A LITTLE PIECE OF HOME: THE UNITED SERVICE
ORGANIZATION DURING THE VIETNAM WAR, 1963-1973

by

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A THESIS

IN

HISTORY

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Approved

Chairperson of the Committee

Accepted

Dean of the Graduate School

December, 2001
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin my acknowledgements by thanking Dr. James Reckner. Thank you for being my mentor and chair and for keeping me on the right track throughout the thesis writing process. I would like to thank Dr. Donald Walker for serving on my thesis committee and guiding my early writing and research on this topic. I owe a great deal of gratitude to the staff and students of the Texas Tech Vietnam Archive. I would like to thank all of you for offering ideas, finding materials and making phone calls on my behalf. I would like to thank the Texas Tech University History Department for giving financial assistance that aided my research. I want to offer a special thanks to the United Service Organization. Many clubs did what they could to find material and individuals that benefited this project. The National USO Headquarters gave me valuable information that helped to guide my research. I owe the greatest debt of gratitude to the Sea-Tac USO for looking through old files and finding priceless information. Your old annual reports gave me the greatest source of information for this thesis. Thank you to Francie Mendenhall and Ed George for sharing your stories and insights into your USO experiences. To all USO participants, I hope this thesis honors the job all of you have done and continue to do. I also owe my thanks to the National Archives at College Park, The Library of Congress, Department of Archives and Manuscripts at Catholic University of America, and the Women’s Collection at Texas Women’s University for access to your collections and your help in using them. Finally, I want to thank my family and friends for their ideas, their edits, and support that helped me to complete this thesis.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The United Service Organization met its most stressing demand in 1963, with the opening of the first club in Saigon, Vietnam. With the opening of this club, the USO began its first operation in a war zone. In earlier conflicts, the clubs were located away from the front lines and fighting, but this was impossible in Vietnam. The clubs, both overseas and stateside, stretched their limits to support American military personnel all over the world during the Vietnam War. This study will examine USO operations during the years 1964 through 1973. These are the years during which significant numbers of American military personnel served in Vietnam. This study will examine how the United Service Organization supported a peak of seventeen clubs in Vietnam and provided services to the American military worldwide, on a budget, 90% of which was provided by the public. This work will also show how the United Service Organization met the needs of the military and how the USO grew to match the military’s numbers. For example, when the military numbers in Vietnam began to decrease, the number of United Service Organization clubs fell as well, and funds were redirected to effectively use the organization’s limited resources as the Armed Forces redeployed. This study also shows that the United Service Organization served a vital need in support of the military during the Vietnam War.

Chapter I offers an historical background of the United Service Organization and the unique war the United States faced from 1964 to 1973. This section explains how the
United Service Organization was started and how the USO defined the role they ultimately played in combating stress and raising morale during the Vietnam War. This section also examines the organizational structure of the United Service Organization, how the organization was run, and the way decisions were made and funding issues were handled. Chapter II focuses on the clubs operated by the United Service Organization. It examines the ways in which they reached out to and served military personnel and their dependants. Also this chapter will explain how the organization services evolved as the war itself changed the American military. Chapter III discusses the United Service Organization-sponsored shows. Examined in this chapter are the principal types of shows: Professional Shows, Gratuitous Celebrity Shows, and Gratuitous College Shows. Chapter Four concludes this thesis. The focus of this chapter will be a 1974 United Way study that set the precedent of securing funding for the United Service Organization in times of war and peace.

The United Service Organization (USO) came into existence in October 1940 with the goal of bringing a piece of home to American military personnel, wherever their service happened to take them. In 1940, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the National Catholic Community Service, the National Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, and the Traveler’s Aid Association of America came together in New York and formed the United Service Organization for National Defense, later renamed the United Service
Organization (USO). The USO continues today and, most importantly, it has remained dedicated to offering a variety of services to American military personnel around the globe.

The USO first began operations in the New York State area and from there expanded to global operations, through effective fund raising and generous private donations. The first permanent USO club was formed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. USOs were created all over the United States, supported by the wave of patriotic enthusiasm that infected Americans during World War II. Without this public support, it would have been impossible for the USO to operate.

The USO offered many services to military personnel during the period covered by the study. Their first priority was to create a “home away from home” for military personnel, even if their service takes them into combat. The first USO activities during World War II were to offer general services like sewing, travel information, spiritual advice, a place to sleep, a place to hang out with friends, write letters, and even eat a meal. These activities varied according to the needs of the personnel in the area and the resources available to the area club. A popular activity during World War II involved many women flocking to the USO clubs to dance with soldiers who otherwise would be alone.

In 1963, the United States became involved in the conflict in Southeast Asia, and American servicemen served there until 1973. The war in Vietnam was unlike any the

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United States had previously faced. In World War II, American troops enjoyed wide popular support. Men and women were celebrated for their participation in the war. They had ticker tape parades and welcome home parties, where family members swelled with pride over their loved one’s service to their country. They came home heroes, and even today are celebrated as “The Greatest Generation.” When Vietnam veterans came home they were branded murderers by a small, but vocal, group of protestors who, if they had behaved that way during World War II would themselves have been labeled “traitors.” Though the American military never really lost public support, the military was not celebrated for their service in the Vietnam War because of the length of the struggle and its inconclusive nature. “Although most Americans did not identify with antiwar activists, they were nevertheless tired of the war.” It was not so much that America hated its military for fighting the war, but Americans did not understand why we fought for so long. “The American people wondered how it had happened, how the Vietnam War had gone out of control, how the richest country in the world could sacrifice hundreds of billions of dollars and tens of thousands of young men in a military effort that seemed, in the end, to have so little significance.” The American public hated the Vietnam War and as a result, those who fought the war would have to wait twenty years to be recognized for their service.

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3Ibid., 281.
The Vietnam War was much different from any other fought by the United States.

There was no front line. The war was everywhere. No place, no position, no individual in
the theater of war was completely safe from the enemy, including the nurses, Red Cross
workers, and USO employees. Though no USO worker fell victim to the Vietnamese
enemy, nevertheless, those who worked in Vietnam faced danger. The enemy in this war
was different from any enemy that the United States had previously confronted. The
Vietnamese communists did not always wear military uniforms, nor did they always use a
gun to harm American personnel. Sometimes the enemy was a child or a woman. The
enemy could pose as a friend or be an employee during the day and attack the Americans
at night. And the enemy were passionate in their desire to win the war. The United States
had fought a similarly motivated enemy in the Japanese during World War II. That fight
required nuclear weapons to bring it to a conclusion. The United States faced a daunting
challenge in Vietnam and was at a great disadvantage with a people and culture they did
not understand, and a land in which they had no experience.

The American Vietnam soldier differed from his predecessors of previous wars in
that he served a tour of duty of fixed duration, generally one year. In past wars, units
deployed together, fought “for the duration” together, and came home together. The units
only changed when a soldier was killed or wounded and was sent home to recuperate. In
the Vietnam War, soldiers served for a year, than went home. They could volunteer for
additional service in Vietnam or they could simply go back to civilian life. The units in
Vietnam were always changing and bonds between soldiers were formed on a more
intense basis because of the constant changing. These soldiers went to war alone and
returned home alone and unheralded. Sometimes they came home to face protestors and to be shunned because of their service in Vietnam. This treatment was not limited to soldiers who served in the Vietnam War; it extended to all who wore an American military uniform. American military who served in the war eventually received recognition for their service but it was a long and difficult road to reach that point.

The biggest impact on the outcome of the war and how it differed from earlier American wars came from the public. The Vietnam War was opposed in the United States by young people disillusioned with their government. The movement to end the war was largely sustained by young college aged citizens of the United States. "The protests swept beyond the campuses. They became part of the youth counterculture, confirming feelings of alienation and betrayal."4 They felt the war was illegal and morally wrong for the United States to take part in. These young people were not worried about the potential of communism from which the United States government claimed to be protecting them. They believed the war was a civil war that should be fought and settled by the Vietnamese without U.S. intervention. The movement against the war started with protests, educational meetings, and petitions. As the war progressed, the movement at times turned violent and bitter.

Morale was critical to the performance and the quality of life in military personnel during the Vietnam War. Highly publicized protests and the stress of service in the combat zone took its toll on the morale of military personnel. Reduced morale amongst the military made their service more stressful and difficult.

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4 Olson and Roberts, Where the Domino Fell, 173.
Stress can help a person produce results. In combat and military situations danger-related stress can make a soldier more alert and effective as a team member. Each soldier must rely on the performance of his other fire team members, platoon, company. However, when stress is too great for an extended period, it can cause many problems. With too much stress, mental and physical alterations can occur. Under such circumstances military personnel in the field can behave in life threatening ways.

During the Vietnam War, military personnel were under great stress and suffered low morale because of the peculiar circumstances of the war, including restrictive rules of engagement in Vietnam and public demonstrations against the war in America.

Since Vietnam, there has been much medical research about the importance of stress relief on improving one’s health and securing an upbeat mental attitude. Experts in stress recommend a wide range of activities to relieve stress, from meditation to exercise. The consensus is that stress relief is necessary to avoid more serious health problems. These problems can range from heart problems to mental difficulties. Today experts conduct studies to determine what will relieve stress and who would most benefit from stress relieving activities. During the Vietnam War, it did not take experts to determine that military personnel needed a break from their stressful jobs.

The United Service Organization was an organization whose principal function was to reduce stress and preserve morale in American military personnel. The men and women of the USO sought to provide the military personnel with a place to relax. At these places they could eat food from home and write letters to family and friends. They could just “hang out” with friends and play games, or they could find a friendly ear,
where they could discuss their stress and problems. The USO basically gave military personnel and their families a place that was as close to home as possible when they were far from home, a place where there was support and relief from the persecutions of stress. The USO’s operations were critical to military personnel during the Vietnam War. The USO reminded military personnel fighting in the Vietnam War and serving in other parts of the world that there were people who cared about and fully supported them, regardless of what the antiwar demonstrators and press had to say or write about them. This organization was unique in that it supported the military personnel at one of the military’s most difficult moments and they did so solely through public contributions.

To fully grasp how the USO effected and helped the military, it is necessary first to understand the structure of the USO and how decisions concerning operations in the United States and overseas were made. Whether talking about government, a business, or just a club, effective organizational structure is critical for success. The USO was no exception. The diverse and detailed USO structure made possible all of its services. The USO was jointly founded by six organizations: YMCA, YWCA, National Catholic Community Service, National Jewish Welfare Board, Salvation Army, and the Travelers Aid Association of America. These organizations incorporated the USO “under the Membership Corporation Laws of the State of New York as a non-profit, voluntary national agency.” The governing body of the USO was the Corporation, which consisted of forty-five people. Nine were chosen by the President of the United States and six by

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5 Organization of USO, National Catholic Welfare Conference/ United States Catholic Conference Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 3.
each of the six founding member organizations. Corporation members served terms of three years.\(^6\) To reduce confusion and to provide the continuity necessary to keep the corporation running smoothly, members were elected in a manner similar to the United States Senate, with one-third of the members up for election every year. This procedure ensured that the corporation always had experienced veterans to guide the new members.

The President of the United States served as honorary chairman of the USO. All other officers served one-year terms. The other officers included chairman of the Corporation, vice chairman, president, and six vice presidents. Each of the six founding organizations of the USO elected one vice president. Harvey S. Firestone, Jr., of the Firestone Tire Company, was elected the USO Corporation’s chairman and served as chairman throughout the Vietnam War.

Within the Corporation the USO had a board of governors comprised of thirty members, four of whom were appointed from each of the six founding membership organizations, and six appointed by the President of the United States. The rest were appointed and elected based on recommendations from USO facilities and the military.\(^7\)

The board of governors elected members of the USO’s executive committee, which was comprised of a chairman, secretary, treasurer, assistant secretary, and the only paid position in the Corporation, the executive director. The board of governors created a number of functional committees to carry out its work. They were the executive, nominating, finance & budget, public relations campaign, program and entertainment,

\(^{6}\)Organization of USO, Catholic Conference Collection, 3.

\(^{7}\)Ibid., 4.
and personnel committees. "To sustain public support, the board invited outstanding leaders who were not otherwise associated with USO to accept membership and to participate fully in the work of a standing committee in the field related to their specialty." However, the executive and nominating committees did not invite community leaders to be a part of the committees. In the case of the executive and nominating committee, each member organization placed one representative in both the executive and nominating committees. The Board of Governors and committees met quarterly in March, June, September, and December.

The Corporation also created a National Council that worked closely with the American public and the individual USO clubs operating all over the world. The council "served as a nationwide forum, with opportunity to recommend USO policy and through which the Corporation, in matters of USO policy, [sought] and obtain[ed] advice, guidance, review and cooperation from leading representative citizens throughout the country." Members of the National Council gained their position either by election or by virtue of an office in which they served. For example, a local council could nominate a member of their USO to be elected to represent them in the National Council. Members were also nominated from military branches and the USO Corporation itself. This group met annually and discussed issues important to ensuring the USO and its services met the demands and needs of military personnel. This organization advised the Corporation concerning decisions on what and how the USO would carry on. Also, the National

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8Organization of USO, Catholic Conference Collection, 4.

9Ibid., 4.
Council had a better understanding of the nature and scope of USO operations in support of our military personnel’s needs because they were the ones in direct contact with the military. “The National Council and its members [had] the important roles of publicity agents and USO image makers. It [was] their responsibility to stimulate in the local community, public interest in, and understanding of USO, its program and purposes and to assist in building public and financial support in the fund raising activities of United Funds and Community Chests and of independent USO campaigns.”

Much in the way that fraternities and sororities work on college campuses, USO facilities had to seek a charter from the National Council. These chartered councils were the individual communities and facilities in which USO services were performed by local citizens. These charter councils were supposed to represent and preserve the image of the USO. Fund-raising also started with these charters.

The charters were divided into two financial categories. In one category, the charter-holders were recipients of “an allocation of funds to meet its budgeted requirements from its local United Fund or Welfare Councils.” These United Funds, Welfare Councils, and Community Chests were funds that communities raised to be divided among various charities to help the needy. One well-known organization that helped to supply these local funds was the United Way from various communities. The USO charters in this category were for the most part financially self-sufficient and needed little help from the National USO to provide their services.

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10 Organization of USO, Catholic Conference Collection, 5.

11 Ibid., 6.
The second group of charters received funding from the National USO Council. Usually this grouping existed in communities where full funding was difficult to raise.\textsuperscript{12} These charters relied upon volunteers to function. There were paid positions, such as the club directors, but paid positions were few.

There was an additional organization under the executive director of the USO. These offices were responsible for running day-to-day operations, including finances and personnel administration. Under these offices the USO had a Director of Financial Development. This director had the responsibility of sustaining the financial position of all USO clubs. Certainly one director could not manage the entire United States, so this office was divided into three regions. These regions (Eastern, Central, and Western) were established to help USOs in their respective regions raise funds for their clubs. If a club did not have funding and needed the help of the National USO, it would first go to its regional director who would then make recommendations to the National USO based on the USO's judgment of the club's situation.

\textsuperscript{12} Organization of USO, Catholic Conference Collection., 6.
Figure 1.1: USO Organization

Source: National Catholic Welfare Conference/United States Catholic Conference Collection, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
CHAPTER II
USO CLUBS

Though designated “advisors,” the Americans sent to Vietnam prior to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution were there in a military capacity, and some had already lost their lives in combat there. And as the USO practiced what it preached, the organization followed the servicemen and entered the war-torn country in Southeast Asia, to provide for the troop’s. In 1964, the USO had two clubs in Vietnam. One club had opened in Saigon in April 1963. This club enjoyed a great deal of patronage, being the only club in Vietnam. In 1964, the Saigon club “averaged more than 1,000 visitors a day.”13 Due to the popularity of the Saigon club, the USO authorized its expansion. It gained a bigger snack bar and became one of the few places in Saigon that had air conditioning. With the growing popularity of the Saigon club and the increasing numbers of troops being sent to Vietnam, the USO and Department of Defense identified the need for another club, this one in the northern port city of Danang. When it opened in 1964, the Danang club offered its visitors a snack bar, social hall, library, photographic darkroom, and rooftop patio.

The two clubs were critical to the morale of troops in Vietnam. They were all the more important because of the absence of Special Service clubs in South Vietnam. The situation in Vietnam was uncomfortable for soldiers because they did not know who were their enemies. Further, in the early years of the war, the U.S. military had little freedom to fight the war, even though their support of the armed forces of the Republic of South

Vietnam made them targets for the Viet Cong insurgents. And although there were "recreational" options, like bars and brothels, outside most major military bases in Vietnam, only the USO offered wholesome and safe entertainment: good, clean fun.

In the Pacific, clubs had been established during World War II and the Korean War, due to the placement of American military personnel to meet American defense requirements. Some of these clubs were in Korea, the Philippines, Japan, and Okinawa. These clubs' importance grew with the war in Vietnam. In Guam, a new typhoon-proof building at Hoover Park recreation area replaced a club destroyed by typhoon "Karen" in 1962. The club, built with United States Navy support, had a social hall, snack bar, volleyball court, picnic area, and outdoor swimming pool.

USO Operations in 1964

In 1964, there were clubs at the Yokosuka Naval Base, and in Tokyo, as well as three clubs in Okinawa, a U.S. administered territory that had not yet been returned to Japan. The club at the Yokosuka Naval Base was unique. The club opened in 1963, and as a part of its services the USO staff converted an old bus into a rolling lounge, used for dockside food, recreation and information and tour services for crews of visiting Seventh Fleet ships. The club in Tokyo had a busy year in 1964. It had a larger number of troops in the area because of the Olympic Games in the city. The Olympic Games became a great leave and liberty destination for U.S. military personnel and a favorable exchange rate of 360 yen for $1.00 meant vacations in Japan were bargains.
Prior to American involvement in Vietnam, Okinawa housed a major complex of U.S. Army, Marine Corps and Air Force facilities and servicemen. That American presence grew as the Okinawa facilities provided forward support for the growing U.S. forces in Vietnam. One club on the island was enlarged and all three carried on an extensive tour program that enabled both the armed forces and the USO staff the opportunity to visit Japan, Formosa, and Hong Kong. Like the Yokosuka club, the Seoul club in Korea found a unique way to reach the Armed Forces. In 1964, it promoted, for its ninth year, a Friendship Day. "This program included house visits by service personnel to homes ranging from the ordinary one to the Korean Presidential Palace, called the Blue House."14

Even though there had been a great deal of activity in the Pacific area because of the Vietnam War, the global nature of the Cold War demanded a large US military presence in the European theater, where the European area USO clubs were equally busy in 1964. One of the most important European USO activities was support of the men of the Sixth Fleet, whenever and wherever they entered port. These temporary canteens were located along the Riviera, Cannes, Golfe-Juan, Marseilles, Menton, Toulon in France; Genoa and Palermo in Italy; Barcelona and Palma de Majorca in Spain; Corfu, Rhodes, and Thessaloniki in Greece; and Istanbul, Turkey. During a seven-day period in Izmir, Turkey, the USO experienced a great deal of use of its temporary facilities by the Seventh Fleet. According to the USO, "The acceptance of the USO among Sixth Fleet

14 1964 Annual Report., 5.
personnel can be seen by the fact that more than 3000 of the 3500 men given liberty each of the seven days of the fleet visit used our facilities.\textsuperscript{15}

The clubs in the European areas included one in Paris that was renovated to meet the increasing demand. The club in Naples, Italy, also was renovated but, unlike the Paris club, the renovations took an extra year to complete.

Stateside USO operations also were important. Specifically, they focused on building support for the USO and furthering the establishment of local autonomous USO councils. The local USO councils were very important to the USO system. USO councils received their funding from their individual communities, and only turned to the national USO offices when all other funding avenues failed. In 1964, the USO had autonomous USO Councils in 71 communities. Only four of the autonomous USO Councils had to seek money from the national office.\textsuperscript{16}

The USO provided an important service in the United States for 100,000 troops who were participating in Exercise Desert Strike in April 1964. “Desert Strike, the largest military maneuver in the continental United States since World War II, covered thirteen million square acres [sic] located in parts of Arizona, California, and Nevada.”\textsuperscript{17} USO operated for 45 days on this exercise. The USO operated seven major centers and thirteen additional facilities as the direct result of USO interest.\textsuperscript{18} The USO’s activities with these

\textsuperscript{15}1964 Annual Report, 5.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{18}Minutes of USO Board of Governors Meeting, June 18, 1964, National
troops were not limited to just the temporary clubs at night. USO volunteers also made trips into the field during operations, to take gifts and treats to the troops, which supplemented troops’ trips in the evenings to the clubs. The troops also enjoyed several USO shows to further pass their time in the desert.

For these forty-five days, the USO very actively sought assistance from various people, to offer all their services. In small towns around the area of operations, USO staff worked feverishly to get donations of books, buildings, food, and entertainment. In Parker, Arizona, the USO used the city’s churches for clubs. In Needles, California, Paul Ragsdale (Director of the Tacoma USO club) and Frank Adams (no rank indicated [Director of the Maneuver]), persuaded the government to allow them to use the City Hall building as their USO club. A unique twist to this club was the jail below it. Being the resourceful group they were, the USO used the inmates as help run the club. 19

Over the 45-day period the USO well served the 100,000 military personnel on the operation. “Over 300,000 visits were paid to these facilities. A total of twenty-two shows played to an audience of over 40,000. Eight thousand, eight hundred oranges were distributed along with a ton of hard candy, 8,000 paperback books, 1,200 decks of cards and other small games. Refreshments were served on 315 occasions with the gallons of ice tea almost double that of coffee.”20 The USO worked hard during this operation and

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19 Minutes of USO Board of Governors Meeting, June 18, 1964, Catholic Conference Collection, 20.

20 USO Board of Governors Meeting, June 18, 1964, 21.
therefore received a letter of appreciation for their efforts from Brigadier General John M. Finn: "The enthusiasm and efficiency displayed by members of staff in solving the many problems that arose in presenting activities of this nature were particularly noteworthy. Their contributions assisted in making Exercise Desert Strike a successful operation."²¹

New clubs were opened in Oxnard, California, at the Coca-Cola Pavilion in New York City, and Dover, Delaware. USO clubs in Ayer, Massachusetts, Valdosta, Georgia, and Fairbanks, Alaska were renovated. The club in Fairbanks, Alaska had a unique aspect to it, it added a dormitory, where members of the armed forces were able to get some sleep and take a shower. Overall, clubs operated in thirty-seven states and Washington, D.C. "Installations were located in 99 different cities with many of the larger ones offering more than one service facility."²²

Public relations are an important part of all successful businesses. Public relations also became a key factor in keeping the USO afloat. Like the rest of the organization, public relations, support came as a result of donations. D’Arcy Advertising in New York City offered its services to help develop the USO’s public relations. The public relations campaign lasted for ten weeks from July 1 to September 15, 1964, at a cost of approximately $35,000. These ad campaigns were so inexpensive because radio, television, newspapers, and magazines donated $9 million of time and space to run the

²¹ USO Board of Governors Meeting, June 18, 1964, 22.

²² 1964 Annual Report, 8.
1964 campaign. The campaign slogan for 1964 was: "USO is there...only if you care. Give. USO is supported by your gift to your United Funds or Community Chests."\textsuperscript{23}

Overall, the USO had an extremely successful year. The USO estimated that about fifteen million visits were made to their 165 USO facilities in 1964. The funding that supplied the year's activity was 93\% donations. United Funds and Community Chests made most of these donations to local USOs. The USO received money from 1,049 United Funds and Community Chests. Seventy-two of these funds were new additions to contributions made to the USO in 1964.\textsuperscript{24}

The USO started 1964 with $188,816. That figure increased to $2,977,784 as a result of the donations to the USO. The USO spent $933,406 on member agencies. The overseas operations cost the USO $625,471. In total, the USO spent $2,689,958 on its operation for 1964. With other expenses paid out for the year the USO had a surplus of $287,826 to carry over into the next year's budget.\textsuperscript{25}

**USO Operations in 1965**

Nineteen sixty-five proved an extremely busy year for the USO, especially in Vietnam. At the beginning of the year, there were approximately 23,300 armed forces members in Vietnam. By the end of 1965, that number had increased to 184,300. With this dramatic change, the need for an expanded USO presence became even more critical.

\textsuperscript{23} 1964 Annual Report., 14.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{25} 1964 Annual Report, 19.
Early in the year the USO had three clubs established, with plans for seven additional facilities.

The USO clearly identified Vietnam as its highest priority because the military personnel there were under the great stress of war. Despite limits on funding, the USO offered its services all over the globe, yet when the Department of Defense requested more USO support for the troops in Vietnam.

Without hesitation, General Emmett O'Donnell, Jr., President of the USO, and the Executive Committee, responded to the request by committing USO without reference to the bank balance at the time. For well it was known that the American people would support an honest request to move the familiar USO sign and services to the boondocks of Vietnam as an aid and comfort to those young Americans bearing the brunt of the battle there.26

The President of the United States even took note of the USO's efforts and sent a letter of appreciation to encourage continued support of the armed forces. Lyndon B. Johnson said, "The decision of the USO leadership to undertake this task will be appreciated by the thousands of servicemen and women who will benefit from the various USO programs. The expanded USO activities are urgently needed and your decision constitutes a most welcome and worthwhile contribution to our national effort."27

USO officials visited their operations in Vietnam in 1965, to determine how they could do a better job of bringing pieces of home to the military personnel in Vietnam.


27Ibid., 5.
Stanley B. Ecker, the Executive Director, was one of the USO officials who went to Vietnam. Of the USO operations there he said:

There are two distinct and very strong impressions that one brings back from this trip. The first is that whether the ‘cease-fire’ order comes as a result of victory in the field or by negotiations, it seems evident that American troops will remain in that country for some time, as they have in Korea. The second impression is one of pride and appreciation to a small but devoted USO professional staff working in South Vietnam. This staff is operating under difficulties never previously faced in the history of USO and is providing many important services for members of our Armed Forces for which we may all be sincerely grateful.  

The clubs in Vietnam were seeing twice as much traffic as they had seen in 1964. Approximately 2,000 military personnel visited the USO clubs in Vietnam every day. The USO club in Saigon reached a peak at 7,000 on Christmas day as military personnel stopped by to take part in the all day Christmas party. According to the New York Times:

More than 7,000 servicemen—many of them spending their first Christmas away from home—ambled into the club to find tables heaped with turkey and ham, and with cookies from home, and hampers full of cards and letters and arm loads of gifts sent from America, addressed to ‘any soldier’. Many of the young men said they had received more presents from the USO than their families had given them.

The four clubs operating in Vietnam during this time were located in Danang, Nha Trang, Saigon, and Tan Son Nhut.

In other parts of the Pacific, the USO remained quite busy. Locations in close proximity to Vietnam experienced a growth in military personnel as the numbers of personnel in Vietnam grew. In Okinawa, three clubs were operated at Koza, Naha, and


29 Ibid., 8.
White Beach. According to USO operators, “Okinawa had indeed become the ‘American Gibraltar’ in the Pacific.”\(^{30}\) The USO club in Tokyo was renovated to better serve soldiers on leave or “Rest and Relaxation” (R & R). In Korea, the Seoul club began operations on a twenty-four-hour basis, which allowed it to add a dormitory like the club in Fairbanks, Alaska. Another service offered at the Seoul club was a trans-Pacific phone service that enabled military personnel to call home.

In the Caribbean, the USO operated as status quo. They added a club at Fernandez Juncos in the city of San Juan and an information center and lounge at the Naval Station in San Juan, Puerto Rico. A unique service operated by the USO in 1965 was to offer its help when the Santo Domingo insurrection left refugees homeless. In the spirit of giving, the USO housed and temporary relocated 5,000 of the refugees from Santo Domingo to their facilities in Puerto Rico.

In Europe, the number of permanent USO clubs increased to seven with the addition of a club built in Rota, Spain. The other permanent clubs were located in Paris and Nice in France; Naples and Rome in Italy; Athens, Greece; and Izmir, Turkey. The USO also continued to operate temporary canteens to serve the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean. Military personnel who chose to take their leave in Europe had the opportunity through the USO to tour historical sites and attend special events in Europe. One of the more popular attractions for military personnel in Europe was the Vatican. Military personnel of all faiths were able to gain tickets from the Rome USO, just a few blocks from the Vatican, to be a part of Papal audiences.

On the home front, the USO issued 73 charters to autonomous USO Councils and 41 other Councils in small areas where the military had significant numbers. "Under the terms of the Charter, autonomous Councils agree to adhere to the policies and standards of the USO, to secure the necessary funds for their operation locally, and to assist in obtaining their proportionate share of the National USO quota as approved by the National Budget and Consultation Committee."\(^{31}\)

In 1965, the D'Arcy Advertising Company again assumed the responsibility of creating and running the USO public relations campaign. The public relations campaign really helped the USO's fund raising. "The USO received more coverage in the press by syndicated writers and commentators than in any year previous since the days of World War II."\(^{32}\) The public relations clearly enabled the USO to stay afloat, since more than 90% of the USO's funding came from donor groups that the public relations targeted.

Fund raising for the USO increased in several places as a result of the public relations campaign. Ninety-four percent of the funding was donations from the United Funds and Community Chests. In 1965, the USO received money from 80 new Fund and Chest drives. Yet, there were areas where the USO was not included in local Funds and Chests. To fund the facilities that had no local support, the USO planned a special campaign. In 1965, the special campaigns took place to fund facilities in New York City,

\(^{31}\)1965 Annual Report, 14.

\(^{32}\)1965 Annual Report, 15.
Chicago; Waynesville, and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; Sheboygan and Neenah, Wisconsin; Henderson, South Carolina; Oak Harbor, Washington; and Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{33}

In total, the USO operated 158 facilities overseas and in the United States. The 158 facilities served 16,000,000 visitors, and required 80,000 volunteers to operate them. At the beginning of the year, the USO had $3,831,154. Of that, they spent $3,345,837. Most of that money went to operations overseas and in the United States. At the end of the year, the USO had $484,293 in its general fund and an additional $1,326,906 in the emergency fund.\textsuperscript{34}

\section*{USO Operations in 1966}

In 1966, troop numbers in Vietnam rose to 385,300. As a result of this increase, the USO opened more clubs to serve the growing military personnel. This raised the total number of clubs to eleven: Cam Ranh Bay, Chu Lai, Danang #1, Hill #327 Danang, Danang East, Di An, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Saigon, Tan Son Nhut, and Vung Tau. Twenty-nine members of professional staff ran the eleven clubs in Vietnam and—what makes USO possible—available local help. In Vietnam that meant 430 loyal Vietnamese volunteers. The USO staff worked very hard. USO president, retired Air Force General Emmett O’Donnell, Jr., observed the professional staff working 12 hours a day, seven

\textsuperscript{33} 1965 Annual Report., 16.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 18-19.
days a week, and therefore recommended the sending of 16 more members of professional staff.

In developing new clubs, the USO made use of all available buildings to exercise as many options as possible. “USO buildings range in size from a multiple of six quonset huts to Butler buildings, and from a French villa to a former theater. The Saigon club was once a large garage in the downtown area.”35 The priority service offered by the USO was the snack bars and canteens. At these places the staff served hamburgers, cheeseburgers, ice cream, milk shakes, and other items. Another unique offering of these clubs was tape-recording devices and tapes so that military personnel could make a taped letter to send home or listen to a tape sent to them.

The clubs were very comfortable places. The USO staff created lounges where people could read and write, and gave them the materials to do so. The USO supplied musical instruments, games, hi-fi sets, and records. Some USOs offered gift-wrapping, photo labs, barbershops, gift shops, hot showers, gardens, and beachfronts. In combat zones, the clubs were made as safe as possible by requiring all military personnel to check their side arms and hand-carried weapons at the door. The USO also sought to protect the visitors and the club by placing armed military guards at the clubs at all times. Like the club in Seoul, Korea, the club in Saigon had established overseas telephone lines, which allowed military personnel to call home at reduced rates. This service grew

extremely popular with the military personnel. It was so popular, in fact, that lines would often begin at 6:30 a.m. to use the phones.

Donations other than money provided the materials that comprised an important aspect of USO’s support of American service men and women in Vietnam. These donations were the special treats sent for the troops: all sorts of home comforts for the military personnel, including paperback books, cookies, candy, stationery, razor blades, soap, taped music, ball point pens, cigarettes and letters and cards to encourage them. The gifts of the American people and mail sent by young and old alike were extremely important to our military personnel. The mail became especially important as popular support for the war waned. The letters were a “a cross-section of Americana.” They often contained special requests, such as pen pal inquiries or they simply asked “what can we do for you?” More than anything, the letters all conveyed the concern of those at home, young and old, for the serviceman in Vietnam.36

The Pacific area saw a lot of activity in 1966. The Tokyo club was renovated to handle the larger numbers of military personnel visiting Tokyo for their “R & R.” USO added an information center in Manila where the Navy opened an, “R & R” Center. Guam also received renovations because the U.S. government stationed B-52 bombers and their crews there, so they could make runs over Vietnam.

The Caribbean saw a few changes in 1966, too. The USO shut down a club in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and replaced it with two dockside information centers. They also closed the club at Fajardo, which served the Roosevelt Roads naval installation, and

replaced it with an information center on the base. The USO took the furnishings from the Fajardo club and put them to use at a new facility in St. Croix.

With the draft creating a large number of young enlisted men collecting at various military installations, the USO opened new clubs in Petersburg, Virginia and Leesville, Louisiana. They also renovated clubs at Junction City, Kansas, which served Fort Riley, and Fort Walton Beach, Florida, which served Eglin Air Force Base. The USO added lounges at airports in San Francisco, California and Columbus, Ohio, which gave military personnel a place to relax while waiting for flights.

In 1966, special honors were bestowed on members of the USO. In March, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented the USO Silver Medallion Award to Bob Hope. President Johnson said, “We all know that wherever American men fight for freedom there will always be Hope. And Bob, two generations of Americans raise their glasses to you. ‘Thanks for the Memories’.”37 The Assistant Secretary of Defense, Thomas D. Morris, gave the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service to the USO’s National Chairman, Harvey S. Firestone, Jr. This award was the Department of Defense’s highest civilian award.

Nineteen sixty-six became a strong year for the individual USO Councils. Seventy-three USO Councils were fully self-supported requiring no funding assistance from the National USO. However, there were 45 local chartered Councils that needed a great deal of support from the National Council. To provide that support, USO arranged a

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system where the six-member agencies each were responsible for a specific geographic area. As mentioned in the organizational section, these regions were divided by Eastern, Central, and Western. If a USO Council needed funding help, they turned to the member's agency for their area to arrange for their funding. These member agencies would then determine the need of the particular USO club and would notify the National USO to gain the necessary financial aid.

One hundred and forty-six new United Funds and Community Chests added the USO to their list of organizations that received local funds. This made 1966 the most successful funding year for the USO. A new funding aspect added in 1966 was the 'Mayor's Campaign.' This idea began in Kansas but quickly spread to other states. The campaign consisted of a mayor in an area where local funding did not include the USO campaign to raise funding for USO facilities. Veteran organizations like the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion also undertook fund-raising, as a show of support and a return of gratitude. In April 1966, the Maxwell House branch of General Foods offered their help in fund raising by implementing a campaign with the slogan: "Flip your lid for the USO."38 This campaign consisted of General Foods' customers turning their plastic coffee lids in to their local grocery stores. For every lid, General Foods donated money to the USO. In total, General Foods gave the USO a check in the amount of $400,000.39


39 Bob Considine, "USO's $400,000 Boon," Record American, 12 August 1966, 36.
Nineteen sixty-six was a special year for the USO. It celebrated its 25th anniversary. The USO was recognized by the White House, governors of the states, Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Chaplains, the armed forces, and civilians. In celebration of the anniversary, "USO ‘Sabbath Days’ was held February 5 and 6 1966, in scores of churches and synagogues throughout the land." The Sabbath Days enabled religious organizations to recognize the USO’s efforts in their religious services. Many communities where there were USOs celebrated the anniversary by holding dinners and other special events. Gifts and awards were given to the USO employees for their years of dedicated service. Major league baseball, too, honored the USO on Flag Day and the Fourth of July. Though the anniversary did a lot of the public relations work for the USO, the D’Arcy Advertising Company ran yet another campaign, with the slogan: "USO is there only if you care."

In 1966, visits to the USO rose from the previous years with about 17,000,000 visits to 163 facilities. Eighty-five thousand volunteers ran the facilities. The USO earned $5,355,174 in donations and spent $4,094,869 and $627,814 was carried over into 1967. In the emergency fund, the USO had saved $1,724,197.

41 Ibid., 21.
42 Ibid., 22.
43 Ibid., 25.
USO Operations in 1967

“During 1967, USO expanded more rapidly and more extensively than in any single year since World War II.”44 In Vietnam, the number of clubs went from eleven to seventeen. The additions were made in An Khe, Cam Ranh Bay Aloha, Cam Ranh Bay Coffee Bar, Can Tho, and three new clubs in Danang. These seventeen clubs were developed to meet the increase of military personnel in Vietnam, which reached 485,600 by the end of 1967. The clubs required 47 professional staff members and 650 Vietnamese employees.45 The USO reported: “Special mention deserves to be made of the morale of the USO staff, working long hours, seven days a week, many times under austere and dangerous conditions. Their work has won the highest commendation from every echelon of commands and from the individual soldiers, airmen, marines, and sailors who regard them as real friends as well as fellow countrymen who are there because ‘someone cares’.”46

A new addition to operations in Southeast Asia was the opening of the first club in Thailand. In other parts of the Pacific, the USO expanded their facilities in Guam, Manila, and Tokyo. New clubs in Koza, Okinawa, and Taichung, Taiwan were also added. All of these additions were extremely important to operations in Vietnam because

46 Ibid., 10.
of the large number of injured members of Armed Forces being sent to the Pacific to heal and the military personnel going there on R & R and leave.

In the Caribbean, a new club opened in Ocho Rios, Jamaica, where for the first time Marines at the base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, had access to a club. Prior to 1967, the political situation in Cuba limited the Marines' access to USO shows and visits by celebrities. Very little change was made in the Caribbean during 1967. Clearly, the focus in 1967 was in Vietnam and the Pacific.

As usual, one of the USO's most important jobs in the European theater was to serve the Sixth Fleet. The Sixth Fleet was very busy in 1967, particularly as a result of tensions that arose relating to the Arab-Israeli War. The fleet's operations brought the USO to ports in Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, and Spain. The USO had designed "a unique system of ship to shore communication [to keep] the command of each Navy vessel in touch with the nearest USO operation. Thus the USO [was able] to anticipate the physical and social impact of hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of American sailors before they [overwhelmed] the resources of a community."\(^47\)

Stateside, many USO clubs received renovations and changes to meet the needs of their military communities. The clubs in Kansas City, Houston, Tampa, and Atlanta were relocated to facilities that better fit the needs of military personnel. New clubs were opened in Killeen, and Temple, Texas; Valdosta, Georgia; Gulfport, Mississippi; and

Victorville, California. The USO also added to two airports by opening airport terminal clubs in the Seattle-Tacoma Airport (Sea-Tac airport), and Love Field in Dallas.

In the fall of 1967, the USO Council in San Antonio received the largest single gift up to that date: title to the Pearl Hemis-Fair Pavilion.\textsuperscript{48} Though that was a fortunate gain for the San Antonio USO, the organization also suffered a major loss when the USO club in Fairbanks, Alaska suffered greatly as a result of a flood. The USO reported the damage as follows:

The building sank six inches, floors slanted, walls warped. Heroic efforts by staff members, volunteers, and military personnel have brought about its complete restoration, and in early November the club director proudly placed a sign in front of the restored building, 'We're Pooped-But We Are Open'.\textsuperscript{49}

On March 30, 1967, the USO presented an award to General William C. Westmoreland, the Commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command in Vietnam. General Westmoreland could not be present for the ceremony, but he sent a video message of appreciation. The video and award presentation was shared at an annual dinner in Chicago held by the USO to honor USO employees and volunteers. The dinner also tied into a USO training and planning conference.

The USO added 129 new Funds and Chests to their list of community funds supporting USO activities. The “Mayor’s Campaign” also continued to be a highly

\textsuperscript{48} 1967 Annual Report., 17.

\textsuperscript{49} 1967 Annual Report., 17.
successful way of fund raising for the USO. This activity that started in Kansas had spread to include 203 campaigns.\textsuperscript{50}

D'Arcy Advertising continued to handle the public relations campaign. The ads were aired on 4,500 radio stations, and appeared in 700 television stations. Their message was also displayed on 92,000 bus and car cards and appeared in \textit{Time, Newsweek, Life, McCalls,} and \textit{Look} magazines.\textsuperscript{51} The slogan resembled past ads, with the message: “Someone you know needs USO.”\textsuperscript{52}

There were 179 USO facilities in 1967, which attracted 19,307,000 visitors. As the number of visitors increased, so too did the need for volunteers, who in 1967 numbered 113,000, and whose labor made the wide-flung USO services possible.\textsuperscript{53}

In terms of funding, the USO had to dip into its emergency fund because it over spent in 1967. Income totaled $5,202,904 and the USO over spent that by $337,414, principally as a result of the flood damage to the club in Fairbanks, Alaska. This did not prove a big problem because of the emergency fund the USO had secured in previous years. The USO appears to have purchased insurance but it is not clear how much or if their policy had flood protection. In either case, the USO was forced to dip into emergency funds to cover the damage. After having covered their deficit spending in the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{50} 1967 Annual Report., 19.
\bibitem{51} 1967 Annual Report., 20.
\bibitem{52} 1967 Annual Report., 20.
\bibitem{53} 1967 Annual Report., 20.
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general expense account, the USO finished the year with $2,044,581 remaining in their emergency fund.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{USO Operations in 1968}

Nineteen sixty-eight was an explosive year for the Vietnam War. In the opening months of the year, the United States was shocked when, on the Tet holiday, the Vietnamese communists launched a massive attack against bases all over South Vietnam. The United States soundly defeated the communist offensive, but the press coverage of the event—at times inaccurate—helped to turn it into an overwhelming psychological defeat at home. Nineteen sixty-eight thus became a turning point for America in Vietnam. From this point onward, the war was on a downward slope, but all the while the USO kept going. By the end of 1968, there were 536,000 troops in Vietnam.

Attendance levels in Vietnam USO clubs were reaching 750,000 visitors a month, this was the heaviest traffic the USO had ever seen. As a sign of that traffic, at the USO China Beach Club in Danang, “One ton of hamburger meat was required every three days to satisfy the appetites of young American servicemen who [wanted] the taste of home.”\textsuperscript{55} This, however, was the first year in the past five years of operation in Vietnam, that the USO did not add a new club in Vietnam. However, the USO did open new clubs in Thailand. The three clubs located in U-Tapao, Sattahip, and Takhli operated 24 hours a

\textsuperscript{54}1967 Annual Report, 22-23.

day out of buildings on military installations, which served 45,000 military personnel serving their tour of duty there. Elsewhere in the Pacific area there were no additions to existing USO operations.

USO operations in the European theater were more dynamic than the Pacific. "Intrusion of the Russian Fleet and stepped-up patrol activity of the US Sixth Fleet during the year had focused new attention on USO operations in the Mediterranean, especially with flare-ups in the Middle-East." The headquarters for USO fleet operations located in Naples, Italy, expanded to better serve the Sixth Fleet but also to serve American forces assigned to NATO commands and allies who also served in NATO. The USO also opened a new club at the beginning of the year at the U.S. Air Force base in Vicenza in northern Italy. This base had no access to recreational facilities, though they did have access to beaches and historical sites in the area. The USO offered reminders of home that were not available to military personnel in the area.

Domestic operations faced a different set of problems. "A systematic approach was established to relocate from blighted areas, from worn out, unappealing buildings, to renovate and refurbish, and to discard worn, many-times repaired, dated and sometimes dull [and] unattractive equipment." The idea to move the clubs out of unappealing areas came because it would be worthless to have a club in an area unwelcoming to people. Clubs that received renovations and/or relocation were: Dover, Delaware; Fort Walton

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56 1968 Annual Report, 10.
Beach, Florida; Key West, Florida; Jacksonville, North Carolina; Rantoul, Illinois; Waynesville, Missouri; Cape May, New Jersey; Fayetteville, North Carolina; and Sumter, South Carolina. The USO also broke ground on a new club in San Diego. As a special treat, the USO, in the presence of the widow of General Douglas MacArthur, dedicated the General MacArthur USO Memorial in New York City. Unfortunately, four less well-patronized clubs in Amarillo, Texas; Glasgow, Montana; Duluth, Minnesota; and Sanford, Florida were closed. However, two new clubs opened at Love Field, Dallas, Texas and Santa Maria, California.

Efforts outside of the clubs included a goodwill effort by the 3-M Corporation and Radio Shack. These companies donated supplies and time to give stateside Americans the chance to go into one of 350 cities’ Radio Shacks and record a taped letter to send to a loved one serving overseas. 59

Seventy-nine new United Funds and Community Chests were added to the USO’s sources of donation. In 1968, the USO received support from 1,913 communities and these funds represented 90% of the total USO income. A surprising source of funds came from college and high school groups. 60 This source was surprising because these were composed of the age groups protesting the war. Another big fund-raising event came with the opening of Madison Square Garden. Bob Hope (star of vaudeville, television, movies, and stage) took part in three events to raise funds for the USO. At the grand opening of the Madison Square Garden, Hope brought together some of his friends,


60 Ibid., 21.
including Bing Crosby and Pearl Bailey, to do a benefit show. The show sold out and Hope and his friends performed to a crowd of 20,000 people. Hope held two other benefits, reaffirming that the USO could always rely on him.  

Nothing changed in the public relations campaign from 1967 to 1968. The message for the USO continued to be “Someone you know needs USO.” The message appeared on television, in print, on radio, and was placed on car and bus cards. These cards were placed on buses and subway car and were seen by large numbers of people.

Visits to USO activities rose again in 1968 to 20,311,565. These visits were made to 191 facilities in the overseas and stateside operation, run by 131,274 volunteers. The USO did well in 1968. They were able to meet all of their expenses without having to dip into their emergency funds. The USO earned $6,276,853 and spent $5,485,949. More than three million dollars of that money went directly to member organizations, while much of the rest went toward shows and administrative efforts. At the end of the year, the USO had $790,904 remaining in their general account.

USO Operations in 1969

As the United States began the process of Vietnamization and withdrawal from the war, the USO saw a downturn in 1969. For the first time in six years, the number of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam dropped to 475,200. The USO added a club at Binh Thuy in Vietnam. However, two USOs in Danang at Freedom Hill and the Coffee

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Lounge suffered from damage when an ammunition dump exploded. Repairs were made to these facilities in a matter of weeks, because the military personnel in the area lent a hand rebuilding what had been destroyed. The USO suffered another setback when a fire destroyed most of the club in Saigon. The overseas telephone service did not suffer damage from the fire and continued to operate while repairs were made to the building.

To keep attendance high at the USO clubs, there continued to be a push for programs that would be attractive to the young people being sent to Vietnam. For example: "Beginning with Thanksgiving and on through the Christmas Holiday Season, traditional meals, appropriate decorations and thousands of gifts brought the customary touch of home to those in uniform in Vietnam."

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In Thailand, two new clubs were opened in Bangkok and Nakhon Phanom, which brought to five the number of USO clubs in Thailand. Elsewhere in the Pacific, construction began on a new club in Taegu, Korea. The USO in the Pacific was experiencing nearly one million visitors a month. In total there were thirty-one clubs built in the Pacific between 1960 and 1969.

In the Caribbean, in July 1969 a larger lounge was dedicated in San Juan at the Fernandez Juncos Wharf. The club had the normal amenities, including a snack bar, ping-pong, pool tables, and a music room. The club was also large enough to host dances for military personnel. The USO lounge at Roosevelt Roads Naval Station in Puerto Rico

expanded their small trailer lounge by building a large patio with a canopy. Overall, the USO clubs in the Caribbean received 433,631 visits.64

In Europe, the USO operated nine permanent clubs and also their temporary and mobile canteens for the benefit of the Sixth Fleet. These mobile USO centers were set up for the Sixth Fleet in Rhodes, Corfu and Thessaloniki, Greece; Trieste, Taranto, Genoa, Messina, and Palermo, Italy; Istanbul, Turkey; Valencia and Barcelona, Spain; and Marseilles, Cannes, Golfe-Juan, and Villefranche, France. This was the busiest the USO had ever been in meeting the needs of the constantly moving Sixth Fleet.

The sites for the Centers are usually in hotel ballrooms or restaurants in the heart of a city. By the time the ships arrived, USO staff had all arrangements made to provide the following services: games, music, dances, information, stationery, checking, athletic and cultural events, and information concerning meeting places of the three major faiths of our country.65

A new club opened in Frankfurt, Germany, significant because it was "the first time since its founding that USO had operated a club in Germany though USO shows have appeared before our troops there since its inception."66

On the domestic front, 1969 found the USO operating 129 facilities, in 29 states and the District of Columbia. The USO spent the year following their previous pattern of relocating clubs that were in poor and uninviting areas. Three clubs were relocated in New Bern, North Carolina; Oakland, California; and Savannah, Georgia. The USO broke

64 1969 Annual Report., 8.