

During World War II, the War Department worked closely with the motion picture studios in Hollywood to provide feature film entertainment to the troops, and together they created the Overseas Motion Picture Service, the largest motion picture circuit in the world. It stretched from military posts in the continental United States to the fighting fronts in the Pacific, Europe, Asia, and Africa.

This service was one part of a larger system of morale programs created by the War Department that provided the troops with entertainment, recreational activities, reading materials, and other comfort items. Special Services, as the division was called, was the origin of a culture of consumerism within the American military that has only increased in the years since.

Professional armies consist of soldiers who relinquish some of their rights as citizens in order to serve their countries. A combination of discipline and morale eases the transition from civilian to military life. During World War II, key figures in the War Department, who had experienced the problems associated with insufficient morale efforts in World War I, focused on providing the troops with all of the comforts of home.

American soldiers are citizens of a rich nation that values and promotes consumerism. These men expect the benefits of their nation to be available to them at war. The War Department provides those benefits, and has since World War II. The story of the Overseas Motion Picture Service, and the window that it provides onto the larger morale mission of the War Department, gives insight into the origins of that system.