

KEEP ‘EM BUYING: ABBOTT & COSTELLO’S 1942 WAR BOND TOUR



“When you meet Abbott and Costello it doesn’t take long to realize why they are tops as movie comedians within only a little over a year before the cameras. Abbott and Costello are a couple of ‘right guys’. Although this tour must have been a terrific strain on them, they can still smile and toss off the gags with ease, and keep ‘em laughing—and buying war bonds.” —Michigan newspaper reporter

The United States would spend over \$300 billion on the war effort. Higher taxes helped, but the government still needed to borrow more than half of the money to fund the war. Starting on May 1, 1941, the Treasury offered Americans a series of Defense Bonds and Stamps. Americans purchased \$185.7 billion in bonds during the war. They were not only lending the government money, but also investing in their own future.



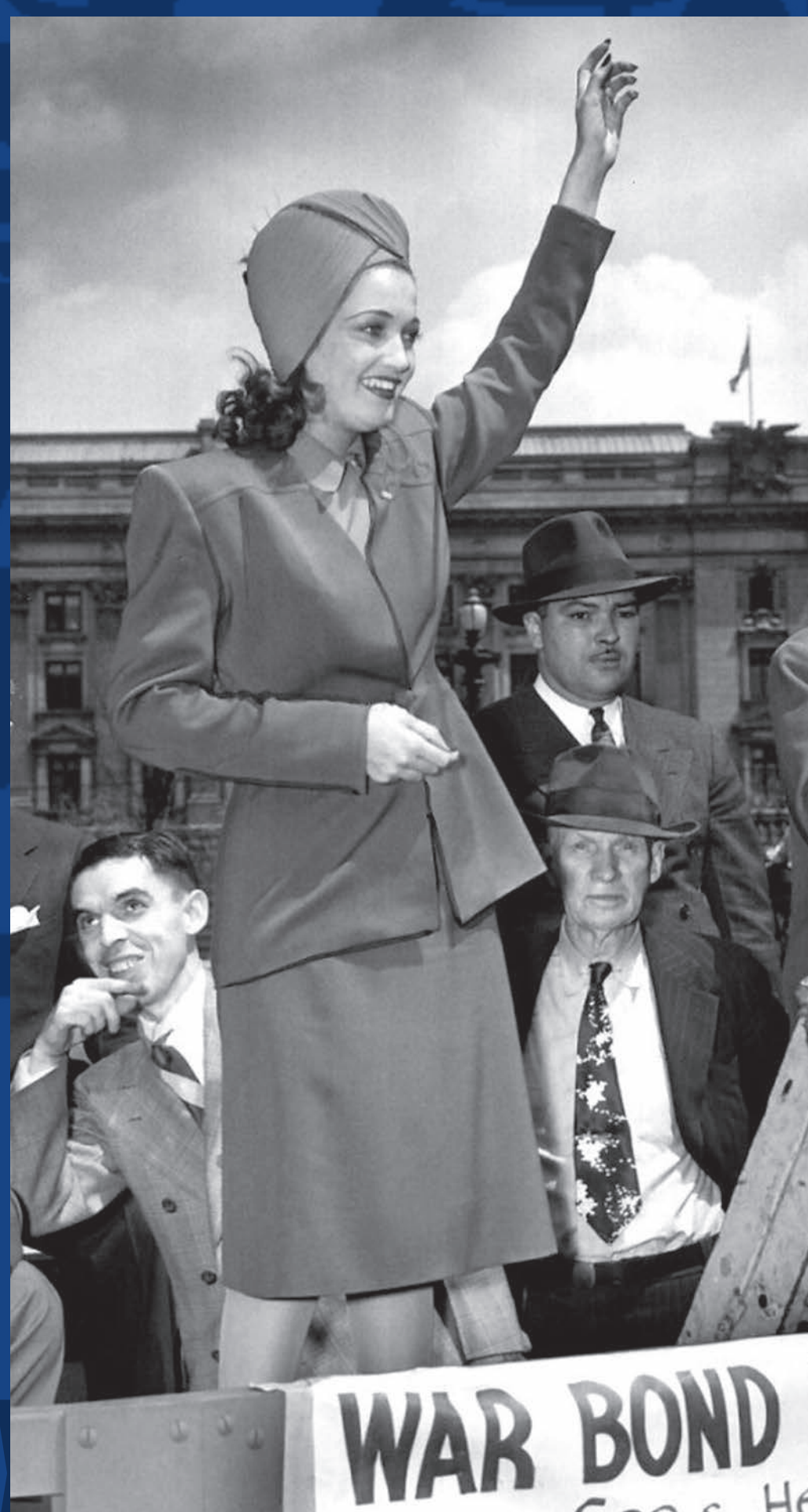
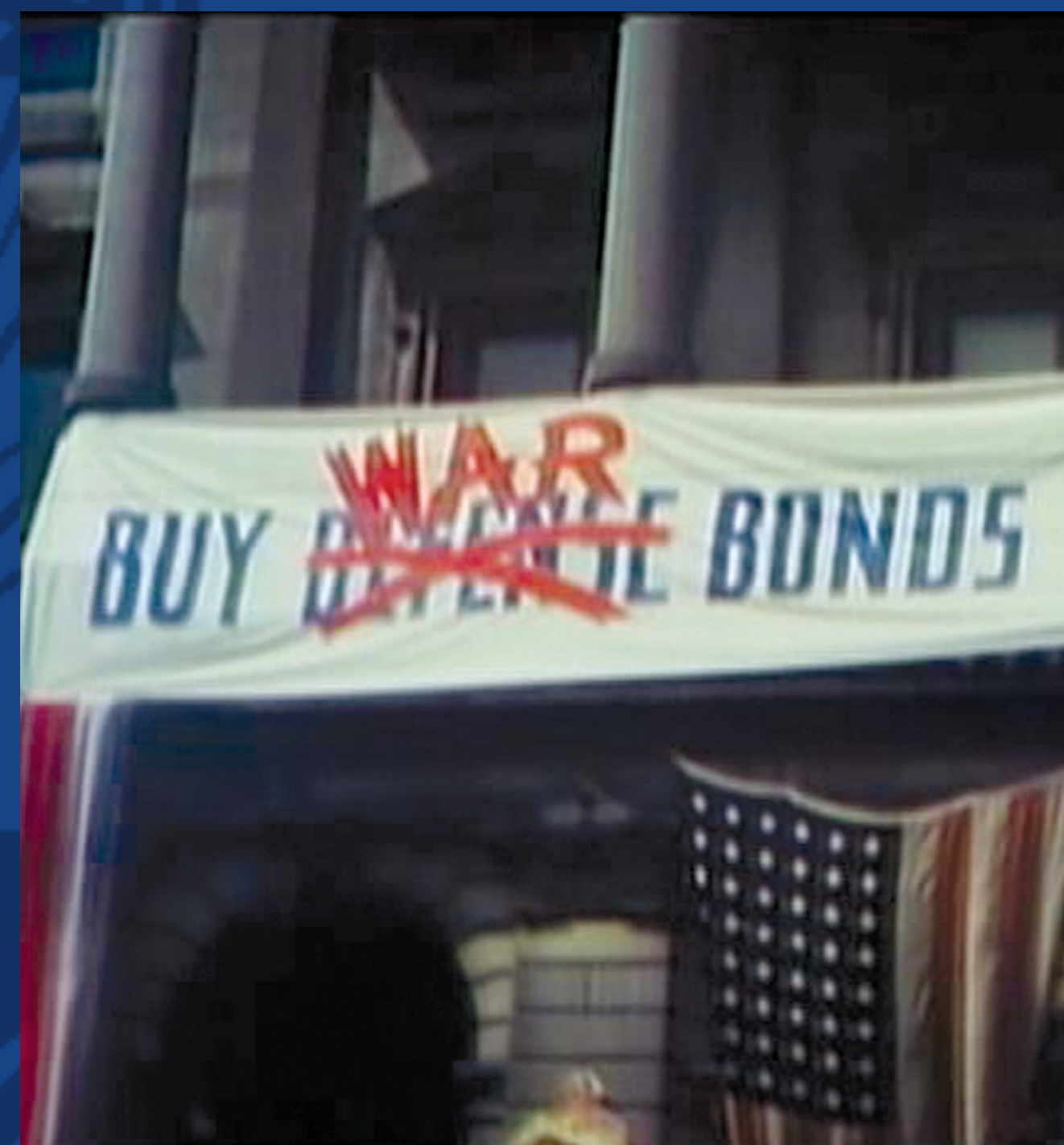
War Bonds sold at 75% of face value in denominations from \$25 to \$10,000, and matured after ten years. War Stamps, starting at 10¢ each, were collected to fill a booklet that could be traded in for a bond.



While *Buck Privates* was setting box office records in 1941, Bud and Lou starred in a newsreel promoting Defense Bonds.



After Pearl Harbor, Defense Bonds were renamed War Bonds. Carole Lombard, Dorothy Lamour, and Marlene Dietrich were the first movie stars to tour the country selling them.



BUY WAR BONDS

Abbott and Costello's hit service comedies helped prepare the United States for the impending war, and their later wartime films helped Americans escape from it.



But Bud and Lou wanted to directly help the war effort. They decided to spend their first true vacation since coming to Hollywood touring the country selling bonds.

BUY WAR BONDS

Three weeks after completing *Who Done It?*, their eighth starring film in just 18 months, Bud and Lou boarded a Union Pacific train in Los Angeles and travelled overnight to Salt Lake City, Utah, the first of 78 stops.



Bud and Lou left Los Angeles on July 21. Lou's wife, Anne, pregnant with Lou, Jr., and daughter, Paddy, and Bud's wife, Betty, saw them off.

As word spread from town to town, the crowds and bond sales swelled.





Morning, noon and night, in sudden downpours or blistering Midwest heat, Bud and Lou appeared on the steps of state capitals or city halls, in blue-collar town squares, wealthy suburbs, stadiums, parks, military bases, hospitals, mills, mines, and munitions factories. One account said that they did eight to thirteen shows a day.



DUTY WAIT DUTY

They did not travel in luxury. Sometimes Army bombers transported them. Trains weren't necessarily relaxing. "We'd reserve beds on trains," Lou recalled, "and when we got there—with the tickets, mind you—they'd given them to someone else, so we'd sleep in the lavatories, leaning on the wall." Another time, "With all the arrangements made beforehand, we had to ride 13 hours with no seats at all." In Michigan, one of their trains was five hours late. Even automobiles could be nerve-wracking as state troopers sped at top speed with sirens blaring, or a flat tire threw their schedule off.



BUY WAR BONDS

The team leveraged their natural competitiveness to sell bonds. Lou's brother, Pat, recalled: "They'd split the crowd between them. Bud would say, 'I'll take this side over here, the respectable people.' Lou would say, 'Okay, I'll take this side, they're a bunch of crap shooters.' Then they'd compete to see whose side bought the most bonds." Bud usually won.



Blackboards for keeping track of Bud and Lou's competing War Bond sales can be seen behind the boys (above) and behind Lou (right).



After the bonds were sold, the boys rewarded audiences with their "Who's On First?," "Mustard," or "Jonah and The Whale" routines.

BUY WAR BONDS

Sometimes they auctioned the clothes off their backs. (They weren't anywhere long enough to have them laundered.) In French Lick, Indiana, Lou was stripped down to his trunks when Bud sold them. The crowd roared when Lou took them off to reveal that he was wearing a second pair. The underwear was later displayed in a department store window.



The boys also vied to collect badges from local police, sheriffs, fire chiefs, and state troopers. Lou said, "Abbott won't tell you, but I have a lot more than he has."





In Lincoln, Nebraska, kids followed the jeep that took Bud and Lou to the capital building, where the Governor gave them goldplated ears of corn.



BUD AND LOU COSTELLO

The appearance that received the most publicity wasn't a bond rally. In Omaha, ten year-old Jerry Young sneaked into the team's hotel and offered them 70¢ to perform in his backyard amateur show. Although they had a full schedule 55 miles away in Lincoln, Bud and Lou returned in time to close Jerry's show in front of 1,000 people. The event was covered in newspapers nationwide and later immortalized in *True Comics* No. 19 (December 1942).



Msgr. Edward J. Flanagan, the director of nearby Boys Town, introduced Bud and Lou at Jerry's show. The comedians had endowed a bed at Boys Town and donated uniforms and equipment for the baseball team, which until then played in overalls. Boys Town and the growing problem of juvenile delinquency made a lasting impression on the comedy duo. In 1947, they opened the Lou Costello Jr. Youth Foundation to serve impoverished kids in Los Angeles.



While in Omaha, Bud and Lou took the opportunity to visit Msgr. Flanagan and Boys Town and play ball with the kids.

BUY WAR BONDS

The boys reached Lou's home town on August 24, where he was presented with an award for his promotion of Paterson.



Lou and Bud hold the cup at Bauerle Field at East Side High School.

Bud and Lou finished up in New York, where they appeared in Brooklyn, Yankee Stadium, and the County Center in White Plains. Their final rally was in Central Park with Mayor LaGuardia.



Above, with Joe DiMaggio at Yankee Stadium, where the boys did "Who's On First?" Left, greeting Mayor LaGuardia outside City Hall.

BONDS



Lou and Bud are welcomed back at Universal Studios after their tour. They will soon start shooting *It Ain't Hay* (1943), which was named for the massive sum they raised selling bonds.

By the end of the tour, Bud and Lou had visited 78 cities and 100 war production plants and sold \$85 million in War Bonds. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau hosted a testimonial dinner for Abbott and Costello in Washington, D.C., the night of August 31.

BUY WAR BONDS

“If the American people ever
lose their sense of humor,
we can lose this war.
I know of no one doing a
better job to prevent this than
Abbott and Costello!”

—Michigan Governor Murray D. Van Wagoner

