

# U.S.O.

by  
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Whenever I think of the USO, I immediately think of Bob Hope! I guess that dates me. I only recently began collecting USO covers. I kept running into them in conjunction with my Military and World War II Patriotic collections, and remembering that I grew up hearing about the USO, they just looked so darned interesting.

The USO was formed in response to a 1941 request from FDR, who determined it would be best if private organizations handled the on-leave recreation of the growing U.S. armed forces. Six civilian agencies coordinated to form a new organization – the USO (United Service Organizations). The six civilian agencies were the Salvation Army, YMCA, YWCA, National Catholic Community Services, National Travelers Aid Association, and the National Jewish Welfare Board. The USO is a private, nonprofit organization, supported entirely by private citizens and corporations.

Throughout WW II, USO centers were established to become the GI's "Home Away from Home" in more than 3,000 communities. Facilities were quickly opened in such unlikely places as churches, log cabins, museums, castles, barns, beach and yacht clubs...At its high point in 1944, the USO had more than 3,000 clubs. USOs could be many things to many people: a lively place to dance and meet people; a place to see movies or find religious counsel; a quiet place to talk or write letters; and, of course, the place to go for free coffee and doughnuts. From 1941 to 1947, USO Camp Shows presented an amazing 428,521 performances. In 1945, curtains were rising 700 times a day to audiences as large as 15,000 and as small as 25 on some outposts all over the world. More than 7,000 entertainers traveled overseas. By war's end, the USO could claim that more than 1.5 million volunteers had worked on its behalf.



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The USO had all but disbanded by 1947. In 1950, when the U.S. entered the Korean War, the USO regrouped and eventually opened 24 clubs worldwide. The turbulent 1960s were full of challenges for the USO. For the first time in its history, USO centers were located in combat zones. The first USO in Vietnam opened in Saigon in 1963. The 17 centers that were opened in Vietnam and six in Thailand served as many as a million "customers" a month. Bob Hope took his USO Christmas show to Vietnam for the first time in 1964; the shows continued into the next decade.

USO entertainment in the 80s retained its stellar reputation while increasing its range. Superstar rock groups, jazz legends, movie stars, performers, rhythm and blues groups, a host of country music stars, and even Jeopardy! Host Alex Trebek have become involved with USO's entertainment program. The Persian Gulf War also challenged the USO. The USO opened three new centers in the Middle East and established the USO Mobile Canteen program with four-wheel drive, all-terrain vehicles that have refreshments, books, magazines, video and compact disc players, and resources for recreational activities. USO workers drove the vans to wherever the troops were deployed. On the home front, the USO established support and education funds to support military families.

...And the USO was in Somalia...and then Kuwait...and everywhere else American servicemen and women are. The USO currently operates 121 centers worldwide. USOs in 10 countries and 21 states use the services of some 33,571 volunteers. Overseas centers are located in Germany, Italy, France, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Iceland, Bosnia, Japan, Qatar, Korea and Kuwait. Service members and their families visit USO centers more than 5 million times each year.

Today, USO Celebrity Entertainment shows remain effective morale boosters and an important part of USO's offerings. Entertainers provide a much-needed break in the midst of duty tours overseas.

Recent USO tours have featured a wide variety of major entertainers such as Wayne Newton, Robin Williams, Drew Carey, Bruce Willis, Gary Sinise, Ben Affleck, James Avery, Kid Rock, and many more.

As the USO celebrates 64 years of service, the USO will continue to fulfill its mission to U.S. military personnel and their families "Until Every One Comes Home." [information courtesy of [http://www.uso.org/pubs/8\\_14\\_2480.cfm](http://www.uso.org/pubs/8_14_2480.cfm)].

Almost all of my USO covers are in with my Military collection (because they're a part of the Military story told by those covers), but someday, if I have enough dupes, I'd like to actually have a separate USO collection. I must have at least 30+ right now, but Mike Samuels, DC, currently has 82. From what I've seen of mine, most are of a stock design, but as the two here show, there are other varieties to be seen. Most, or perhaps even all, are red, white, and blue.

