

# HISTORY

The DeRidder USO Building was the first off-base facility built for and used by the United Service Organizations (USO) during WWII. The facility was one of the largest of five different sizes of Type A buildings designated by the Quartermaster Corp to be used as a USO.

The USO was open to any enlisted man in "good standing" - no drinking or fighting allowed. Dances were held three nights a week, with local girls chaperoned to and from each event. Dances lasted until twelve and the people would be wall to wall. You had to come by yourself, or with your parents, and leave the same way. Nobody left with a soldier. It was a place to have good clean fun, which continued to serve the military throughout the Korean War.

Dedicated in 1912, the War Room Museum houses a small collection of war memorabilia largely donated by Velmer Smith and other citizens. Plan your visit for a self-guided tour to view the various displays and gun room.



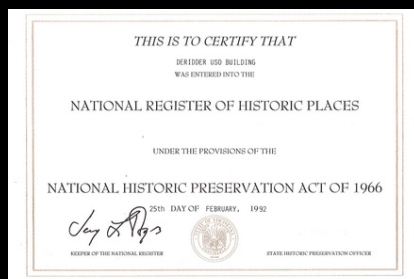
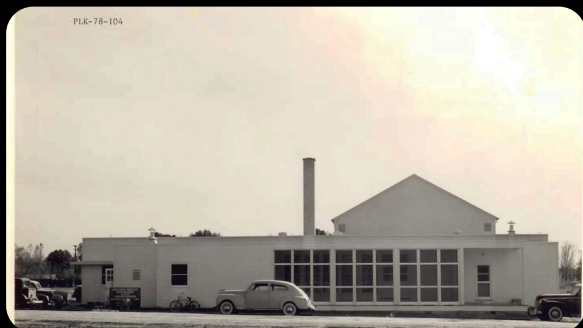
The USO was used for the recreational and spiritual welfare of the Army and Army Air Force in the area. The contract was awarded to LeBlanc Brothers of Baton Rouge and was completed for a cost of \$57,480. Workers labored day and night to complete the building in just 39 calendar days! It was ready to provide the soldiers a home away from home on November 28, 1941. Governor Sam H. Jones was the guest speaker at the official dedication held on December 1, 1941.



The DeRidder USO Building was renamed the War Memorial Civic Center to honor the 51 known Beauregard Parish men who gave their lives during WWII. Since 1946, the facility has been maintained and operated by an ad-valorem tax renewal approved by the voters of Beauregard Parish.



On February 25, 1992, the DeRidder USO Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior.



# DID YOU KNOW?

- Largest Maneuver ever, World War II, held in area. 500,000 troops assembled for mock battles.
- Communications were expedited in the big maneuver. Thirty well-trained pigeons and pigeon loft were on standby in the event modern equipment "went on the fritz." Homing pigeons were distributed to various units in the field, and when urgent action was needed, messages were put in capsules on the leg of the pigeon. When released, the pigeons returned unerringly to loft.
- Each of 19 divisions participation in the "Big One" had its own mobile water purification plant capable of purifying at least 75,000 gallons daily.
- The Army used its new parachute troops for the first time September 17, 1941, as it would in war by dropping 127 men into a Louisiana cotton patch.
- Many famous heroes were involved in training in Louisiana during the "Big One", Generals Mark Clark, Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, George Patton, Leslie McNair, Walter Krueger, Alfred Guenther and George Marshall.
- During the "Big One", the First Cavalry Division performed a notable feat in crossing the Sabine River by fording, which included both animals and vehicles. Such a launch represented an unprecedented combination of forces, old Dobbin the horse, side by side with a big 25-ton tank. The massing of horses, men and tanks had never been tried by real or stimulated war, not even Hitler, in the history of the world.
- Soldiers were turned into traffic cops in the "Big One" when a dozen small grasshopper planes directed movement of 30,000 soldiers in the first stages of the maneuvers.
- In 1943, German POW's were housed at alien internment camp at Fort (Camp) Polk.

## TODAY...

The Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs operates their Beauregard Parish Office by APPOINTMENT ONLY to assist veterans and their families. To schedule an appointment, please call (337) 463-7305.

**Beauregard Parish LDVA Office**  
**BY APPOINTMENT ONLY**  
**M - F 8 a.m. - 3 p.m.**  
**Phone (337) 463-7305**  
**Fax (337) 463-7302**



The War Memorial Civic Center is widely utilized by the community. The Civic Center is governed by an appointed Board of Directors selected by the Beauregard Parish Police Jurors. Rooms are available to rent for your event needs. For further information:

**M - F 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.**  
**250 West 7th Street**  
**DeRidder, LA 70634**  
**Phone (337) 463-7212**  
**Fax (337) 463-4089**  
**info@warmemorialcc.com**



VISIT OUR WEBSITE

## The Historic WAR MEMORIAL CIVIC CENTER



*First Off Base USO In America*  
*Listed in National Register of Historic Places*  
*Established 1941*