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THE GENERAL BOARD
United States Forces, European Theater

SPECIAL SERVICES COMPANIES

MISSION: Prepare Report and Recommendations on Special Services Companies.

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REPORT ON SPECIAL SERVICES COMPANIES

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SPECIAL SERVICES COMPANIES

CHAPTER 1

COMPOSITION AND HISTORY OF SPECIAL SERVICES COMPANIES

SECTION 1

FUNCTIONS

1. General. The special services companies, composed of technical troops trained in many and varied specialized fields, operated in the European Theater with the object of providing recreational services and facilities, otherwise unavailable, to both combat troops and personnel in rear echelons.¹

2. Use. As self-sustaining, semi-mobile units, the special services companies are either attached to divisions, corps, or armies, used in the zone of communications, at ports of debarkation, in rest and leave areas, behind the combat zone or at permanent and forward air corps bases.²

3. Activities. Although their assignments differ according to the troops they serve and the areas in which they operate, special services companies are basically similar, employing specialized personnel and specially developed equipment to provide and service motion picture, library, musical, theatrical and radio activities; to conduct and manage army exchange facilities; and to supplement and repair recreational equipment for every kind of unit and installation in a theater of operations.

4. Training. In addition to advanced training to perform these activities, they are characteristically infantry, basically trained as such, and armed with rifles and carbines for defensive operations.^{3, 4}

5. Administration. Although self-sustaining units with their own Table of Organization and Equipment (T/O&E), organic transportation, mess facilities, etc., they are for administrative purposes attached to the headquarters of the echelon they service.

SECTION 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

6. General. Critical and detailed studies of previous armies and past wars reveal the deep-rooted importance of morale.^{5, 6} At the beginning of this war it was realized that in addition to the fighting effectiveness of the American soldier with high calibre tactical and strategical training, superiority of weapons, advantages of skilled leadership, abundance of military equipment, a just cause and a will to fight, a high standard of morale was essential. Accordingly, with the establishment of special services one of the steps undertaken was the creation of special services companies.⁷

7. New Type of Unit. These were new and unique organizations. Originally it was planned, that except for such services as are ren-

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dered to other troop units during the training period, the special services companies were to operate only in overseas theaters. They were to be assigned to a theater of operations or independent task force, according to local requirements and availability of trained companies.

SECTION 3

VALUE OF SPECIAL SERVICES COMPANIES

8. Commendations. From their first operation, the history of each company is one of outstanding achievement and praiseworthy contribution. The record achieved in the European Theater is attested to by every major command to which these units were attached. Lieutenant General J. C. H. Lee, Commanding General, Communications Zone, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (ETOUSA), for example, expressed his view of their value when he wrote: "The accomplishments of which (the special services companies) constitute the outstanding contribution in the field of special services activities in this theater;"⁸ while Headquarters, ETOUSA, made its appraisal of special services companies when it declared that "from a morale viewpoint, this headquarters places the highest possible value on the special services company and considers it the most workable device yet developed to provide a recreational program for troops overseas. The 17 companies in this theater are successfully accomplishing their mission in an outstanding and superior manner."⁹ Many other commanders familiar with special services companies substantiated these views frequently during the campaign in the European Theater;¹⁰ while the unanimous opinion of every officer of ground, air and service units consulted for this report is that special services companies have conclusively proven their value in the European Theater and should be retained in the post-war military establishment.¹¹

9. Accomplishments. Concrete reasons which elicited such commendations were provided by Special and Information Services, Headquarters, ETOUSA, in partially listing the accomplishments of the 17 special services companies during a single month of operations:¹²

- a. Presentation of approximately 14,000 motion picture showings.
- b. Staging of more than 900 "live shows".
- c. Presentation of more than 500 recorded programs.
- d. Organization of over 300 athletic events.
- e. Assistance in the organization and operation of rest areas.
- f. Publication of over 100,000 news sheets and special services bulletins; and distribution of books, magazines and educational pamphlets.

10. Awards and Decorations. In addition to innumerable commendations, written and oral, nine companies have received the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque, and numerous individual awards including the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal and Purple Heart. The 17 companies have 57 battle participation stars.

CHAPTER 2

ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION

SECTION 1

GENERAL

11. From the beginning, special services companies encountered numerous difficulties. This was to be expected since they were non-existent in the pre-war army. Moreover, being conceived as an emergency measure, there were many organizational and operational problems. Extensive discussion of these problems, is not within the scope of The General Board. It is more important to analyze only those general and significant problems, and on the basis of lessons learned to lay the ground work for effective solution. These problems, an analysis of them, and resulting conclusions are covered in the following sections.

SECTION 2

PLANNING

12. Fifty-Two Companies Planned. Based on a careful study of needs and requirements, it was deemed that 52 companies would adequately fulfill the needs in the European Theater. Plans for training and equipping that number were made. Meanwhile, special services were formulating other plans on the premise that 52 companies would be at their disposal for activities in this theater

13. Seventeen Companies in the European Theater. Only 17 companies of the proposed 52 arrived in the European Theater. This changed original plans, and necessitated revamping them to fit the newly-developed situation. Instead of servicing approximately 15,000 troops, as originally intended, a special services company had to attempt to service upwards of 100,000 troops with no changes in personnel or equipment. Plans for their assignment and use had to be radically altered. This process produced one inevitable result—loss of efficiency and a consequent diminution of maximum effectiveness of the entire program.

14. Directives and Circulars. From the arrival of the first special services company in the European Theater to 8 May 1945, numerous directives and circulars explaining the mission of a special services company were issued by the theater commander. Despite these, however, few commanders were fully cognizant of the role of the companies. This lack of knowledge further impeded successful operation of the special services company, and rendered many of the original plans worthless. This difficulty would never have existed were commanders fully aware of the mission and functions of special services companies.

15. Change in Functions.

a. Another defect in the original plans involved a misconception as to soldiers' desires regarding use of free time and the kind and amount of entertainment they sought. This was particularly apparent when company technicians began to function less in their advisory capacity—originally intended as their primary mission—and engaged in the actual productive activities of the special services company. It eventually became the policy to have the special services company produce entertainment, rather than provide technical aid and recreational equipment to troops to promote their own entertainment.

b. This procedure involved undertaking added duties, for which the companies were not designed. It was justified as troops were not satisfied with impromptu, hastily-planned and hastily-executed

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amateur entertainment. Troops wanted the completed professional product. Moreover, they realized their own inability to produce this from their own ranks. The obvious answer was for the special services company to provide what the soldier wanted. The problem then was to alter original plans to satisfy new demands.

SECTION 3

ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

16. General. For administrative purposes, special services companies are attached to the headquarters of the echelon being serviced. Normal intra-company administration is carried out by the headquarters section of the company.

17. Difficulties. This plan is simple and should have functioned smoothly. However, because of the nature of their work, and the conditions under which they operated, company commanders were not always in constant contact with their appropriate command special services staff officer. Difficulties were also encountered when the question arose as to who would direct the activities of an attached platoon or company—the platoon leader, company commander, or command special services officer. Some commanders, completely misinterpreting the mission of special services companies, assigned a company officer as his headquarters special services officer. A more common problem resulted from the interpretation that the assignment of a special services company relieved staff special services officers of their responsibilities. These difficulties resulted from a failure of information to be disseminated and understood at every echelon of command.

SECTION 4

SUPPLY

18. General. The General Board study, "Special Services Supply",¹³ presents the supply problem as it affected special services generally. Lack of information, false information, limited cooperation, acute shortages, and little standardization produced unnecessary paper work, hindered procurement and resulted in inequitable distribution of available supplies.

19. Company Supply. As a consequence of such a confused supply situation, special services companies were adversely affected. They were often forced to forsake the customary supply channels in order to secure necessary materials. This was especially true when companies were operating in combat areas. Need for equipment was often immediate and only if promptly secured could the mission of the company be accomplished.

SECTION 5

ANALYSIS OF TABLE OF ORGANIZATION

20. Current Table of Organization¹⁴

a. During the period of their operations in the European Theater, special services companies were organized under T/OEE 23-17, 2 April 1943, (C1, 24 August 1943), and 16 March 1944.

b. The current T/O provides one captain, four lieutenants and 109 enlisted men, constituting a headquarters section, and four identical platoons.

21. General Criticisms. In a report to Special Services Division, Headquarters, Army Service Forces, in June 1945,¹⁵ 15 of the 17 special services companies which operated in the European Theater were emphatic in their recommendation that the present T/O be radically changed or else scrapped completely. The current T/O is antedated, embodies too many inadequacies and deprives the company of the flexibility needed to operate successfully under varying conditions, especially in combat areas.

22. Specific Criticisms. Headquarters, ETOUSA, as the urgency for change and modification in company organization became apparent, made some changes. However, it remained for the company commanders and their platoon leaders to rely principally on their initiative in the solution of particular problems. They eliminated certain activities, restrained personnel for positions not provided in the T/O, and trained others to perform three or four different types of duties.¹⁵ Specifically, these changes affected the following personnel:

a. Exchange Section Personnel. There are 34 enlisted men in an exchange and canteen section to operate a mobile post exchange. This section was not employed as such as those troops not provided with Quartermaster gratuitous issues were serviced through Army Exchange Service.

b. Cooks and Cooks' Helpers. The 16 cooks and cooks' helpers were to operate exchange canteens as well as the company mess. Since exchange canteens were not operated, only sufficient cooks and helpers for the company mess are necessary.

c. Librarians and Duplicating Machine Operators. In each platoon there is one duplicating machine operator and one librarian. Their services were extensively used, but rarely were all four operators working simultaneously, and the latter's work was considerably reduced by the issue of "council books", magazines, and periodicals, in large quantities directly to units through other supply channels.

d. Motion Picture Operators. Critical needs of the special services companies can be readily ascertained when it is learned how the companies employed their "non-functioning" personnel. The operation of the "J" Kit, or the motion picture equipment, absorbed many of these surpluses. Besides nine additional projectors authorized by ETOUSA,¹⁶ the dual operation of the eight authorized T/E projectors was abandoned. Dual operation prevents loss of continuity when changing reels, but in the interest of servicing more troops, this luxury was forfeited. This policy, however, necessitated using many more projectionists to service the 17 projector units. In some companies, everyone was trained to operate motion picture projectors.

e. Theatrical Technicians. As indicated in paragraph 15, special services companies were more in demand as entertaining units rather than as agencies for providing technical assistance and recreational equipment to troops to promote their own entertainment. Therefore, special services companies enlarged their theatrical activities, using many more than the four theatrical technicians provided in the T/O.

f. Musical Technicians. To produce more "live entertainment", and to supply music for dances and variety shows, special services companies developed their musical sections to include dance bands. These were non-T/O bands and the men who comprised them, except four musical technicians, were acquired from other sections of the company. In some companies, these non-T/O bands, including as many as 20 men, became their principal attraction.

23. Cellular and Standard Tables of Organization. A standard T/O as T/O 28-17, is based on the premise that the construction of a unit functioning under it need not be highly flexible; that for all operations an organically stable structure will accomplish its mission. In reviewing the deficiencies of T/O 28-17, and the difficulties involved in overcoming them, the General Board gave full consideration to cellular T/O's, types employed in other branches of the service with considerable success. Unlike standard T/O's, cellular T/O's enable a unit to vary in strength and composition according to demands placed on it, or the requirements of a given situation, that is, they are alterable according to available personnel and equipment, plan of operation, immediate mission, and specific services to be rendered. Their primary advantage is that they anticipate and provide for changing conditions by the ~~increase~~ reduction of the number of cells within a unit. The capacity to do this is a very desirable feature of a unit whose operations are as varied as special services companies.

SECTION 6

ANALYSIS OF TABLE OF EQUIPMENT24. Current Table of Equipment.¹⁴

a. The current T/E for a special services company, T/E 28-17, 16 March 1944, is in accordance with AR 310-60, and is the authority for requisition in accordance with AR 35-6540, and for the issue of all items of equipment listed in the T/O&E.

b. Since there are many factors influencing types and quantities of equipment issued by the various services of supply, this study is confined to an analysis of authorized vehicles and the following lettered kits: "A" (Sports and Games Kit), "A-1" (Athletic Kit), "B" (Radio-Phonograph Kit), "B-1" (Public Address and Radio Kit), "C" (Library Kit), "D" (Musical Kit), "E" (Theatrical Kit), "I" (Printing and Publishing Kit), and "J" (Motion Picture Kit). A complete breakdown of items in the various kits and the authorized transportation is contained in Field Manual 28-105.

25. Criticisms of Table of Equipment. In their reports to Special Services Division, Headquarters, Army Service Forces, in June 1945,¹⁵ company commanders reaffirmed their long standing position in a general condemnation of equipment issued to special services companies. Their principal criticisms were as follows:

a. Transportation. The present T/E does not provide sufficient transportation to ensure a high degree of mobility. The theater allowance of nine additional three-quarter ton trucks, 4 x 4, although of considerable help, was still inadequate to allow complete fulfillment of the companies' mission.

b. "A" and "A-1" Kits. The athletic kits fail to consider the seasonableness of sports, and do not provide ample equipment for proven popular sports.

c. "B" and "B-1" Kits. Full use of public address equipment, considered by most company commanders to be one of their most valuable assets, is hindered by some lack of durability and the frequent occurrence of minor mechanical failures.

d. "C" Kit. The library kit is too bulky for company operation under field conditions. A lending library, stocked with hard covered books and large volumes is not feasible in forward areas, whereas an

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agency to issue "council books" and magazines to supplement the supply of these within a command was in frequent demand.

e. "D" Kit. The musical kit includes a very practical and much used field piano, but contains a number of undesirable and unpopular items. Ocarinas and tonettes, for example, are not in demand.

f. "E" Kit. Much of the equipment of the theatrical kit is antedated. Costumes and make-up are unsuitable for a modern variety show; the most popular type of performance.

g. "I" Kit. Publicity for "coming attractions" does much in maintaining morale during the period of expectation. The printing and publishing kit, lacking many important items necessary for effective and creative advertising, does not exploit this element of psychological anticipation.

h. "J" Kit. Insufficient repair and maintenance equipment for motion picture projectors, along with a lack of standardization, handicapped the principal activity of special services companies.

SECTION 7

WARTIME AND POSTWAR PERSONNEL AND TRAINING

26. a. The European Theater was particularly fortunate in having special services companies staffed and operated by personnel, both officer and enlisted, of an extremely high calibre. Their work was highly efficient because, primarily, they had the civilian background for the work they performed in the army. However, it cannot be assumed that the post-war military establishment will be as fortunate. The peacetime army will not have at its disposal such a large part of the nation's manpower and the wealth of talent and ability it provides.

b. Anticipating this, The General Board considered the merits of continuing, with some reorganization, the present Special Services School in Lexington, Virginia. The advantages of specialized training for special services activities are obvious, but what must be determined is a curriculum to include the training of key personnel to form the nucleus of special services units.

SECTION 8

WOMENS ARMY CORPS SPECIAL SERVICES COMPANY

27. a. During the war, consideration was given to employing WAC's in special services companies as librarians, musicians, projectionists and entertainers, and the establishment of a company composed of WAC's. However, it was not until after 3 May 1945 that the planning of previous months materialized, and the first WAC Special Services Company was a reality. Activated in the European Theater and assigned to the United States Third Army, its operations and functions are similar to war-time special services companies except that it services occupation forces.

b. The formation of the first WAC Special Services Company is the realization of plans to have the particular abilities of women in entertainment and recreational fields fully utilized in special services. Moreover, in replacing men who have been operating special services companies in the European Theater for over two years, the women are fulfilling the original purpose of the Womens Army Corps. The precedent having been set, it is expected by WAC personnel officers that the successful operation of this company will result in the formation of other special services units and a greater utilization of women in special services work.¹⁷

SERVICES FOR ARMY GROUND FORCES, ARMY SERVICE FORCES, ARMY AIR FORCES

28. General. During combat operations in the European Theater, special services companies or platoons served at various times with armies, corps, divisions, and air forces; in the Communications Zone, at leave areas, and rest centers. (Reference: Paragraph 2)

29. Major Differences in Commands.

a. These diverse operations demand great versatility and considerable flexibility, since these organizations and installations did not have established numbers of troops, nor was their internal structure standardized.^{18,19} Rather the figures varied to a considerable degree, both internally and in relation to other units at the same echelon of command. There were, for example, at one time over 100,000 troops, exclusive of corps and division troops, in the United States First Army. Other armies did not have 10% of that number. These variations also characterized army groups, air forces and various corps, while the number of hospital patients varied with the latest combat operation. Personnel at leave areas and rest centers likewise increased or decreased as conditions changed.

b. The nature and extent of dispersion of small units or forces within these organizations, and the geographical locations in which they operated produced even greater differences,

30. Problems Attendant to These Differences. In consequence of these differences, special services companies continually encountered the problem of regrouping their organization and facilities in providing entertainment and recreation. They could not efficiently cope with problems arising from servicing armies or corps, with the same technique employed in servicing reinforcement depots or leave areas. Yet, while all these variable factors influenced operations, special services companies continued to function under the limitations of a standard and inflexible structure.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION 1

CONCLUSIONS

31. General. Special services companies played a major role in sustaining morale. They still possess latent potentialities, not fully realized in the European Theater because of the difficulties and problems in organization and operation.

32. Failures in Producing and Disseminating Information. Special services companies were not given adequate publicity through official circulars, orders and directives to impress on commanders at every echelon of command their mission, functions and methods of operation. This, to a degree, was the result of initial plans failing to materialize and the continual process of alteration within the companies to meet the requirements of respective commands.

33. Supply. Because of an ineffective supply system, special services companies were never able to completely satisfy the demands placed on them. Inadequate supply, as much as any other single factor, impeded the operations of special services companies during the war.

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34. Cellular Table of Organization and Equipment. In view of the many deficiencies embodied in T/O&E 28-17, 16 March 1944, and the inflexibility and lack of adaptability of a standard T/O&E in any form, The General Board concludes that a cellular T/O&E adjustable to consider geographical conditions, manpower, and needs is more suited to successful operation of special services units.

35. Training of Personnel. A special services school must have a training program that can exploit the talents and abilities in athletic, recreational and entertainment fields which will exist in the postwar army.

36. Womens Army Corps Personnel in Special Services Units. More extensive use of women in special services activities would have increased the value of special services companies. In view of the success of the first WAC Special Services Company in the Army of Occupation, their use in any position in special services companies during the war should have been restricted only by the number of WAC's available. This likewise should be the only restriction to their employment in future operations.

37. Bands. Company operations have shown the desirability of employing bands in special services units. Every special services company had at least one large band, though it had a non-T/O&E status. Recognizing the need of bands as essential to a high degree of success of special services companies, these bands should be established on a T/O&E basis and be an organic part of special services units.

38. Cellular Units to Service All Echelons of Command. The number of companies in the European Theater was inadequate to service all troops. A special services company with present T/O&E can service between 10,000 and 15,000 troops depending on conditions. With a cellular T/O&E a special services unit can be formed to provide the operating personnel for special services activities at all echelons of command.

SECTION 2

RECOMMENDATIONS

39. Based on the foregoing conclusions, The General Board recommends that:

a. Special services companies be retained in the postwar military establishment.

b. The T/O&E of special services companies be given further study, with a view to establishing a new T/O&E on a cellular basis.

c. Policies and techniques be reviewed continuously to assure that the needs and desires of troops for special services activities are determined and fulfilled.

d. A training program answering the need for specialized training be developed and immediately put into effect.

e. Continued study be made to improve and standardize all equipment.

f. Supply procedure be standardized. Responsibility for procurement and distribution be clearly defined with appropriate supply agencies.

g. Special services companies be made completely mobile.

h. Full consideration be given to the establishment of WAC

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special services units, and the integration of WAC personnel in all special services units wherever WAC units are authorized.

i. Bands be established on a T/O&E basis as an organic part of special services units.

j. Detailed directives and circulars incorporating all essential information relative to special services companies be widely distributed.

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