

ARMY BATTLES BOREDOM

Special Services Recreation Program Is Planned for Our Overseas Troops

By SGT. DANIEL L. SCHORR

THE Army is launching a large-scale offensive in Europe—a battle against boredom—with music as one of its most important, not-so-secret weapons.

For hundreds of thousands of troops awaiting redeployment in assembly areas, for thousands of wounded soldiers and liberated prisoners, and especially for the 400,000-odd men who will remain in occupation, the Army is planning a program of entertainment and recreation that will make the Continent almost literally the European Theatre.

By the time the music program is going full force there will be GI symphony orchestras and dance bands, soldiers learning instruments and theory, or singing in more or less unison. Already Special Services for the European Theatre of Operations, commanded by Brig. Gen. Oscar Solbert, with Major G. C. Bainum as music officer, is combing the Continent for instruments and scanning soldiers' classification cards for musicians.

The tendency is to build on the principle of individual participation and soldier entertainment for soldiers, while taking full advantage of entertainment facilities provided by cooperating agencies such as USO-Camp Shows.

Barely three weeks after the Reims surrender some 1,500 of the GI's who had been sweating out V-E Day for three and a half years, sweated out a rain-drenched line outside the Reims municipal opera house to hear Jascha Heifetz. When he was unable to appear because of indisposition, harried Special Service officers telephoned an SOS to Paris. It so happened that there were on hand S/Sgt. Eugene List, pianist, who had just arrived on lend-lease from the New York Port of Embarkation, and Pvt. Stuart Canin, 19-year-old violinist recently plucked from the infantry.

On ten minutes' notice they were flown down to Reims, where it was explained to the patiently waiting soldiers that, although Heifetz couldn't appear, it was possible to offer them "the Army's own" Eugene List and Stuart Canin. The concert went off to the satisfaction of the music-hungry soldiers, and Sergeant List himself later vowed that it was "the best audience I ever played for."

Triumph Repeated

List and Canin later repeated their triumph in two appearances at the Verdun Opera House, and it was arranged for them to play in hospitals, for liberated war prisoners and for soldiers awaiting ships to take them home or to their next destinations.

Their tour is indicative of the Army's ability to furnish much of its own talent. It does not mean that the military authorities fail to appreciate the warm response soldiers have given "name" civilian attractions who have toured the ETO, such as Jascha Heifetz, Yehudi Menuhin, Lily Pons and Andre Kostelanetz, Alec Templeton, Grace Moore and Nino Martini. But celebrities can only be relied on for occasional visits, and however welcome these are, the Army will have to fall back on its own talents for any long-range music program.

It should be fairly safe to reveal now that as long ago as last fall the Music Branch of Special Services in New York, pretty confident all along of an Allied victory, but obliged to withhold details of its plans because the Army at the

time was worried about premature optimism, mapped the musical phase of the grand strategy designed to avert a peace-with-ennui.

This music plan, published by the War Department as part of a model sixty-day program called "Athletics and Recreation," has since been reproduced by Special Services for ETO in Paris, which makes it official policy for the theatre.

The stated purpose is "to open to every GI an exhilarating new field of enjoyment through music" and thus to "provide him with the wherewithal to fight boredom now, and the means of unlimited pleasure later."

Varied Activities

The program is designed to cover a sixty-day period with a five-day week, four duty hours a day, plus additional off-duty recreation time. The activities, laid out in an hour-by-hour schedule, include music appreciation under the title "So This Is Music!", composition, playing instruments, symphony orchestras, concert bands, glee clubs, dance orchestras, chamber ensembles, mass singing, music quizzes and concerts of recorded music.

The music program is just beginning to get under way, this writer was told by Col. Walter J. Currie, executive officer of Special Services in the ETO, who recently made a flying visit to New York. It has been held up so far by the fluidity of the troop situation in Europe, with many units being moved around and prepared for new assignments. A start has been made among some units stationed in Germany, and the program will begin to grow as the redeployed divisions move out.

One of the handicaps is scarcity of instruments. There never were enough to meet the Army's needs, and now thousands more are required. The Army is scouring Europe for them, buying up the output of a violin factory discovered in the Vosges Mountains, dickering with dealers in Switzerland and wheeling instruments from Britain and France.

Of the dozens of symphony orchestras which it is hoped will arise from the beehive of musical activity, one is now definitely projected—the first all-soldier ETO symphony. Soldiers will be the regular conductors, but famous guest conductors also will appear with the group.

Army officials are optimistic about the prospects for the music program. As Colonel Currie puts it, "GI's love good music. The idea that the GI is only interested in swing just isn't true."