

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM & LIBRARY

SO READY FOR LAUGHTER: BOB HOPE AND WORLD WAR II

On View February 5 – September 5, 2021

Selected PR Images

The New-York Historical Society celebrates the golden age of comedy with a special exhibition showcasing the legendary entertainer Bob Hope. Highlighting his unique role during WWII entertaining troops overseas, So Ready for Laughter: Bob Hope and World War II is organized by the National WWII Museum in New Orleans and supported by the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation. Coinciding with the 80th anniversary of the founding of the USO, the exhibition uses artifacts, films, and rare photographs to illustrate how Hope helped lift spirits both abroad and on the home front with his USO and radio shows during a dark time in American history.

NBC Publicity Portrait of Bob Hope, 1940

Courtesy of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation Collection, World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum

American entertainer Bob Hope was an immigrant when he came to the U.S. as a young boy via New York's Ellis Island. For decades, Hope shaped his art on the vaudeville stage, and by the start of World War II, he was just emerging as one of America's most popular radio and film stars.



Bob Hope in New Caledonia, 1944

Courtesy of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation Collection

Hope was in on the ground floor with the United Services Organization (USO) when it was formed in February 1941 to lift the morale of military service members. He would remain the star most closely associated with their efforts to entertain troops, making a total of 57 tours for the USO in the half century between 1941 and 1991.



Bob Hope's suitcase, ca. 1944

The National WWII Museum, Bob Hope Collection, 2019.001.030

Bob Hope was constantly on the go during World War II. Providing comedy and entertainment to American forces became his mission. Hope and his team traveled to training camps, bases, and hospitals across the country, and as members of the USO Camp Shows division, they journeyed into battle zones to perform for troops.



Letter to Bob Hope from Mrs. A. A. Stumpf, 1944

The National WWII Museum, Bob Hope Collection, 2019.001.015

The many thousands of letters Hope received put names to the smiling faces of his audience. In this letter from Mrs. A.A. Stumpf dated November 27, 1944, she writes of the final letter she received from her son Andy, a Marine who was killed in action on Peleliu soon after seeing Hope's troupe perform.



Coconut, 1944

Courtesy of the National Naval Aviation Museum

Not every piece of fan mail came in an envelope. This coconut was addressed and mailed to Hope in 1944, stamped with only 17 cents of postage.



Hope in the Marshall Islands, 1944

Courtesy of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation Collection, World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum

Hope maintained a frenetic pace, always working on several projects at once. In September 1943, Time magazine referred to him as a “performer who scarcely takes time out to live.” During the war years, he produced his weekly radio show, starred in several films each year, performed at charity events, hosted the Academy Awards, and continued to tour the world during his time off.



Hope and troupe on Guadalcanal, 1944

Courtesy of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation Collection, World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum

Hope assembled a vaudeville troupe of his own for his weekly radio show and for his tours. These musicians, comedians, and dancers traveled in cargo planes, PT-boats, and jeeps to meet America’s troops. They put on shows on the backs of trucks, on stages made of coconut logs, and in hospital wards—sometimes holding back tears while singing.



Bob Hope and Frances Langford in Alaska, 1942

Courtesy of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation Collection, World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum

Singer Frances Langford performed sentimental, romantic songs that often left troops weeping and missing home.



Pith helmet from Patty Thomas, 1944

The National WWII Museum, Bob Hope Collection,
2019.001.029

Patty Thomas was part of the Hope's globetrotting troupe. The tap dancer was only 21 years old when she set out with Hope and the others on tour in the summer of 1944. She was given this hat by the men of Gropac (Group Pacific) 7, a naval supply base in the Marshall Islands.



Dolores Hope, circa 1943

Courtesy of the Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation
Collection, World Golf Hall of Fame & Museum

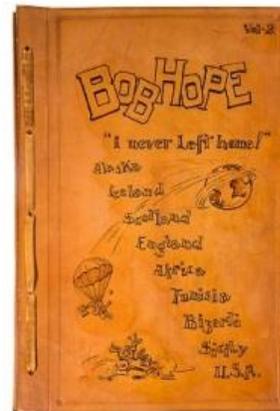
Dolores Hope was the heart of her family, managing the household and raising children Linda and Tony while Bob was overseas or busy at home. Dolores wore this uniform while serving as head of the Southern California chapter of the American Women's Voluntary Services (AWVS), the largest women's volunteer organization during the war. The 325,000 members supported the war effort in numerous ways including canteen work, war bond sales, and ambulance driving.



"I Never Left Home" albums, circa 1944

The National WWII Museum, Bob Hope Collection,
2019.001.001-.002

This album is part of a series of leather volumes handmade for Hope in order to chronicle his tours. Although he documented his WWII tours in numerous works, including his 1944 travelogue I Never Left Home, these albums were never used. The covers are illustrated with Hope's globetrotting efforts to reach those serving in far-off regions.



Cigarette case, 1945

The National WWII Museum, Bob Hope Collection,
2019.001.020

Some souvenirs given to Hope were elaborately decorated, like this cigarette case, a gift from the XXIII Corps occupation force in Germany.

