



Many Americans were still ambivalent about the thought of African Americans serving as soldiers; songs like "The Ragtime Volunteers Are Off to War" treated the notion in a light-hearted way.

### Groundbreaking Music (Bit by Bit)

Most popular music publications during World War I reflected the traditions of Tin Pan Alley, music hall, and vaudeville. In a small way, though, a few songs and recordings began to travel new paths.

#### SOLDIERS OF COLOR

Many Americans had a great deal of ambivalence about the role of non-white combatants in the United States armed forces, despite the longstanding historical deployment of soldiers of color ever since the American Revolutionary War. Some people hoped that the valiant service of the 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry—one of the "Buffalo Soldier" regiments—during the Spanish-American War would elevate the national regard for African-American soldiers, but prejudice still pervaded many aspects of the military as well as civilian life. A particularly dismaying incident occurred during World War I, when Colonel Linard of the American Expeditionary Force sent a surreptitious document to the French military leadership; it was titled *Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops*. Linard explained that the French

INTRODUCED BY BERT WILLIAMS IN ZIEGFELD MIDNIGHT FROLIC

Words by GRANT CLARKE  
Music by GEO. W. MEYER

# YOU'LL FIND OLD DIXIELAND IN FRANCE

**PATRIOTIC WAR EDITION**  
To Comport with the Government and to conserve paper during the War, this song is printed in a smaller size than usual. Your subscription will be very much appreciated.

LEO. FEIST NEW YORK

Bert Williams (of the Walker and Williams minstrel team) presented a sincere tribute to the patriotism of African-American soldiers in the song "You'll Find Old Dixieland in France."

must be very careful in how they interacted with black soldiers, since "Treating blacks as equals was considered to have the most sinister implications for the future, when the black soldiers went home to the states.... The approximately 15 million Negroes in the United States presented a threat of race mongrelization unless blacks and whites were kept strictly separated. [Therefore,] the French should not eat with them nor shake hands with them, nor visit or converse except as required by military matters."<sup>22</sup>

Fortunately, Linard's warnings fell mostly on deaf ears, and the experiences of many black performers resembled minstrel performer Bert Williams' favorable treatment in London. Lieutenant James Reese Europe, bandleader for the all-black 369<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry "Hellfighters," wrote about the French: "Their broad minds are far and free from prejudice, and...despite the desperate efforts of some people, the French simply cannot be taught to

comprehend that despicable thing called prejudice... 'Viva la France' should be the song of every black American over here and over there."<sup>233</sup>

Since Tin Pan Alley had always been a forum for expressing nearly every possible viewpoint, some songs started appearing that showcased the courage and patriotism of various minority soldiers. A century later, many of these songs may appear astonishingly patronizing and stereotype-filled, such as "[The Ragtime Volunteers Are Off to War](#)" (1917) or "They'll Be Mighty Proud in Dixie of Their Old Black Joe" (1918). A much less condescending treatment, "When the Lord Makes a Record of a Hero's Deeds, He Draws No Color Line," appeared in 1918 (although the song focused on African-American heroism during the Civil and Spanish-American Wars).<sup>234</sup> The most genuine tribute was written by Grant Clarke and George W. Meyer in 1918; called "You'll Find Old Dixieland in France," it was introduced by Bert Williams in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1918*. The service of Native Americans did not receive as much attention from songwriters, and the one notable example, "Indianola" (1918), seems painfully condescending today.

#### MUSICAL "REALISM"

One of the most unexpected war-inspired disks to come out of a recording studio was "On Patrol in No Man's Land" (LISTENING EXAMPLE 14), a number written by James Reese Europe with the help of Noble Sissle (1889–1975) and Eubie Blake (1887–1983). Europe had been born in Alabama but, as a child, had moved to Washington, D.C., living just a few doors away from John Philip Sousa. Members of Sousa's Marine Band gave music lessons to African-American children with musical promise, so Europe studied piano and violin. With this solid foundation, Europe went on to lead a professional orchestra in New York, and he helped found the Clef Club, a union for black musicians. He conducted the club's orchestra and chorus in a *Symphony of Negro Music* at Carnegie Hall in 1912, the first time a black orchestra had ever appeared on that stage. When Victor Records signed them in 1913, they became the first black orchestra to have a recording contract with a major label. Europe also served as the music director for the celebrated dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle; the Castles are credited with developing the popularity of the foxtrot.<sup>235</sup>

When a new all-black 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the New York National Guard began forming in 1916, Europe enlisted as a private because he felt it would "bring together all classes of men for a common good."<sup>236</sup> His commanding officer, knowing of Europe's background and impending promotion to lieutenant, asked him to "organize and develop the finest band in the U.S. Army."<sup>237</sup> In response, Europe



James Reese Europe conducts the 369<sup>th</sup> Hellfighters Band outside an American Red Cross hospital in Paris, c. 1918.

asked for a much larger budget and instrumentation than the army usually allowed. With the help of outside support from the U.S. Steel Corporation and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Europe's conditions were met. The band was a quick success, but the regiment encountered significant racism while undergoing basic training, so the army sent them overseas. However, America's segregation laws limited their active role in combat alongside white American soldiers—so they were offered the chance to transfer to the French Army as American reinforcements.<sup>238</sup> They thus became the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army, and their nickname was the "Hellfighters."

Even though the regiment's band entertained widely in France, and their "jazzy" interpretations were all the rage among their French audiences, they were still members of a fighting unit. Lt. Europe became the first African-American officer to lead his troops into combat during World War I—and these battles gave him direct experience with No Man's Land. Moreover, he was injured in early 1918 in a gas attack, and Noble Sissle went with a friend to visit him in the hospital. As Sissle recalled, they could hear him "coughing one of those dry-hacking painful coughs," but when they came around the partition they found Europe sitting upright and writing in a notebook propped against his knees. "When he looked up through his big, shell-rimmed glasses and

saw it was us, a big broad smile swept over his face, and instead of him telling us how seriously he was gassed, as we had expected, or how his physical condition was, the first thing that he spoke up and said

was: ‘Gee, I am glad to see you boys! Sissle, here’s a wonderful idea for a song that just came to me, in fact, it was [from the] experience I had last night during the bombardment that nearly knocked me out.’<sup>239</sup>



### “On Patrol in No Man’s Land” (1918) – Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, and James Reese Europe

The song that had blossomed from James Reese Europe’s frightening experience was “On Patrol in No Man’s Land.” In its sheet music form, it looks like a conventional Tin Pan Alley song, with an introduction, vamp, verse, and a repeated **refrain** (a refrain is a synonym for the repetitive chorus in a verse-chorus form). However, the sheet music does not convey all the nuances that the Hellfighter Band added during their performances. Fortunately for posterity, the band recorded the song in 1919 after their return to the United States.

During the first twelve seconds of the recording, it would be easy to imagine a vaudeville star tap-dancing his way onto the stage to syncopated ragtime-style rhythms—but even during the vamp, odd things begin to happen. Members of the band start using their voices and instruments to simulate the sound of an incoming mortar attack, with drums mimicking the explosions. Despite these intimidating noises, the song’s bright tempo continues unabated, perhaps underscoring a “life goes on” message. When the singer Noble Sissle starts the verse, it soon becomes clear that his lyrics are no ordinary Tin Pan Alley love song or comedy; instead, he is a commanding officer, instructing his soldiers in the way to follow him safely “over the top” into the dangerous territory of No Man’s Land. He peppers his dialogue with contemporary sayings, perhaps to ease some of his men’s anxiety; “Very Good Eddy,” for instance, was a reference to a popular 1915 musical comedy.

The first time through the refrain, the intensity of the attack increases. Here, the lyrics include genuine military terms, such as “Minnenwerfer.” Sometimes nicknamed a “sausage gun,” this was a short-range trench mortar that had been used heavily in the Somme where the trenches were less than thirty yards apart—too close for normal gunfire.<sup>240</sup> A “Vary” light (more often spelled “Very”) was a flare gun, used to launch illuminating flares into the air that could reveal the position of hidden soldiers. “Boche” was the French slang term for the Germans, equivalent to the English “Hun” or “Kraut.”

It is during the repetition of the refrain, however, that the real surprise comes. After the men have dropped to the ground and

**On Patrol in No Man’s Land**

ADDISON AMUSEMENTS Inc. Presents  
*Lieut. JAMES REESE EUROPE*  
AND HIS FAMOUS  
369<sup>th</sup> U.S. INFANTRY “HELL FIGHTERS” BAND







GOOD NIGHT ANGELINE 50  
ON PATROL IN NO MAN’S LAND 50

*M. Witmark & Sons*  
New York Chicago Philadelphia Boston San Francisco London

**James Reese Europe’s “On Patrol in No Man’s Land” (1918) described the wartime experience in an unexpectedly vivid way.**

begun to crawl, the accompanying instruments suddenly stop—and listeners are exposed to sounds and shouts that might occur during an actual attack. The soldiers are ordered to ram their opponents with their bayonets, and soon the Germans are heard plaintively crying, “Comrade...comrade...” as they plead for mercy. And then, the music abruptly resumes, in the same cheerful way it had begun; the realism has ended.

Tin Pan Alley had heard nothing quite like this song. In a way, it resembles the Expressionistic settings encountered in classical music. Somewhat surprisingly, though, it became one of the band’s most popular pieces.<sup>20</sup> Although it gave listeners a small glimpse of an actual wartime experience, it tempered that intensity with its lively cakewalk-style energy.

Despite the innovation and novelty of Europe’s creation, his name is little known to many listeners today. This lack of fame may be because he died far too young, due to a very sad incident that occurred in May 1919. Europe was taking the Hellfighters Band on a post-Armistice concert tour in the United States, but one of his drummers, Herbert Wright, proved to be mentally imbalanced. Wright felt he was unappreciated, and although Europe tried to reason with him, Wright pulled a knife and stabbed Europe to death. Europe’s passing was met with widespread grief, and New York City officials agreed to make his funeral public—“the first one ever so granted to a black American in the city’s history.”<sup>22</sup>

LISTENING GUIDE 14			
“On Patrol in No Man’s Land” – 1918 [2:21]			
JAMES REESE EUROPE (1880–1919)			
Structure	Timeline	Text	Musical Features
Intro	:00	[instruments]	“Brightly (not fast)”
vamp	:10	[Vamp is played 4 times]	
	:12	[wooshing and whining sounds in background]	Whines of incoming mortar
	:15	[bang!]	Drum mimics explosion
	:16	[vamp continues]	
a (verse)	:20	What’s the time? Nine? All in line Alright, boys, now take it slow Are you ready? Steady! Very good, Eddy. Over the top, let’s go Quiet, sly it, else you’ll start a riot, Keep your proper distance, follow ’long Cover, smother, when you see me hover Obey my orders and you won’t go wrong	Solo (featuring Noble Sissle)
B (Refrain)	:43	There’s a Minnenwerfer coming —	
	:45	Look out! [whine in background]	
	:46	[bang!]	Drum mimics explosion

<b>B (Refrain cont.)</b>	:46	Hear that roar!	
	:47	[ <i>bang!</i> ]	Drum mimics explosion
	:47	There's one more	
	:48	[ <i>bang!</i> ]	Drum mimics explosion
	:49	Stand fast, there's a Vary light Don't gasp or they'll find you all right Don't start to bombing	[ <i>flare!</i> ]
	:56	With those hand grenades [ <i>rat-a-tat-tat-tat in background!</i> ]	Drum mimics machine gun
	:57	There's a machine gun	
	:58	Holy Spades! [ <i>cow bell in background!</i> ]	Bell signals gas alert
	1:00	Alert, gas! Put on your mask Adjust it correctly and hurry up fast	
	1:04	[ <i>whine in background!</i> ]	Incoming mortar
	1:05	Drop! [ <i>bang! in background!</i> ] There's a rocket from the Boche barrage	Drum mimics explosion
	1:08	Down, [ <i>bang! in background!</i> ] Hug the ground, close as you can, don't stand Creep and crawl, follow me, that's all What do you hear? Nothing near Don't fear, all is clear, That's the life of a stroll When you take a patrol Out in No Man's Land! Ain't it grand? Out in No Man's Land.	
	1:23	There's a Minnenwerfer coming —	
	1:25	Look out! [ <i>siren in background!</i> ]	Incoming mortar
	1:26	[ <i>bang!</i> ]	Drum mimics explosion
	1:27	Hear that roar!	
	1:27	[ <i>bang!</i> ]	Drum mimics explosion
	1:28	There's one more Stand fast, there's a Vary light Don't gasp or they'll find you all right Don't start to bombing	
	1:35	With those hand grenades [ <i>rat-a-tat-tat-tat in background!</i> ]	Drum mimics machine gun

B (Refrain cont.)	1:37	There's a machine gun	
	1:38	Holy Spades! [cow bell in background]	Bell signals gas alert
	1:39	Alert, gas! Put on your mask Adjust it correctly and hurry up fast	
	1:44	[whine in background]	Incoming mortar
	1:45	Drop! There's a rocket from the Boche barrage Down, hug the ground, close as you can, don't stand Creep and crawl, follow me, that's all	
	1:52	[Shouted commands: "Doughboys! Go to it!" Battle cries of soldiers; more commands: "Get the bloody boys! Get 'em! Stick 'em with the bayonet, boys. Ram it to 'em!" Soon, moaning Germans are heard: "Kamerad...kamerad..." (comrade)]	All music stops
	2:07	What do you hear? Nothing near Don't fear, all is clear, That's the life of a stroll When you take a patrol Out in No Man's Land! Ain't it grand? Out in No Man's Land.	Accompaniment resumes

## Section IV Summary: Musical Responses to "The Great War"

- \* Many musicians were eager to fight for their countries, even though many of them were not in the peak of health. Men who could not serve in the armed forces tried to support their nations in various morale-boosting efforts. Women participated in those efforts and filled many of the vacant jobs in civilian society.
- \* Some musicians served much less eagerly, and usually unhappily; sometimes their experiences influenced the music they wrote, as in Berg's *Wozzeck* or Berlin's "Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning."
- \* The question of whether or not to play music that had been composed by someone from an enemy nation was an immediate issue for most performers and listeners. Many people felt, though, that music transcended national loyalty at times.
- \* Musicians from enemy nations often faced suspicion, restrictions, and even arrest, as the German-born conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Karl Muck, discovered.
- \* Some musicians refused to exhibit "musical prejudice" and thus would not support repertory restrictions and continued to perform music of any nationality.
- \* In the spontaneous cease-fire in 1914, known as the **Christmas Truce**, the combatants listened to each other perform music and even joined together in singing some widely known carols.
- \* Some composers felt their creativity was crippled by the horror of war, but they sometimes found inspiration in trying to fill a philanthropic need, such as by contributing to **charity book** anthologies. Two of the best-known collections were *King Albert's Book* and *The Book of the Homeless*.
- \* Many prominent composers produced works that commemorated those who had made tremendous sacrifices in the war. These pieces included Debussy's *En blanc et noir*, Elgar's *The Spirit of England*, and Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.
- \* Other classical composers wrote works that addressed the war in a more general way, such as Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* or Ravel's "Three Beautiful Birds from Paradise." Some composers also devised pieces that could be played despite physical handicaps, such as the numerous piano