam Phillips, and artists Faron Young, Roy Acuff, Little Jimmy Dickens, Ferlin Husky, Eddy Arnold, Gene Autry, and Pee Wee King.[96] These men traveled to the capital to sway lawmakers to reject the Smathers bill, which proposed to prohibit song publisher's from owning a stake in a broadcast corporation. Such a law threatened to hobble BMI since it was radio station owners who had founded BMI in 1940 in an attempt to circumvent ASCAP's blanket licensing fees. ASCAP brought its own defenders as well, many of whom turned the hearings into a reckoning on the state of music industry, amateurism, and cultural taste at midcentury. Defenders of ASCAP and Tin Pan Alley like Vance Packard referred to country music as "trash" along with rock and roll, genres that lowered the standards, and by extension, the collective IQ of the nation's listening public. In the opinion of pop music's defenders, the amateurs had usurped the power of the professionals, and ASCAP demanded Congress address their grievances.[97]

Country music counted God, the Pentagon, and the free market on its side. Clement combined all three in his defense of country and BMI. Country music, he argued, "speaks of God

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[95] Jack Setters, "Country Music Crusade," *Country & Western Jamboree*, July 1957, 25, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[96] U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Communications of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Hearings on S. 2834.
[97] Ryan, *The Production of Culture in the Music Industry*, 114.

and faith . . . . Hardly a year goes by without the American people adopting as its own a new country song with a religious significance, because in these songs they can see sincerity." He then told the Senators how BMI had increased economic competition in the music market, and therefore, "immeasurably contributed to opening the door for new talent in the United States. The public has thus been given a greater choice of music than it ever had before." The government then used that new talent and newly accessible sound to promote the U.S.'s democratic capitalist agenda around the globe. "This music," the governor continued, "and I specifically refer to country music, is being played and sung throughout the world. The State Department, the armed forces radio network, the Voice of America, and other government instrumentalities which seek to bring a message from the American people of the rest of the world have relied very heavily on American country music." Country performers had traveled "Hundreds of thousands of miles of travel to all parts of the world, under government sponsorship" to promote the "American way of life." Clement called these performers "ambassadors of good will," suggesting that they deserved gratitude, not scrutiny and intimidation.[98]

Artists Roy Acuff and Ferlin Huskey followed Clement's line of reasoning in their defense of country music's popularity and the rise of BMI. Acuff recounted his trips to entertain the troops during and after World War II, reminding the politicians that he had traveled to Canada, Germany, Austria, England, Japan, and Korea "because our kind of music was the kind of thing the boys wanted to hear." For Acuff, country music's popularity in the military reflected a simple calculus of supply and demand. "The army was always very anxious to get country performers to the soldiers. We drew tremendous crowds," he relayed to the lawmakers. "We

[98] *Country & Western Jamboree*, Yearbook 1959, 15, 17, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

were frequently told when we played army bases that we had drawn crowds that were as large or surpassed the crowds drawn by such great comedians as Bob Hope and others."[99]

Huskey echoed that argument. He remembered how he brought his guitar along with him in 1943 when he joined the Merchant Marines. "I served on troopships and did a lot of entertaining for the servicemen. The simple songs were the kind they liked to hear because they could join in singing with me." Huskey also argued that the military gave country music unprecedented exposure, claiming that, "There were lots of boys on the troopships on which I served who had never really heard country music before, and it was interesting to see how fast they acquired a taste for it. In fact, some of the most enthusiastic people were those who came from parts of the country where this kind of music was almost unknown." He pushed back against the pay-for-play narrative of BMI's success and placed the responsibility, instead, with the sociological changes of wartime. Huskey concluded with this stance by arguing, "that the thing that accounts for the national popularity of country music now is the fact that so many people had the chance to hear it during World War II who never heard it before."[100]

Opry star Little Jimmy Dickens added a defense of country music's white working-class roots in his testimony to the Senate and refuted ASCAP's allegations of country music as "trash." Dickens, who hailed from a West Virginia family of coal miners and one of 11 children, took this epithet personally. As he told the Senators, when ASCAP's witnesses referred to "country and western music as trash, they are referring to the American people as trash." "My folks and their neighbors love country and western music," he testified. "They are simple, everyday, hard-working, God-fearing people, and they certainly are not trash." Dickens also emphasized his part in spreading country music via military tours. "I had the great pleasure of

[99] Ibid., 22.
[100] Ibid., 27.

going to Europe in (1949) with our cast of 32 country and western entertainers from our *Grand Ole Opry*. During our stay in Europe, we entertained over 150,000 American servicemen and women. They loved our show . . . We have taken our simple country and western music to the front lines of Korea to boost the morale of our fighting men." Country music lifted the spirits of U.S. soldiers. And that, Dickens concluded, "is not my idea of trash."[101] Dickens's reiteration of the insult "trash" carried significant cultural baggage, and he showed his political savvy situating U.S. soldiers in this context. By defending country fans and soldiers against such insults, Dickens defended them against the insult of racialized poverty—white trash. By extension, he also insinuated that ASCAP had called U.S. soldiers trash, a moral offense in the midst of the nation's Cold War mission.

No one could speak with more authority on country music, BMI, and the military than Faron Young. His testimony reminded Senators, ASCAP witnesses, and the general public that country music owed as much to the Pentagon as it did to any PRO or the alleged plotting of radio station owners to line their pockets with country music royalties. "Country entertainers travel the United States, Canada, the Hawaiian Islands, Europe—in fact the world over, spreading the good faith with country music and country religious music," he told the Senators, building on his previous statement about how the government had sent him around the world to entertain the troops. In all of that experience, Young said that he never felt "any pressure put on me by radio stations or anywhere that I have worked to do BMI songs."[102] The government had given country music an economic boost. That much remained true. But what these testimonies wanted to emphasize was that country music, like the soldiers they recruited and entertained, had earned those benefits fair and square.

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[101] Ibid., 23.
[102] Ibid., 20.

With the promise of economic stability and personal autonomy, the U.S. military joined with the country music industry to entice the nation's young men and women to join the ranks and sell them country records in the process. By 1958, when Faron Young testified for the Senate Subcommittee, the government's use of country music as military entertainment had helped to give the genre commercial and cultural power. If country music had grown so much that it threatened the commercial power of pop music and ASCAP, then he wanted them to recognize how the Department of Defense had enabled that rise. Young reflected on the army's role in his career during an interview in 1984. He told the interviewers that serving with the U.S. Army's Special Services Division "was a big help to me because I was on 2,000 radio stations a week all over the world. Pfc. Faron Young and the Circle A Wranglers. It didn't do anything but help me." Looking back over 30 years of his time in the industry, he still thought people missed the real story of his early success that included the 1961 number one hit "Hello Walls" penned by a then-obscure songwriter named Willie Nelson. Young reflected that most people "don't realize I wasn't really that well known yet until I got in the service and went on all those radio and television things for recruiting for the service." As for those who "say 'the army really started you,'" Young continued, "well, I really can't say that it didn't."[103]

Through its relationship to the military, country music doubled as the soundtrack of both midcentury barn dances and modern military recruitment. The recruitment shows enticed listeners by promising fulfilling careers, economic independence, and world travel while promoting Nashville's white country artists to an audience of the U.S. Cold War military. The ascendancy experienced by the country music industry aided by this relationship to the Department of Defense also reflected many Americans' journey into the modern middle class

[103] Cradle of the Stars, Louisiana Hayride Interview, 1984, FV.2012.2018, FLA.

thanks to government programs like the GI Bill, benefits that disproportionately favored white veterans. The use of country music as a recruitment tool had targeted a demographic of young white listeners. Yet, nearly simultaneously, the Pentagon's racial integration policies had diversified the ranks. Blacks, whites, and soldiers of all races trained, ate, bunked, and fought together.

These soldiers and sailors also played music with one another. The ironies of this institutional public image grounded in ideals of white masculinity and the increasingly diverse demographics of its troops would play out again through music that was developing alongside the country music industry. In the late 1950s, both country music and the military would have to reckon with the threat of a new genre called rock and roll and its country cousin, rockabilly. This new unruly genre would help country appear as the staid, mature music by comparison, making it all the more appropriate for an association with the military. Rock and roll was born, in part, as the rebellious child of country music, a child conceived, like so many Baby Boomers, in the downtime of military duty.

Chapter 3

Singing in the Ranks:

Memphis, Militarism, and the Country Roots of Rock and Roll

Harold Jenkins headed for Memphis, Tennessee as soon as he received his discharge from the army in 1956. He had heard Elvis Presley recently, and Jenkins hoped that he, too, could record for Sam Phillips's Sun Records. For the past two years, Jenkins had honed his skills as a singer, songwriter, and performer by fronting an all-soldier country band, playing for Special Services concerts and AFRS programs. They called themselves the Fuji Mountain Boys at first, a nod to their deployment in Japan, before changing their name to The Cimarrons. According to an interview from 1959, Jenkins claimed he had "been writing songs and singing most of my life, but things started to happen when I was in the Army in Japan."[1]

Jenkins did have some musical experience before the army drafted him. Born in the Delta town of Friars Point, Mississippi in 1933, he learned guitar as a child and performed on radio station KFFA out of Helena, Arkansas before entering the service. But he gained invaluable professional experience in the army while entertaining his fellow soldiers. Jenkins learned how to hold a crowd's attention, how to collaborate with other musicians, and what instrumental lineup he liked best, which turned out to be two guitars, bass, and drums. After receiving his discharge, Jenkins arrived in Memphis with a handful of songs that he thought fit well with the new, happening sound of rockabilly. Phillips declined to offer a contract to Jenkins, believing his sound was too derivative of Presley's, but he liked his songs enough that Roy Orbison recorded one for Sun called "Rock House."[2]

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[1] "Conway Twitty Magnolia Stater," *Billboard*, October 20, 1958, 7; Ren Grevatt, "On the Beat," *Billboard* January 26, 1959, 10.
[2] Ibid.

The young songwriter rebounded quickly. Jenkins changed his name to Conway Twitty and, using personal connections made while in the army, signed a deal with manager Don Seat, who secured a recording contract for Twitty on MGM Records.[3] Twitty went to Owen Bradley's Quonset Hut in Nashville, where he cut his first hit, "It's Only Make Believe." The song shot to number one in 1958 on the *Billboard* pop chart in the U.S. and England, riding a wave of enthusiasm for rockabilly and launching Twitty's career as a singer-songwriter who could straddle the genre divisions of pop, country, and R&B. When he died in 1993, he had notched more number one country records than any other artist in his lifetime, and he received an induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999.[4]

No one could blame Twitty for heading to Memphis and Sun Studio after his stint in the military. By 1956, the city and Phillips's record label had earned a reputation for launching a new musical trend called rockabilly, a style of country music played by white musicians that flaunted the influences of African American musical and visual aesthetics. Compared to Nashville's version of country music stardom, as well as the pop artists of the day like Eddie Fisher, rockabilly performers appeared rebellious, dangerous, and wild. Elvis Presley remains the best-known performer of the genre, but the rockabilly trend included Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Wanda Jackson, Waylon Jennings, Charlie Rich, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Twitty. All of these artists would enjoy mainstream country success in the last half of the twentieth century. Yet, in the mid-1950s, the music industry viewed rockabillies as part of a suspicious new generation and

[3] Ren Grevatt, "On the Beat," *Billboard* January 26, 1959, 10.
[4] "Conway Twitty," Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum, https://countrymusichalloffame.org/Inductees/InducteeDetail/conway-twitty.

denounced its open rebellion as a degenerative influence on America's youth, even as its popularity pushed both the country and pop industry to copy the new sound.[5]

Historians and music critics have recognized how rockabilly signified and helped to create dynamic social revolutions at midcentury. During the 1950s, the region continued a transformation that had begun in the 1930s, from a reliance on the mules and men of manual labor agriculture to the economy of industry, mechanized farming, and service sector employment. The music matched these economic and technological changes. It sounded fast, electric, modern, and young. Rockabilly also reflected and encouraged the shifting constructions of race and white supremacy at the dawn of the mass movement phase of the civil rights movement. In contrast to the segregationists of the era, rockabilly artists, while not advocating racial equality, betrayed an open embrace of black culture in their style even while social conventions, coupled with their own prejudices, insisted that they maintain their distance from actual black people.[6]

The South's economic and racial revolutions represented by rockabilly shared a common, yet underacknowledged, cause: the federal government. Pentagon spending transformed the South in the 1950s, ushering in an economic boom time through the development of new installations and private contracts in the region that began in the 1940s and continued into the postwar period. Memphis benefited directly from the defense budget thanks to the location of the Millington Naval Air Station just north of town, as well as the contracts delivered to local factories like Precision Tools to make ammunition during the Korean War.[7] Additionally, with

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[5] Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1994); Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 89-94; Craig Morrison, *Go Cat Go!: Rockabilly Music and Its Makers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).
[6] Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Morrison, *Go Cat Go!*.
[7] Ed Frank, "Memphis Naval Air Station, Millington," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=921; "Pontoon Parts Repaired Here," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*,

President Truman's Executive Order 9981 in 1948, the military began its incremental and sometimes reluctant march towards desegregating the ranks. This directive placed black and white servicemembers in close proximity as they trained, fought, and policed the world in fulfillment of America's Cold War mission. Many white southerners, either drafted to serve or lured by the promise of economic advancement, found themselves sharing intimate and social spaces with blacks for the first time. For musicians in the military, that could also mean sharing a stage or a jam session with performers of a different race.

The U.S. military's interracial, homosocial spaces and the infrastructure provided by Special Services made an incubator of creativity for the aspiring country musicians, later branded as rockabillies, who briefly pushed the sounds of blackness to the forefront of country music. Elvis Presley's guitarist Scotty Moore, along with Sun Records label mates Billy Lee Riley, Johnny Cash, Sonny Burgess, Charlie Rich, Sun producers Cowboy Jack Clement and Stan Kesler, and Jim Stewart, founder of Memphis's soul label Stax Records, all used their time in the military to work on their craft as country musicians. And after their time singing in the ranks, they all landed in Memphis to chase hillbilly stardom. Because of the economic relationship between the Pentagon and Music Row, the military provided these aspiring country musicians with the time and the space to develop their craft as songwriters, singers, and performers. Serving in the military also broadened their view of the world. It opened their ears to the possibilities of incorporating musical influences across the color line that segregated civilian society and led to the rockabilly revolution in country music.

Memphis and the Military-Industrial Complex

January 5, 1951, 1; Joel Williamson, with Donald L. Shaw, foreword by Ted Ownby, *Elvis: A Southern Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 119.

Bernard Lansky served three and a half years in the U.S. Army during World War II. Although he remained stateside, Lansky's time in the military took him away from his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee, where his father owned grocery and dry goods stores. The army stationed Lansky at Fort Bragg, North Carolina and Fort Knox, Kentucky before assigning him to a troop train, shuttling other soldiers around the country. Fresh out of the army in 1946 and back home in Memphis, Lansky and his brother Guy, also a veteran, needed something to do. The two white brothers borrowed $125 from their father and opened their own store, a clothing shop at 126 Beale Street in the heart of the city's black business district. Beale Street doubled as the black entertainment district where R&B and jazz musicians entertained locals and those who wandered in off the Mississippi River or from the local inland naval base. The Lansky brothers settled on a product that would appeal to thrifty shoppers on Beale. "Things were kind of breaking up, the war was over," he remembered later, so "we started buying fatigues and things like that." The Lansky's original clientele "wanted this stuff because it was inexpensive, talking about a cap or something for fifty cents, a shirt, fatigue shirt or fatigue pants a dollar ninety-five cents."[8] With this business foundation built on military surplus, the Lanskys received an inadvertent but necessary economic boost on their way to supplying Memphis musicians with the clothes that branded them as rock and rollers.

When they ran out of leftovers from the wartime military's sartorial production, the brothers switched to what Bernard called men's "high fashion," a collection of the latest and often the most unusual trends from bigger cities like Dallas. The Lanskys began stocking vibrant colors like pink and chartreuse along with the newest cuts, the pegged pants and double-cuffed shirts that gave Memphis rock and roll its material culture and aesthetic. Their merchandise

[8] Interview with Bernard Lansky, August 14, 1992, Box 5, Rock 'n' Soul Videohistory Collection, 1990-1999, Series 4: Transcripts (hereinafter Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts), NMAH Archives Center.

contrasted with the "plain clothes" other merchants on Beale carried. These new colors and cuts attracted a following from both sides of Memphis's intensely segregated communities. Lansky claimed that the store drew "all the kids, all the people that come in here, people in high school, had the blacks and the whites used to come in and shop with us because we had fashion, we had something that nobody else had."[9] Whether they just happened upon the store or took the directive from Memphis's white R&B radio disc jockey Dewey Phillips to get down there, young black and white men began shopping the "high fashion" sold at Lansky Brothers. The styles sold there would help define the look and attitude of the earliest rock and roll artists to emerge from Memphis.

Beginning in 1950, fifteen-year-old Elvis Presley wandered by the store whenever he could, usually on his breaks from working as an usher at the Loews' Theater in downtown Memphis. The bright colors and bold styles caught his attention, no doubt a welcome change from the ROTC uniform he wore during his sophomore and junior years at Humes High School.[10] When not in his uniform, Presley's penchant for flashy fashion made him stick out among his fellow students at his all-white high school. He also cut a conspicuous presence among the other tenants in Lauderdale Courts, the New Deal-era housing projects that he and his parents called home after arriving from Tupelo, Mississippi in 1948. For two years, the Presley family had bounced from boarding houses to rented spare bedrooms, often because of or just ahead of eviction due to patriarch Vernon Presley's inability to hold a job, before landing the relative luxury of all-white public housing.[11] Living in public housing and enrolling in the ROTC at Humes High, Presley joined thousands of white southerners in leaning on various arms of the

[9] Bernard Lansky interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[10] Williamson, *Elvis Presley: A Southern Life*, 119; Bernard Lansky interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[11] Guralnick, *The Last Train to Memphis*, 52.

state to provide economic security in the present and to help them plan for a future that might lead to a middle-class or even a secure working-class income.

The Presleys reflected the wave of rural to urban migrants who arrived in the city of Memphis, Tennessee in the 1940s. Spread across the bluffs of the Mississippi River and creeping east into the swamps of west Tennessee, Memphis had long functioned as a hub of global capitalist exchange, beginning with the slave and cotton trades that provided the city's foundational white wealth. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the city boomed with an infusion of private industry and people in search of a slice of postwar prosperity. Manufacturers like International Harvester and the Firestone Tire Company opened their doors in Memphis, employing the sons and a few daughters of the Mississippi River Delta and Tennessee River Valley towns that surrounded the city. International Harvester acquired a 260-acre plot in 1942, building the largest farm equipment plant in the South where it employed about 2,000 workers and began manufacturing the combines and cotton pickers in 1947, machines that would replace the region's manual, tenant-farming system.[12] Firestone began producing tires and rubber products at their Memphis plant in 1938, quickly hitting a production of 2,500 tires every day and making gas masks and raincoats for the U.S. Armed Forces during World War II.[13] Longing to escape or pushed out of the agricultural toil that had marked the region's free and enslaved labor for centuries, black and white southerners descended on Memphis for those manufacturing jobs. They went to work indoors, building the machines that took their place plowing and

[12] Michael Finger, "Big Empties: Memphis landmarks that have stood vacant for years, waiting for someone to bring them back to life," *Memphis Flyer*, December 4, 1997, https://www.memphisflyer.com/backissues/issue459/cvr459.htm; Wayne Risher, "Union selling old UAW union hall in Frayser, 30-plus years after Harvester plant closing," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, May 30, 2017, http://www.commercialappeal.com/story/money/real-estate/2017/05/30/union-selling-old-uaw-union-hall-frayser-30-plus-years-after-harvester-plant-closing/319965001/.

[13] Firestone Files, Memphis Public Library, Memphis and Shelby County Room Special Collections.

harvesting.[14] As these industries created a new southern economy, the city's population grew to reach 396,000, a growth of thirty-five percent between 1940 and 1950.[15]

The federal government proved instrumental to this growth, as the military-industrial complex also brought money and people to Memphis. The War Department had constructed the Memphis Defense Depot in 1942 as a distribution center for wartime supplies and a portion of the property functioned as a POW camp for Nazi soldiers during World War II. With over one hundred buildings, 26 miles of railroad track, 25 miles of roads, 642 acres of property, and 5 million square feet of warehouse space, the depot emerged as the largest military distribution point in the nation in the 1950s.[16] Also in 1942, the U.S. Navy took over a World War I-era army airfield in the community of Millington, Tennessee, twenty miles north of downtown Memphis. The navy converted the field into a Naval Reserve Base and began training ground crews and pilots on the 3,500-acre property. Hundreds of aviation cadets passed through the facility between 1943 and 1945, while the ground crew training facility accommodated 10,000 students at once. In 1946, the navy transferred its headquarters of the Naval Air Technical Training Center to the Millington base and gave the installation permanent status during the Korean War, allocating $64 million for a six-year construction project on the base. The Memphis Naval Air Station became one of the largest employers in the area with an annual payroll of $39 million by the end of the 1950s and the largest inland naval base in the country.[17] The military brought

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[14] Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 39-60.
[15] "Table 46, Population Rank of Incorporated Places of 100,000 Population or More, 1990; Population, 1790 to 1990; Housing Units: 1940 to 1990," 1990 Census of Population and Housing Population and Housing Unit Counts United States," U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, United States Census Bureau, Washington, D.C., https://www.census.gov/prod/cen1990/cph2/cph-2-1-1.pdf.
[16] Finger, "Big Empties."
[17] Ed Frank, "Memphis Naval Air Station, Millington," *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=921.

boom times to Memphis and its surrounding communities, fundamentally altering the economy, demographics, and built environment of the mid-South's largest city.

The city's private industries benefited from the growth of the postwar defense state. In January 1951, the Downcraft, Incorporated company converted their entire operation of approximately 100 workers to manufacturing sleeping bags for the soldiers deployed to the Korean War. These "Artic" bags included a new "Quick Release" zipper designed to offer a way out for the soldier without having to unzip all the way to the bottom. This contract represented just a small piece of the $3 million worth of contracts granted to the city's businesses in the first six months of the war.[18] That same month, Captain Fred G. Christianson, the public relations officer at the Memphis Depot, reported that the Pentagon had awarded nearly $1.5 million in contracts to different businesses in the city in a joint effort to refurbish pontoon bridges that the army had stored in the defense warehouse. The companies that benefited included the Hercules Construction Company, Allied Engineering, J.A. Riggs Tractor Company, and the Precision Tool Company.[19]

Precision Tool also produced ammunition for the U.S. soldiers in Korea, putting civilian Memphis residents like Elvis Presley to work in the fight against communism. Having quit his job at Loews' Theater, the sixteen-year old Presley took a position at Precision in the summer of 1951, operating a drill press manufacturing rocket shells for $27 a week. Two of his uncles worked there as well and the boost in pay helped the Presley family stay afloat.[20] Presley also began to purchase small items from Lansky Brothers' store with the little bit of income he did not give to his mother and father. According to Bernard, Presley told him that " 'I don't have no

[18] "GIs Now Getting 'Quick Release' Sleeping Bags," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 4, 1951, 9.
[19] "Pontoon Parts Repaired Here," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, January 5, 1951, 1.
[20] Williamson, *Elvis Presley*, 119.

money, see when I get rich I'm gonna buy you out.' I said, 'Do me a favor, just buy from me, I don't want you buying me out.' "[21] With the steady pay of a government contract and the stable residence provided by government housing, Presley could afford to indulge his taste in outlandish fashion. Between drilling with the Humes High School ROTC for two years and drilling ammunition casings for the Korean War, Presley seemed ready to embrace the economic benefits of militarism well before he embarked on a musical career. Nor was he alone.

Woodshedding in the Ranks

Many of the artists who would define Memphis's contribution to rock and roll honed their chops in the ranks of the armed forces. Presley's future guitar player Scotty Moore joined the U.S. Navy in 1948 and ultimately served a four-year hitch. Born to a poor farming family in the tiny west Tennessee town of Gadsden, located about 80 miles northeast of Memphis, Moore dropped out of high school and enlisted at age sixteen. Although Moore was too young to join, his father forged a false birthdate in the family Bible to trick the navy recruiter into believing his son was seventeen, the legal age to join with a parent's permission.[22] He joined the navy with ambitions of escaping the hardscrabble life on the family farm where hours plucking away on his guitar had provided his only means of mental escape. Introspective, shy, and prone to dreaming, Moore used the guitar as a barrier between himself and the world while growing up in Gadsden. But playing the guitar did not physically remove him from his place in the world, not yet. He needed the government's help for that. Moore's family also inspired him to join. Two of his three older brothers had served in the navy, and he later reflected that "I guess I kind of followed in their footsteps" when he left home for the service.[23] Having dropped out of high school, soured

[21] Bernard Lansky interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[22] Scotty Moore, *Scotty and Elvis: Aboard the Mystery Train*, with James L. Dickerson (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2013), 15-16.
[23] Scotty Moore interview, Box 6, Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts, NMAH Archives Center.

on farming, and longing to see the world, Moore surveyed his options and went with what he knew.

Moore's time in the navy greatly expanded the teenaged plowboy's experiences and view of the world. In July 1948, shortly after he reported for duty in San Diego, California, President Truman authorized the desegregation of the armed forces with Executive Order 9981.[24] Although he had lived in relative racial isolation among his white friends and family in the segregated culture of Gadsden, Tennessee, Moore now served as a fireman III among an integrated crew on the LST-855, a supply boat anchored at Guam and ordered to Shanghai. Moore worked the LST-855's boiler room while the boat hauled food supplies up and down the Yellow River in an effort to aid the missionaries feeding Chinese citizens impacted by the war between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists and Mao Zedong's Communist rebels. He also entered into his first serious romantic relationship in China with a Russian woman who lived in Shanghai. For the child of a Depression-era farming family in west Tennessee who was barely old enough to drive a car, all of these experiences amounted to being thrown into the deep end of worldliness. Moore had been riding his horse named Roy to school less than a year before. Now, he ran the boilers on a ship for the U.S. government, ran around with a foreign woman, and enjoyed the pleasures of shore leave in a Chinese city across the globe from his father's farm. He had even suffered the humbling experience of a physical altercation in which a black sailor beat Moore in the shower.[25] To go from barely seeing African Americans in his hometown to being beat by one while naked did more than alter Moore's perception of the racial hierarchy within the integrated military. For Moore, the whole world had changed.

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[24] President Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, "Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services," July 26, 1948, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/9981.htm.
[25] Moore, *Scotty and Elvis*, 17-22.

The only part of his life that remained constant was how he spent his time alone: playing the guitar. Moore had grown up around guitar pickers on his father's side of the family and learned to play at an early age. Yet, what started as his childhood hobby and a distraction from farm labor, evolved into a life's passion and a new kind of labor while Moore served in the navy. Playing the guitar became part of his identity. "Apart from my age, I stood out from the others because I played guitar. Usually, I played below deck, but sometimes I found a private spot on the stern," he later wrote. "Music was my passion. No one had ever heard music the way I heard it. No one had ever felt it the same way I felt it. I was convinced of that."[26] In late 1949, as Communists took over China and the Soviet Union successfully tested an atomic bomb, Moore worked below deck of the LST-855 on its way back to Bremerton, Washington for decommissioning. Sailing across the Pacific, he honed a unique picking style that mixed elements from his heroes, Chet Atkins and Les Paul. It came in handy when he made port.

The decommissioning process in Bremerton took six weeks, during which time Moore formed two different country bands and met his first wife. All his woodshedding below deck began to deliver some rewards. Although the first group, the Happy Valley Boys did not land any gigs, the second outfit snagged a weekly fifteen-minute show on station KPRO in Bremerton. The group consisted of Moore, a guitarist/vocalist named Sparky, and a steel guitar player. "We probably didn't play very well, but we were about as good as anyone else around, so it didn't matter," Moore recalled.[27]

In the spring of 1950, Moore sailed again for the Far East, this time aboard the *USS Valley Forge*, an aircraft carrier sent to deliver planes to the U.S. occupations in the Pacific. His musical pursuits continued on the *Valley Forge*. Moore recalled how he fell in with fellow sailors

[26] Ibid., 21.
[27] Ibid., 26.

in informal jam sessions: "Well they were just three or four guys from different parts of the country and we got somehow or another, by word of mouth somebody said, 'Hey somebody in such and such division plays piano or plays guitar or something,' and, eventually everybody would get together, and whiled away the hours."[28] His navy buddy Frank Parise remembered his playing in more detail, including an interracial collaboration. Moore played guitar, Parise played harmonica, and an unidentified black sailor sang. One such jam even resulted in an amateur recording, Moore's first. Parise remembered that "One evening we got together in the radio shack, and the three of us recorded a song. . . . I can remember Scotty played 'Double Eagle' on the guitar. He was fantastic."[29] By the time Moore received his discharge on January 4, 1952, he had spent countless hours practicing guitar, learning to collaborate with other players, and even made a recording. He briefly returned to Gadsden but then left for the nightlife in Memphis, where he formed his most professional band yet, the honky tonking Starlite Wranglers with his friend Bill Black on bass.[30]

Moore was far from the only aspiring artist who had served in the military and then pivoted to a career in country music. Nor was he the only one to join underage. A guitar player from Pocahontas, Arkansas named Billy Lee Riley enlisted in the U.S. Army at the age of 15 and served four years. Riley had worked with his family on their sharecropping farm until he turned 13 or 14 and learned guitar from African American players on the same plantation. The army looked like a way out of farming and the predatory structure of the sharecropping system. Riley placed his service in juxtaposition to his time farming. "I went into service when I was fifteen, in the army . . . . Got out just before I reached twenty. I'd served my time," he later said. "I never

[28] Scotty Moore interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[29] Moore, *Scotty and Elvis*, 29.
[30] Ibid., 43.

farmed again."[31] Not that the service fared much better than farming in his estimation. As Riley explained in one interview, "I never did like it. I went in mainly to have a place to live and something to eat!"[32]

The service professionalized Riley's nascent musical talents and gave him a platform to explore his artistic voice as a country musician. He started out with informal jams, singing Hank Williams songs. Too shy to play in front of people, Riley and his fellow solider-musicians hid away to hone their skills. "We would go to the service club and maybe get a couple of guitars, a couple of us guys. We'd go into one of the little rooms and lock the door and play." Before he knew it, those informal picking sessions turned into his first opportunity to play in public. "We were in there one day and the service club administrator came in and heard us . . . . She talked me into being on a talent show at the service club and I went on that show and won first place. From then on I'd had the bug."[33]

That same service club administrator urged Riley to try out for Special Services and turn his talent into a profession within the army. Riley declined to join Special Services, preferring instead to play at the soldiers' clubs with his buddies. However, he did record himself for the first time in the army. While stationed at Fort Lawton, Washington outside of Seattle, he recorded three sides in a record booth, a coin-operated, phonebooth-sized recording studio with one microphone, choosing two Hank Williams songs and one Lefty Frizzell among others from his repertoire of covers.[34] Riley received his discharge in 1955 and traveled directly across the Mississippi River from his hometown of Pocahontas, Arkansas to Memphis where he joined a

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[31] Interview with Billy Lee Riley, Box 8, Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts, NMAH Archives Center.
[32] "Flyin' Saucer Rock 'n' Roll," Billy Lee Riley interview with Ken Burke, 1999, in Jake Austen, ed., *Flying Saucers Rock 'n' Roll: Conversations with Unjustly Obscure Rock 'n' Soul Eccentrics*, foreward by Steve Albini (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 131.
[33] Billy Lee Riley interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[34] Ibid.

growing stable of white country artists creating a new sound for the genre on Sun Records. By 1957, Riley had contributed classics like "Flying Saucer Rock and Roll" and "Red Hot."[35]

Johnny Cash, a native of Dyess, Arkansas and future Sun Records artist, remembered that he "ended up in the military the same way most other Southern country boys did, for lack of a better way out of the cotton fields."[36] After tiring of agricultural work in Arkansas, Cash migrated to Michigan where he worked for all of three weeks in a Pontiac factory before retreating back South. He returned to Arkansas to work cleaning production tanks at a margarine plant, another job that lasted only a few weeks. Following this string of ill-suited industrial jobs, Cash recalled how "a government paycheck and a clean blue uniform looked pretty good. I enlisted for a four-year hitch." He joined the U.S. Air Force in 1951, remembering later how he had felt "it was the thing to do. We boys wanted to serve our country."[37] Cash may have entered military service under the social pressure to protect democracy during the Cold War, but this kind of patriotic obligation offers only a partial explanation about why so many would join. He, like Moore and Riley, needed a steady check, decent working conditions, and the potential of lasting economic benefits. Cash wanted a job as a worker for the state. In the South, that meant joining the military.

It also meant that the air force dropped Cash into its newly integrated ranks as a white southerner who had prior social contact with African Americans, but not on the level of intimacy created by the military. He watched in shock as a "race riot" broke out between black and white airmen in Bremerhaven, Germany not long after he arrived in the country. "I looked down, and there they were, whites and blacks, comrades in arms . . . tearing at each other with everything

[35] "Billy Lee Riley," Sun Records, https://www.sunrecords.com/artists/billy-lee-riley.
[36] Johnny Cash, with Patrick Carr, *Cash: The Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 80.
[37] Ibid., 81.

they had." For his own part, Cash claimed a stance of racial liberalism. He recalled that he "had no problem sharing a barracks with blacks, and I couldn't imagine hating them so much that I was willing to wage a private war on them." Cash attributed the fight, in part, to Cold War military training and close quarters. He argued, "you had a lot of men, black and white, who'd been very strongly encouraged to kill people (North Koreans, Chinese, Russians), then jam-packed together and told to behave like gentlemen . . .. They were a boiler waiting to explode."[38]

As the Cold War military demanded more personnel, the Defense Department increased the likelihood of bringing white and black soldiers into close quarters in the newly integrated armed forces, a proposition that angered many whites, particularly in the South. Beginning in the late 1940s, Congress began batting around the proposition of Universal Military Training (UMT), an idea favored by Presidents Truman and Eisenhower. White southern politicians found themselves torn over the social, political, and moral implications of UMT. Representative James C. Davis, a Democrat from Georgia, saw UMT as a replacement for the draft and a way to reduce pressure on reservists deployed to Korea. Davis initially backed the policy but then rescinded his support. His constituents opposed this policy as a sign of creeping authoritarianism. H.C. Holland, a Methodist minister from Decatur, Georgia, wrote to Davis that UMT would represent "regimentation that is out of keeping with our free enterprise system. It would go far toward militarizing our country like Germany and Japan before World War II."[39] Similarly, R.F. Sams of Clarkston, Georgia considered that in approving UMT, Eisenhower was going "along with the fair-new deal ideas" which was "enuf to make any sincere American sick." He hoped

[38] Ibid., 81, 82.
[39] H.C. Holland to Hon. James C. Davis, January 8, 1952, Box 80, Folder "1952-Universal Military Training," James C. Davis Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereinafter Davis Papers).

Davis would "do all in your power to preserve our old time American way of life & free enterprise, & keep us out of socialism."[40]

These voters need not have feared. Not only did Davis help block the UMT based on these fears of military socialism, but he also objected to the 1952 bill since it mandated "that white boys and colored would live together and be trained on a non-segregated basis." In his estimation, "This is not necessary."[41] Congressional representatives like Davis and his colleague Carl Vinson had built their careers expanding the reach of the federal government in their home state via enormous installations like Fort McPherson and Fort Benning. But, when the specter of universal service included the truly equal drafting of white and black eighteen-year-old men together under the auspices of a federal mandate, white conservatives hollered "socialism." Both Truman and Eisenhower failed to rally support behind UMT, but the military still proceeded with its plans for racial integration, forcing black and white servicemembers together for the first time in intimate spaces of peacetime and the battlefront in Korea.

As historians have shown, the armed forces followed the order to integrate unevenly, aiming for the goal of achieving maximum efficiency, not social equality.[42] Even on the frontlines of Korea, black soldiers faced the racism of white troops who transported their domestic beliefs in white supremacy to the Pacific theater. Military reports of racial violence filtered back to the states, and black veterans of the Korean War recalled serving under inept white commanding officers who received their commission based on race rather than training or

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[40] Hon. R.F. Sams to Hon. James C. Davis, June 14, 1952, Box 80, Folder "1952-Universal Military Training," Davis papers.
[41] Hon. James C. Davis to Mrs. Jack B. Cowan, March 8, 1952, Box 80, Folder "1952-Universal Military Training," Davis papers.
[42] Phillips, *War! What is It Good For?*; Douglas Walter Bristol, Jr. and Heather Marie Stur, eds., *Integrating the Military: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation Since World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); McGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965*; Myers, *Black White, and Olive Drab*.

ability. Those race-based promotions led to the deaths and needless endangerment of black soldiers and incidents of fragging.[43]

White southern servicemen inflamed racial division, particularly through the early-1950s trend of displaying the Confederate battle flag. On September 29, 1951, the *Pittsburgh Courier* ran with the frontpage headline, "REBEL FLAGS IN KOREA!" The article named a few of the military formations that flew the Confederate battle flag while overseas, including the First Calvary Division, the Fifth Maryland Regiment, the "Dixie Division" of the National Guard, and the Fourth Heavy Howitzer Battalion.[44] These troops consisted of reservists and National Guardsmen from southern states. Soldiers and sailors took the opportunity of serving in the U.S. Armed Forces to assert their claim on a specific vision of white southern identity that praised the symbols, and by extension the cause, of the Confederacy. Presidents and the Defense Department might dictate racial integration, but white soldiers used racist actions to maintain a claim on the military as a white-dominated institution.

Black soldiers and civic leaders fought back against white southern displays of racism in the armed forces. Walter White, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, wrote a column denouncing the use of the flag anywhere but especially in the context of the military. He reported the occurrence of "certain bombastic and boastful" Texan troops who decorated their vehicles with their state flag, while "even more Southerners stuck Stars and Bars" on theirs. In a darkly comic twist, White claimed that "Korean and Chinese sharpshooters, abysmally and blissfully ignorant of the fact that the South is still fighting the

[43] Lt. Col. Charles M. Bussey, *Firefight at Yechon: Courage and Racism in the Korean War* (Washington: Brassey's (US), Inc., A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1991).
[44] A.M. Rivera, Jr., "REBEL FLAGS IN KOREA!: Confederate Banners Fly Anywhere!!!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 29, 1951, 1.

Civil War of ninety years ago, assumed that the flags meant that the occupant of the decorated and beflagged car was at least a one-star general."[45]

If a rebel flag could get you killed, country music offered another way to show one's regional pride with less overt, albeit clearly marked, racial meanings. During an interview in 1968, Johnny Cash remembered how he used country music to make a statement about white regional identity while deployed to Europe with the U.S. Air Force, claiming, "Those Yankees in my outfit bad-mouthed country and western so much I started singing it."[46] Like Scotty Moore and Billy Lee Riley, joining the military provided Cash with the space and the time to develop his craft as a musician. He bought his first guitar for twenty-nine deutsche marks while stationed in West Germany. With three other recruits, the young singer formed a group to help kill time around the barracks and called themselves the Landsberg Barbarians. According to a 1956 profile in fan magazine *Country Song Roundup*, Cash credited the U.S. Air Force for providing his start in music. "The best way he can explain it — Johnny Cash became a musician out of pure boredom!," the article's author explained. The air force had stationed the singer in Germany for " 'for three long miserable years'," where Cash "found that learning to play the guitar and working out a few melodies and songs seemed the only way to combat blues and boredom." The magazine also made it clear that Cash's time in the service gave him his musical education. "Having learned the basic chords from Orville Rigdon, a musician from down Nachichotes [*sic*] way," the magazine added, Cash "joined in many an impromptu session with the boys on the

[45] Walter White, "Confederate Flags! A Fad Or Revival Of Fanaticism," *Chicago Defender*, October 6, 1951, 7.
[46] *Country Song Roundup*, April 1968, FLA.

base and in small German honky tonks."[47] One such informal performance in Venice, Italy reportedly drew a crowd of 300 curious spectators.[48]

The dull hours that characterized so much of military life abroad offered Cash an opportunity to develop his songwriting talents, and he penned his signature tune "Folsom Prison Blues" sitting on his bunk in West Germany. Military life also exposed former farm boys to the latest in audio technology. Cash bought a reel-to-reel tape recorder at the PX on base and began recording the Barbarians' renditions of country songs, as well as his first original compositions. Once, a fellow soldier loaded the tape incorrectly so that it played on the wrong side. Cash liked the reversed music and used the odd sound to create the melody for one of his biggest hits, "I Walk the Line." He also worked as a radio surveillance operator. Cash even claimed to have intercepted the news of Stalin's death, making him the first American to hear of the dictator's passing.[49] When he returned to the states in 1955, Cash headed to Memphis with his newly developed talents and a handful of country songs he had written when not monitoring the Russian threat of nuclear war.

Cash's trek to Memphis followed the lead of artists like Stan Kesler, a studio musician, producer, and songwriter for Sun Studio, who received his musical start in the military. Born in 1928 on a cotton farm about 70 miles southeast of Memphis in Abbeville, Mississippi, Kesler came of age listening to blues and country. He remembered how, in north Mississippi, "you don't help but hear a lot of blues and black gospel music, and my favorite, my kind of music, was country music. I mean I loved the Grand Ole Opry; I loved Bill Monroe, Eddie Arnold, all the hillbillies of the time." Yet raising cotton and enough corn and soybeans to feed the animals

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[47] "Johnny Cash," *Country Song Roundup*, April 1956, 20, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.
[48] "Johnny Cash," *Country & Western Jamboree*, Spring 1958, 84, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[49] Cash, *Cash*, 79.

left little time to learn an instrument. He found that time in the U.S. Marine Corps. Kesler joined directly after graduating high school in 1945 and served two years. He looked back on that time with some fondness thanks to the opportunity it granted him to stoke his love of country music. "While I was in the Marine Corps that's where I really got really seriously interested in music," Kesler felt. "I loved the Hawaiian guitar . . .. I managed to buy a little lap, what we call now, a lap steel. I started playing just for my own benefit, just my own amusement there." He returned to Abbeville in 1947 to start a country band with his brother.[50] In 1950, Kesler moved to Memphis and found work as a studio musician at Sun Studio, playing on records with Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Roy Orbison. He also penned five songs for Elvis Presley, including his country hits, "I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone" and "I Forgot to Remember to Forget," recorded in 1954 and 1955, respectively.[51]

Cash's fellow Arkansan and future Sun Records artist Sonny Burgess also landed in West Germany after the U.S. Army drafted him in 1951. Burgess, who had already started playing music in the honky tonks and armory dances around his hometown of Newport, furthered his skills in the army. After his basic training at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, he quickly fell in with a group of musicians, all cooks from Texas, in the 2nd Armored Division stationed in Germany. The group played country and western music with Burgess on guitar and found success with the Special Services playing on the AFRS. Every Friday and Saturday night, the military network broadcast its version of a country music variety show called the *Yukon Grand Ole Opry* live from Frankfurt. The army selected eight bands to perform, including Burgess's group. He looked back on that time with fondness, remembering, "All I did was play guitar. We had a guy that sang for

[50] Interview with Stan Kesler, Box 5, Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts, NMAH Archives Center.
[51] Rob Bowman, "Stan Kesler," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 280; Matt Sexton, "Bartlett man recalls writing rock's past," *Bartlett Express*, May 23, 2013, http://bartlett-express.com/2013/05/23/bartlett-man-recalls-writing-rocks-past/.

us. Looked like Hawkshaw Hawkins. I never will forget him. But those cooks, man, . . . I had a good time." Burgess returned to Arkansas and reformed his old band in 1954. He spent the next two years playing a repertoire that mixed the country songs of Lefty Frizzell with the blues tunes of Jimmy Reed and Big Joe Turner. By 1956, they were recording at Sun Studio, cutting songs like "We Wanna Boogie" and "Red Headed Woman" that defined the raucous, country sounds of rockabilly.[52]

Special Services and the Color of Military Entertainment

The U.S. Army and Air Force Special Services Division created a productive space for aspiring country entertainers to hone their skills and establish their talents as musical artists, particularly through bands like the one led by Sonny Burgess. According to a report on military life prepared for President Eisenhower's Commission on Veterans' Pensions, the army established the Special Services Division during to World War II as a means of creating activities for "the off-duty use of enlisted personnel in the interests of their moral, mental, physical and social well-being." Until that time, the army had allowed individual soldiers to provide their own instruments, sheet music, and entertainment from the Civil War to World War I. During World War I, civilian volunteer agencies like the Young Men's Christian Association and the Knights of Columbus began staging musical performances and offering songbooks for soldiers to sing along with what that organization deemed to be appropriate entertainment.[53]

In 1940, the War Department established a Morale Division under the Adjutant General's Office to accommodate the booking of United Service Organization (USO) package shows to

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[52] Interview with Sonny Burgess, Box 1, Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts, NMAH Archives Center; Marvin Schwartz, *We Wanna Boogie: The Rockabilly Roots of Sonny Burgess and the Pacers* (Little Rock: Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 2014).

[53] "Report on Conditions of Military Service for the President's Commission on Veterans' Pension, Section 7," 1; Historical Summaries of Major Events, 1955-1960; Special Services Division, Special Services Branch; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

army camps, which continued until it was temporarily suspended in 1947. The department moved to the Office of the Chief of Staff shortly before the nation's entrance into World War II, and on March 9, 1942, the Morale Branch assumed the new name of the Special Services Division. Special Services oversaw both professional entertainment and soldier shows, booking USO tours and supplying amateur soldiers with sheet music, instruments, and costumes. The USO staged nearly half a million shows in 42 different countries from 1940 to 1947, performing for over 200 million soldiers to the tune of over $600 million in expenditures for entertainer salaries, insurance, and accommodations. During the Korean War, Special Services expanded its reach when it began producing shows with soldier talent in the "forward areas" near the line of fire.[54] Of course, country music artists and promoters like Connie B. Gay took advantage of that new policy, and the portability of the genre's instrumentation meant that performers like Grandpa Jones could travel easily to the frontlines of the fight.

The Special Services' curation of soldier entertainment controlled the racial makeup of the live music heard in a military setting. The USO sent 908 separate units of entertainers around the globe during its initial seven-year run. Yet only 33 of those units were "All Negro," meaning that white performers dominated soldier entertainment throughout the 1940s. This discriminatory trend extended into the 1950s when Special Services began searching for more talent among the servicemembers. In 1953, Special Service inaugurated its "Soldier Singing Contest," which included the categories of pop, classical, barbershop quartet, spiritual, and country and western.[55]

Winning these Special Services contests delivered real benefits in the civilian entertainment business. The army held its first "All-Army Talent Contest" in 1954, and its

[54] Ibid., 4.
[55] Ibid., 2.

finalists performed on the *Ed Sullivan Show* for an audience of 35 million viewers.[56] The next year, an estimated 45 million watched the army talent winner on the Sullivan show, providing even more coverage for the army's efforts at making armed service seem relatable and attractive to the general public and potential recruits. Special Services then booked the winners and finalists of the "All-Army Talent Contest" on a tour of 76 military installations for 100,000 troops stationed around the country, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The tour, called "Rolling Along," functioned as a combination of soldier entertainment and a way to gin up civilian interest in joining the army by opening concerts to the general public.[57]

Special Services not only offered an opportunity to develop one's talent; it gave a particular advantage to country musicians. Between July 1954 and June 1955, Special Services staged 38,853 concerts by soldier bands for over 7 million soldiers in attendance. Most of these concerts presented what the army described as package shows and dance band performances. But "hillbilly" bands accounted for 5,968 of the performances over that time period, a testament to the popularity of the genre.[58] Connie B. Gay and two representatives from BMI served as the judges for the country and western portion of the All-Army Contest in 1955.[59] For a music business actor like Gay with strong ties to the military, judging an army talent contest represented more than a patriotic donation of his time. Listening to the unsigned, amateur musicians was a scouting expedition for the next Jimmy Dean or Faron Young.

The preference given to white musicians did not go unnoticed. Special Services endured allegations of racial discrimination in the mid-1950s, including a Congressional inquiry into

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[56] Ibid.
[57] "Army Entertainment Is A Hit," 1956 All-Army Entertainment Contest Finals program, RG 407, TAGO, Special Services Division, Historical Major Events and Problems, 1955-1960, 1 Jul 1955 to 30 Jun 1956, Box 1, NACP.
[58] "Report on Conditions of Military Service for the President's Commission on Veterans Pension, Section 7" RG 407, Box 3, Historical Summaries of Major Events, 1955-1960, NACP.
[59] 1955 All-Army Contest program, Box 1, RG 407, TAGO, Special Services Division, Special Services Branch, Historical Summaries of Major Events and Problems, 1955-1960, NACP.

charges that Special Services in the European Command denied the hiring of black entertainers.[60] In 1956, Representative Adam Clayton Powell wrote to the Secretary of the Army William Brucker and claimed, "There seems to be a drift in the Army back to the days of segregation and away from the policy of integration." Powell identified five areas in which the army was accused of practicing discrimination, including the designation of "for caucasians only" on orders, unnecessary racial designations of "colored" on reports, and a low number of African Americans teachers at schools for army children. The other two accusations concerned soldier entertainment. Powell asserted that blacks made up only one percent of the entertainers employed by Special Services and that the USO had established segregated canteens on one installation.[61] The army investigated the claims but denied any wrongdoing in hiring entertainers.[62] In 1957, Special Services added an R&B category to the All-Army contest in a nod to the diversification of soldier talents and tastes, although the bands participating in that genre may have included both black and white performers.[63]

Despite the military's preferential treatment of country music, Special Services did expose future country and rockabilly stars to different styles of music across the color line. Piano playing singer-songwriter Charlie Rich joined the Sun label briefly in the late 1950s after receiving his professional start with Special Services. Rich hailed from Colt, Arkansas, fifty miles west of Memphis, and like all the other early Memphis rock and rollers, grew up chopping cotton and listening to country music. With no ambition for farming, Rich joined the U.S. Air

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[60] "Discrimination in the Employment of Negroes in Special Services," Summary; July 1955-June 1956; Historical Summaries of Major Events and Problems, 1955-1960; Special Services Division, Special Services Branch; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[61] "Powell Airs Army Bias!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 28, 1956, 20.
[62] "Discrimination in the Employment of Negroes in Special Services," Summary; July 1955-June 1956; Historical Summaries of Major Events and Problems, 1955-1960; Special Services Division, Special Services Branch; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[63] "Summary of Major Events"; July 1956-June 1957; Historical Summaries of Major Events and Problems, 1955-1960; Special Services Division, Special Services Branch; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.

Force in 1952 after dropping out of the University of Arkansas. The air force stationed him at Enid Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma, where he played in the drum and bugle corps. He also kept busy after his official musical duties had ended with a jazz group he formed with three other airmen. Rich welcomed the opportunity to play and develop his professional chops while serving his country. He later told how the group "had drums, clarinet, myself on piano, the bass player, and all of us sang, learned to sing I guess you'd say, and we formed this group called The Velvetones."[64]

Rich's group also participated in recruitment spots. Rich remembered how the Velvetones "did some TV work, you know, representing the air force and that sort of thing, did quite a few contests and got to travel around quite a bit." He credited this experience with giving him the tools he needed to pursue music as a profession in civilian life, claiming that "during the Air Force is probably where I sang the most because we had more opportunity, I think to actually do nightclub work." Rich's experience in the air force also exposed him to the latest sounds in jazz, and he absorbed the influences of Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck, and Nat Cole.[65] He channeled those eclectic influences into an R&B-infused country sound that eventually yielded enormous success in the 1960s as a Nashville recording artist. All of these white Sun Records who were eventually tagged as rock and roll or rockabilly started out as aspiring country musicians, regardless of the degree to which they embraced the influence of black music. And they all started out in the military.

The same transformative formula held true for Jim Stewart, one of the architects of the Memphis soul music industry. Another white plowboy in search of life beyond his farm in Middleton, Tennessee, Stewart graduated high school in 1948 and received his draft notice in

[64] Interview with Charlie Rich, Box 8, Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts, NMAH Archives Center.
[65] Charlie Rich interview, NMAH Archives Center.

1951. After basic training at Fort Carson, Colorado, Stewart joined Special Services, playing fiddle in a country band that toured service clubs in the United States. He received his discharge in 1953 and was forever changed by the experience of being thrown together with other young men of different backgrounds. Stewart believed that the experience of military service "gave us, all of us, such as myself a country boy who had never experienced anything like this before . . . you certainly learn that you have lived in a very secluded little corner of the world, very soon."[66] Even though he stayed stateside during his tour, Stewart realized that the demographic mixing he encountered in the ranks opened the world to him. He met other young men of different races, ethnicities, and religions and found the foxhole democracy without ever entering a warzone.

Stewart also hinted at the demographic gamble the Pentagon had wagered since President Truman's executive order to desegregate the military and how it affected his musical development. Without referring to race directly, Stewart still conveyed how diverse he found the U.S. military. "I experienced a lot of different situations, different cultures and people from different cultures . . . from Brooklyn to Mississippi," he recalled years later. He claimed to have grown as a more accepting person from that exposure but also recognized that not everyone found that kind of mixing beneficial. In his words, contact with different types of people "broadens one's background and it was very positive for me. It can be, on the other hand, it can be quite a shock to an individual as well and some people cannot adjust to that type of situation very easily." Stewart attributed his openness to his involvement with music. Specifically, he credited the army with giving him the willingness to listen to and appreciate musical styles beyond country. He charted this personal evolution by saying, "I went from country to western swing, from there to rock 'n' roll and to r&b and I still love all of these. I think I'm still

[66] Interview with Jim Stewart, Box 8, Rock 'n' Soul Collection Transcripts, NMAH Archives Center.

influenced by when I go into the studio, I'm fortunate enough to have all this at my disposal. It's been very good for me."[67]

Inspired by the success of Sun, Stewart started his own studio and label in 1957, originally called Satellite Records. He changed the name to Stax after he went into partnership with his sister Estelle Axton, the new name taken from the first two letters in their last names. Stax would go on to help define southern soul music in the 1960s with artists like Booker T. and the MGs, The Mad Lads, Otis Redding, and Isaac Hayes and emerge as a beacon of interracial musical collaboration, albeit not racial equality, during the civil rights era.[68] Stewart's military experiences not only helped professionalize him as a musician, it opened him up to the possibility of working with people unlike himself. "I like to think that music gave me that talent to be receptive to other cultures and other ideas and understand other people's problems and what they have to live through," he told an interviewer in the 1990s. "I'm thankful to say that I believe my musical interest and heritage has a lot to do with that."[69] Yet all that interracial musical collaboration still lay on the horizon in the early 1950s. For two years, Stewart fought communism as a country fiddler for the U.S. Army, likely crossing paths with Faron Young on tour stops at installations like Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Like Stewart, Gordon Terry, a rockabilly star and Johnny Cash collaborator from Decatur, Alabama, found his talents as a fiddler put to use in the U.S. Army Special Services. Terry's career in country music began at age seven, when his father landed a gig on the *Grand Ole Opry* for their family band, Floyd Terry and the Young 'Uns. Seven-year-old Terry played

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[67] Jim Stewart interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[68] Hughes, *Country Soul*; Rob Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.: The Story of Stax Records* (New York: Schirmer Trade Books, 1997); Robert Gordon, *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[69] Jim Stewart interview, NMAH Archives Center.

fiddle and mandolin as a "Young 'Un," and he won the Alabama State Champion Fiddlers Contest while still a teenager. He joined Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys in 1950, hitting the road with the "Father of Bluegrass Music."[70] During the early 1950s, Terry lived in Nashville, Tennessee at Mom Upchurch's boardinghouse, a residence largely occupied by road musicians and known by the nickname "Hillbilly Heaven."[71]

During a jam session at Hillbilly Heaven, Terry struck up a friendship with a new arrival in Nashville named Faron Young. Terry received his draft notice not long after their meeting and reported for duty at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. A few months in his service, Young arrived at Fort Jackson, and he and Terry resumed playing music together for their fellow troops. Terry then accompanied Young to Fort McPherson, where he joined the Circle A Wranglers for the duration of his military service.[72] Besides this valuable road experience, Terry also credited the army with giving him his start as a singer. In 1957, he recorded his debut single, a Boudleaux Bryant penned-tune called "Wild Honey." The song featured Terry's hiccupping rockabilly vocal and earned him television appearances on *American Bandstand* and a recurring spot on ABC's country music show, *Country America*.[73] Terry spent the 1970s playing fiddle for Johnny Cash's backing band, the Tennessee Three, and Merle Haggard's band, the Strangers.[74]

Terry and Young also shared the bill with black musicians while performing for the Third Army at Fort McPherson. Black soldiers, some of whom emerged as leaders in R&B, blues, and jazz, also found their talents used by Special Services during the 1950s. Jazz pianist Wynton

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[70] Winford Turner, "Country Amusement Park Plan Is Revealed By Gordon Terry," *Decatur Daily*, March 11, 1964, A-12.
[71] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 24.
[72] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 29.
[73] Turner, "Country Amusement Park Plan Is Revealed By Gordon Terry," *Decatur Daily*, March 11, 1964, A-12; Dave Samuelson, "Gordon Terry," *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 534-535.
[74] Bayne Hughes, "Gordon Terry dies at 74," *Decatur Daily*, April 10, 2006, http://legacy.decaturdaily.com/decaturdaily/news/060410/terry.shtml.

Kelly served with the Third Army's Special Services from 1952 to 1954, overlapping with Young's time as the country voice of musical recruitment. Kelly had played with Dinah Washington and Dizzy Gillespie before receiving his draft notice.[75] The army sent him to Fort McClellan just outside of Anniston, Alabama before transferring him to Fort McPherson in nearby Atlanta, Georgia. He joined the Third Army traveling soldier show and recruited another draftee and future jazz luminary Duke Pearson to join him. Together they petitioned Lt. General A.R. Bolling to include more black performers, since they represented the only two in the entire cast at the time.[76] Despite these racial disparities, Kelly led his "Wynton Kelly Trio" for the Special Services, touring the seven states under the Third Army command for two years and even performed on the recruitment show *Talent Patrol* on March 18, 1954.[77]

Kelly's military musical career climaxed in the fall of 1954, just prior to receiving his discharge, when his Trio performed for a reported crowd of 10,000 at Atlanta's Chastain Memorial Park Amphitheater. African-American newspaper the *New York Amsterdam News* described how the group played "a special 'Blues' medley during Third Army's spectacular 'Southland Panorama' musical revue which jam-packed the Atlanta Amphitheater."[78] The paper failed to mention the show's Old South theme, the fact that it praised Confederate leader Joseph Johnston, or the headlining slot given to Faron Young and the Circle A Wranglers.[79] Given that context, the details of Kelly's "blues medley" read like the Special Service's attempt to add a touch of black authenticity into a nostalgic, antebellum-themed fantasy for an all-white audience. Following his discharge, Kelly landed gigs with Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderly, Wayne

[75] "Pfc. Wynton Kelly Joins Army Group For TV Shot," *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 1954, 18.
[76] Mark Gardner, "Wynton Kelly," *Coda*, June 1971, 37.
[77] Pfc. Wynton Kelly Joins Army Group For TV Shot," *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 1954, 18.
[78] "Jazz Pianist Wynton Kelly Discharged By The Army," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1954, 20.
[79] "Third Army Show, Aug. 27, To Recall the Old South," *Army Times*, August 21, 1954, 22.

Shorter, and John Coltrane and stayed busy as an in-demand sideman for a decade after his army discharge. But that success tapered off in the late 1960s. In 1971, Kelly died after suffering an epileptic seizure, alone and broke in a hotel room.[80] For Kelly, a musical career in the armed forces proved to offer a mixture of short-term success and struggles against the prejudices of white visions of what black music should represent. While jazz musicians like Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong helped the U.S. State Department fulfill its mission of promoting America's image as a nation of tolerance and racial inclusivity, the black jazz musicians in the army found themselves constrained by the demands of military morale building.[81]

Other black artists experienced a similar combination of favorable publicity but little commercial return from their time performing for military audiences. From 1954-1956, Clyde McPhatter sang with Special Services, appearing in more than 500 entertainment shows for the armed forces.[82] His career began with doo-wop groups the Dominoes and the Drifters. The records he cut with those groups influenced a generation of rock and rollers, including Elvis Presley who cited McPhatter as one of his idols.[83] McPhatter signed with Atlantic Records and cut a string of records while on furlough with the army, reflecting the fact that his career continued to grow in spite of, not because of the military. These gospel-infused solo records bridged the gap between the doo-wop of the 1950s and the soul music of the 1960s.[84] Yet, where military service helped to launch artists like Faron Young, McPhatter's time in the ranks temporarily stalled the momentum of his solo career. No governors awaited him with thanks and handshakes for his service. His devotion of time and talent to Special Services did not yield

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[80] Gardner, "Wynton Kelly."
[81] See Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*; Monson, *Freedom Sounds*.
[82] "Singer sheds GI uniform," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 29, 1956, 7.
[83] "Elvis Presley," *Rock and Roll Hall of Fame*, https://www.rockhall.com/inductees/elvis-presley.
[84] Colin Escott, *All Roads Lead to Rock: Legends of Rock and Roll: A Bear Family Reader* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999).

glowing reviews that praised his patriotic service. The military, for musicians like McPhatter, represented an unfortunate obligation, not a marketing strategy or an incubator for artistic growth.

Similarly, Texas blues pianist and singer Clarence "Candy" Green found work in the army but no springboard to stardom through the Special Services. Born in 1929 on Galveston Island, Green had joined the Merchant Marines at 16-years-old in 1945 and served for 3 years, traveling the globe, from Europe to the Pacific while always playing in clubs around Galveston and Houston whenever he returned home. He also played in bands for Texas blues stars T-Bone Walker, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, and Roy Hawkins. Green signed a record deal for himself with Don Robey's Peacock label in 1950 and cut his debut single "Galveston Blues." But that same year, Green received his draft notice, entered the army in January 1951, and departed for Camp Atterbury, Indiana, about 40 miles south of Indianapolis. "Galveston Blues" sold well. According to the *Baltimore Afro-American*, Peacock had sold 100,000 copies by 1952. Rather than touring in support of his single, the army placed Green in Special Services, playing piano and singing in the service clubs at Camp Atterbury. He received his discharge in 1952 but could not match his pre-army success. Green moved to Mexico and then to Europe, where he spent the rest of his career playing in clubs on the continent.[85] The army could use Green's talents in the service club around base in the middle of Indiana, but modern blues and R&B did not create the kind of image that the military wanted to cultivate in the early 1950s. It was too wild, too rebellious, and too black. For Kelly, McPhatter, and Green, the military disrupted their careers with no professional return for seizing their time and labor.

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[85] "'Galveston Blues' Catches On; Sells 100,000 Platers [*sic*]," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 19, 1952, 6; "Clarence 'Candy' Green," https://gato-docs.its.txstate.edu/jcr:b416dde1-c0d8-457f-af70-2ef1be028fe2/Clarence%20Candy%20Green.pdf.

Country Veterans

For white, aspiring country musicians and future rockabillies, serving in the military was not a hindrance but a spark for their civilian careers. When Jim Stewart came back to Memphis in 1953, his experiences in the service made for an easy reentry into civilian life. He returned to the job at First National Bank he had left when he entered the service and used his GI Bill to complete his college education at Memphis State University, where he majored in business management and minored in music. He also continued making country music, playing fiddle in the house band at a nightclub called the Eagle's Nest on U.S. Highway 78, just southwest of downtown Memphis headed toward Holly Springs, Mississippi.[86] The club sat on the second floor of a building next to Clearpool, a public swimming pool where middle-class whites from Memphis and its suburbs brought their kids for a swim while adults enjoyed a beer or a set-up and listened to the band.[87]

Stewart's band entertained these audiences by emulating the style of Bob Wills with three fiddles, drums, bass, electric guitar, pedal steel guitar, piano, and vocals.[88] A local country disc jockey named "Sleepy Eyed John" Lepley led the group, while a country-picking ex-Marine who went by the name Cowboy Jack Clement served as an emcee and lead vocalist.[89] Although originally from the Whitehaven community just south of Memphis, Clement had toured the world with the Marine Corps and discovered his talent for songwriting and singing while sitting around the barracks, much like Johnny Cash. Back in Memphis, Clement, like Stewart, attended Memphis State University and eventually landed a job as a session player, producer, songwriter, and engineer at Sun Studio, producing Jerry Lee Lewis's "Great Balls of Fire" and penning

[86] Bowman, *Soulsville, U.S.A.*, 3-4.
[87] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 117-119.
[88] Jim Stewart interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[89] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 119-120.

Cash's "Ballad of a Teenage Queen" and "Guess Things Happen That Way," both number one hits on the *Billboard* country chart in 1958.[90] But in 1953, none of these artists had participated in or could have predicted the revolutions of popular music that lay a few months away. They played as band mates in a Western Swing outfit at the Eagle Nest while Memphis suburbanites cooled off in Clearpool or had a drink. Stewart and Clement were just two white ex-servicemen, living in a thriving industrial southern city, taking advantage of the GI Bill, and playing country music at night for other men and women of similar backgrounds. They cut licks and sang their tunes with skills honed in the U.S. military, delivering Western Swing and honky tonk sounds through the mingling aromas of alcohol, cigarettes, and chlorine.

In early 1954, Scotty Moore's band the Starlite Wranglers played to similar crowds at the Bon-Air Club, a honky tonk on Memphis's eastside. Moore had added a vocalist to the group, now calling themselves Doug Poindexter and the Starlite Wranglers. They cut a record under that name in the spring of that year, an A side called "Now She Cares No More" backed with "My Kind of Carrying On." "Now She Cares No More" featured Poindexter's twangy tenor singing over a waltz time lament that clearly mimics Hank Williams's "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry," even including the lyric "I'm so lonesome / I can't wait." Moore and Bill Black combined their electric and upright bass guitars to make a clip-clop rhythm and Millard Yow added a tremolo-soaked lap steel guitar to give it the full Hank feel. The flipside, "My Kind of Carrying On," picked up the tempo for an upbeat honky tonker that again owed much to the style of Williams, as well as Lefty Frizzell and Faron Young. Poindexter's tenor cuts through the production with lyrics that brag about going on "a lovin' spree."[91] *Billboard* offered an unenthusiastic review of

[90] Interview with Cowboy Jack Clement, Rock N Soul Collection, NMAH Archives Center.
[91] Doug Poindexter and Starlite Wranglers, "Now She Cares No More" b/w "My Kind of Carrying On," Sun Records 202, 78 rpm, 1954.

"Now She Cares No More," reporting, "Good ditty gets an okay chanting from the nasal-voiced Poindexter." The reviewer then hinted at a rural-urban divide within country music disc jockeys and fans. "Big city country buyers might not go big for this, but it should do well in the back country."[92] Even this modestly optimistic prediction failed to materialize for Poindexter and the Wranglers. It flopped. The record sold somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 copies.[93]

The Starlite Wranglers never recorded another song, but that one record provided a connection between the ex-servicemen floating around the Memphis country music circuit and Sam Phillips's Memphis Recording Service. Originally from the northwest Alabama town of Florence, Phillips had moved to Memphis in 1945 after a brief stint in Nashville, Tennessee. He worked in radio in all three towns and opened his recording studio in 1950, famously recording both black and white artists who streamed into Memphis from the small towns and plantations in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Some of those included Harmonica Frank, Howlin' Wolf, and Jackie Brenston and His Delta Cats, who recorded the seminal "Rocket 88" with Ike Turner on piano. Phillips often leased these recordings to labels like Chess Records, who added these Memphis R&B performers to their growing stable of artists. Phillips started his own label in 1950 called Phillips Records in partnership with local disc jockey Dewey Phillips. After that failed, he tried again in 1952 with Sun Records and subsequently changed the name of his studio to match. The first artists recorded for Sun Records helped define blues and R&B, and eventually rock and roll in the 1950s and 1960s, artists like James Cotton, Little Junior Parker, and Rufus Thomas.[94]

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[92] "Review of New C&W Records," *Billboard*, May 29, 1954, 60.
[93] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 89-90.
[94] Ibid.

White country music artists barely show up in the first offerings by Sun, but that began to shift with Doug Poindexter and the Starlite Wranglers. Because Phillips knew Scotty Moore through the Starlite Wranglers, he knew to pair the guitar player and his bassist, Bill Black, with Elvis Presley to round out the young singer's sound. Because of Moore's time in the navy, honing his unique sound, collaborating with different types of musicians, and living and playing with African American musicians, he did not shy away from this strange kid covering an R&B song. And because of the regional success of that first Presley single, a call went out to all those country pickers in Memphis and the surrounding countryside who had worked their craft on the time and the dime of the U.S. government. Come to Sun Studio. Join in creating a new sound in country music. Play and sing in a way that shows your affinity for and indebtedness to African American culture regardless of Jim Crow.

The country music that came from Sun Studio beginning in 1954 would shine a light on the intersection of white and black musical cultures. Sam Phillips may take some credit for making those records happen. But Sun Records owes as much to Uncle Sam as it did Sam Phillips for the talent that showed up to 706 Union Avenue. When the nation's Cold War military threw white country pickers into the ranks with black soldiers, it opened their cultural and social worlds. It made them open to possibility. And it made those white country musicians into an internal threat for the country music industry.

Rockabilly Shakes Music Row

The story of Elvis Presley's meteoric rise is a familiar one, although it warrants retelling here to show just how much he depended on Memphis's country music community created by local military veterans. It also deserves retelling to show just how much Presley both depended on and began to threaten Music Row. On July 5, 1954, he walked into Sun Studio in an attempt

to track a few songs. The aspiring singer had visited the studio before, trying his luck crooning ballads but met little success. Phillips declined to release any of those early sides, although Marion Keisker, his assistant, flagged Presley's demos for the potential she saw in the handsome teen performer. After struggling to come up with proper material for the first recording session with Moore and Black, Presley famously launched into an interpretation of African American artist Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's 1948 R&B hit, "That's All Right Mama." Phillips loved it. The group followed that song by recording a fast 4/4 version of Bill Monroe's 1946 waltz "Blue Moon of Kentucky" for the B-side, and Phillips released it as a single on July 19, 1954, only two months after the Starlite Wranglers record.[95] The songs combined Presley's hiccupped vocal delivery, Black's galloping rhythm, Moore's cutting lead licks, and Phillips's slapback delay production. With these sonic elements, these white southerners recorded two genre-blending mash ups that did anything but flop. Local disc jockey Dewey Phillips propelled "That's All Right" to popularity on his WHBQ radio show "Red, Hot, and Blue" and reported a deluge of phone calls from listeners who inquired about the singer's race. Only when Presley confirmed that he had attended Humes High in an on-air interview with Phillips did listeners understand that the racially ambiguous voice belonged to a white man.[96]

Presley then began scaling the rungs of the local country music scene, bringing his interracial sound to the visibly all-white genre. He started as an intermission act with the Starlite Wranglers at the Bon-Air Club, but the response to the new singer proved too much. "It didn't take us but just a few weeks to realize that wasn't going to work," Scotty Moore said because "most of the crowd were coming were younger and liked that part and didn't care for the country

[95] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 89-97.
[96] Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 62-72.

stuff which I was playing with the whole group." He remembered the split with his old band as an amicable one. "There wasn't a falling out or anything, just everybody realized, 'Well, this is where we need to, to split off and you guys do this and we'll hang in there doing what we do.'"[97] His new group then made a local splash opening for *Louisiana Hayride* star Slim Whitman on July 30, 1954 at the Overton Shell Amphitheater in midtown Memphis. In fact, they had named themselves Elvis Presley and the Blue Moon Boys, a nod to the popularity of their cover of a bluegrass tune, not the R&B song.[98]

Next, the trio hit the Eagle's Nest, playing a few songs in-between Sleepy Eyed John's band that featured Jim Stewart and Cowboy Jack Clement. Stewart "noticed that there was quite a lot of enthusiasm when they came on, a little different from ours, especially from the ladies, they would just, there was this amazing reaction, we had not experienced anything like this, when he would hit the stage."[99] Clement remembered how people "would go wild, man. It was packed." Presley and the Blue Moon Boys used the economical instrumentation of acoustic guitar, electric guitar, and upright bass. By contrast, Clement described his group as being "up there with an 8-piece band and everybody's dancing and having a good time. It was good thing but then Elvis comes on with a guitar, wasn't even amplified and a slapping bass and an electric guitar and they go nuts. Dancing every little nuance." The change in the local music scene came quickly. Clement claimed dramatically that, "Elvis took Memphis by storm. It was all over the first day, man."[100]

While everyone recognized the difference between the trio's music and the country sounds of the day, Presley's race, region, and repertoire kept his music fully within the

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[97] Scotty Moore interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[98] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 109-111.
[99] Jim Stewart interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[100] Cowboy Jack Clement interview, NMAH Archives Center.

commercial structures of country music. There was nowhere else for him to go. Phillips booked Presley on the *Grand Ole Opry* on October 2, 1954. In three months, the group had ascended from the Bon-Air Club to the Ryman Auditorium on the local enthusiasm for one single. Presley even met Bill Monroe, who professed his appreciation of the cover and told the young singer he had recut the song to match the new interpretation. The group also played Ernest Tubb's *Midnight Jamboree* radio show after their *Opry* appearance where Presley reportedly told Tubb he wanted to be a country singer more than anything else.[101]

Country disc jockeys and jukeboxes gave Presley's record another boost. A week after the *Opry* appearance, his version of Monroe's tune had hit number 6 on *Billboard*'s "C&W Territorial Best Sellers" followed closely by "That's All Right" at number 7.[102] On October 16, 1954, Presley and the Blue Moon Boys made their debut on the *Louisiana Hayride*, a connection made through their manager Bob Neal, a Memphis country radio disc jockey.[103] In fact, country radio played an instrumental role in Presley's initial success. Country disc jockey Tom Perryman worked for a small station in Gladewater, Texas, an oilfield town about 80 miles west of Shreveport, Louisiana, home of the *Hayride*. The show's stars often stopped in his station, KSIJ, for promotional appearances. In his opinion, "Presley's first break on the radio came on probably country [radio] because of the 'Blue Moon of Kentucky' song and not 'That's All Right, Mama,' . . .. I know that's the way I did." Perryman also booked the trio into east Texas honky tonks in late 1954, where Presley, Moore, and Black would play weeknights while waiting for their Saturday night appearances on the *Hayride*.[104] These types of gigs and radio promotions established the trio as a working country band long before the mainstream pop music industry

[101] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 127-130.
[102] *Billboard*, October 6, 1954.
[103] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 135-140.
[104] Tom Perryman interview by John Rumble, OHC221, June 19, 1990, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.

knew Presley's name. By the end of 1955, readers of *Country & Western Jamboree* had named him the genre's "Best New Male Singer" ahead of Justin Tubb, Tommy Collins, Porter Wagoner, and Bobby Lord. Riding his wave of post-military publicity, Faron Young took "Best Male Singer" for the year.[105]

But while fans embraced Presley, other artists and cultural authority figures resented the change he represented for the genre. In fact, that began back at the Eagle's Nest, where Sleepy Eyed John disliked the way Presley stirred up the young folks and stole the spot light from his band.[106] Sam Phillips had to beg Jim Denny, manager of the *Grand Ole Opry*, to let Presley perform, and Denny reportedly hated the new style the trio had brought to country music.[107] Hugh Cherry, a prominent country music disc jockey and television host in the 1950s, gave Presley no credit for musical innovation. He complained how "Elvis's contribution to American society is he gave America's youth permission to be sexual. That's all. He's a singer of minimal talent, very limited range. He never wrote a song. He didn't play two chords well."[108] Charlie Louvin, one half of brother duo the Louvin Brothers, toured with Presley in 1956 and lamented how "The music changed" after what was dubbed rockabilly hit the country charts. New styles cut into the bottom line for more established artists with more recognizably country sounds. Louvin observed how "People like Webb Pierce, who had had twenty-five #1s, went down the drain, and the music changed so much that it seemed like it was a terrible slump in music right then, our kind of music, right through there. So it did get lean."[109]

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[105] Leo Zabelin, "Upsets Mark First Readers' Poll," *Country & Western Jamboree*, December 1955, 8, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[106] Cowboy Jack Clement interview, NMAH Archives Center.
[107] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 129-130.
[108] Hugh Cherry oral history interview with John Rumble, OHC57, February 28, 1996, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.
[109] Charlie Louvin oral history interview with Douglas B. Green, OH338, January 11, 1972, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.

The country music press described Presley's impact as an injection of pop or R&B into the genre and his repertoire certainly backs those assertions, at least on the surface. His growing repertoire of R&B covers, including "That's All Right," "Good Rockin' Tonight," "Mystery Train," and "I Got a Woman," all recorded at Sun, certainly encouraged that interpretation. The September 1955 edition of *Country Song Roundup* featured a profile of the singer titled "Folk Music Fireball." Casting Presley as an anomaly within the genre, the author claimed that the "big (6 foot) blonde" singer's first Sun record "represented something new in records: the unusual pairing of an R&B number with a Country standard." The article also enthused about the riotous concert events that Presley caused, including a concert appearance for "Jimmie Rodgers Day" in Meridian, Mississippi. The crowd there listened to Presley's growing catalogue of country songs like "Milk Cow Blues Boogie," "You're a Heartbreaker," Stan Kesler's tune "I'm Left, You're Right, She's Gone," and the Arthur Gunter blues song "Baby, Let's Play House."[110] In December 1955, *Country & Western Jamboree* described how the country music manager and promoter Col. Tom Parker "instituted a new policy when he presented a combination of popular and country & western music on a recent one-nighter tour." At the time, Parker managed country star Hank Snow and his son Jimmie Rodgers Snow and was known in the industry as having managed Eddy Arnold and Red Foley to superstardom. His "new policy" on this tour placed the Snows on the same bill as "pop" acts Bill Haley and Elvis Presley.[111]

Even as Presley gradually earned a reputation as a pop star, he did so by going through Nashville, which put him on a career trajectory bound to intersect with the military. In January 1956, Presley released "Heartbreak Hotel," his first single on the major label RCA after Phillips

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[110] "Folk Music Fireball," *Country Song Roundup*, September 1955, 14, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.
[111] "New Policy Combines Pops-C&W," *Country & Western Jamboree*, December 1955, 13, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.

sold his Sun contract. The song helped cement his reputation as a pop star and rock and roller with its insinuating swing, Black's descending bass line, and accents from newly-added drummer D.J. Fontana's strip club snare. With that release, Presley secured a number one hit on *Billboard*'s country chart, the pop chart, and a top 5 hit on the R&B chart. It also earned him his first gold record. But in the process of creating this seminal rock and roll song, Presley recorded his most country record yet. He cut the tune at the RCA studio in Nashville, and the label's country A&R director Steve Sholes produced the track. It also featured country finger picking wizard Chet Atkins on acoustic guitar, and session pianist Floyd Cramer, who had started a few years before as a member of Faron Young's band, gave the tune its tinkling blues runs. Additionally, "Heartbreak Hotel" presented the first hit for Tree International Publishing. Tree's president Jack Stapp gave credit to Presley for his firm's success. He detailed how "Elvis Presley, who had been recording, I think, country-type songs, did 'Heartbreak Hotel,' which was a Tree song, written by Mae Axton down in Jacksonville, Florida. . . . it went to the #1 position in the charts, and that's when we started making noise."[112] Tree would go on to publish songs by Roger Miller, Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard, Buck Owens, Jim Reeves, and Conway Twitty before being sold to CBS in 1989 for $40 million.[113] Presley, Axton, and "Heartbreak Hotel" provided the foundation of that Nashville institution.

Presley stayed country as he emerged as a national star on radio and television. He signed to a management contract with Col. Tom Parker in March 1956, further embedding the "Folk Music Fireball" within the country music machine.[114] That same month, he met Connie B. Gay and made an appearance on the Jimmy Dean Show on Washington's WMAL television station.

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[112] Jack Stapp oral history interview with Bill Ivey, OH373, August 8, 1972, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.
[113] Jon Pareles, "THE MEDIA BUSINESS; CBS Records to Buy Tree, Ending an Era in Nashville," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1998.
[114] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 258.

Gay remembered the encounter fondly, describing how Presley "was just getting into the business, and he gave me, I guess, my first face-to-face confrontation with rock & roll." However, Gay did not think of him as rock and roll at the time. "I thought of him, of course, in the early days as a country singer, as did a lot of other people," he recalled. "But I recognized that here was a new state-of-the-art, so to speak, and that it probably would hang around for a few years."[115] Besides an appearance on Dean's show, Gay booked Presley on the *S.S. Mount Vernon*, a yacht that Gay rented for "Hillbilly Cruises" while the boat sailed up and down the Potomac.[116]

The next logical step for Presley's burgeoning country career would be a performance for the military. On April 3, 1956, Presley entertained sailors aboard the *U.S.S. Hancock* docked in San Diego for a special episode of the *Milton Berle Show*, followed by a two-night stand at the San Diego Arena where the group drew over 11,000 fans each night. Scotty Moore took the time to reconnect with John Bankson, a navy buddy who was still stationed in San Diego. He brought his old friend to the shows and picked guitar with him until the early hours of the morning. Moore characterized the visit as the moment when he "closed the door on my Navy past. I had to reinvent myself when I left West Tennessee to join the Navy. Once I left the Navy and moved to Memphis I had to reinvent myself once again."[117]

Presley also endured the process of reinvention in 1956, transforming from regional star to an international success story. With that fame came the intense scrutiny of the nation's cultural authorities. In the eyes of his critics, Presley's influence over youth culture and country music made him the leader of an internal rebellion against his race. The backlash to Presley arrived just

[115] Connie B. Gay interview, FLA.
[116] Peter Golkin, "Elvis on the Potomac," *Washington City Paper*, February 19, 2007.
[117] Moore, *Scotty and Elvis*, 109.

as quickly as his success. Southern politicians and religious leaders decried the racial mixing implied in the rockabilly sound and the obvious influences that black culture had on the country music's young white performers. With his hypersexual dancing, long duck-tailed hair, eye make-up, and riot-inducing sway with female fans, Presley had helped define the rebellious sound and image of rock and roll by blurring the boundaries of race.[118] Military service had given rise inadvertently to the new, blacker sound of an ostensibly all-white genre. Ironically, Music Row would need the strength of the Cold War military to subdue the threat of racial mixing that Presley and his fellow rockabillies had brought to country music.

[118] Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, 62-72.

Chapter 4

All-American Boy:

Elvis Presley and the Cold War's Musical and Military Integration

In December 1957, the U.S. Army broke its news to the nation that the draft had reached a previously unthinkable point in its Cold War mission. The army now wanted Elvis Presley as an enlisted man. Although Americans accepted the peacetime draft as part of the fight against the global threat of communism, no one could have predicted just how powerful the federal government had grown that it could conscript the nation's biggest musical star in this foreign policy strategy. For thousands of young Americans, the draft had finally overextended its reach. By early 1958, nearly a decade before the height of anti-Vietnam demonstrations, many American teens protested the drafting of Presley with an intensity found only in youth's devotion to itself. His compulsory service demonstrated both the might of the federal government to enlist whomever it chose and the willingness of the nation's young people to push back against that power. Linda Kelly, Sherry Bane, and Mickie Matson, three young women from Noxon, Montana, wrote to President Dwight D. Eisenhower with an urgent plea on the draftee's behalf. "You don't know how we feel about him," they testified to the Commander in Chief. "I really don't see why you have to send him in the Army at all," the three continued, "but we beg you please please don't give him a G.I. hair cut, oh please please don't! If you do we will just about die!" They signed the letter, "Elvis Presley Lovers."[1]

Shocked that the government could pluck the most popular and commercially successful artist of the 1950s for service in the Cold War military, these young women acted. They were not

[1] Letter from Kelly, Bane, and Matson to Eisenhower, White House Central Files (Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1961), Series: Alphabetical Files, 1953-1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/594359; Alan Levy, illustrated by Dedini, *Operation Elvis* (New York: Holt, 1960).

alone. Thousands of Presley fans wrote letters to their government representatives, wailed, and gnashed their teeth at the thought of losing their symbol of adolescent rebellion and desire. Presley had ascended the rungs of the popular music industry by bucking conventions of genre, racial performance, and class hierarchy with his music, wanton dance moves, and disregard for white middle-class American fashion. For young women like those three "Elvis Presley Lovers," the stifling conformity of military service seemed akin to a death sentence for their rebellious idol. They took exception to what they saw as an abuse of government power when Presley finally did enter the U.S. Army as a draftee on March 24, 1958.

What these young women and thousands of other Presley fans failed to understand was that there was, in fact, *nothing* exceptional about the star's military service. Presley's race, region, and class shaped his place within the Cold War political economy and meant that he would likely serve in the military, regardless of his success in the music business.[2] As a high school-educated white male and the son of working-class parents from the margins of white southern society, Presley likely expected to serve in the armed forces at some point, whether through conscription or as an enlistee looking for the economic security granted to soldiers in the nation's standing military and sold through campaigns like *Country Style, U.S.A*.

Instead of joining voluntarily, Presley took his chances as a working artist in the country music scene. His first releases had balanced his versions of R&B and pop songs with country covers. Presley's connection to country music extended beyond this repertoire. The country music industry had facilitated his ascent, providing his backing musicians, management, and first forays into live radio and television performances. Perhaps most importantly, the country music press considered Presley as one of their own. Thanks to his consistent hits on the country and

[2] Linn, *Elvis's Army*, 1-6.

western charts, Presley ranked as a fan favorite in the pages of *Country Song Roundup* and *Country & Western Jamboree* throughout the 1950s. These fans understood Presley as country, even if he represented a curious new incarnation of the hillbilly sound that revealed the obvious influence of African American music and style.[3]

Presley's sexualized play with the signifiers of black culture, however, represented a betrayal of social and political laws of the segregated South. At the same time, southern white supremacists identified another betrayal of Jim Crow norms occurring within the military through racial integration of the armed forces. In response to both of these assaults, the racist organization known as the White Citizens' Councils fought a multi-front war against school desegregation, rock and roll rebellion, and the integration of the military installations that had mushroomed through the South since the 1940s. One chapter of the Citizens' Council directed their fury at the military integration at Fort McClellan in nearby Anniston, Alabama. According to their worldview, the federal government had ignited an insidious social revolution by integrating the armed forces on domestic installations where men and women, both white and black, would mix in social settings, allegedly to the strains of black music. These white supremacists saw the military, which had brought so much economic prosperity to the postwar South, as an internal threat to social order of Jim Crow.

Elvis Presley represented an analogous, internal threat to the country music industry as an insidious agent of black-inspired culture. Scholars have rightly documented Presley's role in the appropriation of blues and R&B for white profit. There is no reason to dispute the centrality of African American musical culture and fashion in propelling him to stardom.[4] Yet this emphasis

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[3] Nick Tosches, *Country: The Biggest Music in America* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), 39-57; Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 90-91.
[4] Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002), 222-223.

on cultural theft has elided how profoundly Presley remained embedded in the country music industry. Scholars have written Presley into this critical blind spot partly out of the need to reckon with the recording industry's white supremacy and partly out of an inability to imagine the influence of black music within the segregated spaces of the presumably all-white genre of 1950s country. He was not only a Mailer-esque "white negro" interloper dabbling in country covers.[5] Presley's merger of the ostensibly white and black genres represented an internal rebellion within the country music industry by daring to flaunt his affinity for black culture while using the commercial infrastructure of Music Row. In Nashville during the mid-1950s, it appeared that the barbarians had breached the gate. The call was coming from inside the house.

The country music industry maintained its own way of talking about race in the late 1950s that had nothing to do with African American culture or integration and everything to do with the global expansion of the U.S. military. Beginning in 1957, country singers and songwriters initiated a hit-making trend with songs about interracial sexual affairs between U.S. soldiers and women of various races, nationalities, and ethnicities. Lawton Williams, an ex-military policeman-turned-country disc jockey, began the craze with his tunes "Geisha Girl" and "Fraulein," recorded by Hank Locklin and Bobby Helms, respectively. Several artists, both men and women, followed suit with imitations and answer songs that charted as country hits into the early 1960s. This theme of military-transnational romance sold so well that Locklin recorded an entire album of such songs called *Foreign Love*, narrating a virtual world tour of heterosexual encounters made possible by the U.S. military's Cold War mission to contain the spread of communism. The popularity of these songs signaled a tolerance for or even an attraction to

[5] Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, 62-72.

interracial sex among country music fans, at least as it was practiced by heterosexual white soldiers who crossed any color line besides the domestic black-white divide.

When Presley entered the U.S. Army in 1958, he not only followed a familiar trajectory for white working-class men from the U.S. South. He also tracked a known pattern for male country music artists. Country fans had come to expect their favorite male artists would be involved with the military at some point. For a country singer, armed service seemed to come with the job. And like Faron Young and others before him, Presley benefited from his time in the ranks. Presley fulfilled his masculine duty, increased demand for his music by diminishing its supply, and used his service as a springboard into middle-class respectability and a Hollywood career. Military service rid Presley of his image as a Romeo hood who dared to expose the mixed-race origins of country music.[6] Conscription into the Cold War military transformed the biggest rockabilly star. It made him even more accessible as a mass-market pop star by affirming his commitment to the white middle-class values of U.S. nationalism and anti-communism. It cleaned him up, gave him a haircut, and wiped the mascara from his eyelids. It made him wholly white. It branded him with respectability, free from suspicions of racial or sexual perversions. The army made him a man.

The Gendered and Racial Threat of Presleyism

By October 1956, rumors of Presley's imminent conscription filtered into the national conversation about the singer. Servicemen's newspaper *Army Times* noted the nuisance this hearsay had caused at installations around the country. Presley fans would write to and call these posts, insisting that they knew the "Tennessee Troubadour" was in basic training on these

[6] Military historian Brian Linn has noted that military service led to Presley's ascendance in respectability as well. However, Linn's focuses on the conflict between the modernization of the Cold War nuclear army and the need for young men capable of operating such machinery. Presley functions as a brief example of this broader trend. See Linn, *Elvis's Army*.

respective bases and seeking to contact him. *Billboard* ran a story about Presley's impending assignment to Fort Dix, where he would allegedly receive a shortened basic training, along with "extensive dental and periodontal (gum) work" before receiving his orders as part of the army's Special Services entertainment.[7] None of these details were true, yet their publication led to a bombardment of Fort Dix's mailbox and phone lines. Fort Dix postal officer Captain Sammy Robinson stated, "I've got a whole boxful of letters for him and the telephone operators are getting lots of 'let-me-speak-to-Pvt. Presley' phone calls."[8] These rumors plagued other installations as well. An *Army Times* report stated that the officials at Fort Carson, Colorado felt the need "to squelch the countless inquiries, principally from gasping teen-age girls, about the ducktailed hero's whereabouts."[9]

In truth, Presley avoided the service for as long as possible, as he was justifiably unwilling to give up the unprecedented success he experienced beginning in 1956. The singer came under the management of the notorious Colonel Tom Parker, who facilitated his rise from a regional to a national star who was signed to RCA Records with two number one hits, "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Hound Dog." He had sold 10 million singles by the end of 1956 and co-starred in his first film, *Love Me Tender*, in which he played a singing Confederate soldier, doomed in love and war. Elvis's character dies in battle after losing his betrothed to his brother.[10] None of this success could curb the steady stream of controversy that accompanied Elvis's rise to fame, particularly when it came to the perceived pernicious influence he allegedly had on the nation's adolescents.

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[7] "Army to Give Elvis Presley a G.I. Haircut," *Billboard*, October 27, 1956, 1; Levy, *Operation Elvis*, 3-10.
[8] "It Ain't True. Elvis is not in the Army," *The Army Times*, October 13, 1956, 21.
[9] "Elvis Must Have a Good Press Agent," *The Army Times*, October 20, 1956, 17.
[10] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 349-363.

From ministers to politicians to concerned parents, adults in positions of authority rued the debasement of American youth caused by Presley. Rev. W. Carter Merbreier, a Lutheran pastor from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, claimed that American teens had turned Elvis into a subject of idolatry. Yet Merbreier placed blame with the "nervous giggling girls" and their "idiotic parents" rather than Elvis. He claimed that "Even though the gesticulations of Elvis Presley are unquestionably suggestive and possibly, even immoral, the condemnation must lie with those who have by their admiration made him the golden image."[11] Rev. Carl E. Elgena of Des Moines, Iowa gave full culpability to Presley, alleging the rock and roll singer was "morally insane" and believed "The spirit of Presleyism has taken down all bars and standards. . . . We're living in a day of jellyfish morality."[12] American teens had embarked on a short trip towards degradation it seemed. Presley had provided the soundtrack and pointed the way with his hips.

For proof of this social degradation, authority figures and cultural conservatives from all walks of life need point no further than Presley's hair. Long, unkempt, and side-burned, the singer's hair had remained a topic of fascination since his emergence from Lauderdale Courts in Memphis, Tennessee. As Presley's fame grew, so did the hysteria about his coiffure and efforts to police those who would emulate their rock and roll idol. In late December 1956, shorthaired members of the East High School football team near Knoxville, Tennessee cut the Elvis-inspired hairdos of three students, while they made six other students promise to see a barber lest they receive the same tonsorial fate. The football players, all of whom wore crew cuts, claimed that the "longhairs" were "hoods" who invited bad reputations for their fellow high school boys. The

[11] "Minister Likens Elvis Presley to the Golden Calf," *Kingsport Times*, April 9, 1957, 8.
[12] Quoted in Levy, *Operation Elvis*, 32.

crew cut jocks held down the three offenders while another player sheared the long tops and side-burns from these alleged "hoods."[13]

Young women even picked up on Presley's hair sensation. Teenagers in Arkansas started a fad bearing the alternate names "The Elvis Swirl," the "ooh, Elvis," and the "la Presley." This feminine take on the ducktail featured a short cut and sideburns. Paulette Thomas, a thirteen-year-old from Forrest City, Arkansas described how her "hair dresser nearly flipped her lid when I wouldn't let her put a bobby pin in my sideburns."[14] The trend caught on outside of the South as well. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, approximately 400 young women had opted for the "Presley Cut," with its bangs, sideburns, ducktailed back.[15]

Gender subversion had played into Presley's image creation from the beginning. As early as 1954, he began wearing eye shadow for a heavy-lidded look. This use of makeup had helped Presley create a new form of white masculinity that flirted with feminine performance. And, as historian Grace Elizabeth Hale has noted, his choice of singing "Hound Dog," a song originally recorded by R&B artist Big Mama Thornton, meant that Presley played with the tropes of female performance, putting himself in the place of the exasperated woman that narrates the tune about a no-good man.[16] With the feminine embrace of the "Presley cut," these young women sent the gender subversion back the other way. Now, with their ducktails and sideburns, they performed Presley's feminized version of masculinity for their fellow teens. When the army sheared Presley's hair, they also ended the inspiration behind this androgynous play for young women.

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[13] "Elvis Hair Styles Take a Cropping," *The Tennessean*, December 24, 1956, 16.
[14] "Newest Hairdo Is 'Oooh, Elvis,'" (AP) *Montgomery Advertiser*, August 19, 1956, 49.
[15] "The Presley Cut," *The Tennessean*, February 28, 1957, 9; Jack Bloom, "Girls Ape Elvis Hairdo, Barber Predicts Wide Popularity," *Lansing State Journal*, February 28, 1957, 12.
[16] Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, 67-72.

Presley's hair caused such uproar and emulation, in part, because it accentuated the sexuality he conveyed in his personal appearances. His bangs often followed his hips, thrusting forward as he preened for the female gaze on stage. Early on, Presley took to dying his hair dark brown and then black. This color job, combined with the copious amounts of Royal Crown pomade, gave his hair a particular sheen that emulated the popular black hairstyles of the day. As Nelson George has argued, Presley drew inspiration from the black "process," which straightened and styled black hair into a pompadour with the help of Royal Crown Pomade. Ironically, the process represented a black attempt to mimic a white hairstyle. Presley brought the cycle of mimicry back full circle with his use of Royal Crown to style his wild mane into the barely tamed pompadour that became a hallmark of rockabilly style.[17] All that Presley hair came to symbolize—the student rebellion, the racial performance, the gender bending—came under the threat of Uncle Sam's shears when his draft notice arrived in late 1956.

On January 4, 1957, Presley wore his eye shadow, along with a red jacket, a pair of black trousers, and black shoes to the Kennedy Veterans Hospital Examination Station in Memphis for his pre-induction physical. Las Vegas chorus girl Dotty Harmony accompanied the singer in a Cadillac limousine to the hospital. For her part, Harmony volunteered that she had found him to be a "fine physical specimen." Presley, too, believed he was "in good health, as far as I know" and stated that he would serve "whenever they want me." Purely on presumption, the press reported how "All branches of the service are interested in nailing Presley because of his 'special service' talents as an entertainer."[18] A few days later on January 8, 1957, the doctors had returned Presley's physical and mental test results to Captain Elwyn P. Rowan, the Army Recruiting Main Station commander. The Memphis *Press-Scimitar* teased "GIRLS! DON"T

[17] George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*.
[18] "Beat? For Elvis It's Army 1-2-3-4," *The Tennessean*, January 5, 1957, 1, 2.

LOOK NOW! Elvis doesn't even know it yet. But he's 1-A. '1-A' is draft board lingo. It means, 'You've had it,' 'Time to enlist,' or 'Prime draft bait' —depending how you look at it."[19] Expectant fans found relief in the report that Presley would not enter the draft for at least six months, regardless of the physician's findings.[20] Likewise, the reporters assured anxious teens that, as a condition of his assignment to the Special Services division, Presley would retain his controversial hair, foregoing the usual GI cut.[21] With an anticipated two-year hitch in the Special Services and no set date with a military barber in the near future, no one breathed easier than Presley himself, who justifiably dreaded leaving the fame and life of excess he had built in the two and a half years since he stepped into Sam Phillips' studio.

But the U.S. Army did not necessarily want the hip-swiveling symbol of adolescent rebellion and racial mixing in the ranks, whether he landed in Special Services or not. *Army Times* took Presley's mental examination as a chance to rib the draftee. With a picture of the singer with his head in hand and frown on his face, the soldier paper teased that Presley looked "downright houn'doggish before he's even made his first reveille." The caption told that the picture was taken as the "noted knee-knocker, thinks over a question in his pre-induction mental exam at Memphis."[22] A spokesman for Special Services denied that the entertainment branch even wanted Presley. "Our studies indicate that his basic appeal is to young girls. Our interest in that field is somewhat limited. We have not been able to obtain affirmative evidence that he has a similar appeal to young males, particularly in the age groups we seek to reach." He added that the image of Elvis singing about the "joys of Army life 'seems to us a bit grotesque . . . that

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[19] Paul Vanderwood, "Elvis Scores Hit With Army—He's 1-A," *Press-Scimitar*, January 8, 1957, Memphis-Biography files, Memphis and Shelby County Room Special Collections, Memphis Public Library. All of the following *Press-Scimitar* articles come from this collection of clippings.
[20] "Beat? For Elvis It's Army 1-2-3-4," *The Tennessean*, January 5, 1957, 1, 2.
[21] "Relax Girls; Presley May Keep Long Hair Even If Drafted," *The Jackson Sun*, 23.
[22] *The Army Times*, January 12, 1957, 1.

would be overdoing it, we think.' " The article also suggested that the Army was annoyed at the stories claiming Elvis would go into Special Services and was "particularly sore about one [reporting that] he won't have to shave off his sideburns after drafting."[23] The military wanted a certain type of performer to convey its Cold War recruitment message, and Presley did not fit the bill. That performer could be a white, working-class male from the South. He could or, perhaps, should be a country music singer. Yet Presley's gender play and indebtedness to African American culture represented two bridges too far for the army. They wanted someone who was clearly white and clearly masculine.

Musical and Military Integration in the 1950s South

The South's network of White Citizens' Councils, the "respectable" face of white supremacy and segregation, emerged as the nation's most vocal opponents to the rise of Presley and the gender and racial play at the heart of his brand of rock and roll. Formed on July 11, 1954 in Indianola, Mississippi, the Citizens' Councils spread across the region, forming state and local chapters, from Virginia to Texas to apply political pressure against the Supreme Court's decision in the *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas* case, delivered on May 17, 1954. The *Brown* ruling represented the successful culmination of years of legal battles in the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's fight against the 1896 ruling of *Plessey v. Ferguson*. Both the supporters and the opponents of the *Brown* decision understood that the legal dismantling of segregation threatened to extend well beyond southern school grounds. The Citizens' Councils' campaign of "massive resistance" to the first *Brown* decision successfully stalled the desegregation of southern schools. The court then handed down the *Brown II* decision in May 1955, which

[23] Jim G. Lucas, "Elvis' 'Male Appeal' Rated 'Not Much," *The Pittsburgh Press*, February 13, 1957, 22.

inadvertently emboldened white southern segregationists with its mandate of desegregating "with all deliberate speed."[24]

While the fight for integration continued in the courts, rock and roll sustained its assault on segregation in a cultural end-run around the strict separation of the races. The record industry took notice of this promiscuous mixing of genres and attempted to understand what it meant for the sound and the sale of popular music. *Billboard* reporter Bill Simon noted the predominance of R&B's influence on pop and country and western, commenting how there were "few boundary lines left in music these days, and nobody knows this better than the disk jockey, the immediate reflector as well as the frequent creator of public tastes." Most peculiarly, Simon observed how the influence of black music had "manifested itself with the c.&w. public and those that cater to it. Southern audiences, who once craved an exclusive diet of hillbilly platters, certainly don't practice segregation in their platter preferences." Specifically, he offered "the spectacular rise of Elvis Presley" as an example for the style's ability to receive "spins on r.&b. as well as country shows, and as prominent a pop deejay as Bill Randle insists that Presley is a potentially top pop entity."[25]

The country music industry took notice as well. In October 1956, country accordionist and songwriter Pee Wee King addressed what he saw as the negatives and positives of genre blending in his regular column for *Country Song Roundup*. "I suppose most of you have accustomed yourselves to the fact that there is a definite change in Country-Western styled songs that are being recorded," he rapped with his readers, commenting how everyone appeared to shift

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[24] Risa L. Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 5. On the construction of Jim Crow society, see C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

[25] Bill Simon, "Boundaries Between Music Types Fall; Deejays Spin Them All," *Billboard*, November 12, 1955, 34, 36.

to "some kind of Rock and Roll idea." He even admitted to chasing after the sound himself but justified his foray into the new style by saying that if enough artists jumped on the bandwagon they could end the fad. King believed that "if enough of us record the Elvis Presley type of songs, we can KILL this style" the same way he thought pop singers flooded the market with covers of his song "Tennessee Waltz" and Hank Williams' "Jambalaya." On the positive side, he believed that the musical mixing present in rock and roll and other "crazes have wiped out the big barriers that existed between 'Pop' music. Country music and Rhythm and Blues." He also reported that jukebox and record storeowners at the recent Music Operators Convention in Chicago had discussed a future in which music would no longer be divided by genre in record stores. Instead, customers would simply "ask for the record by the name of the song and the artist you like it by."[26] This idea seemed to appeal to King on the notion that his fans would seek out *his* records and not covers of his song by someone else, like Patti Page, for instance. By extension, his fans would buy *his* covers of songs, regardless of who originated the tunes. In this new artist-based system, as opposed to a genre-based classification, fans could reward their favorite performers and not fall prey to upstart singers like Elvis Presley in meaningless fads like rock and roll.

But genres did more than divide the record store. They provided identity and reinforced racial boundaries. White supremacists recognized this. To them a future of genre blending translated into a future of racial mixing, an unthinkable imaginary for anyone so invested in the political, social, and cultural separation of the races. The Citizens' Councils watched in disgust as Presley pushed the South's white youth into dangerous proximity with black culture. One member claimed that his Council chapter had "set up a twenty-person committee to do away

[26] Pee Wee King, "Pee Wee King's Corn Fab," *Country Song Roundup*, October 1956, 12, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.

with this vulgar, animalistic, nigger rock 'n' roll bop." He claimed that the committee aimed specifically at rockabilly and promised to "check with the restaurant owners and the cafes to see what Presley records is on their machines and then ask them to do away with them."[27]

Some country musicians held white supremacist attitudes views of Presley as well. Ira Louvin, Charlie's brother in the duo the Louvin Brothers, expressed a similar attitude to Presley's face. According to Charlie, one night while touring together, Presley found a piano backstage and played some gospel tunes, commenting, "You know, that's the music I really love." Ira, slightly inebriated, lashed out, "Well, you damn white nigger. Why do you play that crap on the stage if that's what you love?" Presley responded with a smile and explained that he simply gave the fans what *they* wanted, not what he always preferred.[28] For Councilers and Ira Louvin, Presley represented an internal enemy, someone who had betrayed his race and tempted the South's malleable white youth with his sexualized stage show, provocative lyrics, and open embrace of black styles. He tempted them so easily because of his position in country music, a visibly white genre that supposedly carried the torch for patriotism and Cold War militarism.

Council leader Asa Carter, later an infamous speechwriter for George Wallace and the novelist behind *The Rebel Outlaw Josey Wales* and *The Education of Little Tree*, emerged in the mid 1950s as one of the South's most vocal and influential critics of desegregation, popular music, and the pernicious influences of the federal government's racial policies. A native of northeast Alabama, Carter began his race-baiting career in 1953 by hosting a radio show sponsored by the white supremacist group, the American States' Rights Association, on Birmingham's WILD 850 AM. Carter took to the airwaves twice a day for nearly two years,

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[27] Quoted in Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 164.
[28] Charlie Louvin, *Satan Is Real: The Ballad of the Louvin Brothers*, with Benjamin Whitmer (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2012), 178.

promoting racial purity and warning of the communist conspiracy behind civil rights, desegregation, and black popular music.[29] WILD fired Carter in 1955 for his verbal attacks on the city's Jewish business community. But without skipping a beat in his pursuit of racial extremism, Carter formed the North Alabama Citizens' Council (NACC) based out of Birmingham in October of that year, creating a working-class version of the predominantly middle-class Citizens' Council movement. He then established a chapter on his home turf of Anniston, Alabama in February 1956, drawing members from the white steel workers, machinists, and gas station attendants of Calhoun County. Speaking at a series of rallies before his blue-collar crowds, Carter relied on two flashpoints to raise the ever-present specter of miscegenation: black music and Fort McClellan, the city's local military installation.[30]

Beginning in the early 1950s, Fort McClellan housed facilities for the Chemical Warfare Services and training facilities for both regular U.S. Army and National Guard units. By 1953, the combination of Fort McClellan and the nearby Anniston Army Depot employed nearly 12,000 people with a payroll of $20 million.[31] Located only six miles north of Anniston, Fort McClellan had also served as a massive training site for white and African American soldiers during two World Wars and even hosted experiments in interracial housing for officers as early as 1942.[32] The presence of African American men in uniform would continue to threaten the racial status quo of nearby Anniston in the postwar period. Carter organized his followers in

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[29] Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 114; Jeff Roche, "Asa/Forrest Carter and Regional/Political Identity," in *The Southern Albatross: Race and Ethnicity in the American South*, eds., Phillip D. Dillard and Randal L. Hall (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1999), 238-239.

[30] "Citizens' Unit Slates First Rally Saturday," *The Anniston Star*, February 23, 1956; "Citizens' Council First Rally Set At VFW Hall Saturday Night," *The Anniston Star*, February 24, 1956.

[31] Ellen Griffith Spears, *Baptized in PCBs: Race, Pollution, and Justice in an All-American Town* (Chapel Hill: The University of Chapel Hill Press, 2014), 85.

[32] On remembrances of the military's experiments in integration at Fort McClellan, see the recollections of Mississippi governor William Winter, who spent time at the fort during World War II. Charles C. Bolton, *William F. Winter and the New Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 49, 55.

early 1956, mobilizing councils in Calhoun County by playing to local racial fears, as well as the gender and class insecurities, of working whites. The alleged weakening of the "Anglo-Saxon" race through "mongrelization" at the hands of the federal government served as the overriding theme of his hate-mongering tactics. As evidence of the government's insidious role in the weakening of the white race, the NACC's newsletter, *The Southerner*, detailed the role that Fort McClellan and black music played in the demise of white power.

The February edition of *The Southerner* delivered on Carter's assessment of Fort McClellan's influence, reporting on the alleged interracial mixing between African American men and white women at the installation within the context of black music and dancing. The article begins by positioning the federal government as an enemy of white southern mores. Referencing Truman's 1948 executive order, Carter complained that "not by choice of the people, but through dictatorial executive order, the government quite some time ago, integrated our armed forces, and consequently, the military bases." Carter, who functioned as editor of *The Southerner*, the NACC Executive Secretary, and the article's most likely author, goes on to indict President Eisenhower's civil rights advisor, Max Rabb, a Jewish attorney, as "the mouthpiece of the mongrelizers to the President's ear" and the culprit for starting Fort McClellan down the path to racial amalgamation. The article claims that the government's plan for integration "was not subtle, but it was quiet," bemoaning the encampment of African American male soldiers with white soldiers just outside of Anniston.[33]

By the time members of NACC and the readers of their publications had awakened to the local ramifications of the Pentagon's racial policies, the South's white political representatives

[33] "Fort McClellan," *The Southerner: News of the Citizens' Council*, February 1956, 3. The February edition is housed at the Alabama Room Archives, Anniston-Calhoun County Public Library, Anniston, Alabama. All other editions reside in the Asa Earl "Ace" Carter Publications Collection, 1956 and undated, File 1265. 1. 1, Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts.

had grown comfortable with receiving federal investment in the form of defense spending. These politicians had directed millions of federal defense dollars into their region in the form of military base expansion during and after World War II. When the Pentagon ordered the desegregation of the military, the federal government turned these dozens of military installations into isolated experiments in integration well ahead of any legal orders to desegregate the South's civilian population.[34]

By 1953, only 15,000 of the army's approximately 200,000 black soldiers remained in segregated units, and the majority of those represented service units stationed in Europe.[35] The Pentagon initiated a sociological study of armed forces integration during the early 1950s codenamed Project Clear. In 1954, reporter Lee Nichols published its findings as an exposé called *Breakthrough on the Color Front*. Nichols believed that the military could state with some justification that "The program, to mix white and colored servicemen and women, is nearing completion and is being described as a complete success."[36]

The South's economic reliance on defense spending meant that it would need to comply with the Pentagon's racial mandate, even though federal policy clashed with local Jim Crow laws and customs. Children on posts in Germany and Japan had always attended integrated schools, while the schools on southern installations in the U.S. began desegregation in 1953. On January 12, 1954, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson issued a memo announcing that "no new school shall be opened for operation on a segregated basis, and schools presently so conducted shall cease operating on a segregated basis, as soon as practicable, and under no circumstances

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[34] Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 136-137.
[35] "Army Nears Full Integration," *Army Times*, September 19, 1953, 16. The army counted 88 all-black units and only 39 of those were stationed in the United States. James P. Mitchell, Assistant Secretary of the Army, claimed that "Army policy is one of complete integration and it is to be accomplished as soon as possible."
[36] Lee Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front* (New York: Random House, 1954); "Bob Horowitz, "Services Lead U.S. In Racial Mixing," *Army Times*, February 20, 1954, 11.

later than September 1, 1955."[37] From Texas to Alabama to Maryland, schools operating on federal land and with federal funding integrated with little incident, although 28,000 federal dependents attended civilian, segregated public schools across the South.[38]

The army's integration policy also applied to the WAC, which had relocated its training headquarters from Fort Lee, Virginia to Fort McClellan in 1954. The WAC's arrival in Alabama included the construction of new, $7 million barracks and training facility at Fort McClellan. Local paper *The Anniston Star* provided photographic coverage of the dedication ceremonies of the new construction and featured staged vignettes of white women drilling, relaxing in their rooms, singing around a piano, and attending etiquette class, combatting rumors that the WAC attracted women with loose morals and promiscuous sexual habits. The juxtaposition of these pictures, smiling white women marching in uniformed formation one moment and sewing in their rooms the next, created an image of white, chaste femininity in service to the state that offered an appealing image for residents of the nearby city.[39] However, not long after its relocation to Alabama, the WAC received allegations of racial discrimination. Michigan Representative Charles C. Diggs, Jr. wrote a letter to Secretary of the Army Robert T. Stevens charging that Special Services on the post refused to admit "Negro Wac personnel and visiting civilians from nearby communities . . . to dance at regular Wednesday night 'white enlisted dances.'" Diggs alleged that civilian hostesses of Special Services dances ordered black women soldiers off the floor and instructed them to return on Thursday nights for a separate dance.[40]

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[37] Quoted in MacGregor, *Integration of the Armed Forces*, 492.
[38] Ibid., 496.
[39] "3rd Army Chief, General Truman, Lauds WAC Facility," *The Anniston Star*, May 23, 1954; "WAC Ready To Dedicate Giant Center Tomorrow;" "WAC Has Vital Role In Uncle Sam's Army;" "Rules Given On Joining WAC," *The Anniston Star*, September 26, 1954. On the history of the WAC and the gender assumptions that accompanied serving, see Canaday, *The Straight State*; Morden, *The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978*.
[40] "Charge Jim Crow at Army Station," *Chicago Defender*, February 26, 1955, 4.

The realities of racism endured by black women at Fort McClellan did nothing to dampen the paranoia of the local Citizens' Council. For the NACC, the housing of black men and white women together on the base under the auspices of the federal government created an intolerable situation. Where Congressman Diggs echoed charges of discrimination, the NACC saw only the potential for interracial sex, particularly related to social functions at the post. Their white supremacist vision of the world created an inverse, alternative reality from the one experienced by black women at Fort McClellan. Black women were not victims in this reality. Black men were predators. With sneering insinuation, an article in the NACC newsletter described how, "as the evening wears on, one can hear the music rising in tempo, the beat growing into a jungle throb, the courtesies growing more lax, until the woman is accorded no visible respect."[41] The NACC sowed the seeds of white racial violence by depicting Fort McClellan as a den of lascivious racial mixing, where white women were the innocent game hunted by black men. For twenty-five cents per copy, white Annistonians could imbibe the NACC's mythmaking, reading about the collusion between the federal government and the communists, the imminent miscegenation at Fort McClellan, and the central role of black musical cultures in it all.

Not everyone took Carter's bait. On March 29, 1956, Anniston reporter Cody Hall, nephew of the Pulitzer Prize-winning, anti-Klan journalist Grover Hall, noticed Carter's antipathy towards African American music and set out to survey the average Annistonian's opinion on the subject. According to Hall, Carter claimed that the Anniston Citizens' Council was then asking the city's "drug stores and restaurants . . . to remove 'rock and roll' records" from their jukebox. NACC member Kenneth Adams, who would firebomb the Freedom Riders' bus outside of Anniston in 1961, led the initiative and described the "animalistic" beat and

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[41] "Fort McClellan," *The Southerner: News of the Citizens' Council*, February 1956, 3.

"Negro origin" of the music as detrimental to the community. Anniston's jukebox owners refused, and Hall quoted several high school and college-aged residents who found the idea asinine.[42]

A week later, on April 10, 1956, three members of Carter's NACC would find a target for their pent-up racial and class resentments, when they attacked and attempted to kidnap Nat Cole during a concert at Birmingham's Municipal Auditorium, sixty miles southwest of Anniston. The kidnapping attempt failed, but the attack pushed the usually quietly political singer to support openly the NAACP's efforts to end Jim Crow segregation.[43] Yet, despite the NACC's actual and threatened violence, certain musicians and soldiers could cross the sexual color line with impunity. And the songs they wrote and sang about these sexual exploits garnered hit records, not terroristic intimidations.

Foreign Love

In 1957, a country music singer named Hank Locklin released his first crossover hit with "Geisha Girl," which reached number 66 on the pop charts and stayed on the country charts for 39 weeks, peaking at number 4.[44] The song's narrator invites the listener to empathize with his situation. He has fallen in love with a Japanese woman and does not know how to help himself.

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[42] Cody Hall, "Opposition To 'Rock'n Roll Meets Cool Reception Here," *The Anniston Star*, March 29, 1956. A similar article followed the next day, picked up from the UP. It also mentions Carter's campaign. See "Disc Jockey Defends 'Rock'n Roll Hits," *The Anniston Star*, March 30, 1956; " 'Rock and Roll' Fighter Finds No Help In Ranks," *The Birmingham World*, April 3, 1956.

[43] Brian Ward, "Civil Rights and Rock and Roll: Revisiting the Nat King Cole Attack of 1956," *OAH Magazine of History* (April 2010), 21-24; Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 95-105; Daniel Mark Epstein, *Nat King Cole* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), 251-256; Leslie Gourse, *Unforgettable: The Life and Mystique of Nat King Cole* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 176-180; James Haskins, *Nat King Cole*, with Kathleen Benson (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1984), 138-140; Gary S. Sprayberry, " 'Town Among the Trees': Paternalism, Class, and Civil Rights in Anniston, Alabama, 1872 to Present" (PhD dissertation, University of Alabama, 2003); Sprayberry, " 'Interrupted Melody': The 1956 Attack on Nat 'King' Cole," *Alabama Heritage* 71 (Winter 2004): 16-24; Nick Tosches, *Unsung Heroes of Rock 'n' Roll: The Birth of Rock in the Wild Years Before Elvis* (New York: Martin Secker and Warburg, Ltd., 1991), 36-37.

[44] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 242.

"Have you ever heard a love song, that you didn't understand? / Where you met her in a teahouse, on the island of Japan / And have you ever traveled, over many thousand miles / To see a pretty geisha girl dressed in oriental style."[45] By the end of the chorus, the narrator has bid farewell to the United States and returned to Japan: "Tell the folks back home I'm happy, with someone that's true I know / I love a pretty geisha girl where the ocean breezes blow."[46]

The success of "Geisha Girl" spurred its writer, a former military policeman and disc jockey named Lawton Williams, to pen more songs detailing the joys and heartbreaks of transnational and often interracial sexual affairs. He wrote "Fraulein" and placed it with singer Bobby Helms. The narrator, presumably a soldier, has left his German lover behind to return to the states, where he reminisces about his abandoned romance. While nothing about the song conjures a direct association with the military, the instrumentation provides subtle clues that connect "Fraulein" with service in the armed forces. In the background of the mix, the piano player repeats a triplet beat in the upper register, providing a near-hidden reminder of a martial drum corps. "Fraulein" reached number one on the *Billboard* country charts and crossed over to the pop charts too, where it peaked at number 36 in 1957. Helms would match this enormous success only with his seasonal hit "Jingle Bell Rock" later that year.[47]

Locklin's and Helms's releases initiated a gold rush of transnational and interracial love songs that reinforced the ties between country music and the Cold War military. Locklin entered the studio with Chet Atkins in December 1957 and recorded an album called *Foreign Love* that included his own version of "Fraulein." Lawton Williams penned the title track, as well as the

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[45] Hank Locklin, "Geisha Girl," RCA Victor Records 447-0795, 45 rpm, 1957. This was not the first geisha-themed song. Country and western artist Danny Dill had released "Geisha Sweetheart" in 1956, but the song nor the artist failed to make much of an impact.

[46] "C&W Best Sellers in Stores," *Billboard*, November 25, 1957, 78; Walt Trott, "Hank Locklin," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 300-301.

[47] Bobby Helms "Fraulein," Decca Records 9-30194, 45 rpm, 1957; Colin Escott, "Bobby Helms," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 236.

tune "Blue Grass Skirt" about a man whose "hula girl" is stolen by a "rock and roller" four years before Elvis Presley's *Blue Hawaii*. All twelve songs, including four written by Williams, addressed love affairs between a man and exoticized women of various nationalities, ethnicities, and races.[48] These included a rewrite of the Spanish-American War/minstrel show artifact "Filipino Baby" by Tin Pan Alley pioneer Charles K. Harris, Cindy Walker's weirdly French/Japanese love song "Anna Marie," and Helen Stone's "Mexicali Rose" from 1923. With these tunes, Locklin took listeners on a historical world tour of U.S. imperialism and Cold War containment.

Locklin's success inspired an outbreak of answer songs written from a range of perspectives. Skeeter Davis delivered "Lost to a Geisha Girl" in late 1957.[49] Kitty Wells followed a similar pattern that same year, mimicking the melody and instrumentation of "Fraulein" for her tune, "(I'll Always Be Your) Fraulein" about a German woman who still holds a place in her heart for her American lover.[50] Jimmie Skinner recorded a refusal to this trend of foreign love with his tune, "I Found My Girl in the U.S.A." After dismissing the exotic charms of geishas, Skinner delivers his romantic version of American exceptionalism with the line, "I was lonesome too while over there but I waited for that day / And found my girl here in the good ol' U.S.A."[51] Brother and sister duo, The McCoys, made their contribution with another Lawton Williams tune, "Daddy's Geisha Girl," sung from the point of view of two siblings left behind in America with their mother while their father travels back to his Japanese lover.[52] And in 1959, Jan Howard and Wynn Stewart, teamed up to duet on "Yankee Go Home," a song that Howard's

[48] Hank Locklin, *Foreign Love*, RCA Victor LP 1673, 33 1/3 rpm, 1958.
[49] Skeeter Davis, "Lost to a Geisha Girl," RCA Victor 7084, 45 rpm, 1957; "Review Spotlight on C&W Records," *Billboard* November 11, 1957, 124.
[50] Kitty Wells, "(I'll Always Be Your) Fraulein," Decca 30415, 45 rpm, 1957.
[51] Jimmie Skinner, "I Found My Girl in the U.S.A.," Mercury-Starday 71192, 45 rpm, 1957.
[52] The McCoys, "Daddy's Geisha Girl," RCA Victor 47-7204, 45 rpm, 1958.

songwriting husband Harlan used to turn a slogan of anti-American graffiti into country heartbreak.[53] Harlan Howard could pull inspiration from his own experience as a soldier, having learned how to play guitar and write songs while training as a U.S. Army paratrooper stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia.[54] Locklin tried to cash in on the trend once more in 1959 with his release "Foreign Car," a comedic song set to the tune of "Geisha Girl" about trying to get it on in a compact import with bucket seats.[55]

Country music fans continued buying military-themed love songs into the 1960s. In 1961, Wells scored her second and final solo number one hit with the song "Heartbreak, U.S.A." This tune addressed the entire "Foreign Love" trend in the form of an answer song, Wells's calling card since her first number one "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels." A chorus of background singers announce this location before Wells begins a mournful epistle to her absent lover. "The harbor's empty my love has gone / With aching heart I face each cold and lonely dawn / And till the trade winds bring him home to stay I'll live in heartbreak U.S.A." The solitude Wells expresses in the song, another one written by Harlan Howard, implies that she will remain chaste and devoted to her lover regardless of his dalliances. She reminds her man not to let foreign women, including "Geesha girls," seduce him while traveling the world, although the resignation in her voice suggests the futility of her pleas.

But these songs represented more than campy Cold War novelty hits. Thousands of U.S. serviceman married Japanese women and brought their partners stateside in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This development of Japanese and American marriages began with Nisei Japanese-

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[53] Jan Howard and Wynn Stewart, "Yankee Go Home," *Foreign Love Affairs*, Bear Family Records, CD 16336, 2004. The original single was released in 1959.
[54] "Harlan Howard, A Country Music Lover," *Country Song Roundup*, March 1968, 12, FLA; "Harlan Howard (In His Own Words)," *Country Song Roundup*, May 1970, 30, FLA.
[55] Hank Locklin, "Foreign Car," RCA Victor 47-7472, 45 rpm, 1959.

American soldiers marrying Asian women while stationed in the Pacific. Thanks to activism by the Japanese American Citizen League, Congress passed a series of Soldier Brides Acts in 1945, 1947, and 1950, which permitted Nisei soldiers to bring Japanese wives to the United States.[56] White and black soldiers also took advantage of these new policies. The American Consulate counted over 8,000 marriages between Japanese women and U.S. soldiers between 1945 and 1952. Seventy-three percent of those marriages occurred between white men and Japanese women.[57] In 1951, the American Red Cross established a Brides' School in Japan and at Fort Bliss outside El Paso, Texas to minimize any impending social conflicts and maximize assimilation.[58] By 1957, when Hank Locklin released "Geisha Girl," the Red Cross claimed to have helped 30,000 Japanese brides assimilate to US culture.[59] But not all women involved with U.S. soldiers became a bride or made their way across the Pacific. Japanese women gave birth to thousands of mixed-race children out of wedlock, and thousands more chose abortion rather than face the stigma of single motherhood.[60]

These foreign love songs did more than reflect the racial and gender politics of Cold War militarism. They represented the way Music Row profited from a deep tradition of interracial love songs written in the context of American empire building. Songwriters chronicled love affairs with women of different races and phenotypes as whites made their way across the continent. Nineteenth century ballads like "Shenandoah," "Fallen Leaf," and "Princess Pocahontas," told of white men loving "Indian maidens," while colonizers drove indigenous

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[56] Tomoko Tsuchiya, "Interracial Marriages between American Soldiers and Japanese Women at the Beginning of the Cold War," *Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 29 (2011), 62.
[57] Ibid., 69-70. Whites made up 73 percent of the marrying males, followed by 15 percent Nisei, while African Americans made up 12 percent.
[58] "13 Japanese Attend School for Brides," *Army Times*, December 1, 1956, 33.
[59] "Japanese Brides Take Lessons in American Way of Life," *Army Times*, June 15, 1957, 35.
[60] Ibid. 77. On the scale of Japanese abortion in the early 1950s, see James A. Michener, "The Facts About GI Babies," *Reader's Digest*, March 1954.

peoples from their lands in the interest of Manifest Destiny.[61] Of course, this theme continued into the 20th century with Bob Wills's "Cherokee Maiden," Hank Thompson's "Squaws Along the Yukon," George Jones's "Eskimo Pie," and Tim McGraw's "Indian Outlaw."[62] In 1896, when the America's white empire builders looked beyond the continental borders, American soldiers could hear their sexual conquests retold in songs like "Filipino Baby," "The Queen of the Philippine Islands," and "On to Cuba, The Cuban Girl's Song to Her Lover."[63] Interracial romance has offered a central theme in songs about cowboys and U.S. law enforcement on the Mexican-American borderlands, from the corridos and cowboy ballads collected by Frank Dobie and John Lomax to Marty Robbins's "El Paso" franchise and Benny Martin's 1959 release "Border Baby."[64] The fascination with Asian women in country songs continued into the late twentieth century as well with Marty Robbins' "I-Eish-Tay, Mah-Su," Buck Owens's "Made in Japan," and John Anderson's "Tokyo, Oklahoma."[65]

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[61] "Shenandoah," *Song of America Project*, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/creativity/hampson/about_shenandoah.html; Frederic Knight Logan, *Fallen leaf*: an Indian love song, Voice and piano, Lyrics by Virginia K. Logan. (Chicago: Forster, 1922), Vocal Popular Sheet Music Collection, Score 418, University of Maine, https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mmb-vp/418/; Richmond F. Hoyt, *Princess Pocahontas.* March and two-step. Arranged by Hugo O. Marks. For piano solo (New York, Chicago: Windsor Music, 1903), Frances G. Spencer Collection of American Popular Sheet Music, Baylor University, http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/fa-spnc/id/6271.

[62] Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, "Cherokee Maiden," OKeh Records 6568, 78 rpm, 1941; Hank Thompson and His Brazos Valley Boys, "Squaws Along the Yukon," Capitol Records F4017, 45 rpm, 1958; George Jones, "Eskimo Pie," Mercury Records 71257X45, 45 rpm, 1958.

[63] Charles K. Harris, "Ma Filipino Baby," (New York: Charles K. Harris, 1898), Charles Templeton Sheet Music Collection, Mississippi State University Digital Collections, http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/SheetMusic/id/25439; J.A. Shipp and Tom Lemonier, "My Dear Luzon," (New York: F.A. Mills, 1904), Frances G. Spencer Collection of American Popular Sheet Music, Baylor University, http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/fa-spnc/id/72566; Paul A. Rubens, "The Queen of the Philippine Islands," London: Francis, Day, and Hunter, 1900), Frances G. Spencer Collection of American Popular Sheet Music, Baylor University, http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/fa-spnc/id/53363/rec/1; Don Ignacio, "On to Cuba, The Cuban Girl's Song to Her Lover," (Philadelphia: J.L. Carncross, 1869), Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music, Johns Hopkins University, http://jhir.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/28864.

[64] Marty Robbins, *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs*, Columbia Records CL 1349, 33 1/3 rpm, 1959; Benny Martin and the Whippoorwills, "Border Baby," Decca Records 9-30712, 45 rpm, 1958.

[65] Marty Robbins, "I-Eish-Tay, Mah-Su," Columbia Records 4-43196, 45 rpm, 1964; Buck Owens and the Buckaroos, "Made in Japan," Capitol Records 3314, 45 rpm, 1972; John Anderson, *Tokyo, Oklahoma*, Warner Brothers Records 9-25211, 33 1/3 rpm, 1985.

Artists purposefully excluded African American women in the country music catalogue of interracial sex, which is not to suggest that those relationships did not exist. Merle Haggard's "Irma Jackson" and Billy Joe Shaver's "Black Rose," both recorded in the late 1960s speak of black-white attractions, presumably set in the U.S. But these songs told tales of forbidden love, shame, and fleeting, illicit pleasure in Jim Crow America - one a story of an unrequited childhood crush, the other characterized as a bad habit in need of divine intervention, respectively. As Shaver sings, "Lord put a handle on a simple headed man and help me leave that black rose alone."[66] Marty Robbins recorded two songs that suggest the female love interest is black, both of them Caribbean-themed, "Kingston Girl" and "Bahama Mama." However, Robbins these sang these from the point of view of island men in an updated minstrel voice, likely in an attempt to cash in on the 1950s calypso boom.[67]

These examples remain exceptional. As a rule, country music has created an audible tradition of celebrating the crossing of any color lines other than the domestic black/white divide in order to reinforce the racial and gender power bestowed on white men who labor in the service of empire. These songs not only reify the country performer/listener's whiteness, but they also reflect the implicit anti-blackness at the heart of the country music industry and the popular music business more broadly. The artists who participated in the "foreign love" trend, as well as the imperialist realities they represented, could pass outside the scrutiny and violence of the nation's worst white supremacists like Asa Carter and the Citizens' Council because their specific models of interracial sex conformed to the gendered power of white settler colonialism practiced since the founding of the nation.

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[66] Merle Haggard, "Irma Jackson," *Let Me Tell You About a Song*, Capitol Records ST-882, 33 1/3 rpm, 1972; Billy Joe Shaver, "Black Rose," Monument Records ZS7 8593, 45 rpm, 1973.
[67] Marty Robbins, *Island Woman*, Columbia Records CS 8976, 33 1/3 rpm, 1964.

The country music industry even accepted rockabillies if they could reign in their wildness and conform to the normative aesthetics of whiteness. Johnny Cash, a Memphis musician and a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, had dabbled in rockabilly but still maintained enough of a tie to the sonic and visual politics of country music to fit the military's vision of appropriate recruitment music, unlike Elvis Presley. In 1957, Cash appeared on an episode of *Country Style, U.S.A.*, alongside Charlie Applewhite to sell military enlistment to the nation's young men. Cash performed three songs, "There You Go," "Give My Love to Rose," and "Home of the Blues." He also introduced singer Carolee Cooper, daughter of bluegrass duo Stoney and Wilma Lee Cooper, who sang one song and joined Cash and Applewhite for the closing theme song of "Stay All Night (Stay a Little Longer)."[68] Cash still recorded for Sun Records at the time. "There You Go" had risen to number one on *Billboard*'s country & western chart the year before, his second number one in a row after "I Walk the Line," the melody for which he had picked out while still stationed in West Germany.[69]

Cash had drawn inspiration from Presley after seeing him perform at the Eagle's Nest and landed a demo session at Sun Studio in September 1954. His music fell roughly into the rockabilly mode with songs like "Hey, Porter!" and "Get Rhythm," and he toured alongside Presley in the mid-1950s. Yet, where Presley indulged in overt displays of hip shaking sexuality, Cash remained more staid in his presentation of the songs, abetted by the insistent *boom-chicka* train beat of Marshall Grant's bass and the calculated, durable melodic lines of Luther Perkins's tremolo-laden electric guitar. And while Presley chose to cover recent R&B hits when dabbling in black music, Cash leaned into the folk genre, kicking off his 1957 debut album with "Rock

[68] *Country Style, U.S.A.*, episode 18, featuring Johnny Cash and Carolee Cooper (1957; Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2007).
[69] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 84.

Island Line," the work song collected by John Lomax from Kelly Pace in an Arkansas prison farm and covered by Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter in 1937.[70] Cash continued this connection to folk music throughout his career, collaborating comfortably with artists like the Carter Family and Bob Dylan. But, perhaps most importantly, where Presley embodied the sexuality of black singers in tunes like "That's All Right" and "Hound Dog," Cash adopted a version of black music mediated by white folklore collectors who fetishized the culture of southern prisons.

With "Hey, Porter!," the A-side to his 1955 debut single, Cash offered a window into the racial politics of country music and why he would serve as an appropriate voice of military recruitment. "Hey, Porter!" gives one side of a conversation from Cash's narrator to a railroad porter on a train headed south. "Hey, Porter / Hey, Porter," the traveler nags, "It's getting light outside / This old train is puffin' smoke and I have to strain my eyes / But ask that engineer if he will blow his whistle please / 'Cause I smell frost on cotton leaves / And I feel that Southern breeze."[71] The porter in this song would have undoubtedly been an African American man and a member of A. Phillip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, working a line traveling through the Deep South.[72] Cash's narrator asks this black worker a series of questions laced with images like cotton fields, the Mason-Dixon line, and southbound trains plucked from minstrel songs like "Are You From Dixie?"[73]

In the mid-1950s, listeners would have recognized that "porter" signified a black man. What they would have missed in the song was that Cash wrote it about taking a train home to Arkansas after receiving his discharge from the U.S. Air Force.[74] With that in mind, a new scene

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[70] Marybeth Hamilton, *In Search of the Blues* (New York: Basic Books, 2009); Johnny Cash, *Johnny Cash with His Hot and Blue Guitar*, Sun Records, 1957.
[71] Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Two, "Hey, Porter!," Sun Records 221, 1955.
[72] A. Phillip Randolph, *For Jobs and Freedom: Selected Speeches and Writings of A. Phillip Randolph* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014).
[73] Miller, *Segregating Sound*, 216.
[74] *Johnny Cash: The First 25 Years*, directed by Walter C. Miller, aired on May 8, 1980, on CBS.

emerges from this song. It is 1955. Two uniformed men encounter each other on a train heading to the Arkansas Delta. One wears air force blue and enjoys the respect afforded a member of the nation's military currently keeping communism at bay around the globe. The other wears the dark blue of the most powerful African American labor union and civil rights organization in the twentieth century. Yet one is clearly in the service of the other. The porter suffers the persistent requests of a serviceman who clearly loves the southern landscape where they are headed together, a landscape that may very well conjure images of violence and prejudice for the black man and who may have taken his job to escape that "Southern breeze." This is a song about power, perspective, and privilege embedded in a rockabilly motif that passed as rebellious country music in the mid-1950s.

Cash combined race, military service, and region in a neat package for his musical debut. And that music fit the needs of the Cold War recruitment machine, a reminder that the army continued to brand itself with the ostensibly pure white sounds of country music even as its ranks became increasingly diverse. Both Presley and Cash may have emerged from the same city and the same label at roughly the same time. But Presley's adoption of black sexual expression in his songs meant that he embodied the threat of racial mixing in a way that Cash never did. In Cash's world of porters and cotton leaves, everyone occupied the appropriate spaces according to their race. The racial distancing meant that Cash's music remained an acceptable medium to convey the military's recruitment message.

On *Country Style, U.S.A.*, Applewhite introduced the usual pitch to join the U.S. Army after Cash's second song, "Give My Love to Rose." The camera cuts to a cartoon of a white boy who looks like a cross between Dennis the Menace and Elroy Jetson. The boy grows into a uniformed soldier as men's voices chant in a cadence-style chorus, "Hey there chum, don't feel

glum / You can be the man you want to become / Just Go, Go Army and Grow / Go, Go Army and Grow." A narrators voice jumps in to tell viewers that they can "Grow through job training. In today's modern army, you'll get tough technical training, training that will make you a skilled expert in your field." Likewise, recruits will "grow through travel. You'll see more of the world in the army. You'll have a chance for Europe, the Caribbean, or the Far East." A young man can also "Grow through advancement. Every step up the ladder means new confidence. Learn to lead. Learn to succeed." The narrator ends the pitch with a combination of two recruitment slogans rolled together, "You too can go army and grow. Get choice not chance from your local army recruiter." The last credit audiences heard reminded them that, "*Country Style, U.S.A.* was produced by the Recruiting Publicity Center for the United States Army Recruiting Service at the Bradley Studios in Nashville, Tennessee."[75] The army willingly integrated the newest country sounds from Memphis but only from the artists who suited the sonic and racial politics of the military and Music Row. Other artists, like Elvis Presley, still had to prove their legitimacy to the nation's Cold War armed forces.

Making Private Presley

In early 1958, Presley could not keep the military at bay any longer. He received a six-week deferment in January to complete filming on his fourth film, *King Creole*. Col. Parker and Hal Wallis, the film's producer, successfully petitioned the army, claiming that pulling out of a motion picture would cause financial hardship for Presley and Paramount Pictures.[76] Memphis's Draft Board No. 86 had suffered enough from the ordeal of inducting the world's biggest musical star. Milton Bowers, Sr., the board's chairman, complained to the local press that he was "fed up

[75] *Country Style, U.S.A.*, episode 18, featuring Johnny Cash and Carolee Cooper (1957; Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2007).
[76] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 445-446.

to the teeth" with letters and calls from Presley fans who complained about the draft and detractors who complained about the deferment. Bowers told how one "crackpot" had called him at home at his bedtime and "complained that we didn't put Beethoven in the Army. Not considering the fact that Beethoven was not an American and has been dead for sometime, I suppose he felt we were discriminating against rock and roll music."[77] Fans may have felt that the army unduly targeted their rock and roll star and cried about discrimination as a result. Country fans, however, understood this move. Some may have even expected it. Serving in the military came with the territory of white working-class life. The only anomaly was that Presley went in after he had achieved success and not before as a precondition to learning his craft. Readers of *Country Song Roundup* even voted Presley as "Country Music's King" at the end of 1958. Army service would do little to dampen their fervor for the "Folk Music Fireball."[78]

On March 24, 1958, Presley reported for his induction at the Shelby County Draft Board. He took an oath of loyalty to the U.S. government, received the serial number US53310761, and endured another physical examination at the Kennedy Veterans' Hospital. This examination included stripping down to his underwear alongside 20 other draftees and volunteers, including two African American men. Outside, Presley's family, friends, and fans from all over the country congregated in the rain to wish him well.[79] His mother sobbed, comforted by his then-girlfriend Anita Wood, an aspiring actor from Jackson, Tennessee. Never to miss an opportunity to push his product, Col. Parker passed out *King Creole* balloons to promote the film Presley recently wrapped.[80] The local and national press swarmed the occasion, simultaneously fascinated with

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[77] "Drafting Elvis Cause Of Woe For His Draftboard," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 5, 1958, Memphis-Biography files, Memphis and Shelby County Room Special Collections, Memphis Public Library.
[78] *Country Song Roundup*, November 1958, FLA.
[79] Louis Silver, "Inductees Haven't Any Gripe At Sharing Army With Elvis," *The Commercial Appeal*, March 20, 1958, 47; Bill Burke, "Officially, Pvt. Presley! Sworn Into The Army," *Press-Scimitar*, March 24, 1958; "Elvis Passes First Test: 'I'll Learn—I've Got To,'" *Press-Scimitar*, March 25, 1958; *Life*, April 7, 1958, 118.
[80] Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis*, 462.

Presley's induction and his fans' reactions. The singer summed up his thoughts in an offhanded comment to the press. "If you think I'm nervous," he told the onlookers, "it's really because I am."[81] At 23-years-old with 14 gold records and four film credits, Presley had every right to feel nervous. His whole world seemed to vanish before his eyes. And, in a way, it did. The Presley who embodied conspicuous sexuality, the possibility of racial mixing, and a rebellion within the ranks of Music Row had disappeared. A transformation had begun. He boarded a bus bound for Fort Chaffee, Arkansas and did not sing a note in public for more than two years.

With this initial induction process underway, Presley began a metamorphosis from the embodiment of country music mutiny into a compliant subject of state power. A *Life* magazine pictorial spread showed Private Presley in his underwear, weighing in and having his height measured. A doctor stands to his left and holds the ruler positioned directly in front of Presley so that it divides his face in perfect symmetry. Behind him and to his right, one of the African American draftees waits for his turn on the scale.[82] These pictures conveyed clear messages about the rock and roller. First, the government had quelled Presley's revolution with the instruments of biometric power. He could not shake his hips or drop to his knees on this new stage of notoriety. The army had tamed the body of rebellion, measuring, weighing, and cataloging his once-dangerous corporeality for processing by the Defense Department. Second, Presley would interact with actual African Americans on Uncle Sam's terms for the next two years, not simply borrowing their cultural expressions to induce young white women's screaming fits of ecstasy.

Nothing demonstrated this exertion of state power over Presley like the long-feared GI haircut at Fort Chaffee. On March 25, the new private sat for his shearing by civilian barber

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[81] Louis Silver, "Pvt. Elvis Begins Army Life In Sentry-Guarded Barracks," *Commercial Appeal*, March 25, 1958, 8.
[82] *Life*, April 7, 1958, 118.

James B. Peterson. The long sideburns fell first, followed by the long top that had shaken and glistened to the beat of Presley's blacked-up country music and inspired so much adolescent lust. The army had advanced the young millionaire $7 out of his monthly $78 check to pay for the haircut. Photographers and journalists surrounded Presley in the barber chair, catching his every move and utterance. As Peterson clipped the hair down to the regulation one-inch length, Presley picked up a tuft in his hand and blew. "Hair today and gone tomorrow," he joked. Nervous and likely bothered with the close media scrutiny, Presley forgot to pay and then forgot to wait for the change from paying for his trim. Peterson had to call him back, causing an embarrassing hiccup in his transformation into a soldier. Outside, Col. Parker handed out cards bearing Presley's official statement, which read in part, "Heaven knows I want to thank you very much. I hope I can live up to what people expect of me."[83]

Both pop and country artists penned songs to cash in on Presley's entrance into the armed forces. The Threeteens, an all-girl doo-wop trio out of Phoenix, Arizona, released "Dear 53310761" on Rev Records in May 1958 in tribute to Presley via his army serial number. The girls sing, "Dear 53310761 / Read this letter when your day is done / In the barracks when the lights are low / Please remember how I miss you so." On the bridge, they addressed Presley by name, "Elvis dear, I'll be true / Waiting here when it's through / I don't want an imitation / All I want is you," while rock and roll guitarist Duane Eddy interjects a riff that sounds like "Taps" in between each line.[84] Radio stations latched onto this release for its promotional value. A disc jockey in Fort Worth, Texas promised $100 to anyone who could bring in a dollar bill bearing the serial number. Trinity Music, the song's publishing firm, printed 50,000 replicas of Presley's

[83] Silver, "Pvt. Elvis Begins Army Life In Sentry-Guarded Barracks," 1.
[84] The Threeteens "Dear 53310761" b/w "Doowaddie," Rev Records 3516, 45 rpm, 1958.

army dog tags as promotional giveaways.[85] Vern Steirman, a jockey on KJOE in Shreverport, Louisiana, dropped 50 of the tags from a single engine plane over the city to promote the record.[86] And in Boston, a disc jockey offered to give away 6 advance copies of the replica dog tags to boys who showed up to the station with guitars and girls who showed up in bathing suits.[87]

Country singers penned songs that poked fun at Presley's tour of duty, as if they could finally express their true feelings once he was out of earshot. Bobby Bare scored his first hit in February 1959 with the Presley-inspired song "All American Boy" released on Fraternity Records. The label released the single under the name Bill Parsons, although Bare actually sang the first-person talking blues style tune in an imitation of Presley's singing style. The song details the rise of a nameless rock and roller from Memphis who makes it big thanks to his guitar and "a man with a big cigar," only to find himself drafted into the military. The last verse ends the singer's career thanks to the call of duty:

> So I'd pick my guitar with a great big grin
> And the money just kept on pourin' in
> But then one day my Uncle Sam
> He said, "Here I am."
> "Uncle Sam needs you, boy.
> I'm-a gonna cut your hair.
> Take this rifle, kid.
> Gimme that guitar."

Parsons sang the B-side, a forgettable tune called, "Rubber Dolly."[88] Bare had recorded the tune while Parsons served in the army. Then, in a carousel of conscription, the army drafted Bare before Fraternity released the tune, meaning that as the tune ascended the charts, Parsons went

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[85] June Bundy, "Deejay Competition Booms Stunts, Contests, Gimmicks," *Billboard*, June 2, 1958, 15.
[86] "Vox Jox," *Billboard*, June 16, 1958, 39.
[87] "Teeners Dog Elvis Tags," *Billboard*, June 23, 1958.
[88] Bill Parsons, "All American Boy" b/w "Rubber Dolly," Fraternity Records JO8W-2324, 45 rpm, 1958.

on tour singing the song. Or, in the case of his appearance on *American Bandstand*, he lip-synced to Bare's voice. The tune peaked at number two on the *Billboard* "Hot 100" in February 1959, reached the top 20 on the R&B chart, sold over one million copies, and involved Fraternity Records in the payola scandal of the late 1950s.[89] Grandpa Jones released a banjo-heavy version on Decca in 1959 backed with "Pickin' Time," a song written by Johnny Cash.[90] The military offered a gift that just kept on giving for the country music industry in the 1950s.

Presley, the actual "All American Boy," led a fairly quiet existence as a soldier in the U.S. Army Second Armored Division. After three days at Fort Chaffee, Presley entered basic training at Fort Hood, Texas, where WAC Lt. Col. Marjorie Shulten ended the media bonanza, telling reporters "there will be no more interviews or picture taking during his training."[91] The Texas sun even returned his hair to its natural color. According to one report, "Fort Hood officials said Elvis' hair is almost blond now, blaming this on the bleaching it has taken from the sun."[92] He returned to Memphis twice during his training in Texas, once on leave in June 1958 and again in August of that year when his mother died.[93] On September 22, he shipped out for West Germany, where he maintained a low profile. As historian Joel Williamson has noted, Presley distinguished himself in Germany mainly by the number of women he bedded in the private residence he maintained in the resort town of Bad Nauheim, a few miles from his post in

[89] Responsibilities of broadcasting licensees and station personnel, Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, House of Representatives, Eighty-sixth Congress, second session, on payola and other deceptive practices in the broadcasting field (1960).
[90] Grandpa Jones, "All American Boy" b/w "Pickin' Time," Decca 9-030823, 45 rpm, 1959.
[91] "Weary Presley Reaches Post; Fans By-Passed," *Commercial Appeal*, March 29, 1958, 11.
[92] Bill Burke, "Elvis Gets His Order: Sails Sept. 22 To Post In Germany," *Press-Scimitar*, September 11, 1958.
[93] Bill Burke, "Elvis Will Let Army Call Tune About His Singing," *Press-Scimitar*, June 3, 1958; "Rock'N'Roll King Saddened Elvis Presley's Mother Succumbs To Illness," *Press-Scimitar*, August 14, 1958.

Friedberg. He also met the adopted daughter of a U.S. Air Force captain, 14-year-old Priscilla Beaulieu, whom he would bring to live with him in Memphis in 1963 and marry in 1967. [94]

By the time he received his discharge from the U.S. Army in 1960, Presley had advanced to the rank of sergeant, matured into his role as the music industry's most famous soldier, and achieved a previously inconceivable level of respectability. He did so by serving quietly and removing himself from the music scene. Not that his music disappeared. Col. Parker wisely socked away twenty-four songs for RCA before his cash cow entered the military and released them slowly over the following two years.[95] But hearing Presley remained a different experience from seeing him. His corporeal presence disappeared—no hair swaying, no hip swinging, no riot inducing sexual teases. Instead, fans had to remember the old Presley or imagine him in his uniform, a wholly different experience from the outlandish Lansky Brothers attire he had sported on his rise to fame.

Return of the All American Boy

The country music industry never abandoned Presley during his time in the ranks, nor did he forget his roots even as he transitioned from music to movie star in his post-service career. In the spring of 1958 as the singer entered the service, RCA Nashville's Steve Sholes drew a line through the recent history of country music, connecting the dots between the demographic mixing that occurred in World War II to the rise of Elvis. "Country-Western music gained more popularity with the advent of World War II," he wrote, "when boys from all parts of the country were thrown together and their various tastes integrated." He rightly recalled how this taste mixing created opportunity for the country music industry to grow in popularity among the

[94] Williamson, *Elvis Presley*, 177-188 ; Peter Guralnick, *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999), 36-47.
[95] Bill Burke, "Army Losing A National Institution," *Press-Scimitar*, February 16, 1960.

soldiers, believing it "a fact that during these years Country music had a heyday overseas, and many 'converts' were made." To him, rock and roll or whatever label the buyers preferred, simply represented the next stage in the evolution of country. He justified Presley's presence in the country music industry one last time as the singer slipped into uniform, arguing that as rock and roll grew in mainstream popularity, "the time was ripe for the great phenomenon that was to effect the final firm merger of Country music to Pop—Elvis Presley. . . . The resulting combination was coined as 'Rock-A-Billy,' which dominates the music world today."[96] Presley belonged to Nashville as much as anywhere else, including in the ranks of the U.S. Army.

In the November 1959, just four months before Presley's discharge, *Country Song Roundup* claimed the singer's country bona fides in an article called "Elvis Presley A Teenage Tradition." Perhaps reminding readers with short attention spans of Presley's accomplishments, the article's author recounted how the singer had hit the music industry "with the impact of an Atom Bomb," releasing "sixteen one million record sellers—which ranks right up there with the likes of Hank Williams, Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby." And country listeners could rightly claim him. *Country Song Roundup* told its readers how "we Country music fans can be justifiably proud of E.P. 'cause he is one of us. He's a plain ole Country boy and he'll always be." Nothing proved how relatable he was like his military service. "Our boy 'Friday' will be comin' home soon—home from serving his country in Uncle Sam's Army way across the sea in Germany." The magazine encouraged readers to show how much Presley meant to them by going out and buying his next release.[97] The magazine's readers voted Presley fourth in their

[96] Steve Sholes, "The New Stars Determine Evolution of C&W Music," *Country &Western Jamboree*, Spring 1958, 42, Box 56 Country and Western Jamboree, 1955-1959, Southern Folklife Collection.
[97] "Elvis Presley A Teenage Tradition," *Country Song Roundup*, November 1959, 6-7, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.

1959 poll for "Country Music's King," less than one thousand votes behind the top three, Johnny Cash, Jim Reeves, and Johnny Horton.[98]

Country and rockabilly artists sprung to the occasion again with songs about Presley's return, trying to rekindle the success of "All American Boy." Bobby Bare returned home from the service to record "I'm Hanging Up My Rifle" released on Fraternity Record like his previous hit. Using the same melody and talking blues structure, Bare's second attempt at chronicling Presley's military career in song fell flat with lines like "All of the cats that think I got it made / Stand tall on the hit parade / Counting my money and all my Cadillacs / Lovin' the girls and paying income tax."[99] This formula did not bring much success for Billy Adams and the Rock-a-teens either. The group recorded a rip-off of Bare's tune called "The Return of the All American Boy" for independent label Nau-Voo Records. Adams did his best imitation of Bare imitating Presley, singing, "Listen here cats and I'll tell you a story / About the return of the all American boy. / It wasn't so bad after all you see / 'Cause he's still rockin' in Germany."[100] Lightning would not strike twice.

On March 3, 1960, Presley landed at Fort Dix, New Jersey for a two-hour press conference. Major Mark Bottorf spoke on behalf of the Defense Department and stated the singer had "behaved himself in a manner so as to cast great credit on the Army." Col. Parker appeared to claim that Sgt. Presley had earned a gross income of $1.6 million in 1959, not a bad haul for living in virtual seclusion on duty for the U.S. government.[101] Nancy Sinatra greeted the returning rocker with a box of shirts, a symbol of Presley's passage from juvenile delinquent and

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[98] "Country Music's King for 1959 is Johnny Cash," *Country Song Roundup*, November 1959, 26-27, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.
[99] Bobby Bare, "I'm Hanging Up My Rifle," Fraternity Records F-861, 45 rpm, 1959.
[100] "*Billboard* Spotlight Pick," *Billboard*, March 9, 1959, 46.
[101] Oscar Godbout, "Presley Flies in to Drop the 'Sgt.,'" *New York Times*, March 4, 1960, 27.

"Folk Music Fireball" into the mainstream of American pop.[102] Her father helped sealed this metamorphosis in May 1960 by appearing alongside Presley in his comeback television special on the "Frank Sinatra Show." *The New York Times*' John P. Shanley barely contained his contempt for the display, calling Presley's release from the armed forces "one of the most irritating events since the invention of itching powder." "Although Elvis became a sergeant in the Army, as a singer he has never left the awkward squad," Shanley sneered. "There was nothing morally reprehensible about his performance," he assured *Times* readers, "it was merely awful."[103] Country had finally come to town, albeit to mixed reviews.

While military service transformed Presley's image, it also changed how his pre-army fans related to him. *Bye Bye Birdie*, a fictionalized version of the events around Presley's military induction, explained just how dramatically his time in the service changed his public image. A stage version of *Bye Bye Birdie* opened to positive reviews in April 1960, and it became a film in 1963. Originally titled *Let's Go Steady*, playwright Michael Stewart wrote the script about a fictional music star named Conrad Birdie, a takeoff on army veteran and rockabilly star Conway Twitty. Despite the name, Birdie's career most closely resembled Presley's, with rabid throngs of teenaged female fans, a scheming manager, and a ducktail hair-do. The army drafts Birdie and his manager plots to boost the sales of a song he wrote called "One Last Kiss" by choosing one teenaged girl for Birdie to kiss on national television before he enters the service. *Billboard* included a review that called the stage version of *Bye Bye Birdie* "a sparkling show" culled "from rather scant material." The reviewer raved about the cast that included Dick Van Dyke as Birdie's manager and Paul Lynde, who played the father of the teenaged girl

[102] Guralnick, *Careless Love*, 6.
[103] John P. Shanley, "Presley Performs on the Sinatra Show," *New York Times*, May 13, 1960, 63.

selected to kiss Birdie.[104] Van Dyke and Lynde held onto their roles for the 1963 film version, which used Ann-Margaret, Presley's sometimes off-screen romantic interest, in the lead of Kim MacAfee, the winning teenager.[105]

The film opens with an iconic scene of Ann-Margaret singing the song "Bye Bye Birdie" as she dances against a solid blue background, a song that offers way to map the evolution of female rock and roll fandom onto its production values. She sings in a pouty, childish voice during the opening sequence, beginning with the lines, "Bye Bye Birdie / I'm gonna miss you so. / Bye Bye Birdie / Why'd you have to go?" Her voice, high and plaintive, mimics the outsized despair expressed by so many female fans when Presley entered the military five years before the film's release. The engineers recorded the vocal track dry, exaggerating the thin, reedy quality of Ann-Margaret's whining delivery. The pianist plays the song's upbeat sixteenth notes in the middle register, adding to the song's innocence, as if the singer is singing in the family living room or in her childhood bedroom. "Bye Bye Birdie," she sings, "Guess I'll always care" and gives a quick turn from the camera. So ends the first half of the song and the beginning of the end of her innocence.[106]

Ann-Margaret reprises the song at the film's end. A tonal shift has occurred that marks the emotional transformation her character has undergone during the film. The lyrics and the production of the music signal what the listener realizes is a physical and emotional maturation. The vocal returns with reverb, adding body and depth to the song. The piano returns but in the lower register. And she shifts her delivery. The teenaged girl is gone. A woman takes her place. Her voice returns full and knowing, aged by the lesson of fawning over a pop music idol only for

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[104] "Zest Triumphs Over Skimpy Book," *Billboard*, April 25, 1960, 21.
[105] *Bye Bye Birdie*, directed by George Sidney, (1963; Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 2006), DVD.
[106] Ibid.

the government to rip him away and the record industry to use your emotional investment in him to sell their latest song. The full-bodied reverb-heavy production of her voice signifies the maturation of her emotional and physical self. Her character is resolved now to lose Birdie, a change heard in lines like "Bye Bye Birdie / The army's got you now / I'll try, Birdie / To forget somehow," which she sings with facetiousness. Ann-Margaret makes it clear that her adolescent lust is gone, and her interest lies somewhere else now, "No more sighing / Each time you move those lips / No more dying / when you twitch those hips . . . Bye Bye Birdie / Ta-ta ol' sweetie pie / Bye Bye Birdie / Time for me to fly . . . Time to say goodbye."[107]

Birdie/Presley could go to the army or not. Ann-Margaret and all the young women for whom she sang were on flights of their own. When she began the song and the film, Ann-Margaret's character idolized Conrad Birdie, as so many white middle-class girls did with Presley. She would do anything to meet him and felt outraged that the government would draft the music star of her fantasies, again, just like the young women who wrote President Eisenhower about the army's drafting of Presley. Yet two years in the life of a teenager might as well be a geological epoch. When Presley left for the army, many of those young women out grew their infatuation with the singer or moved on to one of the pop idols who emerged in Presley's absence. Many simply aged out of the screaming teenaged masses. The movie made it clear just how that change had happened. The combined power of the music industry and the government had conspired to close a chapter of Presley's career.

By the time, *Bye Bye Birdie* hit theaters, Presley had undergone his own cinematic image transformation documented by the 1960 film *GI Blues*, a fictionalized version of his time stationed in Germany. Presley stars as Tulsa MacLean, a tank soldier with the 2nd Armored

[107] Ibid.

Division guarding the Cold War's European front. Presley spends the entirety of the film flirting with frauleins, conducting training drills, giving hell to his overbearing sergeant, and playing music in a combo with his fellow soldiers. The real Presley never played live music in Germany, but the opening scene offers a view into the real economic decisions that would have made military service an attractive option had the music industry not made him a millionaire. In this scene, Presley and his co-star load large caliber shells into a tank, shells that Presley could have made at Precision Tools had the movie been set in the Korean War. The older soldier complains to MacLean, Presley's character, about the long hours and hard manual labor of soldiering. He even threatens to quit. MacLean shuts him up by ribbing back, "Ah, quit squawking. We've got a steady job haven't we? Room and board, lots of fresh air, good hours, what else you want?"[108] Presley's character is only half joking here. As his name and accent suggest, MacLean is a soldier from the South, specifically Texas, doing his duty and happily collecting a government paycheck. What else could a young white working-class southern man want?

When MacLean does complain, he does so in a good-natured way that conveyed the message that serving one's country was more of an inconvenience than a hardship. MacLean lists these benign grievances against military life in the title track, performed at the end of the film when he and his band mates finally convince a local beer hall owner to let them play. The Americans take over the stage from a local group featuring Scotty Moore in lederhosen who stays on stage to accompany the occupying musicians. "GI Blues" sticks to an AAB 12-bar blues song structure through which MacLean lodges his gripes against the army. He starts with the natural surroundings: "They give us a room with a view of the beautiful Rhine / They give us a room with a view of the beautiful Rhine / Give me a muddy old crick in Texas any old time." He

[108] *GI Blues*, directed by Norman Taurog (1960; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 2014), DVD.

then moves on to complain about German food and long for a "slice of Texas cow," as well as bemoaning how the frauleins supposedly lead them on. The musical arrangement and its production contribute to the military feel of the song. Snare drum rolls kick things off and remain high in the mix throughout the tune, making the musical accompaniment more like a marching cadence than a blues-based pop song. The chorus emphasizes this militaristic arrangement with the lines, "I got those hup, 2, 3, 4 occupation GI blues / From my GI hat to the heels of my GI shoes / And if I don't go stateside soon I'm gonna blow my fuse."[109] MacLean expresses his grief about military life, although it is not about the politics of Cold War anti-communism or U.S. militarism. His complaint is about his job. He embeds his grievances in a double entendre on the word "occupation," signifying both the global spread of U.S. soldiers on permanent military installations and the daily grind of working for the Defense Department.

Through the character of Tulsa MacLean, Presley reintroduced himself to the world as a respectable citizen with a clean-cut coiffure and GI khakis. On the surface, this patriotic Presley bared little resemblance to the hypersexual star of his pre-army days. The sideburns vanished. He danced in *GI Blues* but gone were the riot-inducing hip thrusts. And the demands of the soundtrack subdued the music to a caricature of the rocking country music that Presley had used to achieve pre-army fame. No longer "morally insane," Presley appeared to have shed his reputation as a social degenerate and reemerged as a worker in the defense of American capitalist democracy against the encroachment of Soviet communism. At least superficially, Presley appeared to have conducted one of the most striking transformations in the history of American popular music—from delinquency to duty, from punk to patriot.

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[109] Ibid.

Nothing signaled this like the official endorsement of the government. As the opening credits rolled, audiences learned that Paramount Pictures produced *GI Blues* "with the full cooperation of the U.S. Army and the Department of Defense."[110] It took serving his country in isolation from the music industry, but Presley finally won the approval of the U.S. military. *GI Blues* not only benefited Presley's image, it also gave the U.S. Army a powerful recruitment tool, two years after denying Presley a place in the Special Services. The following year, AFRTS even began incorporating rock and roll into its playlists for the first time.[111]

With his star turn in *GI Blues*, Presley announced to the world that he had changed. But here was the ruse. Presley never needed to change. Nor was military service anything out of the ordinary for Presley. Having participated in ROTC training at Humes High School and manufactured ammunition at Precision Tool for the Korean War, he might have ended up in the military before his draft notice had his music career not taken off the way it did. Working for the federal government as a soldier offered an auspicious alternative to the manual labor to which he was likely destined for the rest of his life as a white, working-class Memphian with a high school education. Serving in the military could open collaborative opportunities and valuable woodshedding time for aspiring musicians, as his Sun Records label mates knew. The only extraordinary thing about Presley's military career was its timing. Outside of his fame and in the eyes of the government, Presley was just another working-class draftee converted into serial number 553310761, a pretty catchy set of digits for the Threeteens.

Presley returned to Nashville for his first recording session after the army in March 1960. Back in the RCA studios on Music Row, he cut "Stuck on You" and "Fame and Fortune," a

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[110] Ibid.

[111] "AFRTS: A Radio and Television Programming Chronicle"; AFRTS Story; Histories, Reports, and Program Records, 1942-1992; Historical Materials; Box 4; Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, RG 330; NACP.

single which reached number one on the *Billboard*'s Hot 100, number six on the R&B chart, and number 27 for the country chart.[112] He may have sold millions of records, traveled the globe, served his country in uniform, and returned to international fanfare, but Presley knew where his musical home was. He came home to Nashville. Yet his time in the ranks improved his image to such a degree that Hollywood beckoned. No longer a threat to the racial or class hierarchies of white middle-class audiences, parents felt comfortable with post-army Presley. The newly respectable Presley spent the bulk of the 1960s as a film star, making mostly forgettable, highly formulaic, highly profitable musicals. He left Nashville and his country audiences behind in the process. After "Stuck on You," Presley would score only one other country hit, the ubiquitous "Are You Lonesome Tonight?," before his 1968 comeback.[113]

Thanks to an assist from its allies in the Defense Department, Music Row weathered Presley's threat to upset the sounds of southern whiteness that predominated the country music industry. In fact, Presley's tenure as a soldier reinforced the marketability and the bankability of the alliance between country music and the U.S. military. By the early 1960s, just as the Pentagon began to increase its presence in Southeast Asia, the country music industry doubled-down on its economic relationship with the armed forces. The Defense Department launched new recruitment campaigns and AFRTS programming that highlighted country music, cementing the genre's relationship to the politics of militaristic anti-communism. This continued connection between country music and the military intersected with the approaching political battles of the Vietnam War in unpredictable ways. While the predominant narrative about 1960s country music makes it the soundtrack of a conservative backlash, the politics of genre were never so simple. These cultural clashes made country music a battleground over the politics of U.S.

[112] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 329.
[113] Ibid.

militarism when all of the Pentagon's investment in the South meant that young southern men would die in disproportionate numbers in the jungles of Vietnam.

Chapter 5

Country Profits and Country Politics:

Money, Race, and Country Music Militarism in the Vietnam Era

On August 1, 1960, *Billboard* magazine delivered astonishing news that likely thrilled the country music industry insiders along Music Row. U.S. Army Sergeant Tom Daniels, a disc jockey for the Allied Forces Network (AFN), hosted two country music shows for members of the U.S. Armed Forces, their dependents, and the millions of civilian "shadow" listeners across Europe. His first show each day, *Hillbilly Reveille*, began with Daniels eager announcement that "It's six-o-five and your 'Hillbilly Reveille' is coming to you alive," before treating listeners to the latest in country and western sounds. If listeners missed that show, they could catch the next one later that day. *Stickbuddy Jamboree*, Daniels's afternoon slot, began at 3:05 every afternoon. According to *Billboard* reporter Omer Anderson, the afternoon show attracted "the biggest listening audience of any European program — in any language — on the air at that time." Daniels already knew about the affinity that the military had for country music before he landed his AFN gig in Europe. He had served stateside as emcee for a radio version of the army recruitment program *Country Style, U.S.A.* and the U.S. Air Force's similar show, *Country Music Time*.[1] Now, instead of recruiting country listeners to the military, he recruited military listeners to the fold of country fans. Music Row owed Daniels and the Pentagon a debt of gratitude for the international platform that the AFN and shows like *Stickbuddy Jamboree* afforded country music.

The most promising development for the country industry came from the unprecedented financial boost given to its record sales through the army's network of post exchange stores

[1] Omer Anderson, "Army B'dcasts Boom Overseas C&W Sales," *Billboard*, August 1, 1960, 4.

(PX). The intense demand for country music came as a shock to PX officials. As one PX inventory official told *Billboard*, "We like to think we are rarely wrong — and you can't afford to be in this marathon guessing game we play in picking disks . . . But we were so wrong about the potential of country music among our troops in Europe—and, for that matter, Europeans, too." The PX disc buyers had initially estimated demand for country at around 10 percent, but, as the record buyer claimed, "It keeps climbing, climbing, climbing." In 1960, PX officials believed country music made up about 65 percent of the records sold at their European locations that year, beating jazz, pop, classical, and the little R&B and rock and roll that had made its way overseas.[2] Enabled by a steady presence of the genre on the AFN airwaves, the demand for country music at the PX would only grow, reaching a peak of more than 70 percent of the records sold in the late 1960s.[3] Connie B. Gay, Jimmy Dean, Faron Young, Roy Acuff, and others had sown the seeds of this country music fandom in the ranks starting in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and Music Row was beginning to gather the harvest.

The AFN devoted so much airtime to country music, in part, because of a coordination between the programmers of the AFRTS and the genre's civilian business actors. Connie B. Gay had pioneered this model of government and private cooperation in the 1950s. During the 1960s, Joe Allison, one of country music's most successful promoters and disc jockeys of the decade, continued that tradition and curated a country music listening experience for servicemembers. Allison spun records on a show called *Country Corner* that aired two times a day for over ten years on the AFRTS. At the same time, Allison pioneered the effort to convert civilian stations to an all-country format across the nation, creating a genre-specific parallel to Top 40 pop radio. *Country Corner* turned the AFN into an extension of that all-country radio model, feeding

[2] Ibid.
[3] Omer Anderson, "Country Wins Europe GI's To Tune of $4.2 Mil. Yearly," *Billboard*, January 13, 1968, 1.

servicemembers the latest country hits, encouraging them to buy the records, and priming their ears for what domestic country stations would sound like on their return.

All of those servicemembers listening to country music likely heard their stories of sacrifice, service, and pride echoed in the songs written by country artists during the Vietnam War. Tom T. Hall, one of Nashville's most successful white singer-songwriters of the 1960s and 1970s, discovered his talent while serving during the late 1950s. He then turned out chart-topping hits by writing about soldiers' experiences in Vietnam.[4] Dozens of country songwriters followed Hall's lead, penning songs about the war from a variety of political stances. Some, like Merle Haggard's "The Fightin' Side of Me," famously expressed a vitriolic version of patriotism that threatened violence against protestors who opposed the war. Other artists sang about the personal devastation caused by war, rendering subtle protests to the sounds of steel guitars and fiddles, sounds that had long been associated with military recruitment and unflinching support for the nation's anticommunist foreign policies.

Country music continued to flood the Vietnam-era military through programs on the AFRTS, in the record bins at the PX, and through its recruitment campaigns. Servicemembers continued to use their time in the service to boost their chances of a career in the civilian country music industry, and country music so dominated military's social spaces that even black servicemembers became fans after being inundated with the genre and seeing how it tracked as a soundtrack to armed service. At least one even became a country performer. O.B. McClinton, a black singer-songwriter from north Mississippi, discovered his talent for singing and writing country music while stationed on Okinawa with the U.S. Air Force. Yet, where his fellow airmen encouraged his talents, McClinton experienced more frustration than success within the white-

[4] Interview with Tom T. Hall by Cecil Whaley, OH322, July 22, 1969, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.

dominated spaces of the domestic country music industry, no matter how much he emphasized his military service. For McClinton the relative racial equality created by the Defense Department's integrationist policies did not translate into racial equality in the civilian world.[5]

Historians and music critics have often considered the patriotic themes of Vietnam-era country music as emblematic of the conservative counterrevolution against the antiwar, civil rights, and student protests of the 1960s. Songs like "The Fightin' Side of Me" allegedly reflected a sui generis jingoism within white southerners. That militaristic patriotism made these voters primed for the rise of Nixonian backlash politics and the Republican "Southern Strategy."[6] Yet examining the rise of country's PX record sales, the diversity of war-themed songs, and the complexities of the genre's political and racial cultures during the Vietnam War tells a different story. Since the early 1950s, the country music industry had helped the Pentagon recruit the genre's audience into the military, bringing more fans into the ranks and helping the genre sell more records. Considered in this light, country music sounds less the soundtrack of the Silent Majority and more like the soundtrack of people who had tied their strivings for upward mobility to the Defense Department. Music Row had made its bed with American militarism long before Vietnam. When country musicians sang about the war, they did so, not from any particular ideological stance, but because their industry and so many of their fans had benefited from the political economy of the Cold War defense state. That diversity of political opinion did not stop the genre's industry from moving to the right to maintain its economic and symbolic relationship with U.S. Armed Forces.

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[5] O.B. McClinton and Gerry Wood, *Hard Way to Go: The O.B. McClinton Autobiography* (published by Gerry Wood, 1991).
[6] Schulman, *The Seventies*, 115-116; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 167-176.

Writing about country music militarism during the 1960s offers a corrective to popular and scholarly depictions regarding the sound of the Vietnam War. Rock, folk, and soul music of the 1960s and 1970s informed and reflected young soldiers' experiences, and often their disillusionment, on the frontlines of battle against the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong. During the mid to late 1960s, these genres functioned as the soundtrack for rebellion, political dissent, and psychedelic experimentations. Soldiers of all races and genders longed for and used the music of the 1960s, from the Beatles and the Box Tops to Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding, to express their growing distrust of the Pentagon's global mission against communism and as a simple distraction to cope with conformity, violence, and boredom of military life.

Country music, when it is included in histories of the Vietnam-era military, usually warrants a passing mention, often in the context of soldiers' distaste for the genre or as an aberration from the sounds of pop, rock, and soul.[7] This scholarly emphasis on countercultural music, as well as depictions of the Vietnam War in documentaries and fictional portrayals, has skewed popular conceptions of what military service sounded like in the 1960s and 1970s. They conjure the sounds of Creedence Clearwater Revival or Martha and the Vandellas. Yet record sales and radio airplay tell a different story. For many country-loving soldiers and sailors in the U.S. Armed Forces scattered across Europe, Vietnam, and other parts of Asia, serving in the military sounded more like Nashville than San Francisco or Detroit.

Selling Military Records

The PXs began selling records to servicemembers in 1947. That year, *Billboard* feverishly reported that the armed forces had opened a "new retail record market, with potential

[7] Doug Bradley and Craig Werner, *We Gotta Get Outta This Place: The Soundtrack of the Vietnam War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015); Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Phillips, *War! What Is It Good For?*

sales volume of 1,000,000 disks a month and up." These new retail outlets accounted for more than 800 domestic and foreign retail sites, including the army and air force PXs, along with the navy, coast guard, marine, and Veterans' Administration stores. The development of PX record sections started in the foreign exchanges, where PX officers had experimented by buying several thousand records from Polish and Italian presses. When these sold out, the exchanges decided to institute permanent record sections and to purchase from U.S. distributors. *Billboard*'s report could barely contain its excitement at the sales potential for the military market. The trade magazine expected record storeowners to complain about the government entering the retail record business since the armed forces could sell music without sales tax, possibly undercutting civilian retailers. However, since the military stores did not specialize in record sales and could only carry a limited amount, the magazine believed that the PX would stock and sell "just enough to get the soldier or sailor interested in disks and act as a stimulant for the dealers."[8] The PX would prime the pump for the soldier-consumer's interest in popular music records and eventually deliver a bonanza for the recording industry. In the immediate postwar years, the government appeared poised to give the music industry a much-needed boost after the fifteen-year slump of the Great Depression and World War II.[9]

The PX provided government assistance to the music business by creating an outlet to reach U.S. soldiers, sailors, and airmen who often had no other method of buying American goods. The War Department had established the PX system in 1895 to provide a government-regulated outlet for soldiers to purchase consumer goods. These stores replaced the civilian sutlers who had trailed the U.S. armies since the Revolution and who often took economic

[8] "New Vast PX Wax Market," *Billboard*, September 20, 1947, 29.
[9] Don Tyler, *Music of the Postwar Era* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2008); Andre Millard, *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, second edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

advantage of soldiers' lack of access to other shopping options. The PX offered something different. The War Department mandated that each installation in each branch of service have a PX, a place where for soldiers and sailors to buy products beyond the basic necessities of nutrition and hygiene. The availability of comfort items like magazines and nonperishable food items injected a boost to morale by enlivening the drudgery and boredom of military life.[10]

PXs expanded their list of items during World War I and then began stocking products that appealed to both the soldier and his dependents as the ranks swelled with family men during World War II. By the late 1940s when U.S. military's peacetime occupation expanded around the globe, PXs resembled the domestic consumer economy's modern-day retail experience with an array of goods for soldiers and their families. During the Korean War, the Defense Department even initiated Operation REINDEER, which opened stores in the conflict zones so that active combat soldiers could purchase Christmas gifts. Fifteen years later in Vietnam, these frontline stores offered soldiers in the thick of battle everything from chewing gum and cigarettes to portable radios and "girlie" magazines.[11]

The number and variety of records at the PX grew steadily along with the rest of its inventory over the 1950s, and the music industry took notice. *Billboard*'s Ren Grevatt reported in February 1957 that the Army and Air Force PXs located in 30 nations around the world sold between $5.5 million and $6 million worth of records each year. Long playing albums (LPs) accounted for 70 percent of these sales overall and 80 percent of sales on bases located in Japan. The popularity of this format bucked the civilian buying patterns of the mid 1950s, which began

[10] David Michael Delo, *Peddlers and Post Traders: The Army Sutler on the Frontier* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992); Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*, foreword by James I. Robertson, Jr., updated edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 163, 191; Lair, *Armed with Abundance*, 148-149.
[11] Lair, *Armed with Abundance*, 148-149.

trending towards the 45-rpm singles that had hit the market in 1949. Civilian sales placed LPs ahead of singles at a ratio of only 45-50 percent. Grevatt explained the disproportionate popularity of the LP with soldiers in terms of portability. Soldiers had to maintain their readiness to move from post to post with a minimal amount of personal gear. "The buyer is aware that someday he'll have to move all his possessions back home," Grevatt told the music industry's readers. Soldiers preferred LPs because "he can get more playing time per space occupied with LPs." Grevatt also relayed the industry's surprise at the volume of records purchased by America's Cold War occupiers.[12]

The industry was as interested in the genre of the records that soldiers bought as they were the sheer sales volume. Grevatt notified readers that 50 percent of soldiers' LP purchases went to pop records, 30 percent to classical, and 20 percent to jazz.[13] The age of LP buyers helped explain this ratio. PX shopping attracted older career soldiers and their dependents, mainly their wives, and this demographic civilian or soldier, was more likely to listen to pop, classical, and jazz. Soldier newspaper *The Army Times* also helped cultivate a military market for these genres, particularly jazz and pop. On November 1, 1952, the paper had debuted a column written by Ted Sharpe called "Music on Record." *The Army Times* featured this column throughout the 1950s, and Sharpe continued to direct soldiers to the latest in jazz and pop hailing releases by Stan Getz, Oscar Peterson, and Rosemary Clooney. With his guidance, soldiers stationed around the globe could then purchase the most current recommended records at the PX and feel relatively up to date with the newest sounds of the domestic music scene.[14] The music

[12] Ren Grevatt, "Overseas G.I. Puts Out Millions to Hear Music From Home," *Billboard*, February 9, 1957, 1, 20. Grevatt later worked as a publicist for the Grateful Dead, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Linda Ronstadt, Alice Cooper, and others. See Ren Grevatt, *Confessions of a Rock N' Roll PR Guy: Can I Get Back to You?* (AuthorHouse, 2015).
[13] Grevatt, "Overseas G.I. Puts Out Millions to Hear Music From Home," 1.
[14] Ted Sharpe, "Music on Record," *Army Times*, November 1, 1952, 10.

industry knew and understood these types of consumers. LP buyers represented the striving middle-class, postwar consumers whose buying habits mapped onto the purchase patterns of their civilian counterparts who paid more money for long playing records to spin on their new hi-fi component stereos.

But if PX album sales mirrored what the industry understood as middle-class, adult civilian preferences, the military's singles sales also reflected civilians' love of niche genres and their dependence on radio play. Grevatt wrote that no clear genre dominated these 45-rpm sales, "owing to the fact that the same crossover of pop, rhythm and blues, and country material in effect here also exists across the water." He attributed this to "the influence of the Armed Forces Radio Service, which receives and programs at all its overseas outlets the same records that are being played on Stateside radio stations." Soldiers bought the singles they heard on the air, and Grevatt stated how "new records are received at even the most remote bases within two weeks of their release here." In particular, they bought rhythm and blues artists like Bill Doggett and Fats Domino, who had experienced some crossover pop success, along with crooners Perry Como and Frank Sinatra. Grevatt stated that even Elvis Presley, "whom some believe has a stronger following among female teen-agers, is one of the top sellers among the military buyers."[15] AFRTS may not have officially played rock and roll until 1961, but they likely spun as many crossover hits as possible, making the PX a lucrative market for the niche artists with enough appeal to hit the pop charts. The 1957 report held a clear message for country music industry. More products on the AFRTS would equal more record sales at the PX.

The military's use of country music as a recruitment tool undoubtedly influenced the marketing strategy to push the genre's product to the armed forces. The army had announced the

[15] Grevatt, "Overseas G.I. Puts Out Millions to Hear Music From Home," 1.

launch of *Country Style, U.S.A.* on television in June 1957, only a few months before the PX report.[16] If country music could turn country music listeners into soldiers, then surely soldiering could help turn military listeners into country music record buyers, if they were not already. Music Row only needed to a way to get more of its artists on the air. The genre's disc jockeys learned more about the usefulness of country music as a recruitment tool on November 21-22, 1958, when 2,000 representatives of country's record and radio industries met at Nashville's War Memorial Auditorium for WSM's Seventh Annual Country Music Disc Jockey Festival. The festival was the annual meeting of the Country Music Disc Jockey Association, which was founded in 1953 by Connie B. Gay and other industry actors and which served as a precursor to the Country Music Association. According to historian Diane Pecknold, the CMDJA represented "the first attempt to formally organize the country music field as an independent industry." As such, the organization sought to institute professional standards for the genre's DJs and create a reputation for members as objective mediators of good taste in the music. The CMDJA even adopted as its slogan "the Voice of America's Music" in a bid to claim genre-specific authenticity while also suggesting that country had a universal appeal.[17]

The first day included a "festival workshop" featuring RCA's Jack Burgess, Ray Morris of Pet Milk, Connie B. Gay, and Colonel Vernon Rice of the U.S. Army. Morris spoke about the successful use of country music as a promotional tool for Pet Milk on 200 radio stations around the nation. He believed that country music generated more revenue per dollar spent than any other type of music. Gay delivered an address titled "The Growth of Country Music and Its Place

[16] "New Army TV Show To Aid Recruiting," *Army Times*, June 15, 1957, 34.
[17] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 75.

in Your Future" that predicted an upcoming boom for the genre and received an ovation for his bullish outlook.[18]

The next endorsement came with the authority of the Pentagon. Colonel Rice gave a speech called "Your Fullest Public Service Advantage Thru Country Music." He praised the unique qualities of country music and the music's ability to support successful recruitment campaigns.[19] As the director of recruiting publicity for the U.S. Army and Air Force, Rice was then working closely with country music's labels, studios, artists, and station owners. Rice's embrace of country music recruitment had led to the use of public service announcements for the dual purpose of promoting the military and country music, specifically the creation of *Country Style, U.S.A.* He knew the genre's potential and urged others to use the music's appeal to push their particular message through public service announcements like the Department of Defense had done.

Three weeks later, *Billboard* published the latest PX record sales numbers and alerted labels and artists to this thriving market. The trade press quoted a marketing report that described the U.S. Armed Forces as "the most music-conscious, music-loving, music-appreciating fighting force in the history of armies." John J. Ryan, a market consultant for *Army Times*, had used his connections to the Department of Defense to study the PX's sales potential and connected that sales point to the music industry. By his account, PXs had emerged as "the largest single customer for the music record industry." Soldiers and their dependents represented six million PX customers who spent an estimated eight dollars for every man in the service. Ryan stated that the armed forces bought twenty million records from the PX and spent another $7.5 million on

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[18] Bill Sachs, "C.&W. DJ's Map Serious Event As 7th Annual WSM Festival," *Billboard*, November 17, 1958, 18, 24; Bill Sachs, "Fun and Frolic Dominates 7th C.&W. Deejay Festival," *Billboard*, November 24, 1958, 3, 14.
[19] Bill Sachs, "Fun and Frolic Dominates 7th C.&W. Deejay Festival," *Billboard*, November 24, 1958, 3, 14.

record players each year. Like the Exchange Service report, Ryan found that soldiers preferred the "unbreakable LP" over singles at a ratio of three to one. He also echoed the genre preferences among soldiers who continued to favor pop over their second favorite category, classical.[20]

Ryan had recently completed an intensive study of the PX market describing the potential for retail sales and the centrality of the PX to morale. He published his findings as a book called *Selling the Armed Forces Consumer Market: The Military Market Handbook*.[21] He also contributed a condensed version to *Army Times* that explained the "enigmatic nature" of the PX, which "operates stores in the most inaccessible spots, yet it must operate as efficiently as any civilian merchandising chain."[22] This paradoxical existence was what made the PX so ripe for robust record sales. The stores had to stock the items soldiers desired, no matter their location and no matter the profit margin, and soldiers wanted records.

Ryan's report on the sale of 45-rpm singles revealed the diversity of musical tastes present among U.S. soldiers that remained hidden in the LP sales figures. "Overseas only the top pop singles make it due to procurement practices," *Billboard* relayed. The genre of singles sold at stateside PXs matched the civilian buying patterns. Pop dominated these 45-rpm sales. However, Ryan clarified that soldiers showed "perhaps a shade of preference for country and western in certain areas." He suggested selling to soldiers through mail order record clubs, thereby bypassing the PX in order to satisfy the military demand for music. He also predicted the military record market would grow by seven percent in the following year. Conveniently, Ryan believed record sellers should market these record clubs through his publication, believing "the greatest sales promotion lies in reaching all Armed Forces personnel, both domestic and

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[20] June Bundy, "U.S. Armed Forces Huge Wax Market," *Billboard*, December 15, 1958, 3.
[21] John J. Ryan, *Selling the Armed Forces Consumer Market: The Military Market Handbook* (Washington, D.C.: Army Times Publishing Company, 1957).
[22] John J. Ryan, "Special Report: The Exchange Story, Background, Outlook," *Army Times*, March 16, 1957, A.

overseas, thru the world-wide editions of the Army Times, Air Force Times, Navy Times and the American Weekend."[23] Self-promotion aside, Ryan was right. U.S. soldiers bought and listened to popular music as a way to break the boredom and monotony of peacetime service. The PX continued to provide soldiers and their dependents with easy access to the latest releases.

Joe Allison and the Global Reach of the AFRTS

If country music's record labels and artists wanted to tap the full potential of the PX market and move the soldier's interest in the genre past "a slight shade of preference," then it would need to place more of its product on AFRTS. In 1957, the country music's record and radio industries could use all the help available. That year, the music had reached its lowest radio market share since 1953, having suffered an erosion of its popularity thanks to rock and roll, as well as the rise of Top 40 radio formatting.[24] A Nebraska radio programmer named Todd Storz had pioneered Top 40 format radio in 1955. One night, Storz watched a waitress at an Omaha bar play the same song three times in a row on the jukebox after all the other customers had left, a song that had already been played repeatedly throughout the evening. Inspired by the woman's desire to hear a song she liked on repeat, Storz envisioned a constricted radio playlist of 30 or 40 pop songs that would engrain the hits into listeners' minds. Country radio stations caught onto this formula slowly. Although KDAV in Lubbock, Texas had switched to all country programming 1953, format programming was different than simply sticking exclusively to one sound.[25] Instead, format radio cast a wide net, more interested in catching specific market demographics with repeatedly playing selections from a tightly curated list of songs.[26] The

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[23] June Bundy, "U.S. Armed Forces Huge Wax Market," *Billboard*, December 15, 1958, 3, 85.
[24] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 117.
[25] Kim Simpson, *Early '70s Radio: The American Format Revolution* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 11-13, 157.
[26] Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 2-5.

emergence of the format radio model gave Music Row a way to push its releases in concentrated campaigns. It soon found a way to transfer that model to the AFRS.

The country music industry had long recognized the potential of Armed Forces Radio to cultivate fandom and generate interest in the genre. Connie B. Gay, Jimmy Dean, Redd Harper, and the *Grand Ole Opry* had demonstrated in the early 1950s that putting the genre's products in front of military audiences yielded profits for the genre. Likewise, individual soldiers had hosted shows like the *Stickbuddy Jamboree* and *Hillbilly Gasthaus* over the AFRTS for soldiers and civilians across Europe. Even Elvis Presley had found a way to get in front of military audiences with his performance on the *USS Hancock*. No one could turn down a concentrated audience of young men with steady government income. Yet none of these efforts had embraced the then-new creation of format radio, a strategy that could drill Nashville's latest hits into the ears of soldiers who would then run down to the PX and buy the record. Nashville required a dedicated country music DJ on AFRTS to make that happen, someone linked to Music Row and the needs of the industry.

Nashville found its connection to the military's radio listeners in Joe Allison, a disc jockey, songwriter, and producer, who emerged as the key figure in the creation of format country radio and hosted a long running show on the AFRTS throughout the 1960s. Born in McKinney, Texas in 1924, Allison had received his start in country music in the late 1940s when he went on the road as an announcer for Tex Ritter. In 1949, he landed a job on Nashville's WMAK and quickly rose to the top of the country music disc jockey field.[27] He wrote several successful country songs, including the hillbilly rocker "Live Fast, Love Hard, and Die Young,"

[27] John Rumble, "Joe Allison," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 11.

which turned out to be Faron Young's first hit after receiving his discharge from the army.[28] The record peaked at number two on *Billboard*'s country radio and jukebox charts and remained Young's biggest hit until he reached number one in 1961 with Willie Nelson's "Hello Walls."[29]

Country Song Roundup, a magazine that kept fans informed of the latest genre news, boosted Allison's visibility in the early 1950s by giving the DJ a regular column called "Music City, USA." The column offered evidence of Allison's early on-air personality and the way he connected listeners with the music with his friendly, even familial style. He invited *Country Song Roundup* readers to tune into WMAK where he hosted "a couple of disc jockey shows each day." He then asked them to write to him for more information on the music that he spun. Simply address a letter to "Uncle Joe Allison" at the WMAK studios in the Maxwell House Hotel, Nashville, Tennessee, he told them. "Let me hear from you," Allison wrote, "and I'll bet you half a gallon of red ants I'll cooperate with you in any way I can."[30] His listeners were like friends and family. Just get in touch with Uncle Joe for your country music needs.

Allison also participated in the consolidation of Nashville's music industry power while he cultivated this downhome appeal. In the early 1950s, Allison had moved to California after answering a call from Tennessee Ernie Ford to join the DJ staff at KXLA in Pasadena.[31] The country music industry wanted to grow beyond its loyal demographic base, and the southern California communities of second-generation Dust Bowl transplants represented a prime market

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[28] Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 40. Allison described finding inspiration for the song while watching a gangster movie with John Derek, whose character wanted "to die young and leave a good-looking corpse." Ken Nelson, a producer for Capitol Records, gave the song to Young, pairing the song's hell raising message with the newly discharged and famously rebellious singer.
[29] *Billboard*, May 21, 1955, 32, 34; Diekman, *Live Fast, Love Hard*, 70.
[30] Joe Allison, "Music City U.S.A.," *Country Song Roundup*, December 1951, 11, NMAH Country Music Magazine Collection.
[31] Rumble, "Joe Allison," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 11.

for the music to thrive.[32] The children of white migrants now living in San Pedro, Bakersfield, and Orange County could tune in to hear Uncle Joe spin the latest country platters while on their on their way to work in the shipyards and aircraft factories that fueled the region's exponential postwar growth.

Allison broadened the reach of country music even further in the last half of the 1950s by leading the industry in the development of format radio. After brief stints at stations in Akron, Ohio and Nashville, Allison returned to the West Coast in 1956.[33] He joined other veteran country DJs in converting KRKD, a radio station in downtown Los Angeles, to an all-country format. KRKD began its broadcast as Los Angeles's first fulltime, all-country station on October 1, 1956.[34] Over the next decade, Allison slowly helped to convert a growing number of radio stations around the nation to the format, pushing a curated list of country hits to broader audiences in larger listening markets. During the 1960s, the armed forces created a way to take that radio formula to the world.

In 1961, the AFN announced its plan to increase the amount of country music on its European airwaves by 35 percent, which created a chance to grow the genre's market reach among both servicemembers and European civilians. *Billboard* reported that this expansion would include a "daily hour-long network program of c.&w. and in addition will schedule special Saturday programs on c.&w. themes." The AFN hoped to address the "large unfilled demand for country music" at the same time that the PX began expanding its stock of country

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[32] Peter LaChapelle, *Proud to Be an Okie: Cultural Politics, Country Music, and Migration to Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Darren Dochuck, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
[33] "Folk Talent and Tunes," *Billboard*, May 31, 1952, 82; "Folk Talent and Tunes," *Billboard*, November 15, 1952, 59.
[34] "KRKD Format Shift: 100% C.&W. Music," *Billboard*, October 13, 1956, 53.

albums in the European PXs. According to one PX inventory purchaser, country represented something "more than merely music with the troops." He believed that "Country and western strikes the troops as part of the American heritage, and the troops prefer it to sophisticated, schmalzy [*sic*] music that may appeal to the cocktail hour crowd, but which leaves the GI cold."[35]

The European Exchange System (EES), which operated the European PXs, ordered their stock based on soldier demand, and servicemembers and their families had "been peppering AFN and military publications with letters demanding 'more real American music—country and western.'" The demand for country drew critics who encouraged the AFN to play more classical and avant-garde jazz to "improve the American 'image' overseas since an estimated thirty million Europeans 'eavesdrop' on AFN."[36] And 30 million represented a conservative estimate for European civilians. Only a year earlier, the AFN had placed the number of shadow listeners at 50 million.[37] Nor did those estimates account for civilian listeners in the AFRTS Far East Network that covered military occupations in the Pacific.

Joe Allison brought country radio to those listeners from 1959 to 1970 with a show called *Country Corner*. He recorded the show in Los Angeles at the AFRTS studios, where the tapes were then transcribed onto discs for shipment around the world. Once a week, the pioneer of the country format went into the AFRTS studio with a box of records that he selected and recorded five hours of country music hits along with his commentary and readings from letters he received from around the world. "They made it easy for me," he remembered. "I had my own records at home. I would go down to the Armed Forces studios one day a week. . . . My show was fifty-five

[35] "More Country Music Fills AFN Air," *Billboard*, September 25, 1961, 3.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Omer Anderson, "50 Mil Europeans Can't Be Wrong," *Billboard*, July 11, 1960, 1.

minutes a day in length." He recorded every show for an entire week in one sitting. He later described how, "We would do it almost in five hours. I mean, we just didn't stop."[38] These recording sessions created an efficient way to reach what the network told Allison was an audience of 600 million listeners around the globe. The reach of the AFRTS did wonders for exposing potential new fans to the sounds of country music. Many stations played Allison's show two times a day to meet their listeners demand for the genre.

Unlike most other military country programs, *Country Corner* did not contain any recruitment efforts. As Allison recalled, "There was no propaganda of any kind, not even any recruiting things or no reenlistment propaganda, no nothing. We were employed to do strict entertainment, absolutely." This arrangement gave the DJ free range over the playlist and his on-air personality. The AFRTS created only two rules for the show; Allison could not tell the time of day so that the recordings would be usable anywhere in the world, and he could not dedicate a song to an individual soldier. The prohibition against dedications protected soldiers from hearing the name of a fellow GI who may not have made it out of the last battle alive. Allison described this rule to an interviewer, remembering, how his shows were delayed about one month from their recording to their distribution, meaning that he "couldn't make any dedications to a person by name . . . . Now, if I did one to Sergeant Joe Blow, within that month Sergeant Joe Blow got killed, and then they hear his name a month later, Joe Blow's not going to care, but it demoralizes his buddies."[39]

Each episode of *Country Corner* began with "Main Street Rag" played by Chet Atkins as the theme song before Allison broke in with his mixture of country music insider knowledge and cornpone humor. He delighted in telling listeners about what the artists were like in person. He

[38] Interview with Joe Allison by John W. Rumble, OHC6, May 27, 1994, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.
[39] Ibid.

let them become familiar with the artists vicariously through his personae as Uncle Joe. More foreign civilians than GIs wrote to Allison requesting songs and information on their favorite country artists, and he relished reading selections from these hundreds of letters on the air. Allison mixed in his humor and industry connection in a typical episode to answer one Dutch letter writer. "Dear sir," Allison read before inserting a joke in his Texan accent, "they always call me dear and that's a funny way to spell sir, C-U-R. So, I have both jokes out the way, alright?" He then read the listener's sincere request, "I am a fan of the *Country Corner* music in Holland. And I would like to ask you to send me some pictures of Buck Owens, Jim Reeves, Ray Price, Norma Jean, Kitty Wells, Connie Smith, and Skeeter Davis."[40] Both military and civilian listeners could hear Allison instruct this particular fan on how to obtain the desired memorabilia, feeling connected to the country industry and the U.S. in general through the downhome tone of *Country Corner*. Country artist Jeannie Seely toured Vietnam and reported back to Allison how much the soldiers identified with the DJ. She claimed that during Allison's sign off every day, the men would scream, "Don't go, Joe! Do some more. Don't leave."[41]

Soldiers felt as if they could confide in Allison, too. He received thousands of letters from men stationed in Vietnam. "[A]ll of that was pretty plaintive," he remembered, "like they missed being home and they were counting the days and how much I keep them company with the music and all that." Allison told an interviewer how "the guys would tell me a little about their work. 'This is my buddy and I. We work in a machine shop, and we do so and so. We take care of the general's car.' Or, 'This is my wife and child, and we have housing on the base and shop at the PX [post exchange],' all that kind of stuff. It was just homey."[42] With his

[40] *Country Corner* (#1108 RU-29-7-15 A [Jan. 1967]), Part 1; *Country Corner* (#1109 RU-29-7-15 B [Jan. 1967]). Part 1, LPA 50031, Recorded Sound Division, LOC
[41] Joe Allison interview, May 27, 1994, FLA.
[42] Interview with Joe Allison by John W. Rumble, OHC14 August 12, 1994, Nashville, Tennessee, CMOHP, FLA.

downhome persona, Allison cultivated an affinity for country music with listeners around the globe, and the music industry reaped the financial award.

All of that country music on air began to boost record sales, especially in the European PXs, in the early 1960s. Near the end of 1961, *Billboard* reported that country music sales in the European PXs had jumped from 65 to 75 percent during the Christmas shopping season. One GI described the appeal of country music in terms of U.S. foreign policy. He owned hundreds of country records and claimed that soldiers stationed abroad "are all a little keyed up; we don't know what's ahead. We're all thinking of home more than ever before, and country music is the music of home for all of us." Country performers from the U.S. drew sell-out crowds on their tours of the European bases. The tour manager for country artist Hank Snow relayed that "Americans overseas are starved for country and western music. The boys played to packed houses at every stop, and the foot-stomping and cheering applause was tremendous. Never saw anything like it." That enthusiasm for country records increased sales so much that the PXs could not keep up with the demand due to the limited number of records sent by domestic record companies. One PX buyer believed that "Some American producers seem to regard c.&w. with lofty disdain, as something too vulgar to soil their hands with. From our point of view, this is a tragic mistake."[43]

GI demand for country music not only dominated European PX sales and AFN airplay, it changed the sound of European popular music. West German record companies supplemented the PX shortage of country platters with their own pressings of albums, and both German and American musicians increased their performances of country music to meet the demands for the

[43] "Country Music Has Biggest Year Among Forces Stationed in Europe," *Billboard*, December 25, 1961, 5. The PXs supplemented their record supplies with German country music platters. This led to a dispute between the EES and American record companies, who insisted that the PXs sell American products. See "'Buy American' Push Ups Armed Forces PX Sales," *Billboard*, January 20, 1962, 3.

genre. Gus Backus, an airman in the U.S. Air Force, stayed in West Germany after his discharge and began recording German-language country hits like "Da sprach der alte Hauptling" ("So Said the Old Indian Chief"), which was used as a campaign song for Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Backus had started his military-musical career by joining the interracial doo-wop group The Del-Vikings, all of whom were in the air force and formed while stationed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. However, Backus converted to country music after his deployment to West Germany.[44] Another ex-GI named Bill Ramsey rode country music popularity to fame in West Germany, as well, recording the tunes "Old Johnny War ein Wunderkind" and "Hilly Billy Banjo Joe."

West German performers joined the trend, too. Artists like Jupp Schmitz and His Backyard Musicians performed for German audiences and singer Caterina Valente sold hundreds of thousands of her country sides like "Der Sheriff von Arkansas" to local and American disc buyers.[45] Having witnessed this rise in country popularity, one EES official told *Billboard* that "Our advice to any young composer with talent, and impatient for instant success, is to write country music. The demand is insatiable right here with our own military forces." "Nashville," he said, "doesn't have any real idea of the European demand for country music. The surface has hardly been touched."[46] The EES official obviously exaggerated the lack of Nashville's interest in the military and the overseas markets it created. Country music's business actors had fostered connections between the genre and the nation's fighting men. But he did identify an important point for the commercial growth of the genre overseas. Military audiences and foreign civilians might genuinely enjoy country music. But, if Music Row wanted to grow the genre's market

[44] "More Country Music Fills AFN Air," *Billboard*, September 25, 1961, 3.
[45] "Bavarians Make Pitch as Europe's Nashville," *Billboard*, March 10, 1962, 20; "More Country Music Fills AFN Air," *Billboard*, September 25, 1961, 3.
[46] "Country Music Goes International," *Billboard: The World of Country Music*, November 2, 1963, 166.

reach, it would need to maintain a steady inundation of the European airwaves, concert stages, and the PX record sections.

By 1965, the country music trend had grown to such an extent that military officials recognized that the genre was becoming synonymous with America itself. Omer Anderson reported for *Billboard* that the U.S. Armed Forces had begun a "campaign in Europe to present country music as 'an integral part of the American cultural heritage and of the American way of life.'" Officials announced a four-point plan that would stop the "disparagement of country as 'hick' or 'hillbilly' music," place more country records in the PXs, produce more country radio shows for AFN, and book more European tours for country artists. The promotion of country music addressed what Anderson called "a matter of morale." According to his report, "virtually all military personnel prefer—or at least listen regularly to—country music" and the genre had a way of "instilling loyalty and a sense of duty to country into members of the Armed Forces." The military attributed this phenomenon to the music's roots in the folk music of America and believed that "no music has as strong an emotional appeal to soldiers." As such, the AFRTS received orders to refrain from referring to country music with the descriptors " 'hick,' 'hillbilly,' and 'music from the sticks,'" stressing instead the "American folk character of the idiom." The military suggested referring to the genre as " 'country,' 'western,' 'c&w,' 'American folk music,'" or, in terms that echoed the 1950s campaigns of Governor Frank Clement and the CMDJA, the "music of America."[47]

The military's description of country as the "music of America" conflated national identity with a genre strongly associated with southern whiteness. In truth, country was no more the music of an entire nation than jazz, pop, blues, or the soul music that was emerging at the

[47] Omer Anderson, "U.S. Launches European Drive To Aid Country Music Image," *Billboard* December 25, 1965, 24, 33.

time. Other institutions like the State Department and Voice of America, relied on other genres to express different images of the nation. Jazz and pop served propaganda missions to boost America's image as a country of tolerance, inclusivity, and democratic, capitalist freedom.[48] Yet, in the case of country music, the government was not interested in using the music to boost the image of the nation in an ideological struggle for the Cold War. Instead, the government used the infrastructure created by its own military might to boost the image of country music, changing perceptions about the genre from its image as the sound of rural white ignorance to the modern sound of atavistic folk purity. The Pentagon recognized that country music had become indelibly linked with military service thanks to more than a decade of recruitment campaigns, live entertainment programs, and AFRTS radio airplay. Rather than fight that association, the military wanted to brand the genre as an expression of authentic American culture, a music that echoed and shaped the experience of armed service.

Promoting Country Music and the Politics of the Vietnam War

Few country songwriters could echo that military experience like Tom T. Hall. Born in 1936 at Olive Hill, Kentucky, Hall left school at the age of 15 to earn money for his family after his father suffered a debilitating gunshot wound during a hunting accident. Hall worked in factories and cut grass at a graveyard, among other short-term jobs, before seeing the military as a way out of low waged, low skill employment. "I joined . . . with the intent of finishing high school in the army," he recalled. "I got my diploma there from that, and . . . for a short while

[48] Alan L. Heil, Jr., *Voice of America: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); David F. Krugler, *The Voice of America and the Domestic Propaganda Battles, 1945-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000); Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*.

attended Roanoke College in Roanoke, Virginia, studying to be a writer, of all things, a novelist."[49]

Hall never published a novel, but he had discovered his skill as a songwriter while stationed in Germany in 1957, a skill that led to enormous success in the 1960s. As he remembered, "I was in Europe in the army, and I was singing, entertaining some of the GIs over there in some of the clubs, and we had a band. . . . So I started writing some songs to entertain the GIs. That's the first time that I realized that I had a talent for writing, because they just smashed for the GIs." The songs he wrote reflected his experiences and those of other enlisted men stationed in the network of Cold War military installations around Germany with titles like "3,000 Gallons of Beer," "Short-Timer's Blues," "36 Months of Loneliness" (named for the standard length for a tour of duty), and "Gasthaus Rock," a reference to the German name for a nightclub. Hall described how "I was singing there and entertaining the GIs to such an extent, I thought, 'Well, when I get back to the States, maybe I can write songs and entertain people back there.' "[50]

After returning from the army and his short stint as an aspiring novelist, Hall began working as a disc jockey for country radio stations and continued writing songs. In 1963, Nashville recording star Jimmy C. Newman recorded one of Hall's compositions called "DJ for a Day," written from the perspective of a heartbroken man who wants to take over a radio station and play music for the woman who has left him. Newman's success with the song led to a recording contract for the writer. The following year, Hall released his first single, "I Washed My Face in the Morning Dew." Over the next five years Hall achieved an astonishing level of success. He penned hit tunes like "Harper Valley PTA," which Jeannie C. Riley took to number

[49] Tom T. Hall interview, FLA.
[50] Tom T. Hall interview, FLA; "A Conversation with Tom T. Hall," *Country Song Roundup*, May 1969, 33, FLA.

one on the pop and country charts in 1968, making her the first woman to do so. He also wrote the entire soundtrack for the Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway outlaw film *Bonnie & Clyde*, recorded by Flatt and Scruggs, and at least seven other top five hits for himself and other artists by 1969. Between 1967 and 1985, Hall wrote 33 top 20 country songs in an unparalleled hit-making career.[51] Hall's time in the army and his interest in writing about the themes of U.S. militarism provided the basis of that success.

In the spring of 1965, President Johnson escalated the U.S. involvement in the fight between North and South Vietnam by increasing ground troop levels to 125,000. By that summer, General William Westmoreland ordered the first offensive ground operation against the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Using what he called "expressive terms" for infantry action, Westmoreland ordered U.S. troops to "search and destroy" communist forces and their abettors, unleashing tens of thousands of American fighting men on North Vietnamese soldiers, South Vietnamese combatants, and civilians on both sides of the conflict. The U.S. would not withdraw from the fight until almost ten years later, incurring nearly 60,000 American casualties.[52]

As quickly as Johnson and Westmoreland had given their initial orders, Tom T. Hall responded with a war-themed song. On August 25, 1965, country singer Johnnie Wright released Hall's song "Hello Vietnam." In a plaintive, solemn voice, Wright sings from the first-person perspective of a soldier on the eve of deployment. It begins with the refrain, "Kiss me good bye and write me while I'm gone / Goodbye my sweetheart, Hello Vietnam." The verses explain why

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[51] Tom T. Hall interview, FLA; Geoffrey Himes, "Who Needs Country Radio? Not Tom T. Hall," *New York Times*, January 13, 2008.
[52] Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 158-163; "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics," National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.

the soldier must leave, how the war should inspire collective sacrifice, and how military service fits into U.S. foreign policy. "America has heard the bugle call," Wright sings while a guitar filtered through a heavy tremolo effect mimics a military bugle, "And you know it involves us one and all." He then reiterates the domino theory with the line, "We must stop communism in that land / Or freedom will start slipping through our hands." "Hello Vietnam" debuted at number one on the *Billboard* country charts, holding that position for 3 weeks and staying on charts for over 5 months. With this combination of patriotic gusto and tearful farewell, Hall's song captured the mixture of duty and trepidation that shaped soldiers' emotions on the verge of deployment to yet another war in Asia [53]

"Hello Vietnam" slipped down the charts in the winter of 1965 only to be replaced by another Vietnam-themed Hall composition, Dave Dudley's release "What We're Fighting For." Dudley's song reached number four by January 1966 and spent four months on the *Billboard* country charts. Hall wrote this hit in the form of a letter from a soldier to his mother, who asks her to tell the antiwar protestors that "There's not a soldier in this foreign land, who likes this war / Oh mama, tell them what we're fighting for." The song casts the peace movement as a misunderstanding between soldiers willing to fight and die for democratic freedom and people who simply must have forgotten about the way foreign adversaries can threaten the U.S. homeland. "Tell them that we're fighting for the old red, white, and blue," the soldier instructs his mother, and asks "Did they forget Pearl Harbor and Korea, too? / Another flag must never fly above our nation's door / Oh mama, tell them what we're fighting for."[54] The success of this hit encouraged Dudley to build an entire album of songs that reflected wartime patriotism entitled *There's a Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere*. Every song catered to the soldier

[53] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 477.
[54] Ibid., 131.

experience, including the title track, which was a reworking of Elton Britt's World War II-era hit. The album also featured three Tom T. Hall songs ("What We're Fighting For," "Hello Viet Nam," and "Then I'll Come Home Again"), four songs from Hank Locklin's *Foreign Love* album ("Geisha Girl," "Lili Marlene," "Fraulein," and "Filipino Baby"), and "Viet Nam Blues" by a then-unknown army veteran and aspiring songwriter named Kris Kristofferson.[55]

An initial reaction to Hall's songs might categorize them as jingoistic, pro-war, anti-communist anthems or simply as Cold War kitschy propaganda for Middle America. Subsequent pop culture uses of "Hello Vietnam" have certainly supported that interpretation. The opening credits of Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* shows Marine Corps barbers shaving the heads of the film's stars in preparation for basic training on Parris Island, South Carolina while Hall's song plays over the scene. In Kubrick's hands, "Hello Vietnam" provided an ironic, cornpone soundtrack to the mass conformity of military service.[56] Mercury Records undoubtedly believed they had a statement of patriotic support on their hands with Dudley's "What We're Fighting For." The label shipped 3,000 copies of the single to Vietnam as Christmas presents for soldiers in December 1965.[57]

In each of these early tunes, Hall gives the power of first-person narration to his characters. He allows them to tell their own stories, at once fictional and yet immediately believable. One leaves his lover. The other writes to his mother. Both express fear about their future and the violent errand their government has undertaken. Hall entrusts his listeners with the sensitivity to hear the depth of emotion in his characters. No one is happy about the war. They are merely doing a job that needs to be done, and Hall was merely doing his job by reflecting

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[55] Dave Dudley, *There's a Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere*, Mercury Records SR 61057, 33 1/3 rpm, 1965.
[56] *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1987; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2001), DVD.
[57] Elton Whisenhunt, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, January 1, 1966, 29.

those soldier experiences, giving voice to the nation's servicemembers and their families. Doing his job well meant that Hall could sell more records.

Hall acknowledged the marketability of these themes in times of war. In a 1969 interview, he stated,

> You know, during war the country always comes to country music. I don't know if you've noticed that, but it's a fact that during war people become more country. Country people become more country. Therefore, you sell more country records. . . . That's primarily because all the country boys fight all the wars, incidentally. The rest of them go off to college, and through politics and things, they don't get drafted and this sort of thing. . . . So country boys fight the wars.[58]

Hall was right in his demographic analysis, particularly if by "country" he meant the working-class and southerners. The enlisted troops during Vietnam were approximately 25 percent poor, 55 percent working class, and only 20 percent middle class. Likewise, 30 percent of U.S. soldiers during the war hailed from the states of the former Confederacy plus Kentucky, even though the region made up only 22 percent of the nation's population. Southern soldiers also made up 27 percent of all U.S. deaths in Vietnam.[59]

Like Hall, Nashville's country music industry recognized the escalation of the Vietnam War as a chance to reach fans serving in the military and used the opportunity to promote its products. On January 14, 1966, the *Opry* filmed a special episode of the show as an inaugural program on a new AFRTS station that broadcast from Saigon. WSM, Nashville radio station and home to the *Opry*, recruited the help of emcee Roy Acuff, as well as performances by Dottie West, Connie Smith, the Willis Brothers, Charlie Louvin, the Carter Family, and several more.[60] Later that same year, Bill Williams, the promotion manager for WSM, embarked on a two-week

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[58] Tom T. Hall interview, FLA.
[59] Joseph A. Fry, *The American South and the Vietnam War: Belligerence, Protest, and Agony in Dixie* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 148, 149.
[60] "Opry Stars Send TV Special to Vietnam," *CMA Close-Up*, February 1966, 5, FLA.

long airlift mission to deliver free country music records to soldiers stationed in Vietnam. Williams saw his trip as a way to connect servicemembers with the music in a personal way. "Vietnam is, of course, one of the loneliest spots in the world. It's lonely in the jungle, in the elephant grass, or in the swampy Mekong Delta," he wrote in *Country Song Roundup* on his return. "Alleviating some of this loneliness was part of my intended purpose."[61]

Williams and WSM eased that loneliness by soliciting record donations for soldiers from Decca, RCA-Victor, Capital, Columbia, Hickory, Starday, and Monument record companies. The Tennessee National Guard then loaded the albums on a C-97 and shipped them to Saigon. Williams flew separately but rejoined the shipment in-country. The Joint United States Public Affairs Office arranged a tour for Williams to interview the troops about country music and hand out the free records. In words Connie B. Gay could appreciate, Williams told of traveling where "there were bombs going off too close for comfort, a teargassing, and a shooting incident," yet he persevered to deliver country music to the fighting men who deserved it. And just as Gay had played soldiers' messages during the Korea War, Williams "brought back dozens of tape recordings of the troops to play for their families back home." "It helped create a link," Williams told readers of *Country Song Roundup*.[62]

Nashville's artists cultivated that link by touring military posts in Vietnam, Japan, and Germany throughout the Vietnam War. Established stars like Roy Acuff, Hank Snow, Little Jimmy Dickens, Bill Anderson, Buck Owens, Jeannie Seely, Red Sovine, and others toured Japan and Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s, playing military installations for enthusiastic GI crowds and encountering a surprising number of foreign civilian fans who

[61] Bill Williams, "Country Music Goes to Viet Nam," *Country Song Roundup*, December 1966, 6, FLA.
[62] Ibid.

seemed to know every word.[63] Acuff, who *Country Song Roundup* called the genre's "Bob Hope," had toured for servicemembers going back to World War II, and he visited Vietnam and the Philippines on a G.I. hospital tour over the 1969 Christmas season. "I've met with many of the servicemen. I like to encourage them to go on," he told an interviewer. "We've got to do something."[64]

Military tours also offered an important, albeit risky, steppingstone for performers looking for a way to connect with potential fans and gain valuable touring experience. The predominantly homosocial spaces of male military life seemed to attract tours by young women performers. Pat Campbell, a young woman from Nashville, traveled all over the U.S. and the world singing for soldiers. While on tour in Vietnam during the particularly violent Tet Offensive, Campbell participated in the fight, firing a 105-millimeter Howitzer cannon at Viet Cong forces, before entertaining a crowd of one thousand cheering troops. After her return home, Campbell recalled how on one rainy day in the jungle, "the mortars started coming in," just as she walked out onto the stage. "I screamed and started looking for cover and the guys all laughed and applauded. They were accustomed to that kind of pressure, I suppose . . . I sang until 'Charley' (G.I. term for the Viet Cong) started coming in." The military awarded Campbell several commendations for her service, including an artillery lanyard, a green beret from Special Forces, and a Combat Infantry Badge. *Country Song Roundup* sexualized Campbell as a "brown eyed 5'2" package of TNT" who was "single, weighs 105 pounds and likes '. . . anything

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[63] "Hank Snow Eager for More Viet Nam," *CMA Close-Up*, February 1967, 6, FLA; "An Interview with Bill Anderson," *Country Song Roundup*, February 1968, 15-17, FLA; Bill Anderson, "My German Tour," *Country Song Roundup*, March 1968, 17-18, FLA; Saburo Kawahara, "Special Report on Country Music in Japan," *Country Song Roundup*, February 1968, 43-44, FLA; "To Tokyo, Taiwan and Thailand with Jeannie Seely," *Country Song Roundup,* November 1969, 8-11, FLA; "A Picture Story: 'Red Sovine in Vietnam,'" *Country Song Roundup*, April 1970, 10-13, FLA; "We Talk to Justin Tubb," *Country Song Roundup*, June 1968, 42-43, FLA.
[64] "Roy Acuff . . Country Music's Bob Hope," *Country Song Roundup*, June 1970, 18, 47, FLA.

athletic.'"[65] Four years before Jane Fonda posed on a North Vietnamese anti-aircraft gun and was castigated as a sex symbol-turned-traitor, U.S. soldiers could cheer and ogle female country singers like Campbell, who not only did not protest but actually participated in the battle.

Between these regular tours on the military circuit, the free promotional records distributed by WSM, and the steady play of country music on the AFRTS, Music Row capitalized on its association with the U.S. military mission in Vietnam. In November 1967, the board of the Country Music Association (CMA) invited representatives from the Defense Department and the AFRTS to its banquet and awards show. The country music's industry's most powerful business actors, people like Connie B. Gay and Joe Allison, had formed the CMA in 1958 to guide the commercial growth of the genre. The organization presented the military officials with a bronze tablet engraved with the message, "The Country Music Association Salutes the United States Armed Forces Protecting Us Around the World." U.S. Air Force Colonel Robert Eby, Commander of the AFRTS, accepted the award. He told the crowd that his network only selected the best entertainment for the troops and that the large amount of country music on the air was no arbitrary decision. As *CMA Close-Up*, the CMA's newsletter, reported, Colonel Eby explained that the proliferation of country music was "based on the simple fact that service men and women all over consistently request more Country Music" than other genres.[66] The *Close-Up* also relayed how the Defense Department had commissioned the CMA to produce a film about country music "for the use of the AFRTS in support of the overseas Federal Crusade for health and welfare funds" and how servicemembers "voted overwhelmingly for a country music theme for their campaign promotion."[67]

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[65] "Pat Campbell . . . TNT," *Country Song Roundup*, December 1968, 16, FLA.
[66] "CMA Military Awards Get Top Priority," *CMA Close-Up*, November 1967, 2, FLA.
[67] "CMA Coordinates AFRTS TV," *CMA Close-Up*, November 1967, 6, FLA.

Individual country singers also voiced their patriotic support for the troops with flag-waving hits. These songs spoke from, or at least for, a political position that loathed dissent as it was then expressed by the antiwar movement. In 1966, Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler, a member of the U.S. Special Forces and a Vietnam veteran, scored a number 2 country hit with "Ballad of the Green Berets," a militaristic tribute to the army's elite soldiers.[68] That same year, a honky-tonker from North Carolina named Stonewall Jackson released "The Minute Men (Are Turning in Their Graves)." Written by Harlan Howard, this banjo-driven song includes a militaristic snare beat and cast suspicion on those who "march in lines and carry signs protesters one and all / They'd rather go to prison than to heed their country's call."[69]

Like so many other country musicians, Jackson discovered his talent for singing and songwriting in the late 1940s while serving in the military, which he had joined to escape rural poverty. He briefly joined the army at age 16 by falsifying his birth certificate, but that stint lasted only a few weeks before his commanding officers found the truth about his age. He then joined the navy legally at 17. Although he had played guitar for a few years and written a handful of songs, Jackson said that in the navy "is where most of my country music career started. I started writing more and I found my fellow sailors had quite an interest in my style of singing and pickin." The captain of his ship, the *U.S.S. Kittywake*, was a fan of country music and even loaned Jackson the first "real good guitar" he had ever used.[70] For Jackson, a white southern veteran who had served during the Korean War, witnessing antiwar protests in the mid-1960s challenged his experience with the military as an institution of economic and professional uplift, and those protests challenged what many Americans defined as patriotism.

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[68] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 367.
[69] Stonewall Jackson, "The Minute Men (Are Turning in Their Graves)," Columbia 4-43552, 45 rpm, 1966.
[70] Stonewall Jackson, "The Stonewall Jackson Story," *Country Song Roundup*, May 1969, 9, FLA.

Jackson would soon find himself in the minority with his support for the war. By 1968, a majority of Americans believed sending troops to Vietnam had been a mistake, reaching 58 percent by 1969.[71] But as popular support for the war waned and more Americans identified with the politics, if not the tactics, of the antiwar movement, a few country performers doubled-down on the expressions of jingoistic pride. No artist captured that recalcitrant support for the U.S. military and its role in anti-communist foreign policy like Merle Haggard. In 1969, Haggard released his single "Okie from Muskogee," which, on its face exalted the thrills of small-town America and the virtues of living the square life where, "We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse / And white lighting's still the biggest thrill of all." The support for the military and the Vietnam War comes through in lines like "We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street / We like livin' right, and bein' free."[72] Although many listeners and scholars have conflated Haggard's personal beliefs with those expressed in the song, the truth was more complicated. Haggard was born in California to Dust Bowl migrants from Oklahoma, and therefore something of an Okie himself. He wrote "Okie from Muskogee," with his drummer, as a satirical character study of a certain conservative mindset. He meant it as a joke, but the joke got away from him.[73]

Haggard debuted the song during a concert to U.S. Army soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The soldiers erupted in applause, hearing a rebuttal to the antiwar protestors in the voice of someone who supported the troops regardless of the mission or the popularity of the war. Encouraged by the reaction, Haggard quickly recorded the tune, and it shot to number one. He followed the single with a live album recorded in Muskogee at which the state's governor

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[71] Frank Newport and Joseph Carroll, "Iraq Versus Vietnam: A Comparison of Public Opinion," *Gallup*, August 24, 2005, https://news.gallup.com/poll/18097/iraq-versus-vietnam-comparison-public-opinion.aspx.
[72] Merle Haggard and the Strangers, "Okie from Muskogee," Capitol Records 2626, 45 rpm, 1969.
[73] Rachel Lee Rubin, *331/3: Okie from Muskogee* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

presented him with the key to the city. Haggard proved to be a cagey interviewee when reporters pressed him on the intention of the song and how closely it reflected his own beliefs. Yet the enthusiasm for the song was undeniable on both sides of the political divide of the war. It earned Haggard an invitation to the Nixon White House, while countercultural groups like the Grateful Dead added the song to their repertoire in sincere admiration for Haggard as an artist and an ironic embrace of the opinions expressed in the song.[74]

Pressed by his label, Capitol Records, to take advantage the momentum created by "Okie," Haggard and others dipped back into the well of jingoism. Haggard returned in early 1970 with the single "The Fightin' Side of Me." This new song admonished the "people talkin' bad / About the way they have to live here in this country" and who were "Harpin' on the wars we fight / And gripin' 'bout the way things oughta be." The chorus challenged dissenters with an ultimatum and a threat of violence: "If you don't love it, leave it / Let this song that I'm singin' be a warnin' / When you're runnin' down our country, hoss / You're walkin' on the fightin' side of me."[75] Haggard's caricature of conservative attitudes towards the war inspired others. Ernest Tubb turned in "It's America (Love It or Leave It)" the same year as "Fightin' Side." Tubb's song began by naming the counterculture and implying that protestors were spoiled children who did not appreciate the privilege of a college education or their American citizenship. "Well I'm gettin' mighty tired," Tubb delivered in his deadpan baritone, "of seein' hippies runnin' wild / And burnin' down the schools and steppin' on the flag."[76] The Texas Troubadour had scored a moderate hit with his patriotic song "It's For God, And Country, And You Mom (That's Why

[74] Ibid.
[75] Merle Haggard and the Strangers, "The Fightin' Side of Me," Capitol Records 2719, 45 rpm, 1970.
[76] Ernest Tubb, "It's America (Love It or Leave It)," on *A Good Year for the Wine*, Decca Records DL-75222, 45 rpm, 1970.

I'm Fighting in Viet Nam)" in 1966, which reached number 48 on the *Billboard* chart.[77] Yet Tubb's "It's America" fell flat with audiences and failed to chart.

The most brazen attempt to cash in on war-themed country music came from a disc jockey named Terry Nelson. He, along with a band of studio musicians calling themselves C Company, cut the song "The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley" in 1971, which quickly sold over one million copies. Three years earlier, Lt. William Calley and his men in Company C of the 20th Infantry Regiment had slaughtered of more than 500 unarmed Vietnamese civilians. The mass murder, known as the My Lai Massacre, came to the attention of the American people in 1969 and led to the indictment of twenty-six U.S. Army soldiers, although only Lt. Calley drew a conviction.[78] "The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley," set to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," defended Lt. Calley as an innocent American soldier who had dreamed of serving his country in the military since boyhood, only to be betrayed by the country he loved for fulfilling his patriotic duty. Nashville-based Plantation Records then timed the release of the single to coincide with Calley's court martial verdict, giving the label its biggest hit since Jeannie C. Riley's "Harper Valley PTA," written by Tom T. Hall.[79]

Terry Nelson spun records at WWWR in Russellville, Alabama when he teamed up with the song's writers Julian Wilson and James M. Smith to cut "Lt. Calley" at nearby FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals. *Country Song Roundup* profiled Nelson for a two-page spread in November 1971 entitled "Terry Nelson The All-American Boy." The magazine described Nelson's speaking voice as "quiet, soft" and depicted his pre-fame life with signifiers of the rural South like driving a tractor, picking cotton, and feeding livestock, which gave him "a deep

[77] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 429.
[78] Seymour M. Hersh, "Coverup," *The New Yorker*, January 22, 1972.
[79] Hughes, *Country Soul*, 142.

appreciation for the simple things in life, such as music." He had "blond hair and blue eyes" and his "pet peeve is people who pretend to be something they aren't."[80] If the backing band for "The Battle Hymn of Lt. Calley" took the name C Company, then Nelson and his "All-American" image represented Calley himself. Together, they exonerated the reputation of the most notorious soldier in the Vietnam War by depicting Nelson, and by extension, Calley, as the authentic blonde-haired, blue-eyed, unpretentious American patriot.

Not all country music jumped onboard with the wartime chauvinism. Loretta Lynn released "Dear Uncle Sam" in 1966, an epistolary song to the federal government that reminded the Pentagon of the human cost of war. She begins, "Dear Uncle Sam, I know you're a busy man / And tonight I write to you through tears with a trembling hand." Lynn goes on to describe how her man, a patriot, answered the call to serve but that service had left her with nothing but loneliness and worry. "He proudly wears the colors of the old red, white, and blue," she sang, "While I wear a heartache since he left me for you." By the end of the song, the singer has received the worst possible news. "Dear Uncle Sam I just got your telegram / And I can't believe that this is me shaking like I am / For it said I'm sorry to inform you." Lynn ends abruptly, leaving the listener to imagine the confirmation of death.

Mel Tillis, a singer-songwriter and U.S. Air Force veteran, released the song "Stateside" in October 1967. The air force had stationed Tillis in Okinawa in the mid-1950s, where he formed a country group called The Westerners and notched his first professional experience. "Stateside" reflected Tillis's own experience, as well as the emotions of servicemembers deployed to Asia for the latest war. With a nod to Hank Locklin, Tillis sang "The geeshee girls don't understand the lonely life of a service man / When his heart is far away to a girl in the

[80] "Terry Nelson The All-American Boy," *Country Song Roundup*, November 1971, 16-17, FLA.

U.S.A. / I wanna go stateside, oh Lord, I wanna go stateside."[81] He also wrote "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town," which told of a paralyzed veteran who threatened violence on his lover when he could no longer satisfy her needs. Tillis found inspiration for the song from people he had known in his hometown, a World War II veteran and his British war bride. He altered the lyrics to fit the Vietnam era with the lines, "It wasn't me that started this whole crazy Asian war / But I was proud to go and do my patriotic chore." Waylon Jennings recorded the song in 1966, followed by Roger Miller, Johnny Darrell, and Tillis himself song in 1967. However, it would not become a lasting hit until Kenny Rogers and the First Edition covered it in 1969.[82]

Tom T. Hall wrote the song "Mama Bake a Pie (Daddy Kill a Chicken)," which George Kent released in 1970, followed by Hall's own version in 1971. Like his other military-themed tunes, the song uses the first-person voice, this time to relay the story of a wheelchair-bound Vietnam veteran arriving home from the war. Hall begins, "People staring at me as they wheel me down the ramp toward my plane / The war is over for me I've forgotten everything except the pain." As the veteran comes into contact with more civilians who inquire about his condition, he makes listeners aware of their questions by giving his side of the conversation with lines like "Thank you sir, and yes sir / It was worth it for the ol' red, white, and blue." The titular chorus makes a simple request for his homecoming meal, "Mama bake a pie, Daddy kill a chicken / Your son is coming home, 11:35 Wednesday night."[83] Throughout the tune, audiences hear only the voice of the soldier and his projections about the reactions his family and acquaintances. Listeners learn that the disabled veterans' parents do not know what to say, his drunk uncle

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[81] Mel Tillis, with Walter Wager, *Stutterin' Boy* (New York: Rawson Associates, 1984), 72-84; Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 420; Mel Tillis, "Stateside," Kapp Records 722, 45 rpm, 1967.
[82] Tillis, *Stutterin' Boy*, 170-171; Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 360.
[83] Tom T. Hall, "Mama Bake a Pie (Daddy Kill a Chicken)," on *100 Children*, Mercury SR 61307, 33 1/3 rpm, 1970.

makes an awkward suggestion about acquiring wooden legs, and his former girlfriend is uninterested in staying by his side. The young man leans on the self-medicating comfort of alcohol, which he keeps in a bottle under the blanket covering his legs.

With this familiar first-person narration, Hall used his song to cut through the political din of hawks versus doves and fights over who was or was not patriotic. He made people listen to the consequences of the war, consequences that included psychological isolation, chemical dependency, and a loss of physical intimacy. Hall understood the ambivalence and dread with which soldiers and their families faced the nation's role in Vietnam, and he put those emotions into words with which they might sing along, blending their voices with the voice of his anonymous, wheelchair-bound soldier. He gave his audience the tools and the permission to dissent from the Cold War political consensus that demanded loyalty to the Pentagon's mission of global intervention.

Race, Recruitment, and Politics

If the country music industry's connections with military service provided space for this diversity of political opinions, it struggled to accommodate any performers other than white artists, no matter their connection to the armed forces. Military historians have noted how white soldiers used country music as a symbol of white supremacist pride in their confrontations with black soldiers. Using the sound of country music, white soldiers marked all space within the projection of their speakers as an area controlled by them. The military was rife with racial conflict during Vietnam, and arguments over music served as a proxy for and sometimes as a catalyst for violence between black and white troops. Historian Ronald H. Spector has written that black soldiers often complained about the lack of soul music, and that a service club at "Cam Ranh Bay that featured almost exclusively country and western music was the scene of a near

riot and 'threats to burn the club down.'"[84] In his study of southern veterans, James R. Wilson called white southerners use of country music in Vietnam a "provincial hallmark," noting that "Armed Forces radio blanketed Vietnam with the lonesome, often propagandistic wail of country music."[85]

But it was not all country music in Vietnam. The Special Services and the AFRTS also booked other genres for concerts and played a variety of styles over the air. Top 40 pop music remained the most played genre on the radio and the style preferred by most soldiers.[86] And by the late 1960s, the armed forces could no longer ignore or sideline the entertainment interests of black servicemembers. The USO booked civilian rock, soul, folk, jazz, and pop groups for tours of Vietnam. Soldiers continued to form their own Special Services bands that played those genres. Special Services put together all-black bands to address the musical interests of black soldiers. One such group, the Soul Chordinators, toured encampments and frontline battle positions, playing a mixture of Motown and pop hits like "Cloud Nine," "Heard It Through the Grapevine," and "These Eyes," along with rock songs by Jimi Hendrix, including "Hey Joe," "Fire," and "Purple Haze."[87]

Despite these advancements in entertainment, black musicians often endured the same racial inequality in military settings as they had in civilian life. In June 1968, James Brown suffered ill treatment at the hands of white soldiers while on a USO tour of Vietnam, Japan, and

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[84] Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam*, (New York: Free Press, 1993), 247.
[85] James R. Wilson, *Landing Zones: Southern Veterans Remember Vietnam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), xi. Wilson suggests that country music's patriotic songs created a "social and political milieu that generally made it easier for southern veterans to come home than their comrades from other parts of the world." Although this likely conflates "southern" to mean "white," his point about the pervasiveness of country music and its connection to political attitudes that supported U.S. militarism remain correct.
[86] "Service Men 'Dig' Country Music," *CMA Close-Up*, February 1972, 2, FLA.
[87] "After Action Report 'Soul Coordinators'"; CMTS Tours – Soul Coordinators (78) – Aug. 10, 1970; Records Regarding Command Military Touring Shows (CMTS) Tours in Vietnam; USARV, SSA (Prov)/Athletic, Rec. and Ent. Division, Entertainment Branch; Container 44; Records of the U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia, 1950-1976, RG 472; NACP.

Korea. Brown had volunteered his time to go to southeast Asia to entertain the troops and expected the army to accommodate his needs. After feeling slighted by the hospitality that the army provided, Brown contacted President Lyndon Johnson. "Mr. President," Brown handwrote on hotel stationary, "Since we arrived in Korea I have received very bad treatment and no courtesy . . . I am being very patriotic. Please sir can't you do something. Please let me come home feeling like a good American. I am a black man and I wish that I could be accepted as a man." Brown had not experienced problems with the shows, which he claimed drew "the biggest crowds ever over here," but he did complain that the "small ranking soldier finds it very hard to get in to see the show and we are doing two shows a day." He closed by thanking Johnson for having him for dinner at the White House and wishing the best for the president. He signed the letter, "Your fellow American, James Brown," and then added, "Am I an American?"[88] Brown had given his time, talent, and resources to the war effort and was one of the most successful black artists of the 1960s. Yet, in the context of the military, he felt that soldiers treated him with disrespect, not fully a man nor a fellow American.

Not all black servicemembers and musicians played soul music nor did they experience the same kind of racism endured by Brown. O.B. McClinton, a black singer-songwriter from Senatobia, Mississippi, found that performing country music for military audiences offered a way to gain fandom and respect while serving overseas. Born in 1940, McClinton's love of country music made him something of an outsider among his peers and family. He tuned into WSM to hear the *Grand Ole Opry*, as well as the rhythm and blues played on WDIA out of Memphis, Tennessee, 50 miles to the north of his hometown.[89] In 1957, McClinton dropped out

[88] James Brown to Lyndon Johnson, June 11, 1968; 723-01 Rec & Entertainment Case Files, James Brown File; Morale SUPP Mixed FLS 68; Acc. 73-0010, Container 1; TAGO, RG 407; NACP.
[89] Interview with Cloteal Fitzpatrick, McClinton's sister, by the author, March 4, 2016.

of high school, left Senatobia, and hitched a ride on a lumber truck that took him to Memphis, where he bussed tables at a local Mexican restaurant and practiced singing to the customers.[90] During the early 1960s, McClinton earned a GED and then a bachelor's degree at Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where he started writing songs. Two of his efforts landed with soul singers signed to local labels. Otis Redding recorded McClinton's "Keep Your Arms Around Me," while James Carr cut "You've Got My Mind Messed Up."[91]

In 1966, with the draft looming, McClinton opted to join the air force rather than risk placement in the army or Marines. He entered basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, where heard the country music played on the radio and the bars around the city. When the air force stationed McClinton at Kadena Air Base on Okinawa, the boredom of life on base meant that he focused more on songwriting and kept up with the latest hits through the Armed Forces Radio. During his stay on Okinawa, McClinton penned a follow-up tune for Clarence Carter's "Slip Away," which he titled "Let Me Comfort You." Carter released McClinton's song in 1968. This success led to a five-year songwriting contract with producer Rick Hall's FAME Publishing Company in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.[92]

The air force also presented McClinton with his first real opportunity to hone his craft as a performer, and when he did, he channeled his efforts into country music rather than the soul music he had written in civilian life. The then-recent success of Charley Pride, an army veteran and country music's lone black superstar, inspired this move. McClinton discovered Pride's debut album in a fellow airman's record collection. "That's when I started," he told author Rob Bowman. "When I was stationed on Okinawa, there was a lot of country and western bands over

[90] McClinton and Wood, *Hard Way to Go*, 25.
[91] Ibid., 37-46.
[92] Ibid., 61-69.

there." One night, his fellow airmen urged McClinton to take the mic and upstage the singer for a local country band. When McClinton belted out "Folsom Prison Blues," the bar erupted. "So after that I started working at a lot of clubs on Okinawa, the Army base, and down at the Marine base, and I would work at the Air Force NCO club. Then I started writing more country oriented songs while I was in the service."[93]

McClinton landed back in Memphis after his discharge from the service in 1970 and looked for a path to jumpstart his performing career. Catching wind that Stax's Al Bell was working in Muscle Shoals, McClinton parlayed his connections there to make a visit. He booked himself into the Holiday Inn in a room next to Bell's and waited for him to return from a session at FAME Studios. McClinton then played Bell some demos by a "friend from the service" trying to break into country music. Bell loved what he heard and expressed interest in signing the unknown artist. When McClinton revealed the demo artist was actually himself, Bell refused to believe until McClinton sang along. Shortly thereafter, Bell offered McClinton a contract and $10,000 advance.[94] With money in his pocket, record label backing, a batch of songs, and a well-honed stage persona, McClinton seemed to hold all the necessary cards for success in country music. Now Bell and the Stax staff only had to negotiate the odd calculus of marketing a black man in the genre during the height of the Silent Majority's political counterrevolution.

An early Stax press release delighted in optimism about McClinton's future of breaking the Jim Crow barriers of country music, saying that, "Country music for Blacks, like soul music for whites, had always had a 'do not sing' sign on it." The promotional material then absolved potential white audiences and radio programmers of any wrongdoing, noting that the "problem"

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[93] Rob Bowman, "O.B. McClinton: Country Music, That's My Thing," *The Journal of Country Music* 14, no. 2 (January 1992): 26.
[94] McClinton and Wood, *Hard Way to Go*, 101-103; Bowman, 26.

with the sign "was no one knew who put it there or how it got there. However, since music has many times broken the code of category restrictions, it has become synonymous with freedom to many musicians."[95] With this ebullient attitude, McClinton and the Stax offices did their best to push this racial outsider into an ostensibly pure white genre, releasing four albums between 1972 and 1974, *O.B. McClinton Country*, *Obie from Senatobie*, *Live at Randy's Rodeo*, and *If You Loved Her That Way*. Although his debut failed to produce a hit, he broke into country radio with a cover of Wilson Pickett's "Don't Let the Green Grass Fool You," as well as the title track from *Obie from Senatobie*.

As the name suggests, "Obie from Senatobie" offered a humorous play on Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee." It reiterated the singer's pride in his small-town roots and deep southern accent that coded not as white or black, but as a country voice, which seems always on the verge of breaking into laughter. The opening verse recounts his time joining the air force and how he announced that he hailed from Senatobia to his drill sergeant rather than rounding up to the closest big city like the other recruits had done. The chorus brags, "You can just call me Obie from Senatobie / And you better believe, that's a Mississippi town / We still eat watermelon at the Tate County gin house / And we drink home brew when the sun goes down."[96]

A black man bragging about eating watermelon, that symbol of alleged black carnality and theft, situated at the gin house, that local institution of monocrop capitalism and predatory exchange, all set to a chugging country beat, created a potent statement of country pride, almost to the point of disbelief. It is possible that McClinton made a spoof of white conservative anger. After all, he did campaign for Edmund Muskie, a candidate for the Democratic presidential

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[95] "O.B. McClinton, The 'Black Country Irishman,'" Stax Press release, Stax Museum of American Soul Music Archives, Memphis, Tennessee.
[96] O.B. McClinton, *Obie From Senatobie*, Enterprise Records ENS-1029, 33 1/3 rpm, 1973.

nomination, in 1972.[97] But more than likely, McClinton simply emphasized his country bona fides, including his military service, despite his support for the antiwar Muskie rather than caricaturing the Silent Majority. McClinton's skin made him an outsider, even as everything else about him, including his military service, signaled insider. Eventually, his race proved too big an obstacle in his quest for commercial and critical legitimacy. McClinton spent the late 1970s and early 1980s relegated to constant touring, hocking albums on infomercials, and trying to win over audiences on Ralph Emery's *Nashville Now* before he passed away in 1987 from abdominal cancer.

Regardless of country artists' personal feelings about the war, dozens of performers participated in military recruitment throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The U.S. Air Force had created its recruitment radio show *Country Music Time* in the 1950s, originally hosted by Tom Daniels of *Stickbuddy Jamboree* fame, and extended it into the Vietnam era and beyond. During the Vietnam War, country stars of all political persuasions participated in the effort. In 1967, a World War II veteran and ex-AFRTS disc jockey named Charlie Walker made an appearance on the show. At the time, Walker enjoyed a modest performing career and pushed his first hit from 1958 "Pick Me Up on Your Way Down" as well as his then-current releases "The Town That Never Sleeps," "Don't Squeeze My Sharmon," and "It's No Secret What God Can Do," to round out a set of sin, humor, and redemption.[98] In the middle of Walker's set, the music stopped for a message from Sergeant Tom Shaw, who made a pitch to men and women to consider the

[97] McClinton promotional materials, Stax Museum of American Soul Music Archives.
[98] "Charlie Walker/Bob Luman," *Country Music Time*; 342-CMT-1/2; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; Records of U.S. Air Force Commands, Activities, and Organizations, 1900 - 2003, RG 342; NACP. It made sense for Charlie Walker to star on the show. He had worked as a DJ in Texas since the early 1940s, and while stationed in Japan during WWII, Walker had made a name for himself by broadcasting American hillbilly music from Tokyo on the Armed Forces Radio Network. He returned to his stateside radio job in San Antonio after the war, where he reigned as one of the top ten most popular DJs in the country for 10 consecutive years from 1952-1962. See Bill Sachs, "Folk Talent and Tunes," *Billboard*, February 10, 1962, 46; Ronnie Pugh, "Charlie Walker," *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 567.

educational opportunities through the air force's "Operation Bootstrap." This program paid for two-thirds of an enlistee's college education and provided night classes on base taught by professors from nearby universities.[99] With messaging like this, the air force piggybacked onto the markets traditionally targeted by country music while artists used the program to promote themselves.

Artists cut their segments for *Country Music Time* in Nashville recording facilities with session musicians, complete with a small audience (or at least the band) to provide clapping and generally aid in the organic feel of the show. Engineers later spliced these songs together with prerecorded interjections from the air force recruiter as seamlessly as possible. O.B. McClinton recorded six sessions for *Country Music Time* over his career and remembered his tour in the air force fondly to listeners. "I always feel at home on one of these good old air force shows being an old ex-sergeant myself," he confided on one show, telling the host, "That's right. I did four years, twenty-nine days, and a duffle bag drag."[100] Outtakes from the *Country Music Time* sessions reveal this production technique. On an episode with the Carter Family, the band members read from a script, engaging in a one-sided conversation with a silent recruiting officer, leaving space for his side of the dialogue to be punched in at another time. To fit the theme of the show, the Carter Family sang the Civil War-era ballad "The Faded Coat of Blue," in which a mother mourns the death of her son, a Union soldier.[101] Other artists pulled off the staged

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[99] Richard Adams Bartlett, "Operation Bootstrap: Teaching the Young Men of Today and Tomorrow," *American Association of University Professors Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1956): 482-487.
[100] "Little Jimmy Dickens/O.B. McClinton," *Country Music Time*, 342-CMT-923/924; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; RG 342; NACP.
[101] "Margaret Lewis/The Carter Family and Dave Dudley," *Country Music Time*; 342-CMT-19/20; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; RG 342; NACP; J.H. McNaughton, "The Faded Coat of Blue" (Caledonia: J.H. McNaughton, 1865), Notated Music, LOC, https://www.loc.gov/item/ihas.200001608/.

dialogue a bit more convincingly, like Jeannie C. Riley's flirtatious exchange before her cover of "The Fightin' Side of Me," in which she purrs a come-on to the recruiting officer.[102]

In spite of Riley's selection, the artists on *Country Music Time* did not promote a singular political message. For every "Fightin' Side of Me," there was the Carter Family's reworking of a Civil War-era ballad about the emotional devastation delivered to a family when a son dies in the line of battle and trades his faded coat of blue for a robe of white in heaven. In 1968, honky tonker Johnny Darrell performed a somber version of "Green, Green Grass of Home," a song he had the first cut on in 1965. Written by World War II veteran Curly Putman, "Green, Green Grass of Home" told the story of a death row inmate dreaming of reuniting with his loved ones only to awaken in the reality of his cell just prior to his execution.[103] Heard in the context of a military enlistment advertisement in the midst of the Vietnam War, Darrell's delivery sounded less like the perspective of a condemned prisoner and more like empathy for the homesickness and threat of mortal danger faced by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam.

Country Music Time also provided cover for artists traditionally associated with militarism or conservatism to try different approaches. Sergeant Barry Sadler, of "The Ballad of the Green Berets" fame, recorded a painfully stilted version of "Sunday Morning Coming Down," a song written by army veteran Kris Kristofferson and made famous by air force veteran Johnny Cash about the struggles of a hangover.[104] Similarly, Stonewall Jackson performed his 1968 release "I Believe in Love." With a stark departure from his "Minute Men" hit, Jackson sang lines more closely identified with the hippie counterculture than with country music

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[102] "Jeannie C. Riley," *Country Music Time*; 342-CMT-21; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; RG 342, NACP.
[103] "Johnny Darrell/Stonewall Jackson," *Country Music Time*; 342-CMT-61/62; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; RG 342; NACP.
[104] "Billie Jo Spears and Barry Sadler/Ray Stevens," *Country Music Time*; 342-CMT-13/14; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; RG 342; NACP.

militarism. "I believe in love," Jackson sang. "I think that peace should rule the world to please the Lord above / Before we die, what shall we try? / I believe in love."[105] Country listeners and potential recruits may have bought into the politics that brought economic opportunity through the military-industrial complex. But that did not mean they experienced the pains of war with any less ambivalence or trepidation as their countercultural counterparts who articulated what scholars have considered more normative expressions of protests in more expected venues and with more predictable genres.

Country artists kept participating in these recruitment campaigns, in part, because U.S. servicemembers and their families kept buying country records. By 1968, country records accounted for approximately 65 percent of the records sold in European PXs. Those totals equaled about $4.2 million in sales for country records alone. Charles Hendrickson, the EES record buyer, told *Billboard* that "Country, rhythm and blues, and pop account for 85 per cent of all our record sales. But country dominates the market. This is proved, not only by our sales, but also by letters to the Allied Forces Network." According to Hendrickson, country programs drew 1,200 letters per week from soldier and civilian listeners.[106] With so many military listeners around the world and with so much money at stake, country artists naturally sang about the issues affecting the nation's servicemembers and their families. Sometimes that meant a rousing version of Merle Haggard's "The Fightin' Side of Me" and sometimes it meant something as sobering and implicitly antiwar as Tom T. Hall's "Mama Bake a Pie."

There was no clear partisan through line to country music's ties with the military that could connect the genre to political conservatism, even if politicians assumed there was. That

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[105] "Johnny Darrell/Stonewall Jackson," *Country Music Time*; 342-CMT-61/62; Audio Recordings from the "Country Music Time" Program Series, 1961 - 1986; RG 342; NACP.
[106] Omer Anderson, "Country Wins Europe GI's To Tune of $4.2 Mil. Yearly," *Billboard*, January 13, 1968, 1.

assumption informed President Richard Nixon's decision to appear on the *Grand Ole Opry* on March 16, 1974, during the opening celebration of the brand-new Grand Ole Opry House on the outskirts of Nashville, Tennessee. The Opry had moved from the Ryman Auditorium in downtown Nashville into a state-of-the-art facility in the suburbs, complete with plenty of parking and a country music theme park called Opryland. Dogged by Watergate and the waning days of the U.S. offensive in Vietnam, Nixon could have used a night of performative lighthearted fun. He sought refuge with those Americans he considered his base, the "law and order" voters he had deemed the "Silent Majority." He expected the *Opry*'s fans, whether in attendance or listening over WSM's radio broadcast, remained *his* fans, part of the 24 percent of Americans who still approved of the president at his lowest point or the 29 percent who still considered Vietnam worth fighting as late as 1973.[107] The show's longtime host Roy Acuff introduced him, telling the crowd that Nixon remained "one of our finest Presidents. You are a great man. We love you."[108]

Yet, more than seeking positive press coverage among friendly faces, the president diluted the negativity around his administration with the presumably populist and patriotic sounds of country music.[109] Nixon began his appearance at the *Opry* by praising the genre as something exceptionally American. "First, country music is American. It started here, it is ours. It isn't something that we learned from some other nation," he told the faithful. "[I]t isn't something that we inherited." He then recounted how country stars like Roy Acuff and Merle

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[107] "Presidential Approval Ratings," http://news.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx; Gallup Vault: Hawks v. Doves on Vietnam," http://news.gallup.com/vault/191828/gallup-vault-hawks-doves-vietnam.aspx

[108] Richard Nixon, "Remarks at the Grand Ole Opry House, Nashville, Tennessee," March 16, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-grand-ole-opry-house-nashville-tennessee.

[109] Pecknold, *The Selling Sound*, 224. Pecknold argues that in Kevin Phillips's *The Emerging Republican Majority*, the Republican Party connected with white voters' socio-cultural resentments tied to race and class identity in order to win over white conservative Democrats.

Haggard had played his White House. Acuff had performed alongside Bob Hope for a reception of U.S. POWs recently freed from a North Vietnamese prison. Nixon claimed that when he asked the freed POWs why they enjoyed country music so much, they replied, "Well, you have got to understand, we understood it." The president then clarified the soldiers' response in terms of country music's, and specifically Acuff's, old-timey authenticity, explaining, "They knew it. In other words, it went back a few years, but they understood it, and it touched them and touched them deeply after that long time away from America."[110]

Nixon's supposed affinity for country music represented an attempt to flatter the *Opry* crowd. Besides noting the genre's alleged ancestral Americanism, the president claimed that country music "talks about family, it talks about religion, the faith in God that is so important to our country and particularly to our family life. And as we all know," with a reference to the genre's ties to the military, "country music radiates a love of this Nation, patriotism." He asserted that country music's abiding patriotism reflected the strong "character" of its fans and artists. Americans needed that kind of character according to the president, who was only five months away from resigning in disgrace, in order to ensure world peace for generations to come. As he told the Nashville crows, "it is going to depend on our character, our belief in ourselves, our love of our country, our willingness to not only wear the flag but to stand up for the flag. And country music does that." The audience then sang "Stay All Night (Stay a Little Longer)" for the president, the Western Swing standard that had been the theme song to *Country Style,*

[110] Richard Nixon, "Remarks at the Grand Ole Opry House, Nashville, Tennessee," March 16, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-grand-ole-opry-house-nashville-tennessee. Haggard had appeared in 1973 before to sing "Okie from Muskogee" and "The Fightin' Side of Me."

U.S.A. To end his time on stage, Nixon sat down at the piano and led the crowd in a sing-along of "God Bless America."[111]

Nixon's speech and his very presence at the *Opry* conflated country music patriotism, conservative political values, and military service. He wanted a public relations boost from his base. What the president and his strategists failed to realize was that country music's allegiance to U.S. militarism had less to do with partisan politics and more to do with the economics of the music business. The country music industry, not its individual artists and fans, had aligned itself with the military. As the Cold War consensus fractured over the Vietnam War, the country music business still benefited from its participation in recruitment programs and its sales to servicemembers. But a business relationship with the Pentagon did not mean that country artists blindly backed the president's politics.

Tom T. Hall refused to surrender country music as the soundtrack for the so-called Silent Majority. In a 1973 interview with *Rolling Stone*, Hall told the rock magazine, "I always believed that a writer ought to say for people what they can't say for themselves. And I think there's a lot of those people at peace marches and military bases." He then added, "I don't think George Wallace speaks for the silent majority. Lawrence Welk does."[112] With that statement, Hall dispelled the assumption white southerners, blue collar workers, and country music fans were solely responsible for the rise of Nixonian politics. He fired a shot in a culture war to defend servicemembers like himself who had joined the armed forces in search of a better future or simply because the draft had forced them into duty. Hall knew and had participated in the alignment of the country music industry and U.S. militarism. The U.S. military branded itself

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[111] Ibid.
[112] Les Bridges, "Tom T. Hall: When the Women Hiss, He Says . . .," *Rolling Stone*, June 21, 1973, Box 53, Folder L, The Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music, NMAH Archives Center.

with the country sounds of whiteness, while offering its audiences an economic leg-up. In return, country music received a tax-free venue to push its product and the endorsement of the federal government as an appropriate genre for patriotic consumption. But Hall also knew that country music fans did not harbor some inherent, white working-class disposition for military service or political conservatism. Artists and fans felt tied to the military because of a long history of alignment between the country music business and the political economy of the military-industrial complex. The music simply told their stories.

Conclusion

"Proud to be an American"

In May 2003, the USO faced accusations of racial discrimination for the scarcity of black hip-hop artists being booked for tours of Iraq. Black troops comprised approximately 27 percent of the fighting force, and servicemembers of all races were fans of the genre. Still, their demands for more hip hop fell on deaf ears. The USO denied any intentional wrongdoing and instead blamed hip-hop artists for not volunteering to go to the latest warzone. The rapper Coolio believed otherwise. He had volunteered for several USO tours, and told *Billboard* magazine that he thought the USO was "afraid we'll get them in trouble," suggesting that hip-hop's reputation for controversy might not align with building troop morale. He certainly did not blame his fellow artists. Instead, Coolio accused the USO of not catering to servicemembers' tastes. "I can only guess they're not asking the troops who they want," he told the magazine, "because most of the cats in the service are young, and I'd say 75% of the troops listen to hip-hop and R&B."[1]

What the soldiers received instead was a predominance of white entertainers and a disproportionate number of country music artists. One veteran USO official commented on why country musicians volunteered to perform for the troops overseas more than other artists. He claimed that the "country music community is traditionally patriotic, with deep ties to the military." "It's that 'good old boy' thing," he explained, "And many musicians in the urban black community have long been distrustful of the military."[2]

If black musicians felt "distrustful of the military," perhaps it was because the military did not support, promote, and fund their genres the way the Pentagon had done for Music Row.

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[1] Bill Holland, "Rap, Hip-Hop AWOL in Iraq," *Billboard*, May 24, 2003, 66.
[2] Ibid.

The country music industry did hold "deep ties" to the military, but they were not the kind of bonds suggested by this USO official. By characterizing country fans as "good old boys" who just naturally joined the military and wanted country music as their in-country entertainment, the USO elided the business dealings at the heart of the Music Row-Pentagon connection. From Connie B. Gay and Faron Young to Elvis Presley and Joe Allison, the country music industry had found ways to profit from U.S. militarism going back to the Korean War. Music Row's connection to patriotic armed service cannot be divorced from the economics of country music militarism. Country music militarism had transformed the genre into the soundtrack of white devotion to the armed forces over the course of the late twentieth century to such an extent that what was actually a longstanding business model looked to be something "traditionally patriotic."

That conflation of race, genre, and American patriotism continues to shape country music's political affiliations into the present day. On January 18, 2017, Thomas Barrack Jr., the chairman of Donald Trump's Presidential Inauguration Committee, commented that he had not asked Kanye West to perform at the inauguration ceremonies despite the hip-hop star's previous support for the new president. Barrack described what he saw as a conflict between the tone of the Trump festivities and West's music. "It's not the venue," Barrack reasoned. "The venue we have for entertainment is filled out. It's perfect. It's going to be typically and traditionally American." Instead of West, a black artist from Chicago, Barrack booked several white country and rock music performers, including Lee Greenwood and Toby Keith. Greenwood, of course, performed "God Bless the U.S.A.," a popular anthem of patriotic fervor since its release in 1984 which candidate Trump used as his theme song at presidential campaign events. Keith played "Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American)," his rant of revenge against the

nation's enemies released in the wake of 9/11, as well as "American Soldier," a more introspective musing on what it means to make self-sacrifice the driving motivation of one's work ethic.[3] With bigger names in popular music declining to participate, the Trump administration knew where to turn, and it turned South to Nashville.

The inclusion of these artists surprised no one. Greenwood had written "God Bless the U.S.A." in 1983 after the Soviet Union downed a Korean Air Lines flight carrying nearly 300 passengers, 63 of whom were Americans. War felt imminent. The motivation to express his national pride came in a torrent of inspiration. As Greenwood later recalled, "The song just about wrote itself. It was as if, within my mind, a strong personal statement had been formulated. It's quite possible that my subconscious had been working on it for a long time." He cited his experiences as Boy Scout in planting his first earnest feelings of patriotism, as well as the stories he heard as a child about World War II.[4]

The song's memorable chorus bragged of unyielding support for the nation and boundless gratitude to the military for securing its safety. Greenwood sings, "And I'm proud to be an American / Where at least I know I'm free / And I won't forget the men who died / Who gave that right to me." He then offers to join in the fight to prove his love, "And I'd gladly stand up next to you / And defend her still today / 'Cause there ain't no doubt I love this land / God Bless the U.S.A."[5] Although critics bemoaned what they heard as schlocky jingoism, "God Bless the

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[3] Jon Caramanica, "Concert for Trump Misses an Opportunity," *The New York Times*, January 19, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/19/arts/music/trump-make-america-great-again-concert-review.html?action=click&contentCollection=Music&module=RelatedCoverage&region=Marginalia&pgtype=articla.

[4] Lee Greenwood and Gwen McLin, *God Bless the U.S.A.: Biography of a Song* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002), 138.

[5] Lee Greenwood, "God Bless the U.S.A.," MCA 52386, 45 rpm, 1983.

U.S.A." gave Greenwood a top-ten country hit, a crossover hit on the adult contemporary charts, and earned the "Song of the Year" award from the Country Music Association in 1984.[6]

Greenwood's song also endeared him to the military and conservative politicians. He embarked on dozens of personal appearances for different branches of the armed forces and USO tours ever since. One visit to the *U.S.S. Kitty Hawk* on patrol in the Pacific ended with its crew standing in a formation to spell out "PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN!"[7] All Republican presidents elected since its release have used the song in their campaigns and inauguration ceremonies. Ronald Reagan invited Greenwood to the White House for dinner and quoted from the song in his 1985 Thanksgiving address to the armed forces, saying, "All of us have much to be grateful for. As Lee Greenwood says in his song about being proud to be an American, we do live in a land where the flag still stands for freedom."[8] Reagan assumed his military audience would understand and appreciate the Greenwood reference. They may have, but PX record sales data also suggested country music's diminishing presence in the armed forces. In 1985, when Reagan delivered his Greenwood-inspired address, soul music had risen to dominance in the PX sales, accounting for over 34 percent of the records sold. Country music had dropped behind this black genre and pop music, logging only 9 percent of the records sold.[9]

What the troops actually bought and enjoyed failed to matter in the political world. What mattered was the fact that country music and the military had branded themselves with each other for the previous half century, and politicians continued to capitalize on that relationship. In 1988, Greenwood, along with other country stars like Crystal Gayle and Loretta Lynn, campaigned for George H.W. Bush, who used "God Bless the U.S.A." as a theme song. Bush

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[6] Whitburn, *Hot Country Songs*, 170.
[7] Greenwood and McLin, *God Bless the U.S.A.*, 172.
[8] Kip Kirby, "Nashville Scene," *Billboard*, November 23, 1985, 44A.
[9] "Soul Leads Armed Forces Record Sales," *Billboard*, December 7, 1985, 57.

called Greenwood one of his "secret weapons" and booked the country star to play the opening ceremonies of his inauguration, where the country singer led a 40-piece U.S. Army Band in his signature song.[10] By the time of Trump's inauguration, Republicans almost automatically turned to Greenwood and his ode to militaristic patriotism to gin up flag-waving sentiments in their base.

There is a similar phenomenon happening with Toby Keith in the early twenty-first century. Beginning in 2002 with the release of his hit "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)," Keith built an image as the most vocal patriot in a genre already known for its proud and pervasive support of the nation's military. "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue" declared common Americans' devotion to the national defense and vowed to support the U.S. military offensive against the terrorists who had attacked the United States. Keith gives Uncle Sam a cameo as a vengeful warrior. The Statue of Liberty steps in as a fist-shaking Athena cheering soldiers into battle. Finally, in the culmination of the last verse, Keith promised the nation's enemies that "You'll be sorry that you messed with The U.S. of A. / 'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass / It's the American way."[11]

Although he was initially reluctant to record the song, Keith released it in May 2002, after being convinced to get it to the public by Marine Corps Commandant General James Jones, who had heard Keith perform the song at a Pentagon concert. In the early days of the war in Afghanistan, Keith considered "Courtesy" a morale booster for a specific fight against a clear aggressor, not as blanket support for any and every American military action. There was no partisan message to the lyrics either, and Keith felt he was boosting troop morale more than anything else. The song also served as a memorial. Keith had lost his father, a U.S. Army

[10] "Country Stars Shine During Inauguartion," *CMA Close Up*, February 1989, 2, FLA.
[11] Toby Keith, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)," DreamWorks Nashville, CD, 2002.

veteran, only six months before the 9/11 attacks. He remembered thinking, "What would the old angry American himself, the old one-eyed veteran, think about how soft our country got, to allow somebody to attack us on our own soil and kill this many innocent Americans?" It hit number one on the *Billboard* country chart by July 4 that summer and was placed in heavy rotation by country radio and music video channels.[12]

By 2005, Keith quietly but openly grappled with what his song had done to his career. "Now I know I get painted with a real broad brush [as] this Captain America, right-wing lunatic," he told *Billboard* magazine, "But the truth is, I knew there were a bunch of poor bastards that were gonna have to go into Afghanistan and give their all up for people who killed 3,000 Americans on 9-11." But Keith chafed at being pigeon-holed as country music's warmonger. At the time, the U.S. invasion of Iraq had dragged into its second year, and Keith wanted no part claiming support for that mission, although he still stood by the troops. In reference to "Courtesy," Keith reiterated its original context, claiming, "you don't have to listen but once to the words to understand that the song was strictly for Afghanistan." As for the expansion of the War on Terror to other fronts, the singer clarified that "I have no stance on the Iraq war . . . but the second [that I say], 'I have no stance there, I'm not smart enough to tell whether we should be or not,' it becomes, 'Oh, he's trying to save his career now.' "

Not exactly a right-winger, Keith was a registered Democrat until 2008 when he cut loose from any partisan affiliation, preferring to separate himself from the political fray. Yet members of the media still assumed he supported the Republican Party because of his militaristic lyrical

[12] Ray Waddell, "Red, White, & True Blue," *Billboard*, June 18, 2005, 58. He followed that release with other military-themed songs like "American Soldier" and "The Taliban Song" from the album called *Shock'n Y'all*, itself a play on the Pentagon's "Shock and Awe" tactical campaign in Iraq. On the evolution of Keith's political views, see Spencer Kornhaber, "Toby Keith in Trump's America," *The Atlantic*, November 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/11/toby-keith-the-bus-songs/540654/.

themes and his regular tour schedule with the USO. “I just start laughing,” he said when reporters make assumptions about his politics. “I can’t support the troops and not be a Republican. That’s impossible, right?”[13]

It did seem impossible in 2005. But Keith actually represented a fifty-year history of country music militarism that aligned genre, race, and armed service, regardless of partisan affiliation. Keith tried to honor the sacrifice of the “poor bastards,” servicemembers like his father, who have to fight the war; citizens who may have joined the ranks in search of a better future only to be placed in the line of fire as part of the bargain.

Music Row had made a similar gambit in the 1950s. It hitched country music to the Cold War military as a means of boosting its visibility, record sales, and respectability. The music ended the century largely, although never fully, aligned with political conservatism as a result. There was nothing inevitable about the music’s affiliation with the military or the Republican Party. Country music militarism reflected an economic opportunity for a white southern industry at midcentury. As the Vietnam War politicized the nation’s cultural divisions, the country music industry broke right and its products became the sound of the conservatives who claimed unyielding support for the military as a plank in the Republican Party platform. When we hear “God Bless the U.S.A.” or country artists performing on a sandbag stage for a USO concert, we hear that history. It is the history of race-making, the commercial power of country music, and the expansion of the Cold War defense state. It is the history of how an American devotion to militarism developed a southern accent.

[13] Waddell, “Red, White, & True Blue,” 58.

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