



## Military Finding Lots Of Acts To Entertain The Troops

Regardless of one's political leanings, few in this business would deny U.S. troops "over there" the right to rock.

Marine Corps Capt. **Jesse Davidson** is circuit manager for Southwest Asia, one of six different circuits through which Armed Forces Entertainment routes tours by entertainers from every genre.

AFE is an Air Force command operation and the lead agency providing transportation and logistical support for the United Services Organization in bringing entertainers to troops. In 2005, AFE conducted 136 tours that totaled 1,268 shows at some 270 military installations worldwide.

Special consideration is given to dangerous, remote and isolated locations. "Our priorities for the program are Iraq, Afghanistan and Djibouti," Davidson says. "But just to get to those areas we have to pass through all these other countries we have bases in, so we make sure the shows hit as many of those places as they can."

Davidson says it is surprisingly easy to recruit acts to play these regions. "There are a lot of acts that, mostly for patriotic reasons, want to go play for the troops," he says. "Sometimes they're a little wary. Some groups are not so

big on going into Iraq and Afghanistan because of the security situation."

But the tours are enough in demand that AFE can be selective. Artists apply to the AFE program by submitting promotional materials including CDs and DVDs. The circuit managers review the acts to determine which, if any, circuit would be appropriate for them.

"Basically, we're looking for talent; that's the primary thing," Davidson says. "And, as best we can, we try to gauge how we think they will do out on tour in terms of organization. These tours last for up to a month, going around the world, traveling the whole time."

The program focuses on up-and-coming, recently signed and unsigned acts. "We prefer to have groups that have released CDs and have regional and maybe a little bit of national attention," Davidson says. "Most of the celebrity stuff is handled by the USO, and we coordinate the military side of it."

AFE covers expenses, and artists volunteer their time and talent. "Commercial airline travel, which is how we get them into the area where they're going to be touring, is probably the biggest expense we have," Davidson says. Once they are in the region, the

groups generally travel by military aircraft.

"In the last year in [my] circuit we had 24 tours, about 300 shows total," Davidson says. Artists play for audiences as few as 250 people to more than 1,000 at the larger bases.

Davidson says the audience in his circuit is generally in the 18- to 25-year-old range. "Some of the other circuits, specifically in Europe, have families they're dealing with they may want to entertain; sometimes it's an older crowd," he says. "Each of the circuits is different."

Acts that have recently toured via AFE include **Las Tres Divas**, **Niki Barr**, **Carly Goodwin**, **Inobe**, **Plunge**, **SR-71** and **Waking Norman**. 2005 USO tours coordinated with AFE included **Jessica Simpson** and **Nick Lachey**, **Toby Keith** and **Tito Puente Jr.**

Davidson says he does not have any aspirations to work in the concert business as a civilian. "I fell into this job kind of randomly," he says. "I don't know if this is something I'm going to pursue after my military career, but I'm definitely gaining a lot of experience in marketing and just putting tours together. It dovetails with my military specialty, which is logistics, transportation." ●●●

**NIKI BARR** is among the artists who have toured recently via AFE.

