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Books in Action: Armed Services Editions.

Accession Number : ADA473543

Title : Books in Action: Armed Services Editions

Corporate Author : LIBRARY OF CONGRESS WASHINGTON DC

Personal Author(s) : Cole, John Y

Full Text : <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a473543.pdf>

Report Date : Jan 1984

Pagination or Media Count : 85

Abstract : The Armed Services Editions introduced thousands of American soldiers and sailors to the pleasures of reading. Between 1943 and 1947, nearly 123 million copies of 1,322 titles of these flat, wide, and very pocketable paperbacks were distributed to U.S. Armed Forces around the world. Best-sellers, classics, mysteries, history, westerns, and poetry were part of each shipment. For most of the U.S. troops overseas, Armed Services Editions were the only books that were easily available. And never had so many books found so many enthusiastic readers. How did it happen? The idea of producing low-cost books for overseas distribution originated in 1942 in the U.S. Army. Ray L. Trautman, a young officer who

headed the army Library Section, developed the scheme with assistance from H. Stahley Thompson, a U.S. Army graphic arts specialist. A key part of the plan was to use rotary presses normally used for printing magazines but available during wartime for other purposes because of the drop in the production of consumer goods. But nothing on a large scale could be accomplished unless American publishers would accept the plan and allow current books to be reprinted. In January 1943, Trautman and Thompson took their proposal to Malcolm Johnson of D. Van Nostrand Company, who was a member of the executive committee of the Council on Books in Wartime. The council was the catalyst that turned a good idea from the U.S. Army into an efficient cooperative enterprise which involved the army, the navy, the War Production Board, over seventy publishing firms, and more than a dozen printing houses, composition firms, and paper suppliers. The Council on Books in Wartime was a group of trade book publishers, librarians, and booksellers formed in 1942 to use books to contribute to the war effort of the United Peoples.

Descriptors : *MILITARY PERSONNEL , *BOOKS , MILITARY FORCES(UNITED STATES) , WARFARE , LOW COSTS , OVERSEAS , DISTRIBUTION , PRINTING , LIBRARIES , PERIODICALS

Subject Categories : Information Science

Distribution Statement : APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

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