

Blue Jacket Blues: Lost Recordings of Johnny Cash at the Naval War College – Live in '75

David Kohnen and Roy Cash, Jr.

Sailors far from home often identified with the lyrics of traditional sea shanties, which highlighted the isolation and hard work on an unforgiving sea. Following in this tradition, American sailors also gravitated to the punchy diddy bopper rhythms and bleak lyrical storyline of Cash's rockabilly classic, "Folsom Prison Blues" Since he scored that first hit in 1955, Cash has cast a very long shadow on American popular culture. Given all that has been written and generally remembered about Cash, many surprises remain unexplored in the remarkable chronology of his life and rise in popular American music. One such example is the previously undocumented performance by the "Man in Black" on St. Patrick's Day in 1975 at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. Using recently rediscovered audio from the event, this article examines the concert, as well as the broader influence of Cash upon popular culture, the role of military service upon his work, his intimate connection with the Naval War College, and his broader impact on the United States military.

Les marins loin de chez eux s'identifiaient souvent aux paroles des chants de marins traditionnels qui traitaient de l'isolement et du travail acharné sur la mer impitoyable. Reprenant cette tradition, les marins américains étaient également attirés vers les rythmes percutants et le sombre récit du classique du rockabilly de Johnny Cash intitulé «Folsom Prison Blues.» Après avoir connu ce premier succès en 1955, Cash a marqué à tout jamais la culture populaire américaine. Malgré tout ce qui a été écrit et tout ce que nous

retenons de Cash, bon nombre de sujets demeurent peu connus dans la chronologie remarquable de sa vie et son grand rôle dans la musique populaire américaine. On peut citer, à titre d'exemple, le spectacle non déjà documenté du chanteur connu sous le nom de « Man in Black » le jour de la St-Patrick en 1975 au Naval War College à Newport, au Rhode Island. À l'aide de l'enregistrement sonore du spectacle qu'on vient de redécouvrir, cet article étudie le spectacle ainsi que l'influence de Johnny Cash sur la culture populaire, le rôle du service militaire sur son œuvre, son lien intime avec le Naval War College et ses répercussions plus vastes sur l'armée américaine.

Within the American sea services, sailors traditionally wore working uniforms as dark as the blackest depths of the deep blue seas. Navy blue working uniforms defined the “bluejacket” image of American sailors from the age of sail and the era of steel and steam of the twentieth century. During the era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet, “Cracker Jack” popcorn snacks became synonymous with the mascot, “Sailor Jack,” which depicted an American sailor. The image inspired the informal reference to US Naval enlisted uniforms as “Cracker Jacks.” At sea, sailors preferred heavy woolen button-down work shirts of blackish navy-blue while plying the windy chills of the North Atlantic. Within the US Navy following the Second World War, such uniforms became widely known among American servicemen as the “Johnny Cash” – in homage to the rockabilly music icon, J.R. “Johnny” Cash.¹

Sailors far from home often identified with the lyrics of traditional sea shanties, which highlighted the isolation and hard work on an unforgiving sea. Following in this tradition, American sailors also gravitated to the punchy diddy bopper rhythms and bleak lyrical storyline of Cash’s rockabilly classic, “Folsom Prison Blues.” Since he scored that first hit in 1955, Cash has cast a very long shadow in American popular culture. Given all that has been written and generally remembered about Cash, many surprises remain unexplored in the remarkable chronology of his life and rise in popular American music. As this brief study demonstrates, the influence of Cash upon American policy and strategy remains an open question.² Indeed, Cash still has much to say about

¹ Chris Van Avery, “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly of Proposed Uniforms,” *The Navy Times*, 4 October 2004, 1.

² Michael Stewart Foley, *Citizen Cash: The Political Life and Times of Johnny Cash* (New York: Basic, 2021), 7, 9-40, 47-48, 58-90, 114, 144, 184, 205-6, and 201-39.



J.R. “Johnny” Cash on Stage in Spruance Hall at the Naval War College on 17 March 1975. (Courtesy, Naval War College Historical Collections)

the role of American sea power into the twenty-first century – as recorded in the recently rediscovered audio from the undocumented performance by the “Man in Black” on St. Patrick’s Day in 1975 at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island.³

The impromptu performance at the Naval War College reflected the politics and strategic trends that influenced the course of American sea power in the Vietnam War era. Unacknowledged on the official chronology of performances by Cash and the Tennessee Three, the performance at the Naval War College

³ “News Brief – 14 March 1975,” Record Group 36 (RG-36), Correspondence Files, Box 1, Folder 71, Materials relating to Johnny Cash performance, Naval War College (NWC), Newport, Rhode Island; and Audio Tape, 17 March 1975, “An Evening with Johnny Cash at Naval War College,” RG 15, Microfilm Cabinet 2 / Drawer 9, Mixed Materials, NWC. Note: after this essay was accepted for publication, key original documentary collections have been moved from the Naval War College to essentially inaccessible warehouses. Plans have hitherto not been promulgated to restore efficient access to these unique historical collections, which are strategically crucial for applied research of issues in naval strategy, intelligence, and the future of American sea power in the twenty-first century. The original recording has been remastered recently by US Naval Academy graduate and former submariner, Commander Daniel A. Kohnen, USN (Ret.).

also fills a major gap in the cultural history of the institution, and more broadly, the US Navy. Known within the American sea services as the “home of thought,” the institution provided a forum for practitioners to open their minds about the question of war.⁴ Therefore, when Cash strapped on his guitar and took the stage, his Naval War College audience struggled to understand the theoretical future of “small wars” and the unfulfilled promise of strategic airpower.⁵ As the previously unreleased recording from the collections of the Naval War College has now revealed, Cash certainly had much to say about civil-military relationships and the future of America on the global stage in 1975.

Diddy Boppers

Cash earned a lasting place in American musical history as an entertainer by walking the line between blind patriotism and popular rebellion. He championed the working classes. Known as “J.R.” when growing up on a farm in the Jim Crow South, Cash drew from his own experience to conjure the ghosts by talk-singing like an old-time preacher delivering a sermon. Using simple rhythms on an acoustic guitar to carry his message, Cash spoke on behalf of the people. He wrote allegorical lyrics about the bureaucratic corruptions of “the man” to remind those in power about the true purposes behind the utopian dream of America. Wrapping himself in the flag, Cash rallied his followers to seek command of the moral high ground during the waning months of American military operations in Southeast Asia. In 1971, Cash explained in lyrical form with the musical masterpiece, “The Man in Black,” that “I wear the black for the poor and beaten down.”

Veterans of both world wars had also weathered economic depression and social upheaval, which caught the keen eye of Cash when he grew up in the deep Jim Crow South. But war and death continued to loom over the planet in the postwar years as the American dream of Anglo-American, Soviet, and Chinese forces working together as the “Four Policemen” under the United Nations faltered.⁶ Popular American writers, like Walter Lippmann, lamented

⁴ Gerald E. Wheeler, *Admiral William Veazie Pratt, US Navy: A Sailor's Life* (Washington, D.C.: Navy Department – Navy History Division, 1974), 71.

⁵ Beatrice Heuser, *NATO, Britain, France, and the FRG: Nuclear Strategies and Forces For Europe, 1949-2000* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Beatrice Heuser, “Small Wars in the Age of Clausewitz: The Watershed Between Partisan War and People's War,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 1 (February, 2010): 139-32; and Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 313-82.

⁶ John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 23-27.



Sailors formed with the Naval War College on the horizon, as the limousine with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Admiral Edward C. Kalbfus maneuvers to the pier side in the summer of 1941. (Courtesy, Naval War College Historical Collections)

the failure of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “nuclear alliance” vision, advising readers to, “know our limitations and our place in the scheme of things.”⁷ Lippmann rallied Americans to remember, “our oldest and best tradition – to be the friend and champion of nations seeking independence and an end to the rule of alien powers.”⁸

Cash stood among other confused postwar youth as conflict seemed to continue and spread in the 1940s and 1950s. While he embraced veterans of the world wars as heroes, Cash perceptively recognized the civil wars ongoing in Asia, along with the uncertainties of Europe, as manifestations of unfinished business after the atomic bombs fell in 1945. Cash pondered the theoretical end of a “century of humiliation” when Mao Tse Tung triumphantly christened the People’s Republic of China.⁹ Uncertain about the consequences, Cash still believed in Roosevelt’s dream of Four Policemen. Americans also enjoyed economic supremacy in shaping the strategic landscapes on the global stage.¹⁰ Yet, when Cash reached the age of eligibility for military service, the American

⁷ Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in US Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1947), 62.

⁸ Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in US Foreign Policy*, 176-77.

⁹ Alison Adcock Kaufman, “The Century of Humiliation – Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order,” *Pacific Focus* 25, no. 1 (Spring, 2010): 1-33.

¹⁰ Benn Stiel, *The Battle of Bretton Woods: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1-19 and 330-48; Benn Stiel, *The Marshall Plan: Dawn of the Cold War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 315-18; and Ed Conway, *The Summit: Bretton Woods, 1944: J. M. Keynes and the Reshaping of the Global Economy* (New York: Pegasus, 2014), 21-53, 201-63, and 365-85.

vision for the future also seemed to fade within the bureaucratic confusion of the United Nations.

Communist propaganda and the perceived threat of the Soviet Comintern provided justification for Americans to embrace the militaristic future of the United States. Like other voters, Cash rolled with the headlines when President Harry S. Truman changed the peacetime course of American policy with the establishment of the Department of Defense (DoD), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Armed Forces Intelligence Agency (AFSA).¹¹ The so-called “military industrial complex” had existed behind the scenes before the world wars, but now took a firm place at center on the public stage of American politics in the aftermath of the atomic bomb.¹² Airpower theorists of the era also made truly dangerous assumptions about the capacity of atomic weapons to win wars without having to fight battles. Unification debates bubbled below the surface of airpower propaganda.¹³

The elder generation celebrated the atomic bomb, contributing to the still unproven theory of strategic airpower. The ominous image of mushroom clouds also haunted younger Americans, like Cash. At age fifteen in 1947, Cash stood at the crossroads of an uncertain future when his elder brother, Roy, returned from service in the US Navy. Both shared tragic memories of their other brother, Jack, who had been killed in a freak accident involving a saw. Having also experienced the hardships of naval service, Roy provided an example for Johnny to keep on truckin’ on. Before the navy, Roy played guitar with the rhythm and blues country band, The Dixie Rhythm Ramblers. Yet, the band faded in memory when Roy’s fellow bandmates failed to return from the Second World War.¹⁴ Music always provided the key outlet for Roy, which by extension influenced Johnny to chase nirvana through music. Roy

¹¹ Thomas R. Johnson, *American Cryptography during the Cold War, 1945-1989: The Struggle for Centralization, 1945-1960* (Fort Meade, MD: Center for Cryptologic History, 1995), 1-189.

¹² Demetrios Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification: A Study of Conflict and the Policy Process* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 3-122; Herman S. Wolk, *Planning and Organizing the Postwar Air Force, 1943-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Office of US Air Force History, 1984), 36-38, 87-95, and 154; Paolo Coletta, *The United States Navy and Defense Unification, 1947-1953* (East Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Press, 1981), 92-93; and Jeffrey G. Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals: The Fight For Naval Aviation 1945-1950* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 2001), 3-40 and 50-62.

¹³ Paul Fussell, *Thank God for the Atomic Bomb and Other Essays* (New York: Summit, 1988), 11, 20-26, and 36; David Kohonen, *Twenty-First Century Knox: Influence, Sea Power, and History for the Modern Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 131-51; and Coletta, *Defense Unification*, 92-93.

¹⁴ Roy Cash, Sr. played guitar with the band before the Second World War. The other members were killed during the war. The Dixie Rhythm Ramblers faded to memory until another act unconnected with Cash later formed under the same name in the 1950s.

also influenced Johnny's younger brother, Tommy, who later earned stripes in the US Army while spinning vinyl on Armed Forces Network (AFN) – leading to his own career in music.

The Cash brothers felt an unspoken obligation to enlist for at least one stint among the regular ranks of the armed services. Military service provided a gateway for the Cash brothers to earn their stake in the American dream.¹⁵ Other family members previously served in the ranks of the army and naval services. Johnny characteristically chose his own lonesome path – pursuing his future among the clouds by enlisting in the newly established US Air Force. Johnny's nephew, Roy Cash, Jr., recalled “going to Union Station in Memphis to see J.R. (he hadn't picked the name, Johnny, at this point) off to Lackland Air Force Base for initial enlisted training.”¹⁶ The emotions ran deep as Roy remembered that “we waved goodbye to J.R. while Grandma and Papa Cash held back tears, seeing their teenaged son go off to the military and, possibly, war, with the Korean War beginning to rage.”¹⁷ Later, Roy recalled that “I can distinctly remember wishing that I could go [too].”¹⁸

Airpower propagandists portrayed the new service as an elite branch that selectively recruited only the very best of American society.¹⁹ Always looking to the wild blue yonder, Johnny excelled within the ranks of the US Air Force. He quickly screened for duty among the elite within the elite. Superiors recruited him into the secretive world of signals intelligence. Due to his finely tuned ear, Johnny qualified to serve with the “diddy boppers,” the slang term widely used in reference to elite special intelligence branches within the communications divisions of the armed services.²⁰ Diddy bopper culture originated with wireless communications specialists associated with railroads and merchant ships, which then extended to the communications and intelligence subcultures of the military and naval services.

The ability to get rhythm set the Morse Code specialists apart from other technical subfields in the broader universe of wireless communications and intelligence analysis. One needed to have an acute ear for the arduous work and an artistic mind to perform the job well. As a diddy bopper, Cash proved

¹⁵ Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohnen, 4 April 2022.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ George M. Watson Interview with Stephen F. Leo (Leo Reminiscences), August 1982, 21-25, 48-52, 67-80, Maxwell, Alabama, Center for Air Force History (AFH); Obituary, Stephen F. Leo, *New York Times*, 3 October 1983, 15; and Guy Richards, “Air Force Drum-Beater Keeps Feet on the Ground,” *Washington Star*, 18 September 1948, 10.

²⁰ James L. Gilbert, *The Most Secret War: Army Signals Intelligence in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2003), 22.



Squadron patch for the U.S. Air Force 12th Radio Squadron (Mobile), with which Johnny Cash served in Landsberg, Germany. (Courtesy, US Air Force)

ideal for the task after being assigned to the newly formed 12th Radio Squadron Mobile (12th RSM). Upon qualification, he reported to Lieutenant Colonel Edgar H. Heald to join sixteen hand-picked enlisted airmen and four officers with 12th RSM. Having sailed to Europe, 12th RSM then amalgamated with Detachment 25 (Det-25) under of the 6910th Special Security Group of the US Air Force Security Service (USAFSS), which operated in conjunction with strategic operations under the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE).²¹ From 1951 to 1954, Cash worked closely among the “spooks” in the secretive network feeding the strategic operations of the NSA and CIA.²²

Cash demonstrated talent as a radio intercept specialist with American occupation forces in Europe. Within the 12th RSM, Cash fell in with “Flight Abel” during their forward deployment to Landsberg am Lech in southern Germany.²³ Cash had natural talent for hearing the rapid electronic signals. More importantly, Cash superseded others in his ability to glean Morse signals as encrypted in Russian Cyrillic. Red stars and Soviet tanks amplified the tension among the troops, as Cash walked the line of demarcation along with American occupation forces on the German countryside.²⁴ In his autobiography, Cash mused that the “air force taught me the things every military service imparts to its enlisted men – how to cuss, how to look for women, how to drink, and how to fight.”²⁵ Cash characterized Soviet radiomen as virtuosos in transmitting Morse signals, recalling “I thought it was a machine transmitting until I heard him screw up.”²⁶ He went on to explain that among radio intercept operators, “I was the ace [and] I was the one who they called when the hardest jobs

²¹ AFH, Unit Histories, 12th Radio Squadron (Mobile), 1-6.

²² History of the 12th Radio Squadron, Mobile, 1 January 1951-31 December 1951; 1 January 1953-31 March 1953, 1-188, Records of the National Security Agency, Record Group 457 (RG 457), Special Research History 242 (SRH 242), National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

²³ Ruth Raim and Sonia Fischer, *Don't Take Your Guns to Town: Johnny Cash und die Amerikaner in Landsberg, 1951-1954* (Munich, Germany: Volk, 2015), 14-30, 66-73, 99-116, and 148-52.

²⁴ Johnson, *American Cryptography*, ix-x.

²⁵ Johnny Cash with Patrick Carr, *Cash: The Autobiography* (San Francisco, CA: Harper-San Francisco, 1997), 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

came up.”²⁷ Cash recalled the art of catching the key to solving Soviet signals that “we all knew what to listen for, but I was the one who heard it.”²⁸

Superiors entrusted Cash with responsibility for supervising his own mobile team on remote operations in the German countryside. He had the responsibility to lead small task-



Staff Sergeant Johnny Cash, USAF, with 12th Radio Squadron (Mobile) in Landsberg, Germany in 1953. (Courtesy, Cash Family)

organized excursions with fellow diddy boppers on what they called, “tricks,” to remote locations along the line of demarcation and in clandestine radio intercept stations near Soviet positions. Classified letters of commendation issued to 12th RSM extended to individual servicemen, like Cash.²⁹ Like other diddy boppers, Cash remained absolutely committed to keeping his solemn oath of secrecy – only rarely discussing his service experience throughout his long career on the global public stage. This is partially the reason he did not receive a decoration for display on his uniform. Cash proved an exemplary member of the intelligence community, earning a Good Conduct Medal. His rapid ascent with meritorious promotions into the noncommissioned officer ranks provides additional evidence of his performance among the ranks.³⁰

When Cash served on the scarred landscapes of the historic battlefields of Europe in the ideological war against the Soviet Union, the atmosphere conjured the freewheeling traditions of American adventurism of the old west. Settling into his mission, Cash took on the attitude of a gunslinger with the black hat – not the good guy in the white hat. Winston S. Churchill’s portrayal of the “Iron Curtain” defined the lines between good and evil, pitting the Anglo-American forces against the Soviets.³¹ For Cash, the Soviet troops walked the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ History of the 12th Radio Squadron, Mobile, 1 January 1951-31 December 1951; 1 January 1953-31 March 1953, 1-188, RG 457, SRH 242, NARA.

³⁰ Nashville, Tennessee, Johnny Cash Museum, Cash’s US Air Force uniform and related items on display.

³¹ Henry B. Ryan, “A New Look at Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ Speech,” *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 895-920; Reginald Whitaker, “Cold War Alchemy: How America, Britain and Canada Transformed Espionage into Subversion,” *Intelligence and National Security*

line just as closely as his unit. The green pastures and forested landscapes of southern Germany seemed surrealistically conditioned for war – the bomb cratered roads and cities still smoldered from the Second World War.

The scars of recent battles on the European landscape and among civilian populations had an influence upon Cash's point of view about American policy. Service with military occupation forces also defined Cash's understanding within the haze gray nexus between peace and war. The somber experience of performing warlike duties to counter the Soviets also defined Cash's broadly humanistic outlook as an artist.³² Recalling the tensions of the times, Cash later referred to the ambiguities of Soviet intentions after the death of Joseph Stalin. Many years later, Cash never made specific claims about being involved with intercepting messages relating to Stalin. In the aftermath of Stalin's demise, however, Cash had clear recollections of panic within the various Anglo-American occupation force headquarters. Such experiences on the brink of war certainly influenced Cash's point of view.³³

Peacetime Invasions

Cash enjoyed full access to the broadcasts of Soviet radio stations as a regular part of serving with the occupation forces in Europe. He listened to all the various forms of music. Off watch, Cash enjoyed listening to the shows on Radio Luxemburg. He heard the preachers on various radio shows on Armed Forces Radio, Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, and Radio Luxemburg. Among others, *Back to the Bible* and *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* sparked happy memories of home for Cash.³⁴ In addition, the Voice of America (VoA) broadcasts selectively intermixed propaganda with popular American radio shows and music selections. Gene Autry and Hank Williams inspired Cash to learn a few chords on guitar as a teenager growing up in the South. The banjo sounds of Earle Scruggs and The Weavers with Pete Seeger resonated with Cash. The blues of Robert Johnson, Leadbelly, and many other African-American artists appealed to his finely tuned ear – helping him to get rhythm.

In performing military duties with other diddy boppers in Europe, Cash gained firsthand technical experience in understanding innovations in audio

15, no. 2 (June 2000): 177-210; David Reynolds, *From World War to Cold War: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 259-84; and Robert Dallek, *Harry S. Truman: The American Presidents Series* (New York, Time-Warner, 2008), 43-46.

³² Cash, *Cash*, 58-60.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, eds., *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe – A Collection of Studies and Documents* (New York: Central European University Press, 2010), 1-48.

recording. Having tinkered with radios as a hobby, Cash built upon military technical training to become a true master of electronic communications technology. He had the unique ability to fine tune radios to receive distant stations far beyond the horizon. On the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) programs, Cash heard the distinctive skiffle music of such artists as Lonnie Donegan and Ken Colyer. Irish folksongs and Scottish drones further inspired Cash while he learned to play guitar. An early snapshot of Cash on deployment shows him with a traditional style German folk guitar. Cash pressed the limits of his own expertise – and the capabilities of technology at the time – in efforts to pick up the broadcasts of radio stations back home in America while serving in the mountainous terrain of southern Germany.

Reconstruction strategy required American servicemen to work in close quarters with local civilian populations. Music provided an innocuous means by which to foster friendly relations. Like Many American servicemen, Cash obtained German-made guitars from base exchanges and local music shops. He paid \$5.00 for a very traditionally constructed Framus folk guitar in the Landsberg Post Exchange. Similarly, Sergeant Elvis Presley acquired an Isana guitar at a music shop in Frankfurt. German-built musical instruments often proved superior in quality to American designs. Conversely, the cheaper prices of European instruments indirectly fueled the myth of American supremacy. Younger Europeans scoured music stores to find American made instruments, like Gibson, Fender, and Martin guitars while drummers sought the coveted Ludwig models.³⁵

American economic dominance intermixed with postwar propaganda, which emphasized the historical transatlantic connection among the Anglo-American maritime powers. Winston S. Churchill's musings about the connection between "English-speaking peoples" and his invention of a so-called "special relationship" followed the strategic trends which shaped the younger generation in postwar Europe.³⁶ For example, anything arriving from America fascinated the so-called "Cunard Yankees" of Liverpool, like John Lennon and Paul McCartney, that frequented the docks of the Merseyside. Lennon and McCartney tuned into AFN, Radio Luxembourg, and other Pirate Radio stations to hear the latest American records, including jazz, country, or western tunes. African-American blues also sparked the imaginations of young Europeans, like Lennon and McCartney. Their fellow Liverpoolian, George Harrison, bought an American-made Grestch guitar from a passing

³⁵ Andy Babiuk, *Beatles Gear: All the Fab Four's Instruments from Stage to Studio*, rev. ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Backbeat Books, 2015), 7-68.

³⁶ Henry B. Ryan, "A New Look at Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' Speech," in *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 4 (December 1979): 895-920.

sailor along the docks of the Merseyside. Richard Starkey, or “Ringo Starr,” also rejected his British-made Premier drums as soon as he could afford his now legendary Chicago-made Ludwig kit.³⁷

The influence of American culture upon European youth progressively defined strategic trends in international affairs within the global maritime arena. American servicemen in Europe – like Cash and Presley – also returned to the United States with a new sense of the interconnections between global cultures with a fresh view of the future. Cash’s music coincided with that of Presley and the competition between the American labels – to include Chess, Sun, and Motown Records. The British entrepreneur, Brian Epstein of Liverpool, specialized in marketing American hitmakers – like Cash and Presley – to their European patrons. His North End Music Stores (NEMS) served as a logistical waypoint for American companies to distribute merchandise in Europe.³⁸



American music served as another means for occupation forces to encourage European youth to look away from the worker’s paradise, as portrayed by the Soviet Union. Profiting from Anglo-American reconstruction strategy, Epstein also provided records to AFN and BBC. He shrewdly fueled the local Liverpoolian appetite for American music by contracting the most talented acts, like The Beatles and Gerry and the Pacemakers. Akin to the microphone feedback on the rock and roll stage, the last British “invasion” of America happened as a direct result of postwar occupation strategy. In 1964, the Anglo-American “special relationship” certainly entered a new phase when The Beatles shocked and awed television viewers on the *Ed Sullivan Show*.³⁹ Ten years after Cash wrote his first hit single while serving with occupation forces in Europe, The Beatles restored the glory of old Britannia among American audiences.⁴⁰

American servicemen directly fed into local economies on foreign shores,

Sergeant Johnny Cash, USAF, with the German folk guitar for which he paid \$5.00 in the Post Exchange in Landsberg, Germany. (Courtesy, Cash Family)

³⁷ Babiuk, *Beatles Gear*, 7-68.

³⁸ Brian Epstein, *A Cellarful of Noise* (New York: Doubleday, 1964); Bob Spitz, *The Beatles: The Biography* (New York: Little Brown, 2005), 53, 158, 160-65.

³⁹ Ryan, “Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ Speech,” 895-920.

⁴⁰ Bernie Ilson, *Sundays with Sullivan: How the Ed Sullivan Show Brought Elvis, The Beatles, and Culture to America* (New York: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2009), xi-xvi, 15-25, 53-70, and 77-82.

just as music provided another means by which occupation forces enabled former enemies to recover from war. In Europe, for example, German artisans restarted production lines to craft high-quality musical instruments under older brands like Framus, Isana, and Höfner.⁴¹ Microphone and audio innovations by such innovators as Georg Neumann also influenced postwar German reconstruction with the production lines returning to work at Telefunken and the Akustische und Kino-Geräte Gesellschaft (AKG, meaning “Audio and Cinema Equipment Company” in English).⁴² Civilian technicians associated with these German companies – including former Nazis – frequently provided technical assistance for the peacetime military mission of 12th RSM.⁴³ Along with other Americans among the Allied occupation forces, Cash immersed himself in the local civilian culture in the beerhalls. In the process, he sang German folksongs and learned the basics of other European languages.⁴⁴

Cash discovered his natural talent for singing in tune with a wide-ranging voice, which transcended from tenor to baritone. Armed with his German guitar, Cash was able to get rhythm by listening to artists like Gene Autry and Leadbelly. He viewed music as a weapon to combat the mundane realities of deployment in an occupied foreign land. His training in Morse communications code likely influenced his distinctive approach to strumming along with familiar folksy melodies. As a rhythm guitarist, Cash refined his delivery as a lead singer with fellow servicemen Reid Cummings and B.J. “Billy” Carnahan to form the folk group, The Landsberg Bavarians. Cash learned to speak rudimentary German by playing traditional folksongs in local pubs, much to the amusement of the local audience. Growing confident in his musical abilities, he and his bandmates progressively developed a sharper musical edge as the rockabilly act, The Landsberg Barbarians.⁴⁵ During this period, Cash drew from other forms of music to write truly unique songs like, “Hey, Porter” and his landmark hit, “Folsom Prison Blues.” Cash found inspiration for the latter song after seeing the 1951 film noir, *Inside the Walls of Folsom Prison*.⁴⁶

The bureaucratic culture of the military and mundane realities of being deployed in a foreign land provided additional inspiration for Cash. The ugly

⁴¹ Babiuk, *Beatles Gear*, 13, 19-30, 38, 43, 160-70, 179, 197-98, 203, and 223.

⁴² Bryan Kehew and Kevin Ryan, *Recording the Beatles: The Studio Equipment and Techniques Used to Create their Classic Albums* (Houston, TX: Curvebender Publishing, 2008), 166-190.

⁴³ History of the 12th Radio Squadron, Mobile, 1 January 1951-31 December 1951; 1 January 1953-31 March 1953, 1-188, RG 457, SRH 242, NARA.

⁴⁴ Raim, *Don't Take Your Guns to Town*, 135-52.

⁴⁵ Cash, *Cash*, 58-61.

⁴⁶ Vivian Cash and Ann Sharpsteen, *I Walked the Line: My Life with Johnny* (New York: Scribner's, 2008), 29-31.

façade of Landsberg Prison also provided a point of reference for Cash, as he penned the lyrics of “Folsom Prison Blues.” Landsberg Prison remained closely tied to the legacies of the Third Reich. It was the prison in which Adolf Hitler had dictated and wrote *Mein Kampf*. After the Second World War, Landsberg served as the place of incarceration for the key ranking Nazi leaders under Allied custody. Following the Nuremberg Tribunals, Allied occupation forces conducted nearly three-hundred executions against convicted Nazi war criminals by hanging and firing squad within the walls of the prison.⁴⁷ The bleak atmosphere around Landsberg left a lasting impression upon Cash.

The legacies of the Third Reich loomed over Germany when Cash served with occupation forces in the Landsberg area. He found the atmosphere of Landsberg strangely intriguing and conversely upsetting. He settled into the environment, along with other servicemen, by balancing the unending monotony of duty routines with heavy drinking in the local *kneipe* and private social clubs around Landsberg. With his German folk guitar strapped to his back, Cash progressively developed his edgy black façade by wallowing in the mud, the blood, and the beer on the darkened streets and ancient medieval passageways of Landsberg. Service in Germany left an enduring mark on Cash – particularly when an American military surgeon botched an operation to remove a growth on his right cheek. Cash later told tales about the military doctor, musing that the doctor was drunk when he faced the knife.⁴⁸ Cash incorporated the distinctive facial scar into his burgeoning outlaw cowboy image as the “man in black.” The location of the wound on his cheek also proved ideal, as it appeared to resemble the jagged imperfection of a dueling scar.

Cash stood at another critical crossroads in life when he decided to detach from the service upon reaching the end of his enlistment in 1954. His superiors offered a pathway to commissioning as an officer, which prompted Cash to look for an escape. Feeling caught in a trap within the military ranks, Cash had developed mixed feelings about the role of America on the global stage. Military bureaucracy sapped his soul, although he viewed servicemen – and their families – as the true American heroes.⁴⁹

And it Burns – Burns – Burns ...

Service with occupation forces in Europe opened his eyes to the secretive

⁴⁷ Garth Campbell, *Johnny Cash: He Walked the Line, 1932-2003* (London: John Blake, 2003), 41-57.

⁴⁸ Campbell, *Johnny Cash: He Walked the Line*, ix and 55.

⁴⁹ Robert Hilburn, *Johnny Cash: The Life* (New York: Little Brown, 2013), 29-53.

world of clandestine operations and intelligence in an era of unsettled peace.⁵⁰ Cash also developed healthy skepticism of the propaganda, which defined the mythology of the armed services – and especially the US Air Force.⁵¹ Cash returned from Europe with an informed perspective during an era in which the “military industrial complex” defined the presidencies of Truman and then Eisenhower.⁵² The American dream seemed somehow corrupted for Cash, as the political extremes shaped the burgeoning presidential campaigns of John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon.⁵³

Old divisions within American culture appeared below the surface of propaganda about the specter of communist ideology and nuclear weapons. Along with fellow Americans, Cash feared the militaristic potential of the Soviet Union and the communist regime in China. Conversely, he equally feared the rampant anticommunist propaganda within British and American media. Upon returning to America in 1954, Cash stood conflicted about his political leanings. Still wearing his US Air Force uniform, Cash got married in a fever – just as he later asserted in song. His childhood sweetheart, Vivian Liberto, had kept all his love letters from Europe.⁵⁴ Cash deeply loved his wife and growing family despite all the petty distractions of the entertainment industry. He always defended his family against vicious accusations by the Ku-Klux-Klan and other racists. Rumors about Liberto’s racial heritage later created controversy when Cash broke other social barriers as an entertainer.⁵⁵

Facing unemployment and the lifetime constraints associated with a TOP

⁵⁰ Tyrus G. Fain with Katherine C. Plant and Ross Milloy, eds., *The Intelligence Community: History, Origin, and Issues* (New York: Bowker, 1977), 1-36, 215-305, 675-93, and 817-946; Michael Warner, ed., *Central Intelligence: Origin and Evolution* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 2001), 6; David Stafford and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, eds., *American-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations, 1939-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 5-20, 49-73, and 74-94; David Rudgers, *Creating the Secret State: Origins of the Central Intelligence Agency, 1943-1947* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 93-186; and Stafford T. Thomas, *The US Intelligence Community* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 1-102.

⁵¹ Herman S. Wolk, *Planning and Organizing the Postwar Air Force, 1943-1947* (Washington, D.C.: Office of US Air Force History, 1984), 214.

⁵² James Ledbetter, *Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military Industrial Complex* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 1-164.

⁵³ Jonathan Silverman, “Dove with Claws: Johnny Cash as Radical,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 91-106.

⁵⁴ Cash, *I Walked the Line*, 1.

⁵⁵ Cash, *I Walked the Line*, 315. In 2021, DNA testing proved that her great-great grandfather was the son of a slave, Sarah A. Shields, and the slave owner, William Shields. See Sydney Trent, “White Supremacists Attacked Johnny Cash for Marrying a ‘Negro’ Woman,” *The Washington Post*, 21 May 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2021/05/16/johnny-cash-first-wife-vivian-black/>

SECRET obligation, Cash anticipated the birth of his first child when he returned to civilian life. He had to find a way to pay the bills. Cash consulted the former navy man and elder brother, Roy. At that time, Roy worked as a mechanic at the local DeSoto-Plymouth dealership in Memphis, Tennessee. Their younger brother, Tommy, had followed Roy and Johnny into the military. Roy's son, Roy, Jr., developed a particularly close connection with his uncle Johnny. Having refined his guitar playing skills in the pubs of Germany, Johnny taught his nephew the tricks of going beyond the chords on the fretboard of a guitar. Roy later explained that Johnny "gave the German guitar to me and later taught me to play it by drawing lines representing the strings and numbered my fingers, 1 through 5."⁵⁶



Johnny Cash at center with Luther Perkins to left and Marshall Grant to the right in 1956. (Courtesy, Library of Congress)

The intangible musical connections between the brothers, Roy and Johnny, provided momentum for the Cash family to earn an important place in popular American culture. The elder brother encouraged Johnny to take his nephew, Roy Jr., along to purchase his first Martin guitar at a local shop in Memphis. Playing together, Cash then taught his nephew the cowboy classic, "Home on the Range." During this early collaboration, Cash and his nephew wrote the song "I Call Him." Roy explained that his mother:

often used the phrase, "I call on Him," when she felt the need for prayer or God's blessings. I'd heard her say it countless times; however, one day Mom and Dad were having a "discussion" (or rather, an "argument") while I was around the corner trying not to be seen or heard and after Dad said something rather rude, she blurted out, "well, I CALL HIM!" It startled me, so I peeked around the corner of the living room and said, 'Mom – that would be a great title for a song!' Dad (Roy, Sr.) snarled at me and yelled out, "Well, go to your room and write it!"⁵⁷

Roy Jr.'s father, first introduced Johnny to fellow mechanics at the auto repair shop. Long greasy hair went well with the rolled-up jeans and cigarette packages rolled in the t-shirt sleeves on the guitarist, Luther Monroe "L.M."

⁵⁶ Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohnen, 4 April 2022.

⁵⁷ Ibid.



Johnny Cash executing the distinctive down-strum on his Martin D-28 guitar in 1956. (Courtesy, Library of Congress)

Perkins, the steel guitarist, A.W. “Red” Kernodle, and the bassist, Marshall Grant. Passing the time between fixing cars to the sounds of roaring engines and wrenches clanking on heavy metal, Cash and his pals played old religious standards, folksongs, blues, and a finely tuned mix of country and western.⁵⁸

Cash honed his talents as a salesman and performed odd jobs with his brother and other mechanics while considering other career opportunities. Always willing to give his time for a worthy cause, Cash and his band agreed to play their first public concert during the Christmas holiday in 1954, taking the stage at the Galloway United Methodist Church in Memphis. His brother and nephew also joined on the stage. Roy later recalled that we went together to the “church for that performance [and] sang Christmas and religious songs (it was mid-December) and a few country songs, like, Hank Williams’ *I Saw the Light* and *Precious Lord, Take My Hand*.”⁵⁹ Cash also delivered familiar church hymns like “Amazing Grace” intermixed with cheerful selections of the holiday season.

The proverbial lightning struck when Cash and his bandmates played the Christmas show for their churchgoing audience. After the performance, Cash took his place at the front of the band. Whenever Perkins and Grant played without a drummer, Cash appeared with the “Tennessee Two.” He often laced an ace of spades playing card – or a dollar bill – between the strings of his guitar to simulate the sound of a snare drum. His card trick on the guitar produced the distinctive boom-chukka-chuk when microphoned with heavy reverb. Meanwhile, Perkins fingerpicked the melody on a Fender “Esquire” six string through a clean sounding Fender Deluxe. Grant plucked the backbeat on his heavily reverbed standup bass. Whenever Kernodle joined the gang to get rhythm, Cash referred to them as the “Tennessee Three” during their stage

⁵⁸ Marshall Grant with Chris Zar, *I Was There When it Happened: My Life with Johnny Cash* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 2006), 18-31, 46, 52, 81, 101, 132, 153, 161-63, 186, 276, 346-49.

⁵⁹ Marshall Grant with Chris Zar, *I Was There When it Happened*, 18-31.

performances. In any configuration, Cash always put on a show.

Cash stood first among equals in developing the unique sound and image, which resonated among a variety of audiences. Most comfortable in some kind of uniform, Cash and his band adopted black suits – often with western frills and rhinestone motifs. Cash also knew from experience that uniforms simplified logistics for maneuvering forces together – such as in the circuslike atmosphere of a traveling band. Black outfits obscured the sweat while conjuring an aura of mystery as amplified by the powerful sounds and movement on stage. To stand out, Cash often wore a black shirt with a matching tie



Johnny Cash aiming his weapon – his trusty Martin D-28 guitar – for Sun Records publicity shot in 1956 (Courtesy, Library of Congress)

– the others faded into the background with the “man in black” flowing with the rhythm and strumming his guitar. Cash took on the persona of a man on fire. He rolled his eyes and menacingly pointed the headstock of his guitar at the audience, as though aiming a rifle at a sitting target. Cash sometimes strummed over the fretboard – drawing the audience into the music.

Walking the Line

Cash and the surrounding gang of musical talents demonstrated great creativity, drawing from all the various musical styles to develop a completely unique sound. Cash and Perkins worked together to synchronize their boom-chicka-chuck guitar rhythm. With Cash singing on an amplified acoustic guitar, Perkins spiced the sound with the reverb set to maximum output on a Fender amplifier. He also stood on the technical cutting edge of the future in the musical recording industry. Cash drew from past military experience to pioneer the recording techniques employed within the studio environment. Working in collaboration with Sam Phillips at Sun Studio, Cash set the standards by pressing the limits of recording technology at the time. He later grew annoyed with Phillips for telling tall tales about his role in developing the “Sun Sound.”⁶⁰ In this respect, the underlying tug and pull between the musicians and producers reflected the same constructive tensions between

⁶⁰ Peter Guralnik, *Sam Phillips: The Man Who Invented Rock & Roll* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 2015), 246-54, 291-306, 328, 432, 460, and 558.



From the left, Roy Cash, Sr., listens with his son, Roy, Jr., or “Roy Rivers,” and the “man in black” to their latest hit, “I Still Miss Someone.” (Courtesy, Cash Family)



Johnny Cash with his nephew, Roy Cash, Jr. in the studio while recording their hit, “I Still Miss Someone,” in 1958. The track was released on the B-Side with the other Sun Records hit, “Don’t Take Your Guns to Town.” (Courtesy, Cash Family)

artists and critics, actors and directors, and writers and editors. Like other great creative talents, Cash always kept his audience in mind while Phillips focused upon the bottom dollar.⁶¹

Cash stood at the center of a burgeoning musical revolution in popular American culture. He drew from the G.I. Bill to study radio and broadcast arts during the off hours. Cash increasingly found financial success as a musician on the local scene around Memphis, Tennessee. In June and July of 1955, Cash cut his first early hits at Sun Records, including “Folsom Prison Blues.” Perkins and Grant provided backup in the studio during the recording of their number one hit, “I Walk the Line.” Recording drums always remained challenging in the studio setting. For many of his early hits, Cash used the card trick to simulate the sound of the drums on guitar.

Operating on the cutting edge of studio recording technology, Cash found inspiration in the musical traditions of the past. His singing style frequently sounded like simple storytelling, which resonated through the music. During this period, and somewhat by accident, Cash stood among the ranks of the “Million Dollar Quartet” – along with Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Lee Perkins. Sharing the same surname but unrelated, L.M. Perkins and Grant of the Tennessee Two smoked cigarettes and traded guitar tricks with Elvis and

⁶¹ Guralnik, *Sam Phillips*, 291-306.

the Blue Moon Boys, Winfield Scott “Scotty” Moore, III, and Bill Black. The drummer, W.S. “Fluke” Holland, also hung around in the same musical circles before he helped reform the Tennessee Three with Perkins and Grant. Leading from the front, Cash always stood alone.

The cash literally followed with the early successes of Cash and the Tennessee Three’s Sun Records. Audiences gravitated to the authenticity of Cash. The stories he told in lyrical form held broad appeal. He mastered the art of communicating through allegory and sound. Historical influences of music and popular culture influenced Cash in collaborations with friends and family. During this period, Cash again collaborated with his brother-in-law, Ray Liberto, and his young nephew, Roy Jr. Together, Johnny and Roy penned the lyrics to their classic hit, “I Still Miss Someone.” After the song hit the charts, Johnny invited his nephew to join the act on the road to the Midwest. Roy seriously considered a career in music, adopting the stage name, “Roy Rivers,” to carve his own image in conjunction with that of Johnny’s. The bearer of the original surname, Rivers, had earlier intermarried with that of the Cash family. However, Roy found the experience of touring deeply unsatisfying.⁶²

Roy enjoyed playing music with his uncle and he took particular interest in audio recording technology in the studio setting. He conversely disliked the rigors of touring with a band in smoke filled dancehalls with alcohol fueled audiences. Roy was primarily interested in the music, rather than entertaining audiences. He also harbored unfulfilled aspirations of finding his own path to the stars. Roy explained, “I dreamed of being a pilot since my dad [Johnny’s brother] took me to Millington Naval Air Station to see the Navy’s Blue Angels . . . my wish to go with J.R. to air force light blue turned into Navy Blue in aviation.”⁶³ With Johnny’s full endorsement, Roy abandoned a promising career in music by following his father into the navy. As a former enlisted sailor, Roy, Sr., chided his son, Roy, Jr., after he reported for Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island. Roy Cash, Jr. earned his commission as a US Naval officer in 1963, subsequently earning the double-anchors with shield and wings insignia of US Naval Flight Officers (NFO). Roy then became the first NFO to earn additional cockpit qualifications at the controls of fighter-bomber aircraft with the distinctive single anchor insignia of Naval Aviators. In this role, he flew in combat in the undeclared global war against Communism – fighting for future American influence in Southeast Asia over the embattled jungles and mountain peaks of Indochina.⁶⁴ Civil wars in newly

⁶² Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohonen, 4 April 2022.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ DVD Oral History, AFC/2001/001/99347 (Cash Oral History), American Folklife Center, Veterans History Project, Roy Cash, Jr. Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

minted nations, like Vietnam, drew American forces into grappling with the more complex questions of an unsettled peace on the global stage, the realities of empire in a post-imperial era, and social reckoning as reflected in the counterculture of the 1960s.⁶⁵

Ring of Fire

Johnny took great pride in his nephew's patriotic decision to pursue a career in the naval service. He sometimes referred to his nephew during performances, especially when appearing for shows in military towns in America, or overseas for the troops as a sponsored artist of the United Service Organizations (USO). His hit singles appealed to audiences worldwide. The unique

storytelling style of Cash also drew audiences of all nationalities and political inclinations. Cash reached unprecedented levels of popularity during the transition from rockabilly to rock and roll and when western blues became country. He repackaged country songs to appeal to rock and roll audiences and conversely twisted hardboiled rockers into hits on the western charts. For example,

Cash covered the song written by June Carter, "Ring of Fire." Originally, she wrote the song in

a traditional folksy style. Cash took the song into the stratosphere of popular music by upping the tempo, adding a backbeat, and using a deep and dark verbal delivery. "Ring of Fire" became a signature song for Cash.

Fellow artists on the travelling music circuit also inspired the curious mind of Cash, as he took notes on their stage delivery and playing techniques. Cash reveled in observing the stage performances and musical genius of Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Like other brown-eyed handsome men, Cash followed along with a growing pack of artists from Bill Haley to Buddy Holly. Rockabilly artists Eddie Cochran and Waylon Jennings added additional spice. The former US Navy sailor, Gene Vincent, added the rough-edged and deeply provocative undertones of "Be-Bop-a-Lula" with a rough-edged delivery. Vincent referred



Johnny Cash providing encouragement to the troops on Armed Forces Network. (Courtesy, U.S. Army)

⁶⁵ Andrew R. Martin, "A Voice of Steel through the Iron Curtain: Pete Seeger's Contributions to the Development of Steel Band in the United States," *American Music* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 353-80.

to his naval service in naming his band The Blue Caps. He had intended to make a career in the navy. Having accepted a reenlistment bonus, Vincent qualified for a disability pension following an accident involving a motorcycle and a woman driving a truck. Navy doctors deemed Vincent physically unfit for naval service – setting the stage for a rock and roll future.⁶⁶

High-fidelity recording technology remained insufficient to capture the full energy of live performances by Cash and other artists of the times. In the 1950s, studios relied most heavily upon the echoing effects of heavy reverb for the lead singer. Multiple singers harmonized to add depth while guitarists boosted their treble to maximum output in sharpening the sound. Studios simply lacked the requisite experience, budgets, and technical means to employ the techniques, which later became common – such as overdubbing, double-track recording, and looping. Recording technology of the times also failed to capture the special relationship between the artists and audiences. Despite limitations, the sounds produced by artists with Sun Records also pierced the waves along with the hard-hitting tones of Detroit's Motown Records and the Chicago sounds of Chess Records.⁶⁷

The initial musical buzz created by artists associated with Cash faded quickly, as the generational conflicts between the elder establishment and youthful rebellion rolled with the waves of popular culture in America. Unlike the army of one hit wonders, Cash glided above others within a unique niche in American popular music. Many artists associated with Cash disappeared from the stage, leaving him to stand in the spotlight by 1959. Jerry Lee Lewis lost his sparkle after his outrageous third marriage to his thirteen-year-old cousin. Death also seemed to chase artists like Cash. Buddy Holly died while flying to another gig in an airplane with Ricky Valens and Jiles Perry "JP" Richardson (alias The Big Bopper) when their aircraft crashed on a remote farm field in Iowa. The following year, Eddie Cochrane added another tombstone to the roster of bright stars on the dark stage of rock and roll. Cochrane's particular style of reverb driven rockabilly followed in the same raucous vein as that of Cash. In 1960, Cochrane died in an automobile accident while touring England with Gene Vincent. Having survived the crash, Vincent pressed onward like a true rock and roller – sharing the stage with such acts as Little Richard and The Beatles on the European stage.

The deaths of American music luminaries like Holley and Cochrane left

⁶⁶ John Collis, *Gene Vincent and Eddie Cochrane: Rock and Roll Revolutionaries* (New York: Virgin Books, 2004), 68-104.

⁶⁷ Guralnik, *Sam Phillips*, 291-306; Rich Cohen, *The Record Men: The Chess Brothers and the Birth of Rock and Roll* (New York: Norton, 2005); and Gerald Posner, *Motown: Money, Sex, and Power* (New York: Random House, 2002), 1-11, 167-95, and 325-30.

a vacant stage for Cash to fill a major gap in popular American culture. He remained relevant in the form of the “man in black.” Cash used his influence to support the music of African-American artists like B.B. King and Howlin’ Wolf and joined such other greats as Chuck Berry and Little Richard. Along with other American artists, Cash also found receptive audiences on stages between London, Liverpool, Berlin, and Hamburg – where they traded licks with acts to include Rory Storm and the Hurricanes, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Rolling Stones, and the Beatles.⁶⁸

The transatlantic relationship between America and Europe hinged upon common strategic interests in relations with China and the Soviet Union, which often followed the frequently overlooked influence of popular culture. The economic interests of the music industry frequently reflected the trends. The rockabilly phase of rock and roll drifted into the faddish noises of teenybopper commercialism, rendering artists like Cash to again face the crossroads of the music industry. As Cash walked the line to navigate his future on the popular music front, Elvis lost his footing as a soldier on the muddy training grounds of Germany. As John Lennon pointedly noted, “Elvis died the day they put him in the army.”⁶⁹

As Elvis faded into olive drab, Cash adapted his musical image by taking an alternative musical course. He sought inspiration from the jazz and folk music scenes in the cities and on the college campuses of New England. Cash developed close ties with the banjo man and unrepentant communist, Pete Seeger. Leading the pack ahead of other folk artists, Seeger introduced Cash to Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery, Jr.⁷⁰ Having won fame in antisubmarine operations – including the capture of the Nazi submarine *U-505* – Gallery worked with Seeger to mobilize the sounds of music with the US Navy Steel-Drum Band.⁷¹ Like other naval officers of his time, Gallery mused to Seeger and the National Broadcasting Company talent scout, James Street, that folk, country, and calypso music “might knock Rock n’ Roll and Elvis Presley into the ash can (where they belong).”⁷²

⁶⁸ John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, Richard Starkey, eds., *The Beatles Anthology* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books/Apple Corps, 2000), 7-71 and 80-81; David Bedford, *The Country of Liverpool: The Nashville of the North* (Liverpool, UK: Liddypool Books, 2020), 93-108, 160-65, and 372-405; Richard Porter, David Bedford, and Susan B. Ryan, *The Beatles Fab Four Cities Liverpool, London, Hamburg, New York: The Definitive Guide* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: ACC Art Books, 2021), 4-5; and Babiuk, *Beatles Gear*, 1-24.

⁶⁹ Peter Norman, *John Lennon: A Life* (New York: Ecco/Harper Collins, 2008), 758.

⁷⁰ Martin, “A Voice of Steel,” 353-380.

⁷¹ David Kohlen, “Tombstone of Victory: Tracking the *U-505* from German Commerce Raider to American War Memorial, 1944-1954,” *Journal of America’s Military Past* (Winter, 2007), 5-33.

⁷² Gallery to James Street, 13 May 1957, Papers of Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery, Jr.,

Still Missing Someone

Social trends reflected the generational shifts, as veterans of the Second World War ascended to positions of power while many disenchanted youths lost confidence in the entire American system. Cash somehow found a way to bring Americans back together with his increasingly varied musical repertoire. His rekindled interest in traditional folksongs blossomed with his close friendship with Seeger. The innovative style of Woody Guthrie and his fellow travelers also appeared in the music of Dave van Ronk and Joan Baez, which greatly appealed to Cash. During this period, he developed a lasting musical alliance with the enigmatic kid from Hibbing, Minnesota – Robert Zimmerman, known by his chosen *nom de guerre*, “Bob Dylan.” In 1964, Cash, Carter, Seeger, Baez, and Dylan warmed up backstage before their separate historic performances at the Newport Folk Festival. That same year, Cash and Carter also covered Dylan’s song, “It Aint Me Babe.” Given the popularity of folk music, the British invasion loomed over the historic shores of the Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island when the man in black arrived in the summer of 1964.

The stony ramparts of Fort Adams stood on silent watch across the harbor from the Naval War College, which sat like monuments to American sea power in the approaches to the Narragansett Bay. Cash had reason to think about the setting at that time, as his nephew, Roy, had just completed Officer Candidate School in Newport before beginning his training as a Naval Flight Officer (NFO). The following year, Cash referred to the history of Newport in his delivery on stage at the Newport Folk Festival in 1964. Along with Pete Seeger and other folk music artists, Bob Dylan and Joan Baez also partied with Cash backstage. Seeger stood among the skeptics, as other artists backstage celebrated the sounds of the British invasion. The Beatles had taken America by storm with chimey British-made Vox Amplifiers and American-made drums and guitars.⁷³

Unlike other artists, Cash and Dylan anticipated the electrical storm over the horizons of popular music and American politics. Although they sang familiar American folksongs, Cash and Dylan also stayed on the cutting edges of popular music by intermixing other musical forms – never pandering to the popular trends. The Beatles shocked the American music scene after 1964. Sensing the threat, Elvis attempted to adapt his image as the king of rock and roll by running away to make forgettable Hollywood schlock, like *G.I. Blues*,

(Gallery Papers), Special Collection, Nimitz Library, US Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

⁷³ Jim Elyea, *Vox Amplifiers: The JMI Years* (Hollywood, CA: History for Hire Press, 2012), 14-97; David Petersen and Dick Denney, *The Vox Story: A Complete History of the Legend* (Milford, CT: Bold Strummer, 1993), 1-42; and Babiuk, *Beatles Gear*, 7-68.



The “ticket to ride” – stub from the 25 July 1965 performance during which Bob Dylan went electric next to the Naval War College on Festival Field in Newport, Rhode Island. (Courtesy, Author’s Collection)

Girls-Girls-Girls, and, *Blue Hawaii*. When Elvis followed his Hollywood dreams, Cash and Dylan got into *A Hard Days Night* with The Beatles.

With a ticket to ride the sonic waves of Beatlemania, Dylan famously abandoned acoustic folk sounds by going electric with a Fender Stratocaster. In July of 1965, Dylan followed the example of Cash in setting a new tone for the future of American culture. On Festival Field – immediately adjacent to the Naval War College – Dylan tossed aside his Martin acoustic in favor of an orange sunburst Fender Stratocaster. Coincidentally, The Beatles adapted their chimes to mimic the earthy acoustic sounds of Dylan. The rockabilly sounds of Cash and Carl Perkins also resonated on The Beatles albums *Beatles for Sale*, *Help!*, and *Rubber Soul*. Throughout this period, Cash stood at the center of a transatlantic musical negotiation which defined the cultural future of what Winston S. Churchill earlier called the “special relationship.”⁷⁴

Global politics intermixed with the transatlantic musical exchanges, as American forces muddled into the jungles of Vietnam. To the shock of many veterans of the Second World War, the young Queen Elizabeth II decorated The Beatles with Member of the British Empire medals after they spearheaded the last British invasion of America. To their great credit, The Beatles refused to play to segregated audiences in America – forcing the winds of social change. Having also fought off the racial stupidity of the Ku-Klux-Klan, Cash fully identified with the humanistic leanings of The Beatles. In 1965, John Lennon and George Harrison stood starry eyed and unable to speak when they met Cash before their show at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. The following year, Lennon went further in celebrating Cash on film in D.A. Pennebaker’s *cinéma vérité*, *Eat the Document*. Lennon gave his full thumbs up for Cash while mimicking his baritone voice in reference to the tune “Big River,” as Dylan rode along in a limousine on tour in England.⁷⁵ Among the other Beatles, Ringo also had fond – if not hazy – memories of meeting Cash with Joan

⁷⁴ Ryan, “Churchill’s ‘Iron Curtain’ Speech,” 895-920.

⁷⁵ Jordan Runtagh, “Remembering Bob Dylan and John Lennon’s Drugged-Out Limo Ride,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 27 May 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/remembering-bob-dylan-and-john-lennons-drugged-out-limo-ride-155141/>.

Baez during their final tour in 1966. Paul McCartney stood equally in awe, later dabbling in the recording studio with Cash. Clearly, the “man in black” inspired the leading forces of the last successful British invasion of America.⁷⁶

Cash consciously avoided the temptation of abandoning his original sound as the American record industry scrambled to sign acts to mimic the chime of Vox amplifiers and twelve-string Rickenbacker guitars. Cash continued to stand apart, as the “man in black.” Cash operated on the fringes of the burgeoning hippy scene. He criticized figures like Dr. Timothy Leary for pandering to the popular trends with such phrases as, “turn on, tune in, and drop out.”⁷⁷ Leary



Johnny Cash after Bob Dylan went electric in 1965. (Courtesy, Cash Family)

bothered Cash. Instead of leading the intellectual discussion, Leary exploited the freewheeling spirit of the hippy movement to protest the policies in Vietnam. Unlike Leary’s arguably anti-intellectual approach, Cash artfully criticized the policies of President Lyndon B. Johnson with his musical selections.⁷⁸

Cash continued walking the line between protesting the war and acknowledging the counterculture while rushing to defend American military personnel. Simultaneously, his relationship with Dylan enabled Cash to play the role of intermediary with counterculture leaders and the California hippy scene. Five decades after the fact, the rediscovery of a previously unreleased 1968 performance at the Carousel Ballroom in San Francisco revealed the complexity of Cash’s views at the time.⁷⁹ Grateful Dead soundman and LSD mixer Owsley “Bear” Stanley recorded the show. Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead served as an emcee.⁸⁰ The recording revealed one of the more interesting performances of Cash and his evolving sound in the same year he married June Carter. Coincident with the remarkable concert at Folsom Prison, Cash and Carter graced the psychedelic stage of the Grateful Dead,

⁷⁶ Larry Kane, *When They Were Boys: The True Story of the Beatles Rise to the Top* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2013), 59-60.

⁷⁷ Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era* (New York: Putnam, 1983), 253.

⁷⁸ Neil Strauss, *Everyone Loves You When You’re Dead: Journeys into Fame and Madness* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 337-38.

⁷⁹ Dennis McNally, *Long Strange Trip: The Inside History of the Grateful Dead* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 247-57, 263-66, and 457-58.

⁸⁰ “Johnny Cash at the Carousel Ballroom, April 24, 1968” (Cash at Carousel Ballroom in 1968), Bob Weir recollections in liner notes, as first released in 2021, Owsley Stanley Foundation, Bear’s Sonic Journals (BSJ), Occidental, California.

Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company.⁸¹

Cash struggled with the corrosive influences associated with drugs and other forms of lawlessness in the American counterculture movement. He addressed these issues between the songs to the loyal fans of the Grateful Dead from the stage of the Carousel Ballroom. He admitted to earlier indulgences of taking speed and smoking marijuana along with other artists on the popular music scene of the 1960s. Cash also acknowledged the fun associated with the “acid tests” of Ken Kesey, as audiences indulged in liquid experimentation to the sounds of music. At the same time, Cash encouraged audiences to be careful – without insulting them. He took on the unthreatening persona of a preacher and friend to all humanity.

Past musical successes provided license for Cash to operate on all American cultural fronts in the Vietnam War era. In 1968, the live album *At Folsom Prison* truly resonated with the times. The subsequent performance at San Quentin Prison provided additional foundation for Cash to address problems in American society. He spread a humanistic gospel by targeting prisons, traditional African-American venues, Native-American Reservations, and military installations.⁸² Justice always remained the central focus for Cash. On television, the Johnny Cash Show appealed to the elder generation while still providing a stage for younger audiences to gather to the sounds of Dylan and the former prison convict Merle Haggard. Always true to his musical roots, Cash appeared with Buck Owens, Roy Clark, and Glen Campbell.

The counterculture movement remained an ongoing influence upon the commercial focus of the popular music industry in America. Cash controlled the high ground at the crossroads of music and politics. His finely tuned ear and inquisitive approach also enabled him to recognize other up-and-coming artists. In 1969, Cash again appeared at the Newport Folk Festival. During the show, he invited Kris Kristofferson to the stage.⁸³ The former Oxford University Rhodes Scholar became a US Army Ranger and helicopter pilot before service as an instructor at the Military Academy at West Point. Kristofferson felt unsatisfied and slightly disillusioned about the direction of

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Kurt Loder and Johnny Cash, “You Have to Call Me the Way You See Me,” *Southern Cultures* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 5-17; Daniel Geary, “The Way I Would Feel About San Quentin: Johnny Cash and the Politics of Country Music,” *Daedalus* 142, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 64-72; Dustin Tamahkarah, “An Indian in a White Man’s Camp: Johnny Cash’s Indian Music,” *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3, (September 2011): 591-617; and Colin Woodward, “There’s a Lot of Things that Need Changin’: Johnny Cash, Winthrop Rockefeller, and Prison Reform in Arkansas,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 40-58.

⁸³ Brock Helander, *The Rockin’ 60s: The People Who Made the Music* (New York: Schirmer, 2002), 103.

the American military and began drinking heavily and then developed a very close relationship with Janis Joplin.

Working as a janitor in the recording studios, Kristofferson occasionally interacted with Cash and the entourage with the Tennessee Three. Having written the song, "Me and Bobbie McGee," Kristofferson attempted to give the song to Cash to cover. Kristofferson also taught the song to Joplin. Another mutual friend, Kenny Rogers, eventually covered the song, which finally drew the attention of Cash. Backstage at the Newport Folk Festival, Cash and Kristofferson traded stories about their military service before they delivered their duet on stage. Later, Kristofferson stood dumbfounded upon hearing Joplin's rendition of "Me and Bobby McGee" on the day after her death.⁸⁴ Cash also covered the song, although Joplin's rendition became the timeless classic.

Kristofferson and Cash shared common views about the higher ideals of American tradition. Military service sharpened their understanding of the hollow promises of politics and bureaucracy. Through mutual friends, Kristofferson maintained connections with Cash. Living the Bohemian lifestyle as an aspirant musician, Kristofferson made good money shuttling passengers as a helicopter pilot. Confident in his songwriting skills, Kristofferson used tactical surprise – worthy of an army ranger – by landing his helicopter on the front yard of the Cash family compound in Tennessee. Cash later told a tall tale about Kristofferson landing the helicopter with a beer in one hand and song lyrics in the other. Although the truth may never be fully told, Cash recorded an alternate rendition of the Kristofferson song, "Sunday Morning Coming Down." As the lyrics resonated among listeners, the rendition by Cash became an anthem for many veterans returning from the Vietnam War.⁸⁵

Cash rarely discussed his personal views in the heated debates concerning the future of American policy on the global stage in the Vietnam era. Clandestine efforts to counter the influence of Communist boogymen in the Soviet Union and China sparked offensive military operations involving American forces in direct combat in undeclared wars and forgotten battles on foreign shores and at sea. Airpower theory had proven decisively ineffective during such undeclared wars as Korea and Vietnam. Cash sometimes questioned the policies, but always gave his strategic support to the personnel of the armed forces. His nephew, Roy, had already completed multiple combat tours over the embattled shores of Southeast Asia. Having earned the callsign "Outlaw," Roy made history by becoming the first naval aviator to qualify for duty in both backseat

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ethan Hawke, "The Last Outlaw Poet," *Rolling Stone* (16 April 2009), 57.

functions and those in the front of the cockpit.⁸⁶ Outlaw flew from the pitching decks of aircraft carriers into the warzone in the F-4 Phantom fighter-bomber.⁸⁷

Back home in America, entertainers stood divided between the cultural extremes of American society about the situation in Southeast Asia. The race riots of the past loomed as the backdrop in the minds of many. Some hippies tuned out while other counterculture leaders pushed back against the conservatives. Elvis sought a direct role in countering the counterculture during the administrations of presidents Linden B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon. Elvis even tried to secure a commission in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Cash, on the other hand, drew from history and selected the best elements in American tradition to encourage his listeners to reach their own conclusions on issues of peace and war. Between the two, Cash arguably stood alone as the “man in black” with a presence akin to the quiet cowboy gunslingers of the old west or the superhero figures of American popular culture.

For many, Cash had achieved the ability to stand with credibility as a national spokesman. He could say things to key figures without insulting them and, simultaneously, make key points by leading his listeners with logic and compassion to reach the obvious decision. When playing the stage at the White House in 1970, he inadvertently made headlines when delivering his standard mix of songs and stories at the invitation of President Richard M. Nixon. Between songs, Cash asked Nixon and the audience to join in a prayer to “end this war in Vietnam sooner than you hope or think it can be done, and we hope and pray that our boys will be back home and there will soon be peace in our mountains and valleys.”⁸⁸



The coauthor, Lieutenant Roy “Outlaw” Cash, Jr., with Lieutenant (j.g.) Ed Kain of VF-33 after they splashed a North Vietnamese MiG-21, on board USS *America* (CVA-66) on Yankee Station in 1968. (Courtesy, Cash Family)

Cash demonstrated great diplomatic prowess in articulating the aspirations of the Nixon Administration in anticipation of the upcoming presidential election cycle. The dream of securing clear victory ashore in Vietnam had long since faded, as Nixon

⁸⁶ Thomas McKelvey Cleaver, *The Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club: Naval Aviation in the Vietnam War* (New York: Bloomsbury / Osprey, 2021), 8-10 and 172-75.

⁸⁷ Cash Oral History, Library of Congress.

⁸⁸ Marie Smith, “Cash Sings a White House Sermon: Cash in the East Room,” *The Washington Post*, 18 April 1970.

and his team worked the diplomatic lines to negotiate the orderly American withdrawal. In the meantime, Cash's nephew, Roy, earned the distinction of downing the last enemy MiG-21 to be shot down during Operation Rolling Thunder in 1968.⁸⁹ Having served in major combat in direct contact with the enemy, Roy received a Silver Star for gallantry in subsequent operations over Vietnam. When the Vietnamese repatriated American prisoners of war after 1973, Roy bumped into an old squadron mate, Commander Rod Knutson, at the Officer's Club in Miramar, California. Roy explained that Knutson endured the torturous experience of being a Prisoner of War (PoW) at the Hanoi Hilton for seven years. Roy recalled that Knutson:

was setting up a homecoming event in San Diego and Rod wondered if Johnny would be interested in performing. He put me in touch with the organization and former POW, James Stockdale, Jeremiah Denton and other contacts. I knew Denton from my time in VF-41 aboard USS *Independence* and William Lawrence, who is a Tennessean, also. Denton and Lawrence asked me to pulse John about the homecoming event. I did – through my Dad – and J.R. [Cash] gladly agreed to do a Welcome Home Concert.⁹⁰

Roy helped make the arrangements with Cash for a special performance for the returning PoWs at the San Diego Civic Center. Among the PoW audience, Stockdale later received the Medal of Honor. He also later served as President of the Naval War College in the months following Cash's performance on St. Patrick's Day of 1975.⁹¹

Discovering Another Lost Performance – Live in '75

The Naval War College serves as an important strategic forum within which officers study the historical foundations of American sea power and shape the future military policy of the United States. From the era of President Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet through that of his cousin, Franklin, the Naval War College defined American notions of sea power for the purposes of "waging peace."⁹² The rich history of the institution before the wars in Korea and Vietnam also inspired the president of the Naval War College, Vice Admiral Julien LeBourgeois. In 1974, he asked Lieutenant Commander Roy "Outlaw" Cash, Jr., to invite his famous uncle to lecture about the counterculture and the

⁸⁹ Cleaver, *Tonkin Gulf Yacht Club*, 172.

⁹⁰ Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohonen, 4 April 2022.

⁹¹ Cash Oral History, Library of Congress.

⁹² "An address by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, at the National Exchange Club Convention," *The Exchangite* 26, no. 11 (November 1947): 4, Ernest J. King Papers (King Papers), Box 39, Library of Congress.



NEWS BRIEF

E-2

THE UNITED STATES NAVAL WAR COLLEGE • NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

Friday, March 14, 1975

REMINDER: It's Service Dress Blue or equivalent today for visiting SECNAV J. William Middendorf, III, who addresses U.S. students at 3:30 p.m. and dedicates new Center for Advanced Research. A brief meeting with the media will follow to conclude the short visit.

ALSO VISITING: RADM Bell Davis, RN, Commander British Navy Staff in Washington, D.C., at NWC for orientation visit Monday and Tuesday, 17 and 18 Mar. ...COL G.S. Reidel, USAF, Director of the Mobility Forces Division, OSD Program Analysis and Evaluation, to lecture to CNW and NCC students on Wednesday, 19 Mar.

AN EVENING WITH... Johnny Cash, renowned country and western singer, is scheduled for Monday, 17 Mar. in Spruance Auditorium at 7 p.m. Tickets required for admission.

NOTE TO AVIATORS: To date, some 6000 officers have not responded to their aviation service prior to 1 June '74 review that was forwarded by the Chief of Naval Personnel. Some of these officers are now approaching their 12 or year gates. A "no response" must be treated as concurrence or non-concurrence as soon as possible. Those whose aviation service started after 31 May '56 and before 1 June '74 who have not received an ACIP Review Sheet should inform BUPERS (Pers-432a) by letter.

A TRADE?: Will the person who picked up a London Fog raincoat last week size 38 with shortened sleeves like to have his size 42 back? Trade can be made by calling LCDR Williamson at x3852.

EVENING LECTURER: PROF Rich Lloyd talks about "Current Economic Issues" on Tuesday, 18 Mar. at 7:30 p.m. in Spruance Auditorium.

NAVAL AVIATION MUSEUM OPENS: A historic event in Navy/Marine Corps aviation occurs on 13 Apr. when the United States Naval Aviation Museum is dedicated at NAS Pensacola. All Navy and Marine Corps personnel cordially invited to attend with the many distinguished visitors. Project coordinator is CDR W.F. Hampton and he can be reached at autovon 922-3604.

Naval War College News Brief for 14 March 1975 announcing the St. Patrick's Day concert, "An Evening with Johnny Cash." (Courtesy, Naval War College Historical Collections)

Naval War College officials receiving the road weary band for a reception at the admiral's quarters on 17 March 1975. (Courtesy, Naval War College Historical Collections)



role of the military in American society. Having lost contact with the “man in black” during service overseas, Roy Jr. asked his father to assist in locating Cash on the road.⁹³

In an era before the internet, communications proved very difficult in efforts to reach the mobile entourage of Cash and the Tennessee Three. Along with June Carter Cash and Carl Lee Perkins, Cash blazed across America in a bus – often dropping in unannounced to the surprise and delight of audiences. On Sundays, Cash sometimes appeared in churches and other religious gatherings without warning. After his father passed the message, Cash contacted his nephew at the Naval War College. Roy Cash, Jr., recalled the “telephone rang and when I picked it up – there was that voice on the other end.”⁹⁴ Roy recalled whenever “I was home on leave, or had a scheduled performance near my duty stations in California or Virginia – Johnny – or ‘J.R.’ as we called him – even provided free tickets to us and our squadron mates.”⁹⁵ When Roy asked his uncle to give a lecture at the Naval War College, “Johnny said, ‘well, I don’t give lectures, but I can sure give a show.’”⁹⁶

Cash made strategic adjustments to maneuver his musical forces with the efficiency required to achieve complete surprise in the operation. Between shows already scheduled in Maine on 16 March 1975 and those slated for 19 March, Cash and his tour busses rolled into Newport for an unscheduled St. Patrick’s Day performance. The surprise performance at the Naval War College entered the realm of folklore at the institution. The event also remained completely unknown – outside the cloistered walls of the Naval War College and associated activities surrounding the Newport Naval Base at Coaster’s

⁹³ Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohnen, 4 April 2022.

⁹⁴ Roy Cash, Jr., telephone interview with David Kohnen, 14 February 2022.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.



Road weary and on tour with the band, June Carter Cash and Johnny attend luncheon reception in the admiral's quarters at the Naval War College before the show on St. Patrick's Day in 1975. (Courtesy, Naval War College Historical Collections)

Harbor Island – just across from the location where Bob Dylan plugged into an amplifier with an electric Fender Stratocaster guitar ten years before at the Newport Folk Festival.

The appearance of Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three at the Naval War College remained undocumented in subsequent published histories. The official history of concert engagements on the Johnny Cash website fails to reflect the unscheduled performance at the Naval War College.⁹⁷ The only surviving evidence of the show exists on the daily news brief issued to Naval War College staff and students for Friday, 14 March 1975. In typical naval form, the short announcement underscored the excitement along with the headline, “An Evening With ... Johnny Cash.”⁹⁸ The official notice then described the “renowned country and western singer is scheduled for Monday, 17 Mar. (*sic.*) in Spruance Auditorium.”⁹⁹ Just three days after the first announcement, Cash captivated an audience of roughly 300 at the Naval War College. He also made special arrangements to bring his brother, Roy, Sr., and his wife, Wandene, from Tennessee for the show in Rhode Island. “Outlaw” Roy Cash, Jr., sat with his parents, wife, Billie, and ten-year-old daughter, Kellye. The four-year-old sons of Johnny and Roy, Jr. played together. John Carter and his cousin Carey had a good time.

The Naval War College stands at the confluence of American maritime history, along the rustic New England shores of the Narragansett Bay. Since the nineteenth century, the yachting culture of Newport drew a unique cultural mix in which the robber barons intermingled with working class sailors and recent immigrants. As a key intellectual anchorage for the US Navy, Newport became the waypoint for many luminaries of the past – from admirals Stephen

⁹⁷ See <https://www.johnnycash.com/about/tour-history/?tour-year=1975>.

⁹⁸ “News Brief – 14 March 1975,” RG 36, Box 1, Folder 71, NWC.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

B. Luce to Alfred Thayer Mahan to William S. Sims to Edward C. Kalbfus. The so-called “home of thought” stood as an important symbol of American sea power, which carried a double-edge in the counterculture era of the 1960s.¹⁰⁰

Personnel assigned to the Naval War College often participated in the clambake social culture among the yachting clubs of Newport. Situated between Boston and New York, servicemen in the greater Newport area also interacted with the local music culture. Notably, the former home of Admiral Kalbfus, Restmere Mansion, appeared on the 1964 cover of part one of the Newport Folk Festival 1964 live albums featuring Cash, Dylan, Seeger, Odetta, Earl Scruggs, and others. The gravestone of a former Naval War College staff member from the era before the Second World War, US Navy Commander Fredrick Utter Weir, stood nearby at Island Cemetery. Having grown up in the navy, Weir earned the nickname, “Foo,” among shipmates in the fleet. Weir had technical skills required ashore. He specialized in submarine optics during wartime service in San Francisco. After the war, Weir left the navy to pursue his fortune. Weir later purchased a guitar for his adopted son, Bob Weir – who joined Jerry Garcia in Mother McCree’s Uptown Jug Champions before evolving into the folk-rock act, The Warlocks, which subsequently blossomed into the Grateful Dead.¹⁰¹

Cash had experience with the Frisco music scene and embraced the fundamentally American personality of such acts as the Grateful Dead. Acting as liaison between the counterculture and fellow citizens among the uniformed services, Cash sometimes went the extra mile to bridge the gaps among the shattered cultural factions of America during the Vietnam War era. Having earlier played patriotic selections for the Deadheads in the Carousel Ballroom in 1968, Cash made the surprise decision to divert his travelling act to play an unscheduled performance on the band’s day off after playing a gig in Maine. Along for the ride, The Tennessee Three, Carl Perkins, and June Carter Cash arrived with the “Man in Black” at the Naval War College – just in time to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day.

Cash proudly sang about being everywhere on a grinding tour schedule between cities and remote ports of call along the coasts of America. Often Cash took the wheel to drive the convoy of tour buses as they crossed the Narragansett, buzzed through the colonial-era streets of Newport, and through the gates on board Coaster’s Harbor Island to the Naval War College. Pulling up to the main buildings in their tour busses, Cash and the band landed on the Naval War College campus with very little fanfare. The ailing President, LeBourgeois, missed the opportunity to welcome Cash and his weary band for

¹⁰⁰ Wheeler, *Pratt*, 71.

¹⁰¹ US Naval Academy, Yearbook of the Class of 1931, *The Lucky Bag*, 267.

a light lunch held at his official residence, Quarters AA. LeBourgeois lingered in bed, stricken by the flu. Undaunted, Cash immediately requested permission to go up into the private quarters of LeBourgeois.¹⁰²

Roadies meanwhile set up the stage in Spruance Hall in anticipation of the show that evening. Cash then prepared a carefully curated selection of tunes, which he designed to entertain while also making implied statements about American policy and strategy.¹⁰³ Cash then joined Carter and Carl Lee Perkins to review the set list with the band. Cash remained with Carter and Perkins to warm up under the rotunda in Mahan Hall, as the band played preamble instrumentals on stage in Spruance Auditorium. Unfortunately, the preliminary performance under the rotunda in Mahan Hall has been lost to history. However, Cash's grandniece, Kellye, captured the show in Spruance Hall with a portable tape recorder. The one hour and fifty-eight-minute show marks a previously unacknowledged milestone in the institutional history of the Naval War College and in popular American music culture.

Ragged Old Flag

The unreleased recording of the Naval War College concert stands among the most significant lost performances in the musical history of American sea power and popular culture. Cash sang all the standards, interspersed with individual performances by Carl Lee Perkins and the renowned fiddler, Gordon Terry. The original lead guitarist, L.M. Perkins, died in a tragic fire. Bob Wootten provided backup on guitar with Larry McCoy on piano. Grant kept booming the bass sounds with Holland providing the backbeat on the

June Carter Cash follows Johnny with their son, John Carter Cash, backstage at the Naval War College during the performance on St. Patrick's Day in 1975 (Courtesy, Naval War College Historical Collections)



¹⁰² Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohnen, 4 April 2022.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

drums. Cash performed numbers by the Byrds and spoke about his enduring friendships with Elvis and Dylan. The Beatles loomed large in his remarks, as he highlighted the transatlantic influence of American culture upon the peaceful reconstruction of Europe in the aftermath of war. Cash joked about taking drugs in the 1960s.¹⁰⁴

Cash intermixed protest songs with old American standards to emphasize the historical role of the American armed services. He referred to the Constitution in suggesting that “you guys in the army and navy are really the first protest group in American history – I mean George Washington would have been big old hippy, I think.”¹⁰⁵ The audience howled with laughter as Cash tied his stories together with his carefully crafted selection of songs, like Johnny Horton’s “Battle of New Orleans” and his own historical recital of “Remember the Alamo.” Cash acknowledged his nephew, Roy, for writing the songs “I Still Miss Someone” and “I Call Him.” He then performed a new song written in collaboration with Roy in which they celebrated the “Ragged Old Flag”:

She waved from our ships upon the Briny foam
 And now they’ve about quit waving her back here at home
 In her own good land here she’s been abused
 She’s been burned, dishonored, denied, and refused

And the government for which she stands
 Is scandalized throughout the land
 And she’s getting threadbare and wearing thin
 But she’s in good shape for the shape she’s in
 ‘Cause she’s been through the fire before
 And I believe she can take a whole lot more

The Naval War College audience sat mesmerized by the patriotic undertones, which Cash used to press his vision for the future of America. He challenged the audience to think about their mission, take pride in their service, and continue doing their duty. Cash also pressed them to recognize the value of listening to alternative points of view when he said, “I will take questions, but only if you also take some from me!”¹⁰⁶

As a military veteran of the Cold War era and as a musical icon of the

¹⁰⁴ Audio Tape, 17 March 1975, “An Evening with Johnny Cash at Naval War College,” RG 15, Microfilm Cabinet 2 / Drawer 9, Mixed Materials, NWC.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.



To the left, Billie Cash, the coauthor's spouse, stands with Johnny. Captain Roy "Outlaw" Cash, Jr., stands between Johnny and June Carter Cash on board USS *El Paso* (LKA-117) in 1985. (Courtesy, Cash Family)

counterculture era, Cash fully understood the strategic importance of the Naval War College in shaping the historical influence upon sea power upon American civil-military relations and the military policy of the United States. For years following the lost performance at the Naval War College, Roy explained that his uncle "'J.R.' [Johnny] and I were very close [and] we usually made it home once a year on leave."¹⁰⁷ Roy continued that Cash "was always interested in my career, what I was doing, loved hearing my combat and flying experiences and asked lots of questions about politics and national security stuff."¹⁰⁸ Ten years after the show at the Naval War College, Cash made a special effort to celebrate Roy's singular achievement of screening for command of a warship of his own – as the skipper on board USS *El Paso* (LKA-117). In anticipation of the ceremonies, Roy recalled that Cash "had insisted that no press coverage be allowed [but] the press got word somehow that he was there, so my Change of Command (courtesy of J.R.'s presence) got national coverage."¹⁰⁹

The personal relationship between Cash and fellow Americans remained an ongoing theme, as the man in black continued to cast a very long shadow in an era of dangerously unsettled peace. Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Roy Jr. again collaborated with Cash to update their song "Ragged Old Flag" with the lyrics:

Cause she's been through that fire before
On 9/11 three firefighters raised her from the ashes once more!"

¹⁰⁷ Roy Cash, Jr., email message to David Kohnen, 4 April 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

He paused and wiped a tear away,
 And said, Mister, we gotta thank our God each and every day,
 ‘Cause all those Americans that fought and died,
 Have bought us our freedom and patriot’s pride,
 So we gotta make sure we exercise our rights,
 And stand in allegiance to those stars and stripes.¹¹⁰

Cash continued recording patriotic lyrics with a timelessly provocative edge. His voice and his message resonate long after his death in 2003. The Cash family traditions survive with his nephew, Roy – now retired in the rank of navy captain. His daughter, Kellye, became Miss America in 1987 and later toured with the United Services Organization (USO) as a Christian-rock and country musician. Her brother, the Reverend Dr. Carey Cash, went down to



The coauthor, Captain Roy “Outlaw” Cash, Jr., USN, with the “Man in Black,” uncle J.R. “Johnny” Cash, on board USS *El Paso* (LKA-117) in 1985. (Courtesy, Cash Family)

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

the seas to pursue a career in the US Navy. Carey served as chaplain at Camp David during the administration of President Barack Obama. By 2022, he commanded the US Navy Chaplain's School on the grounds adjacent to the Naval War College on Coaster's Harbor Island and earned his own stars with promotion to the rank of admiral.

The recent rediscoveries of forgotten performances by such luminaries as Cash provide innumerable opportunities for future listeners to ponder the cultural history and traditions of America. His message remains applicable in considering contemporary debates about the future of both peace and war. The lost 1968 recordings of the Grateful Dead soundman, Owsley "Bear" Stanley, at the Carousel Hall in San Francisco revealed new material about Cash with the first public releases in 2021. The recent rediscovery of original audio tape recordings from the performance by Cash at the Naval War College have provided another perspective. At the age of ten, Cash's grandniece, Kellye Cash, captured the previously undocumented performance while sitting in the audience at the Naval War College. By comparison with the recordings at the Carousel Ballroom by the Grateful Dead's soundman, Bear, future listeners may debate whether Kellye might have done a better job at capturing the true essence of the legendary "Man in Black" during the performance at the Naval War College in 1975.¹¹¹

Innumerable biographies about Cash naturally focus upon the man and his musical contributions on the international stage. His first wife, Vivian, offered sympathetic firsthand accounts about Cash from his early years. June Carter Cash similarly examined the elements of personality and musicianship that made Cash into an international superstar. Shortly before his death in 2003, Cash spoke for himself in an autobiography, *Cash*, written with Patrick Carr. As the present study has demonstrated, historians should continue to discover fresh avenues of research by focusing upon the military and maritime history which influenced towering personalities like Cash. Just as the "Man in Black" demonstrated in his lifetime, his exploits provide much for historians to ponder in examining an era of world wars and pivotal global change in American culture. The recent rediscovery of the 1975 performance at the Naval War College highlights the work, which still awaits scholars. As this brief analysis has shown, Cash indeed continues to offer an important historical perspective on the future potential of American sea power in our collective efforts to attain the sustainable peacetime end of war in the global maritime arena of the twenty-first century.

¹¹¹ "Johnny Cash at the Carousel Ballroom, April 24, 1968," BSI; and Audio Tape, 17 March 1975, "An Evening with Johnny Cash at Naval War College," RG 15, Microfilm Cabinet 2 / Drawer 9, Mixed Materials, NWC.

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David Kohnen completed doctoral studies with the Laughton Professor of Naval History at the University of London, King's College. Having served in the seagoing ranks of the US Navy supporting operations in Afghanistan and then twice ashore in Iraq, Kohnen completed the Naval War College resident curriculum in 2007. He retired in 2018, presently serving as institutional historian at the Naval War College. His published works have also focused upon American maritime policy, naval strategy, and popular American cultural history.

Roy Cash, Jr. completed informal musical studies as an understudy of his uncle, Johnny "J.R." Cash, before releasing some songs with Columbia Records under the penname, "Roy Rivers." Having earned the Silver Star Medal in combat during the Vietnam War, Cash completed the Naval War College curriculum in 1975 before commanding TOPGUN. Cash retired after thirty years in 1993.