

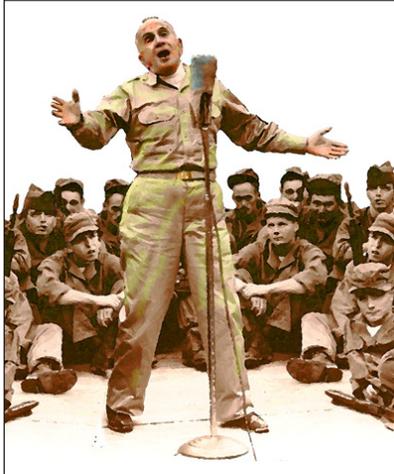
NewsRelease

The International Al Jolson Society

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GROUP SEEKS VETERANS WHO SAW JOLSON PERFORM

The International Al Jolson Society, an organization of over 1000 members worldwide, dedicated to honoring the legacy of the late entertainer, is seeking help from American servicemen and women who may have seen the famed singer during one of his many USO tours.



Jolson, billed in his lifetime as “The World’s Greatest Entertainer”, played to millions of fans on the stage, screen and radio for nearly fifty years. But he often stated that his #1 audience was the American GI. During WW I he entertained stateside in many army hospitals all over the nation and appeared in countless War Bond rallies. During WW II he was the very first to perform under the USO banner in Alaska, South America, England, Ireland, Scotland, North Africa and Sicily. In Algiers he had a private meeting with General Eisenhower and staff. Jolson was accompanied to the ETO by his pianist, famed music composer, Harry Akst. The two played dozens of shows, giving the soldiers a morale boosting taste of the music they’d left back home.

At the start of the Korean conflict in 1950, Jolson requested The White House to grant permission for him to be the first to entertain our soldiers. The USO had been disbanded earlier so Jolson paid his own way to the Far East to sing once again for his favorite audience. He did twenty-three shows in one week for over 30,000 soldiers based in hospitals in Japan and on the front lines in Korea itself. He and Harry Akst were invited to a private lunch with General and Mrs. MacArthur at the time during which “Jolie” sang all of the old tunes that the General requested.

The exhausting entertainment schedule took a toll on the 64 year old Jolson, yet despite a severe bronchial infection, he continued to sing his heart out for “the kids.” Three weeks after returning home to California, Al Jolson died (Oct. 23, 1950). President Truman called him as much a victim of the Korean War as was any soldier fighting there. Accordingly, Al Jolson was posthumously awarded The Medal of Merit—the highest honor to be bestowed upon a citizen by the U.S. Government.

The Jolson Society ([www. Jolson.org](http://www.Jolson.org)) is trying to contact Veterans who saw Jolson entertain in any of the many shows he did at army hospitals at home and abroad or in any of the famed front line performances. If these soldiers would write about their experiences, or perhaps tape record their precious memories, The Jolson Society would publish these accounts and share them with others. Any photos of these historical Jolson shows would be greatly appreciated too. It would be a wonderful way to honor the memory of an entertainment legend who worked tirelessly in three wars to ease our soldiers’ burdens and bring them a few hours of laughter, tears, and sweet musical memories. Interested Vets and their families can contact Mr. Kirk Estee, of the Jolson Society, at esteek@cox.net (402 616.0460). He will ensure that their special storied accounts are thoughtfully reported.

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