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 ***American Girls, Beer, and Glenn Miller: GI Morale in World War II* by James J. Cooke (review)**

Kara Dixon Vuic

Register of the Kentucky Historical Society

Kentucky Historical Society

Volume 111, Number 4, Autumn 2013

pp. 626-628

10.1353/khs.2014.0011

REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Kara Dixon Vuic (bio)

As the American military mobilized draftees and volunteers for World War II, commanders faced unprecedented demands for weapons, ammunition, uniforms, ships, jeeps, tanks, medical supplies, and countless other war materiel. But as one famous military commander noted long ago, armies march on their stomachs, and it is this lesser-known work of supplying GIs with food, drink, and fun that James J. Cooke examines in his history of the army's morale-building work.

Cooke offers an organizational, top-down history of the Special Services Division and Army Exchange System during the war, told largely through the experiences of men such as Frederick Osborne and Joseph W. Byron who directed the work of providing for GIs' material, intellectual, and social desires. The work complements his earlier study, *Chewing Gum, Candy Bars, and Beer: The Army PX in World War II* (2009), and thus focuses most intently on the work of the Special Services to provide films, athletics, information, recreation, and educational opportunities.

As the author notes, the task of maintaining high morale proved much greater than anyone in the armed forces anticipated. GIs arrived at training camps with expectations of familiar comforts and, as the war dragged on, increasingly depended on movies, radio programs, magazines, books, dances with American girls, candy, and beer (even the less potent 3.2 percent "army beer"). Female personnel introduced new questions for morale officers who had not previously given serious thought to supplying PXs with nylons and cosmetics. But if the soldiers **[End Page 626]** knew full well the value that recreation and comfort items could have on morale, Cooke notes that Special Service officers frequently struggled to justify the necessity of allotting valuable space on ships for transporting footballs, musical instruments, Cokes, and cigarettes. Even the officers and enlisted men of Special Service companies were, first and foremost, combat-ready soldiers who could be reassigned to infantry units if necessary.

Despite some reluctance, however, army commanders and the U.S. Congress eventually recognized the essential roles that recreation played in keeping the troops occupied when not engaged in warfare. Congressional appropriations for recreation services increased each year during the war, while the very profitable Px system funded its own expansion in every theater. As Cooke notes, both military and civilian authorities recognized that sporting events, social affairs, and film showings could divert soldiers' attentions from the less-wholesome temptations that awaited them in nearby cities and villages.

Cooke also suggests that Px goods and recreation activities played an important role in shaping relations with the Allies and occupied nations. He suggests, for example, that military commanders feared that comparatively well-paid Yanks flaunting their money in local shops and bars could have disastrous consequences on relations with populations that had suffered under years of wartime deprivation. Even the meager fifty-dollar monthly salary of an enlisted man could go a long way in England or Australia, and was—much to the dismay of British and Australian men—a handsome sum in the eyes of women. Relatedly, Cooke suggests that the Special Services Division assumed a dual role as tour guide and cultural interpreter through its pocket guides to regions where soldiers were stationed. Produced by academics and civilian authorities, these guides explained local history and customs, instructed soldiers on how to interact with local people, and formed the basis for their understanding of local religions and cultures.

As these examples reveal, morale work held ramifications beyond meeting GIs' demands for comfort and diversion. Cooke does not **[End Page 627]** offer an exhaustive examination of the broader meanings and functions of morale work, but his tour through service clubs, Pxs, and sporting events suggests a number of intriguing questions and possible avenues for further research.

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of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy (2008).

American Girls, Beer, and Glenn Miller: GI Morale in World War II. By James J. Cooke. American Military Experience Series. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012. Pp. 224. \$40.00 cloth; \$40.00 ebook)

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