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Exploring the Pages of Col. Grover C. Graham's Camp Robinson Scrapbook



Camp Joseph T. Robinson



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Message from the Editor

In this issue, we have several interesting articles. The granddaughter of Col. Grover C. Graham, who was the Commander of Camp Robinson during the WWII years, donated a scrapbook that her grandfather made during his time on Post. Three articles are developed from information taken from this scrapbook. Jah Whyte and LTC (Ret) Brian Mason include articles on boxers Joe Lewis and Sugar Ray Robinson when they visited Camp Robinson during the War. These articles provide different perspectives. In addition, Will Reaves investigates Cecil B. DeMille's, visit to the Post during WWII.

Because of the Cecil B. DeMille article, we decided to include a featured artifact article on the movie projectors at the Museum. We gave LTC Matthew Anderson a rest for this issue, so I have taken over the Featured Artifact duties!

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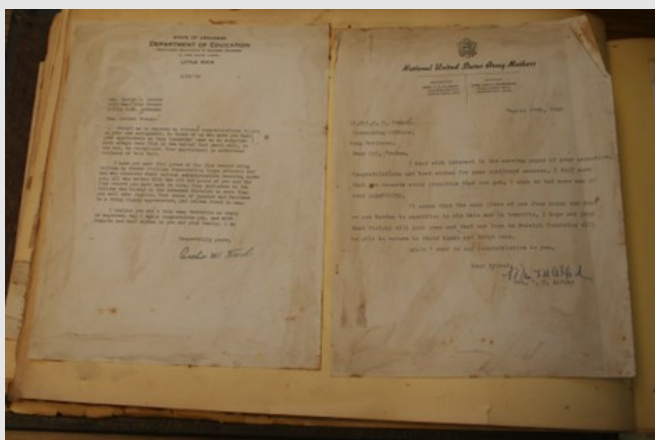
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EXPLORING COL. GROVER C. GRAHAM'S SCRAPBOOK COMMANDER OF CAMP ROBINSON 1942-1946

Keeping your service records safe comes highly recommended by mentors and peers, but it is relatively easy in the digital age. The military does it for you, right? Documents, photos, certificates...all of it is in the ether...somewhere. Safe? That's why we make copies and put them in a folder (either physical or digital). It's a matter of trust and it is a guarantee we have it if (or when) we need those records. We keep photos on our phones these days, but what happens when you drop them in the lake? It's very likely that those photos were automatically uploaded to some backup location within hours of you taking the photo. You just get a new phone and all the data, including notes reappear like magic. Yet this clearly has not always been the case. How did military record-keeping work before our digital era? Enter Colonel Grover C. Graham. His meticulous record keeping in the form of scrapbooks has been perfectly preserved, and recently made available via digitization for all those curious about the history of Camp Robinson. It is our



Letters congratulating COL. Graham on his promotion.



Photos with captions of significant events at Camp Robinson

honor to write on Col. Graham's contributions to Camp Robinson, utilizing stories from the past that would have been forgotten had it not been for the scrapbooks of Col. Graham.

Colonel Grover C. Graham was the commander of Camp Robinson during WWII. Some 70 thousand (plus) soldiers were trained here during his four years, and the camp saw considerable increases in the infrastructure necessary to house, feed, train, and even entertain them. Camp Robinson / Camp Pike was utilized in a very similar fashion during WWI, but we don't yet have the camp commander's scrapbook or journal to understand much of what took place. We do know approximate numbers, units, training, and even some building locations and purposes, but the commander's scrapbook allowed us to take a much deeper look into the everyday lives of the command and soldiers who served and trained here, thanks to Col. Graham's meticulous efforts to document with photos, captions, maps, brochures, and detailed personal descriptions of both his career and achievements as well as what he experienced.



Photo and article of Col. Graham and comedian Bob Burns.

The story of the scrapbook is indeed interesting. It is quite obvious why Col. Graham kept one. This place was a busy one during WWII, and so many changes in such short a time were occurring. It's often a wonder how he had time to document the important stuff like VIP visits, movie premieres, boxing exhibitions, building dedications, and so much more. But, when we were presented with a second scrapbook detailing his career prior to being assigned as the commander here, everything made perfect sense. Yes, there's not one, but two...both of them explaining the career of Col. Graham, detailing the important parts of his career from enlistment in 1908, through WWI where he received a battlefield promotion, to his tenure as the commander of Arkansas's Civilian Conservation Corps, through his historic command of Camp Robinson/Pike, culminating in his retirement ceremony in 1946.

Mrs. Susan Wilson, granddaughter of Col. Graham, gifted the first scrapbook to the Arkansas National Guard Museum in late 2019, right before the pandemic muddled things up for visitors and even staff to fully explore, research, and explain what a treasure-trove of information this first scrapbook is. The rediscovery of the scrapbook further adds to its amazing story. Mrs. Wilson found these precious items in trash bags, about to be thrown away, nestled in a work-shed behind her sister's house. Since the second scrapbook had 'Camp Joseph T. Robinson' labeled on its cover, the Wilson's were kind enough to donate it to the museum. This past summer, the staff and volunteers/interns had the privilege of working in the scrapbook, carefully scanning and making it available through a new digital archive and public programming software. We began to get a glimpse of how critical the camp was to the war effort and the state, and more importantly what took place here outside of the training that was both historically significant and internally meaningful. Both President Franklin Roosevelt and Vice President Truman visited (separate trips mind you).

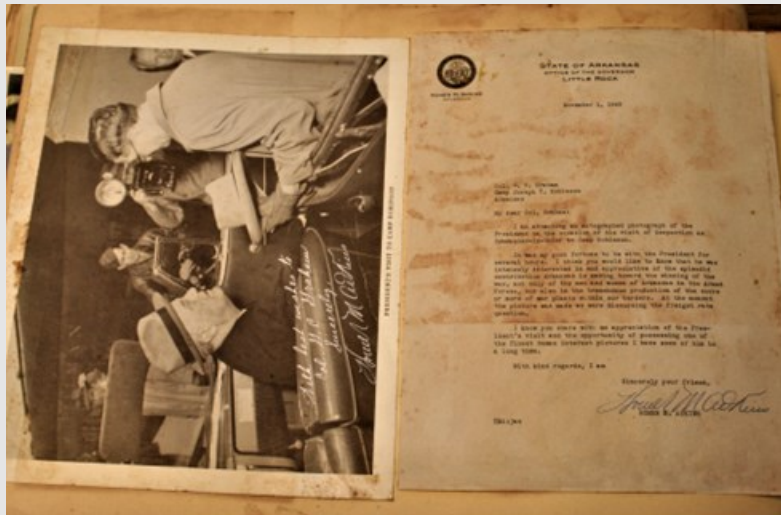
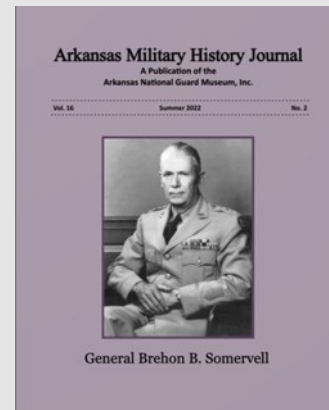


Photo of President Roosevelt and Letter of Appreciation by Governor Adkins.



Cover of AMHJ Vol. 16, No. 2 Summer 2022

The Army's top logistician, MG Brehon B. Somervell was here. A movie produced and directed by Cecil B. DeMille, of *The Greatest on Earth* and *The Ten Commandments* fame, premiered locally, and the Director visited Camp Robinson. Bob Burns, Arkansas native and, at the time, one of if not the most famous comedians in the nation, also visited with a stand up special for the troops of Camp Robinson. (photo) Another important event here at Camp Robinson during the war was a boxing exhibition that featured SSG Joe Louis and SGT Sugar Ray Robinson. The scrapbook, full of important photos and

documents, is a treasure-trove of Camp Robinson and Col. Graham's incredible achievements and history.

Recently, the Wilson's donated the first scrapbook to the museum. This time, both Susan and her husband Lt. Col. (Ret) William Wilson, stopped in to gift the museum with not only a second scrapbook, but a host of items significant to the family and Col. Graham's career. The items included some personal narratives about his early experiences in the Army, including being stationed in the Pacific during the height of Progressive Era Imperialism, his time on the Mexican border during the pursuit of Pancho Villa, and his promotion and service in France during World War One. But that is for a later issue. For now, we hope you enjoy reading this assortment of articles covering themes from the Col. Graham's Great Depression and World War Two era scrapbook. After reading this, check out the digitized version of the scrapbook on our website. You will be able to click through the scrapbook as if turning the pages themselves. And of course, be sure to stop in at the museum for more Camp Robinson history.



Newspaper clippings of various events that occurred at Camp Robinson during Col. Graham's tenure as Camp Commander. An incident during a training exercise at Lake No. 2 at Lakewood left 11 soldiers dead. Much of these newspaper clippings deal with incidents. Other happenings include new personnel and the designation of Camp Robinson as a WAC Center.

Susan Wilson's Donation—September 2023



Susan Wilson, granddaughter of Col. Grover C. Graham sharing stories of her grandfather with Volunteer LTC (Ret.) Mason and Intern Will Reeves.

Lt. Col. Brian L. Mason retired in February 2022 and has been active in volunteering his time to the ARNG Museum providing research, article information, and assistance with archiving and curation.

Will Reeves is a graduate student in the Heritage Studies program at Arkansas State University. Will was an Intern at the ARNG Museum during the summer of 2023 and was instrumental in digitizing Col. Graham's scrapbook and placing it on our website.



<https://arngmuseum.com/col-grover-c-graham-scrapbook/>

About Camp Robinson Visitor, Joe Louis

By Jah Whyte

One of Camp Robinson's most famous visitors, a boxer with a win streak spanning over two years. That is an accomplishment that only a few can make. Joe Louis was an American boxer from Chambers County, Alabama and he did just that. In his professional career he won a whopping 69 total fights with 52 of them by knockout. The heavyweight champ was terrorizing the boxing world for years. Louis defended his title a total of 26 times. However, he would start another career where he would empower many more with his strength and heroism. Louis became a symbol of what it meant to be American. The heavyweight champ defended something much more valuable than his championship belt. Joe Louis was fighting to defend people's freedom and democracy.

Louis put his career to the side to fight for his nation. He had always been a patriot, donating a portion of the prize money from fights to military organizations. Louis decided to join after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Like many, he didn't appreciate the fact that other nations felt that they could deceive the U.S. successfully with no repercussions. Before enlisting he supported the U.S Navy by giving an extremely generous donation of \$89,092. That's an equivalent of about \$1,838,586 today. When he joined, Louis was seen as a beacon of hope for the American people. However, Joe did not let himself get distracted by the spotlight and decided to try and make an impact fighting for the equal treatment of other black soldiers. "Although Louis saw himself as a patriot and supported all the troops, he felt a special



obligation to support the masses of blacks who had donned uniforms like himself" (Anthony Bell. army.mil). Joe would take tours of other bases to see the living conditions of the black troops and advocate for the equal treatment of both black and white soldiers. Because our post had black troops at the time it was most likely the reason he came to visit our very own Camp Robinson.

When Joe Louis visited Camp Robinson another notable figure was also in attendance, that being Sugar Ray Robinson. They most likely met in the old gym, which has now been taken back by Mother Nature. "Guests at the

reception given by the special services office for the members of the Joe Louis troupe which is now touring the military posts of the nation include left to right: Sgt. Ray Robinson, uncrowned welterweight champion of the world and member of the troupe; Col. West A. Hamilton, Member Chief of Staff; 8th Service Command Sgt. Joe Barrow Louis, World heavyweight boxing champion" (CMD Scrapbook). This piece was collected from the scrapbook of a previous post commander. Joe Louis was also used to rally troops' spirits to get them ready to fight overseas. One way that Louis achieved this was by setting up expedition fights at the camps. Supposedly, there was one here at Camp Robinson, but no footage or photographs were preserved to confirm that claim.



Joe Louis stepped in to be the American hero that the military needed. He lifted many people's spirits by joining the military. When you accomplish as much as Joe had there's a kind of immortality that you receive with it. By seeing that the heavyweight champ was in the war fighting alongside you, it really gave other soldiers a level of confidence that was needed at that time. While serving as a massive public figure for the army, Joe was still able to pursue his own goal of advocating for black soldiers around the nation. By visiting bases around the nation, he put some very needed pressure on making serving in the military equal for the black soldiers. Because of his dedication to his

country and prowess as a boxer, it makes Joe Louis one of Camp Robinson's most recognized visitors.

Sources:

Bell, Anthony T. "Soldier-Champ: Joe Louis Sacrificed Much for His Country." Army.mil, U.S Army, 28 Feb. 2014, https://www.army.mil/article/121005/soldier_champ_joe_louis_sacrificed_much_for_his_country.

Martin, Kali. "Joe Louis: From Boxing Gloves to Combat Boots: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans." *The National WWII Museum | New Orleans*, 8 Apr. 2020, www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/joe-louis-boxing.

About the Author Jah Whyte

Jah Whyte was an intern at the Arkansas National Guard Museum during the spring of 2023 as a senior at Maumelle High School. His father is a Major in the National Guard and now stationed in Florida after a two-year stint at the Professional Education Center (PEC), Camp Joseph T. Robinson. Jah is now a freshman at the College of Staten Island in New York, where he received a track and cross country scholarship.

The Story of Dr. Wassell, and Camp Robinson's visit from Cecil B. DeMille

By Will Reaves¹

On Tuesday, April 25, 1944, reporters swarmed Camp Robinson as the military base welcomed a famous visitor. As part of the three-day premiere of his latest film, *The Story of Dr. Wassell*, the renowned Hollywood director Cecil B. DeMille and some of the cast members were welcomed onto the Army post. The imposing figure, not by dimensions but by presence, stood on the grounds of the Infiltration Course behind a rope as a military unit crossed a model 'No Mans Land' under live fire in front of him.² Patriotism was in full swing as the nation was still engulfed in World War Two. Almost a month before the premiere and DeMille's visit, on June 6, 1944, Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy during the D-Day Invasion. Now Allied forces were fighting through the hedgerows of France, pushing their way ever towards places like Saint-Lo, Paris, and eventually all the way to Berlin. The liberation of Europe was underway, but victory was still far from being within reach. In the Pacific Theatre, General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz continue their campaign of encroachment towards Japan through Island Hopping. The previous month, Marines managed to successfully invade Saipan, and the first successful air raid on the Japanese mainland since the Doolittle Raids of 1942 targeted the steel factories of Yawata. Still, as with the case in Europe, total victory is far from within reach.

DeMille was certainly doing his part to fan the flames of patriotism. *The Story of Dr. Wassell* was one of the many military films to be released during World War Two to celebrate the successes of current military prowess and spread a pro-American message. Hollywood has been in the fight even before America entered the conflict. Coming out a full year before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* is a shocking satire of fascism and Adolph Hitler, and an investigation of Hollywood by the U.S. Senate was launched to determine if producers with "warmonger" mentalities were attempting to persuade the American public to join in a "needless war."³ Now that America has actually entered the conflict, Hollywood movies now had an increased role in presenting a view of the war to the public that would boost morale, help with recruiting, and propagate an uber patriotic mentality.⁴

The Story of Dr. Wassell certainly tries to push this narrative, presenting the true story, albeit with plenty of liberties taken, of a daring rescue of injured sailors during the early days of the war. The namesake of the movie, Dr. Corydon Wassell is present for the premiere in his hometown of Little Rock. As are other dignitaries. Yet right now all cameras are pointed at one person, Cecil B. DeMille. A camera flashes as he looks on at the military gallantry proceeding before him. The picture will end up on the front page of the *Arkansas Gazette* the next day, and a

¹ Will Reaves is a graduate student in the Heritage Studies program at Arkansas State University.

² Col. Grover C. Graham, scrapbook, April 25, 1944.

³ David E. Meerse, "To Reassure a Nation: Hollywood Presents World War II," *Film & History* 6 (1976): 91.

⁴ Maria Tommerdahl, "An Unknown Ally: Hollywood's Role in World War II."

photocopy version ends up in the scrapbook of Col. Grover Graham. In turn, this scrapbook ends up in the Arkansas National Guard Museum, where it is used to rediscover, this previously forgotten, historic visit.

Bio on DeMille

Cecil B. DeMille was born on August 12, 1881, in Ashfield, Massachusetts. It should not be too surprising that Cecil B. DeMille went into the field of drama, as both of his parents were playwrights. It seems older brother William, Cecil, and infant sister Agnes enjoyed a decently mild and enjoyable childhood. Much of that childhood was spent at the family estate 'Pamlico' at Pompton Lakes, New Jersey.⁵ While at Pamlico, the parents, father Henry and mother Beatrice, ran a private school and were involved in the Episcopalian Church. However, family tragedy interrupted that peaceful existence for young Cecil. In 1893, his father Henry died of typhoid fever. On his deathbed, Henry told Beatrice that he did not want his sons to be playwrights like him. The next year Agnes passed away at the age of three from spinal meningitis.⁶

Despite his father's dying wish, Cecil went into theater, foremost as an actor, but also writing and directing. It was through acting that he met his wife Constance Adams, who was playing opposite DeMille in *Hearts are Trumps*.⁷ They were married in 1902, and in 1908 Cecilia DeMille, Cecil's only biological child, was born.⁸ However, this career in theater did not last long. His departure from theater was in part from an incident of plagiarism of one of his unnamed scripts from lifelong idol and former friend of his fathers, David Belasco.⁹ This coincided with a string of plays that were unsuccessful. After watching the silent film *Les Amours de la reine Elizabeth*, DeMille was inspired to enter the world of film.¹⁰

At the time, film was in its infancy. The first moving pictures originated in the late 19th century, and around the turn of the century, pioneers in the field such as the Lumière Brothers and Georges Méliès experimented with special effects and cinematography techniques. Yet getting into filmmaking during this era was somewhat risky. While motion pictures were popular novelties, there was no way of determining if this new art form would stick around and continue to be popular over time.

Cecil B. DeMille entered the film industry with colleagues who had been theater producers, Jesse Lasky and Sam Goldfish, as well as other businessmen, and formed the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company in 1913.¹¹ Their first film, and film directorial debut for DeMille, was an adaptation of the *Squaw Man*, a play about an English captain who starts a ranch in the

⁵ Scott Eyman, (2010). *Empire of Dreams: The Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMille*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 28

⁶ Eyman, *Empire of Dreams*, 29-31.

⁷ Cecilia DeMille Presley; Mark A. Vieira. (2014). *Cecil B. DeMille: The Art of Hollywood Epic*. Philadelphia: Running Press. 21.

⁸ Simon Louvish, (2007). *Cecil B. DeMille: A Life in Art*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books. 31.

⁹ Louvish, *Cecil B. DeMille: A Life in Art*, 37.

¹⁰ Dick, Bernard F. (2001). *Engulfed: The Death of Paramount Pictures and the Birth of Corporate Hollywood*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 7

¹¹ Dick, *Engulfed*, 7.

American West.¹² Like the main character in the story, DeMille went west to find a location to shoot the film. He eventually found a barn to rent in the small town of Hollywood, a suburb of Los Angeles, and DeMille became the first Hollywood director in history.¹³ Unlike his career in theater, DeMille found huge financial success in the film world. *The Squaw Man* made \$255,000 against a budget of \$15,450 and was essential in turning the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company into Paramount Pictures, the studio giant we know today.¹⁴ From this point onward, Cecil B. DeMille became one of, if not the most influential and powerful directors in the film industry. He adjusted well through monumental changes such as the shift from silent films to ‘talkies’ and the introduction of technicolor. He pioneered techniques and technology now common in Hollywood such as ‘Motivated’ style lighting, the microphone boom, and a soundproof camera blimp.¹⁵ He favored large scale epics, and his films consistently broke box office records. By the time World War Two started, Cecil B. DeMille was a household name.

Like the rest of the nation, DeMille was affected by the war, and tried to do his part in the war effort. On one fateful night on April 28, 1942, DeMille listened to one of Franklin Roosevelt’s Fireside Chats. He found himself mesmerized by a true story of heroism.

“I should like to tell you one or two stories about the men we have in our armed forces: There is, for example, Dr. Corydon M. Wassell. He is a missionary, well known for his good works in China. He is a simple, modest, retiring man, nearly sixty years old, but he entered the service of his country and was commissioned a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy.

Dr. Wassell was assigned to duty in Java caring for wounded officers and men of the cruisers Houston and Marblehead which had been in heavy action in Java seas.

When the Japanese advanced across the island, it was decided to evacuate as many as possible of the wounded to Australia. But about twelve of the men were so badly wounded that they could not be moved. Dr. Wassell remained with these men knowing that he would be captured by the enemy. But he decided to make a last desperate attempt to get the men out of Java. He asked each of them if he wished to take the chance, and everyone agreed.

He first had to get the twelve men to the seacoast—fifty miles away. To do this, he had to improvise stretchers for the hazardous journey. The men were suffering severely, but Dr. Wassell kept them alive by his skill and inspired them by his own courage.

And as the official report said, Dr. Wassell was “almost like a Christ-like shepherd devoted to his flock.” On the seacoast, he embarked to men on a little Dutch ship. They were bombed, they were machine-gunned by waves of Japanese planes. Dr. Wassell took virtual command of the ship, and by great skill avoided destruction, hiding in little bays and little inlets.

A few days later, Dr. Wassell and his small flock of wounded men reached Australia safely. And today Dr. Wassell wears the Navy Cross.”¹⁶

¹² Gene Ringgold; DeWitt Bodeen (1969). *The Films of Cecil B. DeMille*. New York: Citadel Press. 3

¹³ Dick, *Engulfed*, 8; and [Ringgold & Bodeen](#), *The Films of Cecil B. DeMille*, 3

¹⁴ John Douglas Eames (1985). *The Paramount Story*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 10; and Walter Lowe (October 22, 1956). “DeMille at 75 Still Creating.” *Kentucky New Era*.

¹⁵ [Presley & Vieira](#), *Cecil B. DeMille*, 47 and 166.

Bio on Wassell

Corydon Wassell was born on July 4, 1884, in Little Rock, Arkansas. He seemed destined for a quiet, mundane life, having completed only one year of high school before becoming a plumber.¹⁶ This all changed when he was bitten by a rabid dog in 1904, leading him to seek the Pasteur treatment in Baltimore. From this incident, Wassell became infatuated with medicine, and he decided to become a doctor.¹⁷ He returned to Arkansas and passed the high school equivalency test, and graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1909, then did his post graduate work at Johns Hopkins University.¹⁸ After his formal education, he returned to his home state of Arkansas and went into private practice in the town of Tillar, where he met his first wife, Irene Yarnell, and had four children.¹⁹ Had his story ended here, he would still be seen as an inspirational person, starting from humble roots to working hard to become a respected doctor. Yet this is far from the end of his remarkable story.

Like DeMille, Wassell was a devout Episcopalian. In 1914, Wassell decided to use his medical training for ministry, becoming a medical missionary in Wuchang, China. While in China, tragedy struck the Wassell's. Irene died from a freak accident, slipping on wet concrete, hitting her head, and then falling into a pool of water.²⁰ While still in China, Wassell remarried to Madeline Edith Day. Madeline, like her husband, was in China for medical missions, serving as a nurse.²¹ Wassell spent twelve years as a missionary in China, and was forced to leave the nation in 1927 as a result of an uprising by Chiang Kai-shek and the Cantonese.²²

Returning to Arkansas, he continued his work in the medical field. He was a public health officer, working in several CCC camps throughout Arkansas and Louisiana, using these camps as a study of malaria control.²³ It was also during this time that he joined the Navy reserves, and was called into active duty in 1936.²⁴ In October 1941, Wassell received orders to report to the Philippines by way of San Francisco, stopping at the naval base at Pearl Harbor. His ship just so happened to pull away from the dock at San Francisco on December 7, 1941, the same day as the Pearl Harbor attack that brought America into World War Two. Thus, the ship, and his new post, was rerouted to Java.²⁵

¹⁶ Robert S. Birchard, and Kevin Thomas. "The Story of Dr. Wassell." In *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 323–28. University Press of Kentucky, 2004.

¹⁷ Birchard and Thomas, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 324.

¹⁸ Ibid, and David O. Bowden, "Corydon McAlmont Wassell" *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* April 29, 2022

¹⁹ David O. Bowden, "Corydon McAlmont Wassell" *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* April 29, 2022.

²⁰ Birchard and Thomas, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 324.

²¹ "Dr. Wassell, War Hero, Resuming His Career at 63 in Leper Hospital: Tired of Retirement, Man Who Led Wounded Navy Personnel to Safety in Pacific in 1942 Leaves for Molokai in Hawaii." *New York Times*, Sep 22, 1947.

²² Birchard and Thomas, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 324.

²³ Thomas F. Brady. "No Hollywood Hero: Dr. Wassell tells his story to the films only to help Navy Relief" Jun 28, 1942.; and "Corydon McA. Wassell, M.D." *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 5081 (1958): 1241.

²⁴ Bowden, "Corydon McAlmont Wassell" *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*.

²⁵ Ibid.

In Java, Wassell served as liaison to a Dutch hospital in Djokjakarta and cared for injured sailors that had come off of the badly damaged *USS Houston* and *USS Marblehead*. Having just come out of conflict with Japanese forces, much of the crew was seriously injured. In total, 47 injured sailors were transported by train to Djokjakarta. When the Japanese offensive reached Java, the Americans were ordered to evacuate to Australia. Wassell orchestrated the evacuation of the wounded men from his hospital. There were 10-12 men evacuated via submarine, five on a Navy oiler, and the rest of the wounded who were able to walk on a Dutch freighter.²⁶ There were nine men who were unable to walk, and thus did not join this evacuation as there was no room for stretchers on any of the evacuation crafts. Due to this situation, Wassell was ordered to leave these men behind and join the rest of the evacuation. However, Wassell chose to disobey his orders and stayed behind to attempt to get the rest of the injured men off the island.

These nine injured men: William Anderson SM2c, William A. McCurdy S2c, Thomas Borghetti Jr. FC1c, Benjamin G Hopkins S1c, Melvin Francis S2c, Bob Whaley EM2c, Joseph Leinweber, Bob Kraus, Pao San Ho and Dr. Wassell returned to the hospital inland, returning via boxcar, since there were no hospitals on the coast.²⁷ From the hospital the patients and few remaining nurses could hear Japanese Zeros flying overhead and the bombardment for former American facilities nearby.²⁸ While the men were constantly being carried to the hospital shelter due to the arrival of Japanese planes, three of the men were in such bad shape that they were left behind in their cots.²⁹ Bob Whaley, one of the injured men, later described the moment it was time to leave the hospital behind,

*“Just when our hopes had almost gone, Dr. Wassell walked in and told us to get ready as quickly as we could. ‘We’ve another chance to get out of here’ he said, ‘and it’s our last chance.’ I threw the stuff I needed and a few small souvenirs in a zipper bag and limped out of the hospital.”*³⁰

The group joined a British convoy headed for the coast. The three worse cases rode in an abandoned Army jeep that had been left behind.³¹ One of the injured, Ben Hopkins, insisted on being left behind, and was the only sailor that didn’t make it on the trip to the coast.³² Once they reached the coast, there was another problem; finding a ship to take them to Australia. This solution came in the form of the Dutch river boat *Janssens*. This was no joy ride, however. The craft was designed for 19 passengers, when the Wassell group arrived there were 800 people on board. The three stretchers and men on them were put on the top of a hatch.³³ Once underway, a wave of Japanese Zeros bombarded the craft with machine guns and aircraft cannons. Miraculously, the craft sustained no major damage, though all but one of the lifeboats had been

²⁶ Edward Pinkowski, “Dr. Wassells Boys,” *Our Navy*, 1945.

²⁷ Pao San Ho was a Chinese mess attendant. Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hopkins was later taken as a prisoner of war by the invading Japanese. Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

destroyed, and the *Janssens* still had a long way to go.³⁴ The *Janssens* pulled into a small cove to protect itself from another air raid, and 3/4ths of the passengers abandoned the ship, sure that they were not going to make it. Dr. Wassell let his men vote on whether or not they should get off or continue the voyage. Regardless, Wassell was going to stay with them to the end. The wounded men voted to stay on the *Janssens*.

They were several days at sea with no contact, the threat of Japanese submarines high. One day, a submarine appeared, and it seemed that all hope was not truly lost. However, a few minutes later an Australian patrol plane flew over and signaled for recognition. The group had made it.

Dr. Wassell was one of the first Americans of World War Two to receive the Navy Cross for taking it upon himself to save the injured under his command. Ironically, he missed the citation given to him by President Roosevelt. The day after the speech, when a friend told him about it, his response was “Heifer-dust.” When someone else congratulated him, he was still skeptical, saying, “That’s nothing, George Washington used to talk about me in his speeches too. Happens to me all the time.” After a third person congratulated him, he realized that this might not be an elaborate prank and bought a paper containing the speech.³⁵ Soon after, he was given orders to report to San Francisco, and suddenly he was worried. Wassell was sure that he was reporting to get court-martialed, as he had disobeyed orders in the very act that got him the Navy Cross and a citation by the President.³⁶ However, that was not the case. Rather, when he arrived, two secret service agents took him aside and told him not to speak with anyone. He registered at a hotel, and was promptly found by Commander Jack Bergen, and was told to leave at once. “I didn’t know Bergen from a hole in the wall. I saw he had three stripes and was my superior officer-so I obeyed. We went to the Mark Hopkins. Everybody seemed to know him, and he took me to an expensive suite, saying I was his friend,” Wassell later recalled to a journalist.³⁷ When he got to his suite with Bergen, Wassell asked if there was any way he could get in touch with his family in Arkansas. “Without saying a word, Bergen went to the telephone, calling my mother in Little Rock and my wife in St. Charles, Arkansas. When I was congratulated on having the President mention me as a hero and for getting a Navy Cross I said, ‘Yes, I am grateful to George Washington too.’ I didn’t believe it.”³⁸ As it turned out, Wassell was not brought to California to be court-martialed. Rather he was here to meet with none other than Cecil B. DeMille.

Production of the Movie

At the time that DeMille heard Roosevelt’s rendition of Wassell’s story, he was in a deal with Paramount to produce three films. He had just finished the first film of the deal, *Reap the*

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Brady. “No Hollywood Hero: Dr. Wassell tells his story to the films only to help Navy Relief.”

³⁶ Louella Parsons. “Missionary Doctor Visits Hollywood.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jul 19, 1942.

³⁷ Parsons, “Missionary Doctor Visits Hollywood.”

³⁸ Ibid

Wild Wind, and was set to make a film about the Mexican Revolution called *Rurales*.³⁹ However, this changed once he heard the fireside chat. Interested in making a film on the last minute evacuation, DeMille dropped *Rurales* and sent a telegram to Will Hayes, the Chairman of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America, and Stephen Early, Roosevelt's secretary, concerning the prospect of making a film based upon Wassell's story.⁴⁰ Despite being a Conservative Republican, DeMille was actually a supporter of Roosevelt, lending him a car for the 1932 Presidential Election.⁴¹ Yet lending a car might not be enough to seal the deal, so in the telegram, DeMille and Paramount executive Y. Frank Freeman promised that they, "Would pay liberally for rights to this story. Disposition of such payments could be worked out in reference to distribution to Armed Forces Relief Agencies and Dr. Wassell."⁴²

This worked, and Wassell was pulled from Australia to meet with DeMille and his screenwriters. Since films that were based on published works had more prestige, the famed English author James Hilton was brought on to publish a book based on the screenplay written by Charles Bennett. While the book was actually based on the screenplay, it was published before the movie was released, and the film is credited as being based off of the book.⁴³ This practice also prevented copyright claims.⁴⁴ That is not to say that James Hilton did not make the novel his own in some regards. Hilton, along with Associate Producer Louis Harris, did make a trip to New York, where the *Marblehead* was docked after being badly damaged in the Pacific, to speak with crewmembers who had contact with Wassell while in Java, and then to Little Rock, where Hinton and Harris spoke with family and friends of Wassell.

Wassell was actually a little unimpressed with the idea of a film based on his deeds. "Personally, I don't like it," Wassell told one journalist during his visit to Hollywood. "But it's for Navy release, so I'll do anything I can." When asked who should play him, he responded in a southern accent, "Spencer Tracy would do fine. I saw him in San Francisco, and I liked him."⁴⁵ In reality, there was only one star that DeMille ever wanted to play the role, Gary Cooper. During their visit to Little Rock, Hilton and Harris even let it slip that Cooper was being eyed for the role.⁴⁶ The issue was that Cooper was in the middle of shooting the Western film *Saratoga Trunk* for Warner Bros. Unsure if Cooper would be ready to join the production of *The Story of*

³⁹ *Reap the Wild Wind* was an adventure film starring John Wayne and was a massive production, featuring an electrical giant squid. Bichard and Thomas, *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 324, and Eames, *The Paramount Story*, 158.

⁴⁰ Will Hays is perhaps best known for implementing the 'Hays Code' in 1934, which set standards of morality within films. Furthermore, Paramount was not the only movie studio to reach out and express interest in making a Wassell film. MGM and Columbia also reached out, but DeMille beat them to the punch by one hour. *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), June 6, 1942: 6.

⁴¹ While he might have supported Roosevelt, DeMille never voted for another Democrat after him. Eyeman, *Empire of Dreams*, 288.

⁴² *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 324.

⁴³ Charles Bennett. "Unconquered." In *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense: The Life of Screenwriter Charles Bennett*, edited by John Charles Bennett, 177–84. University Press of Kentucky, 2014.

⁴⁴ *Cecil B. DeMille's Hollywood*, 325.

⁴⁵ Parsons, "Missionary Doctor Visits Hollywood".

⁴⁶ *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), June 6, 1942: 6.

Dr. Wassell on time, DeMille initially cast Albert Dekker. Dekker eventually withdrew from the film, feeling that the role was unsuitable for him, but by that time Cooper was ready to join *The Story of Dr. Wassell*.⁴⁷ The shooting of the film appears to be largely uneventful. While a lot of the jungle foliage scenes were shot in Central America, most of the film was done in a studio, with bleachers were set up around the set, so visitors could see how movies were made.⁴⁸

Melvin Francis, one of the injured sailors who was aboard the *Janseens*, was asked by DeMille to provide additional details, and ended up playing himself in the movie. “When I signed my contract,” Francis recalls, “the first thing I did was call my girl, Anita Galindo, at Boise and I proposed to her over long distance.”⁴⁹

Despite the interviews of eyewitnesses and Dr. Wassell himself, plenty of liberties were taken with the story. Wanting a romantic subplot, DeMille cast Laraine Day as Madeline, Wassell’s actual wife, but in the movie the couple was not married.⁵⁰ Some liberties were also taken in order to add to the spectacle of the film, such as the inclusion of a volcanic explosion.

DeMille was also very interested in putting religious themes in the film. Christianity in film was nothing new to DeMille. Religious epics was one of his favorite kinds of films to make. Among his most popular films were: *The Ten Commandments*, *The King of Kings*, and *The Sign of the Cross*. All of these films dealt with Biblical topics. *The Sign of the Cross*, came out in 1932, and now that the world was at war, he felt a renewed sense of adding religious elements to his films. In an interview with reporter Betty Threadgill of *The Arkansas Gazette* during the film’s premiere at Little Rock, he said,

“Whenever humanity is in distress, it reaches out to find some greater power to help it. Human beings call it by many names. I shouldn’t call this a ‘religious revival.’ It is much more than that. The saying, ‘There are no atheists in foxholes’ means more than a temporary ‘religious revival.’ It is realizing the unimportance of the things we previously were struggling for and the value in understanding the importance of something greater than we are.”⁵¹

As such, and because it fit in with the character of Wassell as a former missionary, a central theme of this film dealt with reaching out to God during times of distress.⁵²

The Premiere

Once the film was completed, it was shown to Navel officials for review in Washington, D.C. before its official premiere in Little Rock on April 26, 1944. The Navy ended up receiving \$50,000 from Paramount.⁵³ They were paid upfront, so even if the film did poorly at the box

⁴⁷ Bichard and Thomas, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*.

⁴⁸ Ibid. And “Screen news here and in Hollywood: Paramount Crew, under Arthur Rosson, to film ‘Dr. Wassell’ Scenes in Central America” *New York Times*, February 9, 1943.

⁴⁹ *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), April 24, 1944: 2.

⁵⁰ Bichard and Thomas, *Cecil B. DeMille’s Hollywood*, 324.

⁵¹ *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), April 25, 1944: 6

⁵² Lindvall, Terry. “Foxhole Prayers (1939–1945).” *God on the Big Screen: A History of Hollywood Prayer from the Silent Era to Today*, NYU Press, 2019, pp. 62–96.

⁵³ Brady. “No Hollywood Hero: Dr. Wassell tells his story to the films only to help Navy Relief”; and “Corydon McA. Wassell, M.D.” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 5081.

office, the Navy would still make a profit from it. Little Rock was chosen as the spot for the official premiere as it is Wassell's hometown. Much fanfare and anticipation was given for the event. Starting on April 24, Governor Homer Adkins held a parade and reception for the distinguished Hollywood and military guests who were a part of the premiere. Held at the War Memorial Building lawn, DeMille presented Governor Adkins with a bound copy of the production notes, and Adkins made DeMille an official "Arkansas Traveler." A 25-piece band from the Naval Air Technological Training Center came down from Memphis to play.⁵⁴

The next day, the activities of the premiere made their way to Camp Robinson. Thanks to the preservation of material in Col. Graham Grover's scrapbook, we have a detailed account as to how the procession went at the Camp. There were four main parties: the Hollywood Party, Navy Party, Civilian Party, and the Governor's Party. The Hollywood Party included Cecil B. DeMille and wife Constance; Mr. Sidney Biddell, the associate producer; Ms. Signe Hasso, one of the cast members; Ms. Carol Thurston, one of the cast members; Mr. Melvin Francis; Gladys Rosson, DeMille's secretary; Mr. Ken Whitmore, DeMille's press agent; Mr. Mervin Houser, a Paramount publicist; Mr. Allan Glenn, a Paramount representative; Mr. Frank Gebman, Paramount photographer, and Mr. Tom McKean, another Paramount representative.

The Navy Party was highly reflective of the Navy's medical interest. It was made up of: Rear Admiral E.C. White, representing Vice Admiral Ross T. McIntire, Surgeon-General of the U.S. Navy; Commander Wassell; Lt. Commander Kent, aide to Admiral White; Commander A.R. Mack; Lt. A.G. Miller; Lt. W.M. Wisner; and Lt. Commander Spearman. We do not have the names of those who made up the civilian party at Camp Robinson, only that there were approximately 15 motion picture exhibitors, 15 press representatives, and 10 drivers as part of this group. The Governor's Party consisted of only Governor Adkins and General E.L. Compere, aide to the Governor. At 4:00 PM, all parties left the Albert Pike Hotel in Navy Station Wagons and were escorted by two State police cars to the main gate of Camp Robinson. Around 4:30, when the group arrived, they were met by the Camp Special Service Officer, Capt. John S. McGinnis, as well as a military police escort. From there, the groups were taken to the Camp Headquarters Building. From there, Governor Adkins, Rear Admiral White, Commander Wassell, Cecil B. DeMille, Signe Hasso, Carol Thurston, and Melvin Francis were introduced to the Commanding Officer and military and civilian personnel working at the Headquarters Building. For the sake of time, most of the introductions were kept brief, with the exception of DeMille remarking on the excellent job of women working to allow men to go on to fight.

The groups made their way to the hospital, where the individuals who were introduced at the Camp Headquarters Building were presented for the convalescent patients. A note made in the procession account states that all remarks made while at the hospital presentation should be kept to three minutes to allow cheering remarks from patients.

Around 5:25, the group made their way to the Infiltration Course by way of the Rifle Range. Here, the group witnessed the crossing of 'No Man's Land.' The demonstration was over around 6:20, and the groups made their way to the Infantry Replacement Training Center. This is

⁵⁴ *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), April 20, 1946: 6.

where the distinguished group members were introduced to the Commanding General of the Training Center. After their meeting of the Commanding General, it was time to eat. IRTC Officers took charge and assigned the various groups to respective messes. The Naval Officers ate with Col. Graham, and his staff were treated to a buffet supper in the Camp Officers Club. At 7:30, the groups were taken to Service Club No. 1. Twenty minutes later, Capt. McGinnis again took charge, and led the group to the Soldiers Arena adjacent to the Field House. At 8:00, a program began at the Field House. It began with some form of impromptu camp show. What kind of show is unknown, as the details are not marked in the stage program preserved in Col. Graham's scrapbook. While this show was going on, the P.A. system was getting set up, as well as the microphone and stand on stage. Once all of these details were done, a band played the National Anthem. Once the final note played, Capt. McGinnis, assuming the role of Master of Ceremonies, got up and gave a two-minute presentation, which was followed by a local act. Like the impromptu camp show, this local act is not known, and is marked as "undetermined" in the stage program. Melvin Francis, the sailor who was saved by Wassell and was later featured in the movie, was next on stage, speaking for five minutes. We do not know what the contents of his speech consisted of, but one can imagine that he was able to tell his version of the ordeal.

Another unknown local act followed Francis, and then actress Carol Thurston gave a five-minute speech. Another local act followed, and then Signe Hasso, "Bettina" in the film, gave a speech. Some of the local acts came on the stage, and then Governor Adkins gave a five-minute speech. The last person to give a speech was, ironically, the biggest star, Cecil B DeMille. Rather than being limited to a five-minute speech, he was given twice as long to speak. The program ended with the band playing "California Here I Come," and the parties were escorted back to the Main Gate by M.P.s, and state police cars escorted them back to the Albert Pike Hotel. So ended the visit to Camp Robinson.

The next day, the film was shown at the State Capitol, and also appeared in theaters throughout the state. State capitol offices closed at noon to allow people to see the film and join in the festivities. It went on to be a hit at the box office and was nominated for an Oscar for Best Effects.

Conclusion

After the war, Wassell briefly retired, splitting time between a house in Hot Springs and Madeline's hometown of Englewood, New Jersey, but did not stay put for very long.⁵⁵ Following his prewar passion of medical missions, Corydon took over as superintendent of the Episcopalian Shingle Memorial Hospital on the Hawaiian island of Molokai, a 32 bed hospital for lepers.⁵⁶ He resigned just two months in, claiming that, "It is being run as a commercial

⁵⁵ "Dr. Wassell, War Hero, Resuming His Career at 63 in Leper Hospital: Tired of Retirement, Man Who Led Wounded Navy Personnel to Safety in Pacific in 1942 Leaves for Molokai in Hawaii." *New York Times*, Sep 22, 1947.

⁵⁶ "Dr. Wassell, a Missionary: War Hero, will serve without pay in a Leper Hospital." *New York Times*, Aug 25, 1947. 19.

public institution and not a missionary hospital.”⁵⁷ Corydon and Madeline lived in Key West for a bit before he returned back to Arkansas to be closer to his mother in St. Charles. He passed away in 1958 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Cecil B. DeMille continued to churn out blockbusters after *The Story of Dr. Wassell*. In 1952, he released *The Greatest Show on Earth*, which became Paramount’s most successful movie at the box office at that point in history and won DeMille the Oscar for Best Picture. In 1958, while climbing a ladder on the set of his huge remake of *The Ten Commandments*. DeMille suffered a heart attack. He continued having a series of heart attacks after this initial incident and died the following year in 1959.⁵⁸ He is buried in what is now called the Hollywood Forever Cemetery.⁵⁹

Plenty of Tickets Now Available

World Premiere!

Don't Miss Your Chance, Get Your Ticket TODAY!

Paramount Presents
In TECHNICOLOR

CECIL B. DeMILLE'S

"The Story of Dr. Wassell"
(Little Rock's Own Hero)

Starring
GARY COOPER
With Laraine Day - Signe Hasso
Dennis O'Keefe - Carol Thurston
And Carl Fennell - Stanley Ridges
Renny McEvoy - Oliver Thornton

**Wednesday
APRIL 26**

Personal Appearances on the Stage!
Commander Corydon M. Wassell (M. C.) U. S. N. R.
Cecil B. DeMille, Producer and Director
Signe Hasso - Carol Thurston - Melvin Frances

Signe Hasso

Cecil B. DeMille

Carol Thurston

Simultaneous Showing
CAPITOL 8 P. M. — ARKANSAS 8:30 P. M.
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Established Price \$1.00
Federal Tax25
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Total Admission and Tax \$1.60

Avoid Disappointment. Get Your Tickets TODAY!

LEFT: An advertisement for the premiere of *The Story of Dr. Wassell* in the Arkansas Gazette. April 23, 1944.

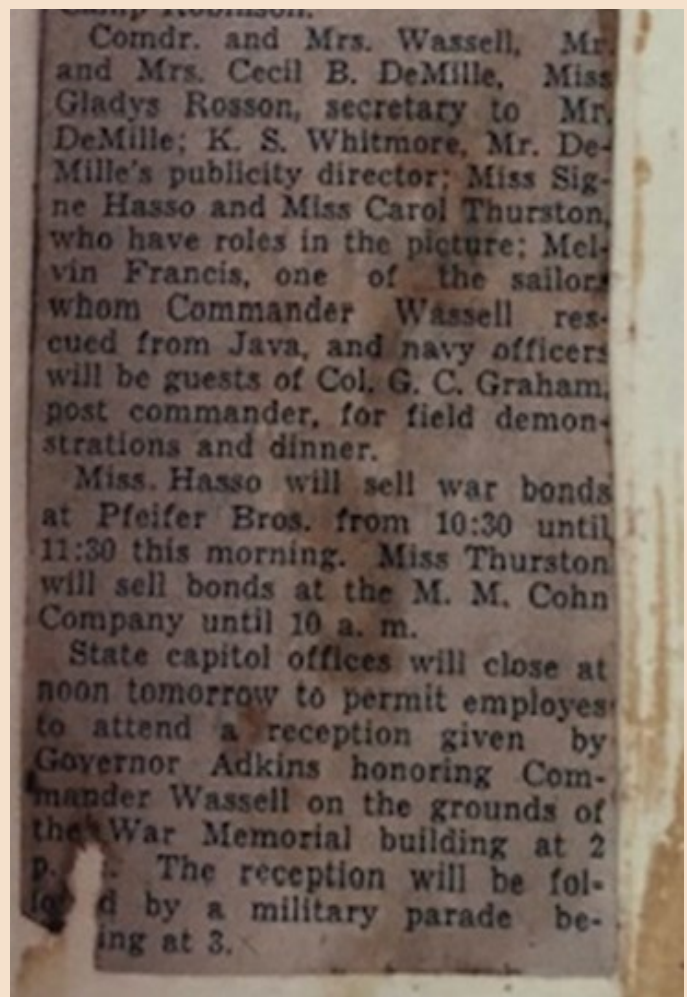
⁵⁷ "Dr. Wassell Resigns Post: Quits as Head of Molokai Hospital, calling it 'Commercial.'" *New York Times*, December 19, 1947.

⁵⁸ Presley & Vieira, *Cecil B. DeMille*, 402.

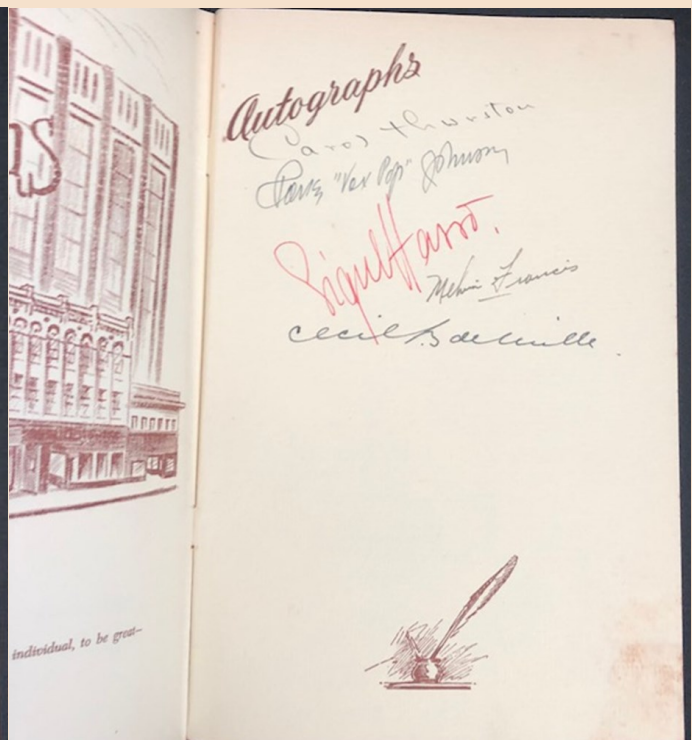
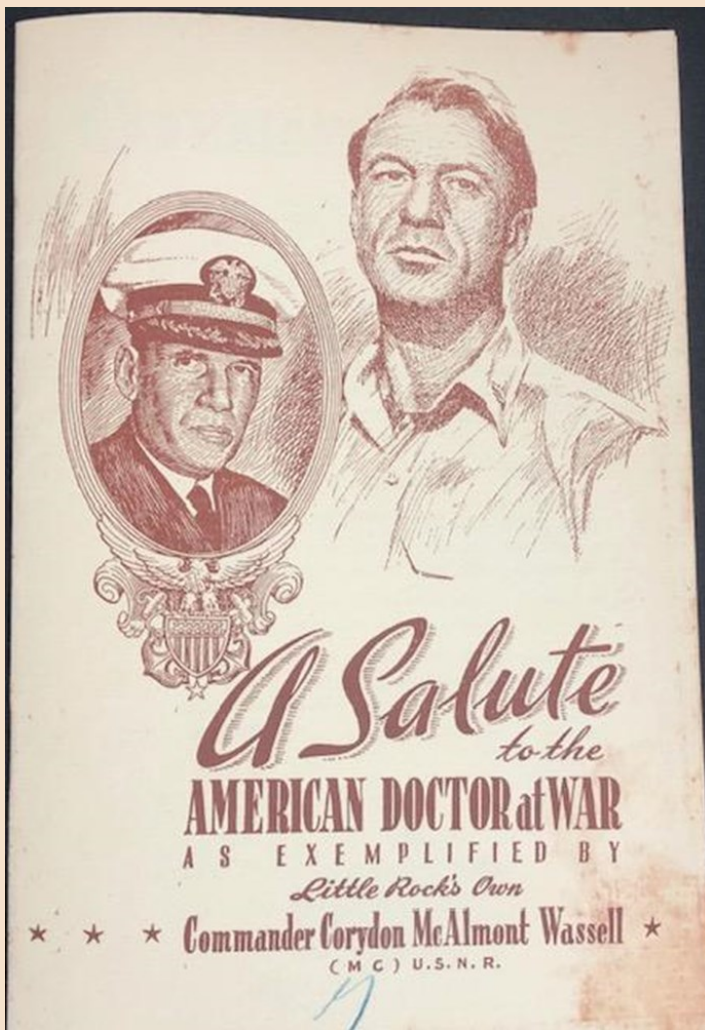
⁶⁰ Paul Donnelley. *Fade to Black: A Book of Movie Obituaries* 3rd ed. (Omnibus Press, 2004) p. 318.



ABOVE: Col. Grover Graham kept a treasure trove of information on Camp Robinson's World War Two history in his scrapbook, including this section on Cecil B. DeMille's visit.



ABOVE: A newspaper clipping of the premiere in Col. Grover Graham's scrapbook.



LEFT: A program from the movie premiere.

ABOVE: Included in the program are various autographs from the cast and crew of *The Story of Dr. Wassell* that were present for the premiere, including the signature of Cecil B. DeMille.



LEFT: Col. Grover Graham at the premiere of *The Story of Dr. Wassell*. He is seated next to none other than Dr. Wassell himself.

Page

--- STAGE PROGRAM ---

(Continued from preceeding page)

(Impromptu camp show. P. A. system. Mike on stage. Stand.)

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 minutes | 1. Band -- National Anthem. |
| 2 " | 2. Master of Ceremonies. (Capt. McGinnis) |
| 5 " | 3. Local act. (Undetermined) |
| 5 " | 4. Melvin Francis, of the cast of "The Story of Dr. Wassell" etc. |
| 5 " | 5. Local act. (Undetermined) |
| 5 " | 6. Carol Thurston, "Three Martini" in "The Story of Dr. Wassell." |
| 5 " | 7. Local act (Undetermined) |
| 5 " | 8. Signe Hasso, "Bettina" in "The Story of Dr. Wassell". |
| 5 " | 9. Local act. (Undetermined). |
| 5 " | 10. Governor Homer Adkins of Arkansas. |
| 10 " | 11. Mr Cecil B. DeMille, producer-director of "The Story of Dr. Wassell"; also the producer and guiding genius of the "Lux Radio Theatre." |
| | 12. Band, "California Here I Come" |

9:45
8:50 p.m.

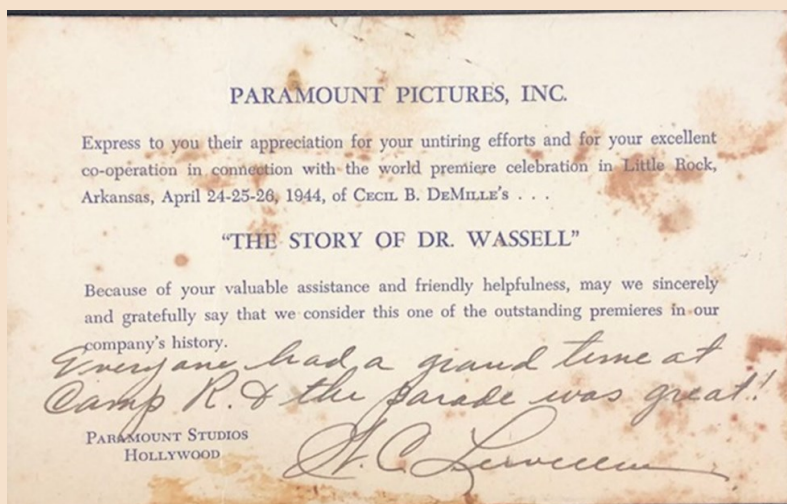
All guests who arrived in procession are returned to their vehicles for return trip to Albert Pike Hotel. M. P.'s escort to Main Gate of Camp. State Police cars meet procession here and escort back to Albert Pike Hotel.

FINIS

ABOVE: The program of the presentation made by various dignitaries and cast of *The Story of Dr. Wassell* at the field house. Other pages include the schedule of the visit to Camp Robinson.



ABOVE: The presentation of soldiers crossing "No Man's Land". Cecil B DeMille is present in the center. Col Graham is behind DeMille to the right. Dr. Wassell is in a Naval officer uniform to the far right, Melvin Francis is to the left of DeMille, and Carol Thurston is to the left of Francis.



LEFT: A card from Paramount Pictures expressing their thanks for Col. Graham for his part in the premiere of *The Story of Dr. Wassell*. The signature is from W.C. Lewellan, a Paramount exec, who oversaw the premiere for the studio.

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Two of America's greatest boxers visit Camp Robinson.

By LTC (Ret) Brian Mason

The Brown Bomber and Sugar Ray Robinson's visit to Camp Robinson during World War II would have been forgotten if it was not for the Post Commander's scrapbook. This scrapbook was donated to the Arkansas National Guard (ARNG) Museum in 2021 by Col. Graham's granddaughter, Mrs. Susan Wilson. Since then, a few interesting finds have been discovered in this, the first of two books gifted to the ARNG Museum from the family¹. One such finding was a photo that caught the attention of the reader about one-third of the way through Col. Grover Graham's scrapbook. The photo was located just after a secret document detailing Vice President Truman's visit. After reading the caption, I was suddenly and excitedly caught on the ropes.

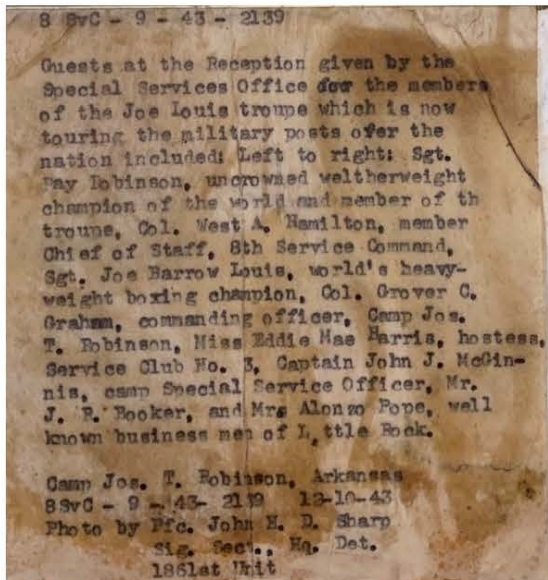
Both Joe Lewis and Sugar Ray Robinson were drafted into the U.S. Army during the war's early years. Neither would see combat, as their value to the war effort was realized in a far more poignant manner. Boxing and exhibitions at home and overseas boosted recruitment and morale. The only other sport besides baseball that was so beloved, watched and listened to (radio) by most Americans at the time of the war was boxing. Accounts of their exhibition visits to military bases all over the world are recalled and written fondly and with excitement. Troops were more likely to see President Roosevelt, Vice President Truman, or Gen. Eisenhower than the Brown Bomber and Sugar Ray. Truman's visit is also in the colonel's scrapbook, but that is for another article.

The scrapbook, like most others, includes photos, cut-out and typed captions, newspaper clippings, typed orders, map cut-outs, and typed narratives that help explain the most important occurrences on Camp Robinson Camp Pike during his command, which spanned from 1940 through 1946.



LEFT: Reception of the Joe Louis Troupe by Camp Commander, COL Grover Graham, December 10th, 1943. L to R: SGT Ray Robinson, COL West Hamilton, SGT Joe Lewis, COL Grover Graham, Ms. Eddie Harris, CPT John McGinnis, Mr. J.R. Hooker, Mr. Alonzo Pope. (Photo courtesy PFC John H.D. Sharp, Signal Section, HQ Det., 1861st Unit, 8th Service Command.)

¹ Camp Robinson Scrapbook (1941-1945), Grover C. Graham collection. ARNG Museum Archives



Typed caption below the Joe Louis Troupe Reception Photograph in COL Graham's (Camp Commander's) Scrapbook.

Finding heroes during WW II was -- and still is -- quite easy. Most of them now lay under white crosses or other markers, having carried the burdens of our nation's call. They were young men and women volunteers or draftees, just your average citizen; most were barely out of high school, now loading onto ships or jumping out of planes, carrying rifles, flying aircraft, loading naval guns or large artillery. Two of those fighting men put on the uniform after they had proven themselves more than formidable... in the boxing ring.

The Brown Bomber, Joe Lewis Barrow, was born in 1914; the seventh of eight children of Munroe and Lillie Barrow from Chambers County, Alabama, the children of former slaves, alternating between sharecropping and rental farming. Lillie was half Cherokee and Munroe was African American with some European ancestry.

Not speaking much until about six years old, Joe had a speech impediment and other developmental setbacks. He hardly knew his biological father, as Munroe was committed to a mental institution in 1916. His mother remarried after being falsely told her husband died while institutionalized. Munroe actually lived until 1938, unaware of his son's fame as a boxer. The Ku Klux Klan's terrorist and murderous activities forced the Louis family to flee the South and move to Detroit, Michigan, where Joe and his brother worked for Ford Motor Company, living in Detroit's "Black Bottom" neighborhood. Joe's stunted development as a child resulted in his removal from the mainstream educational foundation and into a trade school, where he could adapt to the curriculum far better. At 15, Joe left the cabinetry school to work and help support the family. It was then when a friend, an amateur boxer, invited Joe to spar with him, and thus began his illustrious career... as a boxer anyway. He did dabble in professional wrestling, golf, TV, and film. Still, his record in boxing (66 wins, three losses) was the legacy that labeled him as one of the greatest boxers of all time. His reign as heavyweight champion from 1937 to 1949 recorded 26 championship fights, and his two fights against Max Schmeling propelled the sport of boxing to the global stage.² Louis spent too much time golfing prior to the first match, having been KO'd in the 12th round by Schmeling.³ The rematch two years later was one of the most significant matches in all of boxing history. It was the first time many white Americans openly cheered for a black man against a white opponent. Louis pummeled Schmeling, knocking him down three times; the third resulting in the famed, "Throwing in the Towel" by Schmeling's trainer after only two minutes and four seconds.⁴

January 9th, 1942 would mark the start of Louis' other career as a Soldier. After fighting a charity bout for the Navy Relief Society, raising over \$47,000 for the fund, Joe enlisted the next day as a

² Gerald Astor. (1974). "... And a Credit to His Race": *The Hard Life and Times of Joseph Louis Barrow, a.k.a. Joe Louis*. New York: Saturday Review Press.

³ Rich Lerner. (November 12, 2007). "The Brown Bomber's Green Legacy". The Golf Channel. Archived from the original on November 17, 2007

⁴ Lewis A. Erenberg. (2005). *The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis v. Schmeling*. New York: Oxford University Press.

private in the U.S. Army at Camp Union, Long Island, New York.⁵ When a reporter asked during the induction, “What’s your occupation?” Joe answered, “Fighting, and let us at them Japs.” Later he would speak at another Relief Fund dinner saying, “We’ll win because we are on God’s side.” Private Joe Lewis Barrow would be assigned to a segregated Cavalry unit based at Fort Riley, Kansas, where his love for horses and his ability to help the cause of repressed black Soldiers would impact both his personal well-being, as well as the esprit de corps among the troops. His ability to influence the War Department’s treatment of black soldiers was notable, as he is attributed with the facilitation of a group of black applicants’ admissions to Officer Candidate School (OCS); where racism held up the applications for several months. One of those applicants would later become a close friend of Lewis, the baseball legend, Jackie Robinson.⁶



The War Department soon realized his potential to improve troop morale and encourage enlistments and placed Louis and fellow boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, into the Special Services Division commanded by Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, another visitor to Camp Robinson during WWII, (see his story in Vol. 16, No.2, Summer 2022). Louis and Robinson together would travel the country in uniform, boxing in nearly 100 exhibitions and entertaining more than 2 million soldiers and countless civilians. One of those stops was Camp Joseph T. Robinson in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Neither Lewis nor Robinson saw combat during their enlistments but would serve rather, as excellent representatives of both the Army and black servicemen to the world. Louis

⁵ Arlington National Cemetery Biography of Joe Louis. Retrieved 12 February 2023.

⁶ Truman K. Gibson & Steve Huntley (2005). *Knocking Down Barriers: My Fight for Black America*. Chicago: Northwestern University Press

attained the rank of Staff Sergeant and Robinson to Sergeant by the end of the War. Lewis was awarded the Legion of Merit for his contribution to the war effort.⁷

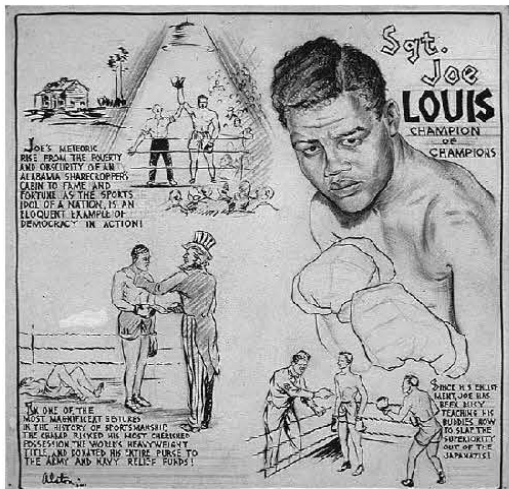


Joe Louis Army Service WWII.



Louis speaks to a crowd in Italy before an exhibition match.
(Photos courtesy The National WWII Museum)

Sugar Ray Robinson, born Walker Smith Jr., in May 1921, was also a young boy in the Detroit neighborhood called “Black Bottom.” He stated it was named that way, “Black because we lived there and bottom because that’s where we were at.” His mother moved him to Harlem, New York, in 1932. It was there where his intrigue of the streets won out over his attentiveness in school. In the streets, he earned a few nickels dancing on the corner or shoplifting with his pals. After bragging about knowing Joe Lewis during his time in Black Bottom, Detroit, he was challenged to prove himself in a church basement boxing club. There, a trainer took the 14-year-old under his wing, and both would see their way to world championships and much more.⁸



Poster that Accompanied the Exhibition Fights highlighting Lewis' accomplishments
Photo courtesy War Department

Robinson (Smith) somehow saw glamor in boxing, and it was the ring that offered him the means to become the “renaissance man” he so desired. His trainer, under great pressure from the ferocious ambition of young Walker Smith Jr., placed him in an amateur bout where another fighter on the ticket, Ray Robinson, was a no-show (he quit). Smith and his trainer couldn’t legally get an AAU membership card which would allow him to fight even as an amateur until he turned age 16, so, out of convenience, Walker signed the card under Robinson’s name, and his trainer let him fight...the kid not only won, but looked graceful doing it, and thus the reporter dubbed him

⁷ "National Museum of the U.S. Air Force". Archived from the original on January 14, 2012. Retrieved 13 February 2023.

⁸ Sugar Ray Robinson & Dave Anderson. *Sugar Ray*, London: Da Capo Press, 1994

“Sugar,” and the name on the card stuck with him as well. “Sugar Ray” became a star and one of the greatest boxers of all time. His big smile hit the cover of Time Magazine in 1951, propelling him to a legendary status not only as a boxer but as a social icon, royalty if you will.



Cover of Time Magazine Published June 25th, 1951.
Cover Credit: Ernest Hamlin Baker

Robinson (Smith) was drafted into the Army in 1943 and danced his way into the same unit as his old friend, Joe Lewis. The traveling exhibitions and road-show entertainment were more of a distraction for Robinson than it was for Lewis. While both fought professional bouts during their time in uniform, they tended to be more brutal for Sugar Ray; having faced fierce opponents in fourteen different professional fights in 1943 alone, Robinson was barely able to keep up with his military obligations. Sgt. Robinson’s 15-month military career was marked by both controversy and fame, despite the press story of him missing movement just three short months after his exhibition at Camp Robinson. When his unit finally prepared to ship out, Robinson was nowhere to be found. His unit and ship sailed without him on March 29th, 1944. A week later he showed up in Manhattan, New York, claiming that he suffered from amnesia after an accident. There was no record of the accident. Records indicate that he woke up on April 5th in a hospital at Fort Jay. The file said a stranger found him in the street on April 1st and took him to the hospital. The doctor’s report concluded that Robinson’s version of the events was sincere. However, military authorities determined him to suffer from a “mental disorder” and some press coverage concluded that he was a deserter, which Robinson wrote was, “unfair.” The press hasn’t changed much. They still enjoy publishing the stories that sell, and interviews with Sugar Ray sold papers. Rather than deal with the publicity of disciplining one of their prize boxers and recruiters, the Army gave him an honorable discharge. Sugar Ray returned to full-time professional boxing, gaining the ranking of the greatest boxer of all time by sportswriters, peers, and trainers. And, with a record of 201-19, he most certainly earned it.⁹

⁹ Mike H. Fitzgerald & Dabid L. Hudson. *Boxing's Most Wanted: The Top Ten Book of Champs, Chumps and Punch-drunk Palookas*, Virginia: Brassey's, 2004

"I GOT MAD... STARTED CHOKING THE MP"

RAY ROBINSON RECALLING AN INCIDENT IN ARMY

I didn't stay out of action after losing to La Motta. I went right back to work two weeks later and beat California Jackie Wilson in Madison Square Garden.

A week after that I went in again with La Motta, in Detroit. I beat him. I fought him three more times after that and won all three.

It was in the summer of 1943 that I got a telephone call home in the Bronx. I was still living in my mother's house, with Edna Mae. The call was from Henry Armstrong. He was making a comeback and they were talking about him fighting me. A lot of people in Harlem put it down that I shouldn't fight him because he was old and I would make it touch on him.

Henry said I should fight him because he was broke and needed the money. I couldn't get myself to say yes. I hung up on the phone.

Henry came around to see me. He said I wouldn't do right. I couldn't listen no more. I said J.K. I said I would fight.

It was on August 27, 1943, in Madison Square Garden. It was my last fight before going into the Army.

One fellow put it down, after the fight, that I carried Henry back to old Virginia.

I wonder if that fellow knows how it feels to be in there with a fellow you look up to. It ain't you don't want to knock him over. It's because you can't. You don't have the feel for fighting a friend.

I beat Henry 10 rounds, but it wasn't a good fight. I went into the Army a short time later, at Mitchell Field on Long Island.

Outside they called me the uncrowned welterweight champion, but in the Army I was plain Walker Smith, Jr. Private Walker Smith. I got moved up fast after a while and got to be a sergeant before I got discharged on June 3, 1944, at Fort Hamilton.

The best days in the Army were with Joe Louis. We were in a boxing troupe and went around to all the camps and entertained the soldiers by boxing. We went every place in the country. Then they decided to send our boxing troupe overseas.

I could have had a chance to get a commission then, but I wanted to stay with the troupe. Only thing was that down in Camp Siebert, in Alabama, a doctor told me I would be discharged because I had something wrong with my ear.

It was down in Camp Siebert I ran into something that hurt me a lot. It hurt Joe Louis, too. He was head of our troupe and we were good friends. We felt that if we were in the Army fighting for freedom, it was our job to stick up for it.

We lived together in a lady's house in Gadsden, Alabama. One day we were leaving camp together. We went down to the bus station and found the buses crowded. They had one bus for Negro soldiers to every two for white soldiers.

It was a long wait for the bus and there were a lot of soldiers there. Joe went into a phone booth to call a cab. I

stayed outside the phone booth and made like I was hitting a golf ball with the putter I had with me.

Joe came out of the booth just when an M.P. came up to us. He said to Joe: "Hey, Sergeant, you belong on the other side. This side's for white soldiers."

I remember how Joe looked mad. He said: "What for do I have to go to the other side?" The M.P. told him. "Don't you know your color?"

Joe was getting madder. He got his voice up high. He said, "I got a uniform on, same as you, and we're fighting the same war. I don't stand being discriminated against."

The M.P. started pushing us and he grabbed the golf stick I was carrying. I got mad. I started choking the M.P. Everybody started yelling and soon a lieutenant came in and quieted us down.

Instalment No 6 Of
My Fighting Life
By Sugar Ray Robinson



JAKE LA MOTTA, the only man to defeat Sugar Ray, world middle champ, till Randolph Turpin took the title from him this year.

JAKE LA MOTTA, the only man to defeat Sugar Ray, world middle champ, till Randolph Turpin took the title from him this year.

'Story That We Were Beat Up'

'Story That We Were Beat Up'

The comedian King here heard about this. He did the whole camp. The troops began rustling around. They got a false story that Joe and me were beat up. We had to go around to show our faces. They quieted down.

Later, the inspector general's office sent a man down from Washington to investigate. They put an end to Jim Crow buses in Army camps.

The boxing troupe went to Washington next. I got sick there. All the junk I ate as a kid didn't make my stomach good. An Army doctor said I should be discharged. He said I wasn't fit for the Army.

When we got to Fort Hamilton, in New York, I was real sick. The boxing troupe was due to sail on March 30, 1944. I got a chance to get out of camp and when I was outside I got sick. I wound up in Halloran Hospital on Staten Island. The troupe left without me. Somebody started a rumor I jumped overboard from the ship and went AWOL. Another rumor was that I was carried on the ship in a strait jacket.

They were both wrong. I never was on the ship when it sailed for England. Just about 2 months later, I got out of the Army with an honorable discharge.

Edna Mae and me got an apartment at 716 St. Nicholas Ave. The rent was \$63 dollars. It's three rooms, and we still live there.

I didn't do any fighting for about 4 months. Then I went to the men running the Disabled Veterans' Fund for the Hearst newspapers. Mr. Gainford told them I saw so much suffering in the Army I wanted to do something for disabled

veterans. I started fighting for the fund. I gave 20 per cent of each purse to the fund.

I boxed Issy Jannazzo in Boston. I knocked him out in 2 rounds. I knocked out Lou Woods in Chicago. I beat Vic DeLauri in Detroit. I knocked out Sheik Hassan in Philadelphia and Georgia Martin in Boston. The fund got its cut from all these fights.

That was the first fight for charity. Since then, I fought for more charities than any other fighter. I gave pieces of purses to the Infants' Paralysis Foundation, the B'Nai B'rith, the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund. The last one, I gave my whole purse from my fight with Charley Frazier in 1956. I defended the title against him and gave the cancer fund everything.

That's where Mr. Gainford comes in. He was the one always advised me right about charity fights. He said give a right don't fight for them at all.

He helped me a lot all the way. Especially when I came out of the Army, he helped.

There was the time in 1945 when I was fighting Geo. (Sugar) Contar in Chicago. It was on February 14. The Chicago papers said I was dishonorably discharged from the Army.

Mr. Gainford went to the telephone and called Mike Jacobs in New York. Mr. Jacobs got my honorable discharge from my house and got it photostated. He sent the copies to all the newspapers in Chicago. They stopped saying I was kicked out of the Army.

I had 2 fights in 1945. I got a surprise in one of them. Joe

Bassora held me to a draw in Philadelphia. He was a tall fellow from Erie. He could punch. It was a hard fight. I thought I lost. He kept after 10 rounds. They called it a draw.

September 26 that year I fought Jake LaMotta the fifth time. It was in Chicago. It was 12 rounds and I won. It was a hard fight. He kept coming at me and I was in a come away with my life.

The newspapers were calling me the uncrowned welterweight champion for real. That's because Freddie Cochrane came out of the Navy and instead of giving me a fight for the title he got a purse of \$50,000 dollars for a championship fight with Marty Servo.

Servo had a shrewd manager, Mr. Egan. Well, He just moved in and got the chance for his boy.

Servo knocked out Cochrane in 2 rounds and Mr. Egan said that he would have to fight me next. Mr. Egan is chairman of the New York Athletic Commission.

Mr. Egan really believed I deserved the fight. That year, 1946 I had 16 fights and didn't lose one. I weighed about 145, but I fought big middleweights up to 160 lbs.

But Mr. Egan didn't let Servo meet me. Instead, Servo got 40,000 dollars for a fight with Rocky Graziano. Servo got knocked out in 4 rounds. It hurt him bad. He got a bad nose.

Mr. Egan stood up for me. He made Mr. Weill sign for a fight with me. It kept being put off. One it was scheduled for Yankee Stadium, but they found out the Yankees had a postponed game. The fight was put off.

It never happened. Mr. Weill retired Servo because he said Marty's nose was no good. They lost a 7000 dollars forfeit for the fight. Mr. Egan said somebody would have to fight me for the championship.

(Copyright 1951, Fawcett Publications, Inc.)
(To be continued next week.)

BLACK LOOKS & BAD WORDS

"I have never heard language like it and I don't think I ever will again."

That was a police act, a mixture of words and actions, when he was arrested as a bad wordsman on Wednesday.

Magistrate F. E. A. Bateman sent William to jail for a total of 3 months.

Lawyer Says Dr. Has No Case To Answer

Magistrate F. E. A. Bateman yesterday reversed decision after lawyer Nat Lappin had asked for a dismissal of 2 charges against Dr. Evelyn May Bedwell of Forreston, North Perth.

Following the completion of the police case, Mr. Lappin argued that Dr. Bedwell had nothing to answer.

Dr. Bedwell is charged on 2 counts of having knowingly given a prescription for a drug merely for the purposes of addiction.

Police alleged that she made out prescriptions in the names of 2 patients for her own use. Yesterday 194-Sgt. C. F. Lamb, claimed that Dr. Bedwell had admitted to him that she had been under treatment at Heathcote as a morphine addict.

Sgt. Lamb said he was relying on circumstantial evidence.

Lawyer Lappin submitted that the police case must fall on the interpretation of the words "give" and "merely" contained in the charge, and that there was no direct evidence of Dr. Bedwell committing a crime.

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1950 Ford Custom Utility, 6000 miles, \$1250.
1950s Plymouth Sedan, for exchange, as new, \$275.
1950 Austin A40 Sedan, 1915.

The Mirror. Perth WA. Sat. 8 Sept. 1951, pg. 11.

The indignities that black service members endured long after the Civil War continued well through WWII. They often received poor training and equipment compared to their white counterparts, and it is well documented that they lived in substandard conditions, saying little of

the racist treatment by whites, both officers and enlisted.¹⁰¹¹ Although everyone “relished meeting the heavyweight champion of the world,” as T-Sgt. Joe Louis Barrow once said. It was also noted by his son that Joe would have readily given up his role as a morale booster, in favor of sloshing through the mud and snow in Europe with the troops.

The show was a big hit at Camp Robinson and everywhere they boxed. Thanks to Sugar Ray’s experience with dancing on corners for nickels in Harlem, the show was a bit more than just boxing. By 1944, Louis would find himself entertaining troops and shaking the hands of wounded men from the various campaigns including Normandy. Author Randy Roberts explained the impact of Louis’ visits to troops, “No movie star has been greeted by our fighting men with more enthusiasm than that displayed when the Brown Bomber got into action.”¹²

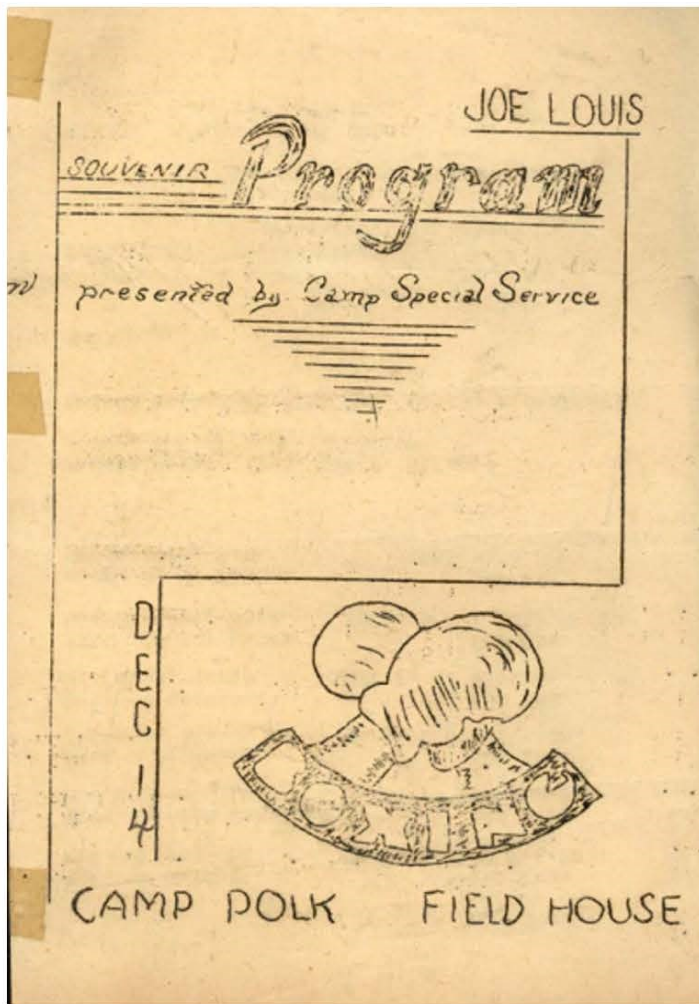
Although there was no political or military leadership desire to integrate the armed forces during WWII racially, (some) officers and political leaders both saw the benefit of appealing to Black Americans. The effort to highlight famed black Soldiers would also send a message to the world of a unified America; one that is determined to fight tyranny in both Europe and Asia simultaneously. The traveling troupe of boxers never made it known if they took issue with their employment as goodwill ambassadors. However, they did send a clear message to the War Department and the nation by refusing to perform in front of segregated audiences, however. Much of their work was behind the scenes in a humble and effective fashion, hearing Black Soldier’s stories and making verbal requests. Their clout and star power resulted in marked improvements in attitudes and even some tangible actions like desegregating Army buses. Lewis and Robinson’s work behind the scenes to improve racial issues and knock down barriers, and enhance recruitment and morale was much more than just helpful in the war effort. They brought a unique spotlight with them, illuminating the continuing struggle for civil rights and showing the world that change is necessary and that people like Hitler must (and can) be defeated. Both fought through racism and even criticism from their own community for promoting the recruitment of blacks in a military that consistently failed to serve their interests and recognize their value. Their accomplishments outside the ring are many and impressive. Still, both would agree that none of it was more significant than serving their country.¹³

¹⁰ Louis Moore. *We will win the day: The civil rights movement, the Black athlete, and the quest for equality*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2017.

¹¹ Neil A. Wynn. *The African American Experience during World War II*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010.

¹² Randy Roberts. *Joe Louis*. Yale University Press, 2010.

¹³ Randy Roberts. *Joe Louis*. Yale University Press, 2010.



ABOVE: Front cover of Camp Polk Boxing Exhibition just 4 days after the Camp Robinson Visit. Courtesy: Sweet Thunder: The Life and Times of Sugar Ray Robinson. Wil Haygood.

Author's Note: There was undoubtedly a similar program created for the Camp Robinson exhibition. It would be great to see one surface. There are treasures in those attics. We just need to find them.

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Camp Robinson Scrapbook (1941-1945), Grover C. Graham collection. ARNG Museum Archives.

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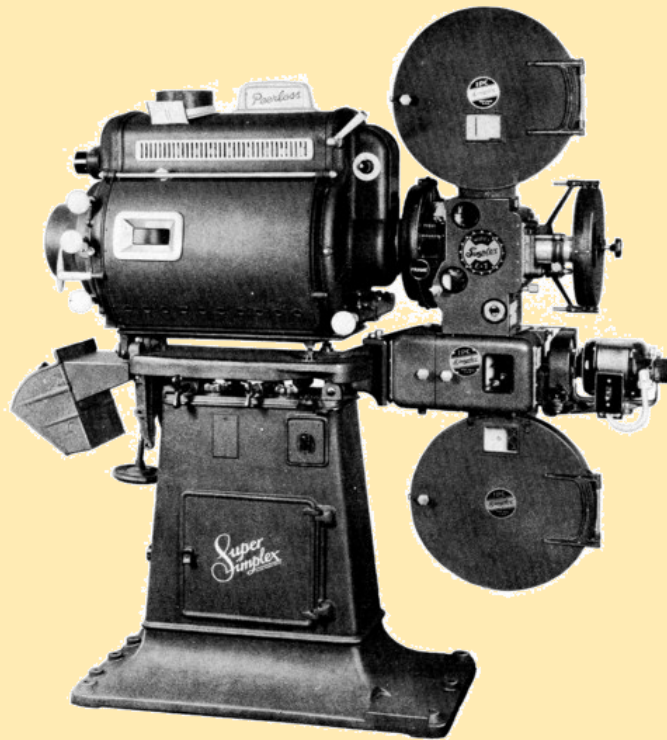
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Featured Artifacts: Simplex E-7 Movie Projectors

By Raymond Screws



In 1932, the construction of Lloyd England Hall, which now houses the Arkansas National Guard Museum, was finished on Camp Pike. The construction cost of the auditorium was less than \$33,000. In 1941, after the Post (which was renamed Camp Joseph T. Robinson during the late 1930s) was federalized because of WWII, Lloyd England Hall was converted to a movie theater. A projector room was built in which two Simplex E-7, 35mm movie projectors were installed.

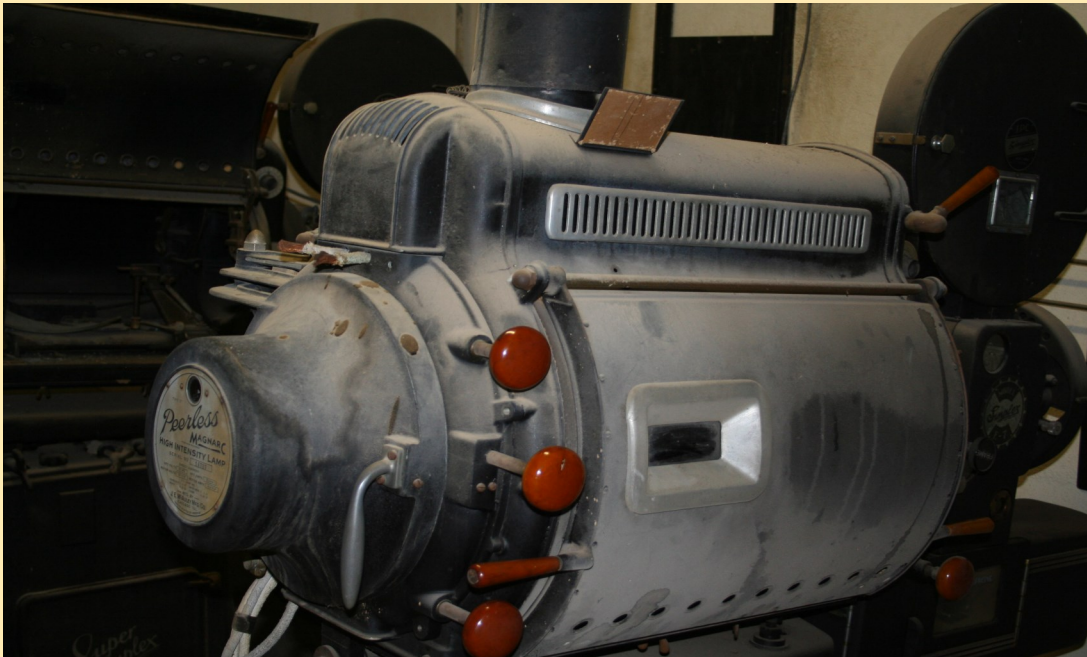
These two projectors are still in place in the projector room. The patent for the projectors is 1938, with an original patent of 1927. This model was used through the early 1950s before being replaced by newer models. One of the problems with the Model E-7 is that it was prone to leak quite a bit of oil.

Although no longer operational, much of the components are still there. The projectors included a reservoir for the oiling system, a fire shutter (because film contained nitrate which was extremely flammable), as well as several gears to run the film. As the Operation and Maintenance Manual indicates, only Simplex oil should be used for lubrication. The threading lamp is a type S-6, 6 watt, 120 volt, with a candelabra base, while the framing lamp is a 3 watt, 6-8 volt bayonet base, Mazda #55.

These projectors were used in Lloyd England Hall into the 1960s and possibly the 1970s.

Projector Room Lloyd England Hall





Cover Photos from National Archives

183275—Motion pictures star, Cary Grant, enjoys a talk with Camp Commander, Col. Grover C. Graham, in Camp Headquarters, Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Arkansas 18 March 1943.

222909—Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell, second from left, CG, Army Service Forces, inspects training activities at Camp Jos. T. Robinson, Arkansas. Members of the party are, left to right; Brig. Gen. Francis B. Mallon, CG of the Branch Immaterial Replacement Training Center; Lt. Gen. Brehon B. Somervell; Brig. Gen. James E. Baylis, CG, Medical Replacement Training Center; and Col. Grover C. Graham, Camp Commander of Camp Robinson. June 7, 1943.

222922—Silver Star: TO T/3 Stanley T. Ickiki, Stockton, California, for Gallantry in action 29 March when he knocked out a machine gun nest with his carbine in a wooded area near Idstein, Germany. The medal is being presented to his father, Kinzio Ichiki of McGehee Relocation Center by Col. G. C. Graham, Post Commander.

222929—Tje Dostomgiosjed Service Cross posthumously awarded T/Sgt Ted T. Tanouye for heroism in the campaign in Italy before he was killed is presented to his mother, Mrs. Momoye Tanouye, of the Rowher Relocation Center, McGehee, Ark., by Col. Grover C. Graham, camp commander Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Arkansas. March 5, 1945

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