



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	Ena Isma "Midge" Pomeroy (née Grant), Entertainer, Detachment 4, Australian Entertainment Unit, interviewed by Sharon Davis for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45 Discussing pre-war ballet training; enlistment; dancing routines; show locations throughout Australia; audiences; performance conditions; costumes; post-war ballet career.

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Uh, this is Ena Grant, better known as 'Midge', born the 3rd of the third in the '20s and my mother was a Tasmanian. She married an Australian and I was born in Manly.

Um, when I was about eight, my mother decided I was going to be a ballet dancer. She sent me to Frances Scully and I ... became an advanced dancer with the RAD in England - at Sadler's Wells - just be....

The RAD?

The Royal Academy of ...

Yes ...

At the age of six my mother sent me to ballet - to Frances Scully, who was a representative of the Royal Academy of Dancing in England - Sadler's Wells - and just prior to the war I became an advanced dancer with RAD. ARAD after my name. The war broke out. My father joined and became a prisoner of war in Changi and on the railway.

My mother and I thought that we would try to do something about it. Not that we could do anything when we did get in, but my mother joined the army and I joined the army. After 'rookies' I was sent to - I did artillery for twelve months. My mother went into the New Guinea Vehicle Pool. I did twelve months in the artillery and two years in DRO and one of my happiest days was at DRO, was when they told me my father was still alive - what condition they didn't know, but he was still alive.

Just explain for me what DRO is?

Oh, District Records Office in the city - the showgrounds. (long pause) My mother claimed me from DRO into the Vehicle Pool after we found out that my father was safe. But for some reason or other they wouldn't let me go. Whether it was because they didn't think it was advisable for mother and daughter or what, I don't know. But I have a suspicion because I was sent to DRO and found out that they would like to have a ballet of eight girls and being a choreographer and a ballet dancer, it's the job I got.

Uh, pardon me, that wasn't my work, that was done in our own time and we still did office work. Uh, those girls were very good and they had a seven page in *Pix* one year.

Tell me about that ballet troop? What were you doing? Who were you performing for?

They performed for the, um, army balls, any army official things that were on. We weren't supposed to dance anywhere else. But there was another ballet called the [La Gelee Feet?] that did rather well at the same time. (Laughs) I was there for two years and then the army said that the girls could join the Entertainment Unit so I immediately transferred over and had an audition and was taken on in Detachment 4 - the 4 Detachment.

Who auditioned you?

If I remember rightly, it was Freddie Hughes, who was the ... CO of 4 Detachment.

(5.00) And what did you have to do for the audition?

Tap and Toe, ballet, a little of everything, you know, which was quite easy actually. I used to do a number where, uh, Doug Cross, (coughs) he was a singer at the Prince Edward for many years, and Michael Pate ... Do you remember *Laura* - oh it's a song (sings part of song) she's only a dream. Right. So Michael Pate spoke the chorus - orated it and it was very nice - Doug Cross sang the song and I was the dream behind this gauze you see. Anyway Jimmy Davidson saw it one night and he called me in after, he said, 'Can you do pirouettes around the stage?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Fouette rond de jambe' 'Yes.' 'Can you tap dance on your toes?' 'Yes.' Can you do modern?' 'Yes.' 'Well why then, you know, are you doing what you're doing?' 'Because', I said, 'I'm a dream.' I said, 'You know, the music is dreamy, that's the words of the song and I don't feel I can just, you know, change a chorus of - one after the other.' He said, 'When that show comes down, the next time I see it, I want one chorus of toe, a chorus of tap-toe, a chorus of modern.' 'But I'm a dream sir.' 'That's enough.' 'Right.' So I asked George Wallace how on earth I was going to change my toe shoes into tap-toes and how was he going to do with the orchestra, you know. I wasn't very happy with the dance I did for the simple reason I'd just done my advanced exams and could do everything that Jimmy Davidson wanted. But I - what I did, I was too young to ... Or what can I say? The army was the army and you don't go against things, so I didn't feel that, uh, I could protest because the show was already set up, you know.

Anyway, later on when Davo did see it, well I was called in after the show, which wasn't very nice. I - the only words I could say was, 'But I'm supposed to be a dream, sir', (laughs) and that was the last - I didn't say another word. Oh he was so furious but that was that. Oh, I did tap dances, of course you have to fill in everywhere you can. Um, what else? Skits - you know sketches with ... I'm afraid George Wallace broke me up every time. Um, and then we would be, what do you call it, a, um, an assistant to the magician which one night was very funny because we had a young chap that came in to camp. His name was [Ray Ayling?], he had a lovely crooning voice, and he had said to me, 'You're going in the head chopper tonight' and having seen this before I said, 'No'. So I said to Dot Scott, 'You're in the head chopper tonight', and she said, 'No.' I said, 'I'm a corporal, you're a private, you're in the head chopper tonight'. Anyway she refused to. So Cec said to Ray Ayling, 'You're in the head chopper tonight', and being new he thought everybody had to have their cha.... their turn, you see. So Ray goes in it - in the head chopper - and the wrong blade comes down of course and it jams. Well, if you could see two men carrying off the head chopper with Ray still with his head caught in there saying, 'What's going on?' Had to lift him off the stage like that (laughs) and when they lifted the thing up, oh, poor Ray's neck, it was bleeding. Anyway they got him into the dressing room and one of the other lasses came in - he was quite all right and he was, you know, he didn't sing for three weeks after, his throat was really, you know, bad. Anyway one of the girls came in and said, 'Oh look at the blood', and that was the last straw. Ray goes ohhh, you know. Anyway we got over that, but the boys as regards the girls were absolutely fabulous because we used to travel three or four hundred miles a day, then you'd have dinner. Um, of course there were always girls' accommodation, you know, but after dinner would be the show. Then you'd be on the road the next day and they were a family and I was an only child. They were wonderful, wonderful people.

Oh I'd like to tell you about the first day. Ask me how I felt when I ....

(10.00) First of all, how did you feel about going from the place you were, the DRO, into the Entertainment Units? Were you scared, were you worried?

No I was very thrilled to bits till I ... When I walked in everything seemed to be normal and I had everybody - I'd gone to the RSM and told him I was there and everything was right and I'm walking up the pathway and somebody says, 'Oh you horrible little bitch'. (Laughs) So I - it happened a couple of times and someone was snarling at me, you know, and I rang up my mother and I said, 'Look, there's people here I've read about, (laughs) you'd better get me out of here.' Well I found out they were very, very nice people, but it was just the shock for an only child walking in and I didn't know why they called me that till I realised after, particularly when their clothes, their female clothes were beautifully made - but the horrible real girls they just got whatever was going. We didn't have anything to be compared with theirs. Theirs were absolutely delightful.

This is the female impersonators that you're talking about?

Impersonators, yes, yes. But they were a good crowd too. They were very good. It was just the shock when I first walked in and thought, 'What on earth have I done and where am I', you know.

It's the first time you'd ever come into contact with a female impersonator?

Yes, yes. I - you know, I'd read about them and I've seen them on the stage and they were very good, but, um, I could laugh now, but this child that walked in and, you know, receives these words, I was just shocked for the moment and mum said, 'I'm afraid you just have to stay there now, girl.' (Laughs)

So was there some resentment between the female impersonators and the women, initially?

Well, if there was, they didn't - well that's the only way they showed it, you know. I think - I think why because, um, most of them, well they're ... I don't know whether they cooked all the time or whether they went out with other shows or not, but they did have other jobs to do and I didn't see any, and there weren't any in our show. Perhaps they went into other shows that they didn't perhaps have sufficient girls in, you know. But I always found them all right, they - apart from as I say, slinging off. I don't blame them because I always remember one, beautiful toe dancer, which I've never seen anybody - male toe dancer - before or since, you know, most unusual, but he was very good. Oh yes, they were all right.

And what were their costumes like in comparison to your costumes?

Dreadful. Theirs were beautiful, ours were - ours were rags (laughs) or what we made of them. I know, I came home and did a lot of work on mine, but theirs were beautiful. They wouldn't take anything else anyway but beautiful clothes, they wouldn't wear them. But I really - really enjoyed every moment over there.

Did you find that the people that were involved in the Entertainment Units had to have quite a lot of versatility?

Yes, but if you've been on the stage, I think, if - if you are a theatre person it's - you're always ready for the unknown, you know. I mean, I was a dancer but there's many a time I've had to go on and sing and many a time I've had to do somebody else's part. I mean, since the war I've been a teacher and I've always taught that you always stand behind and learn because, you know, since the war I had an academy and I - even if I had a ballet of fifty girls, if four were ill there were another four that could take their place, because everybody learnt everybody's part.

Which areas did you travel to?

Uh, all round Victoria. The part I did enjoy in Victoria, I think, was tap dancing up in the hospital. It wasn't the easiest thing in the world going between beds and up and down, but I think that's what I enjoyed the most, because they appreciated it I think, and we went to all the camps. Uh ... Uh, right, after we went to Victoria, when we came back we went up to Brisbane and we did many shows in Brisbane. Um, the only place we didn't work at was one particular place where they didn't have any quarters for the girls. It may have been Cowra. I think it had - I think it was because I have seen photos of all the Japanese lined up from the hill - a photo one of the boys took so I think maybe that was the place.

(15.00) We went right up Queensland and I was told ... I did ask where we were going when we left and they said, 'As far as we know, you'll be going as far as New Guinea.' Well the war - I forget how far up Queensland we went, but the war finished and we came back, so, whether they were going up any further or not, I don't know, but it was only about six or seven months before that, that they allowed - were allowing the girls to go up to New Guinea.

And what kind of audiences were you performing to?

Uh, you mean how many or how big?

How big and civilians, troops, the whole ...

Oh no, no, just all troops. All troops and thousands of them. You know, really big audiences. Um, oh ... I can't even imagine where this place was. It was round and it was huge and there were faces as far as you could see, you know, absolutely fantastic and they received every bit. It didn't matter whether you boo-booed or not, it was all appreciated, you know. I don't think when you do it every night, like we did, that you don't have an off night, you know. But I thoroughly enjoyed it. They were very, very nice to us and very good.

I suppose a lot of people would find it surprising that a trained classical ballerina would be in one of these shows?

Yes, perhaps, but then actually though, what I did I don't think that they would know I was a trained ballerina because actually *Laura* is not what I'm used to doing. Now *Swan Lake* or something, you know, which you can't do by yourself anyway, and that isn't, I think, not that the troops don't like ballet, but I don't think - it was a variety show and I think what I did was within keeping with the skit that they did, you know. But I would - I feel sorry that I didn't realise that I could have done ... There was no need for me to dance to his singing. The music could have been made my time for another chorus, but still, you're young, you're in the army and you do what you're told.

Yes.

That's how I felt, you know.

So what did you do? You danced behind a veil on the stage while someone else was singing?

Oh, it was like a mosquito netting or something. It was just a flimsy - to make you look like a dream, you know.

What kind of dancing did you do behind it?

Oh, toe dancing, like a dream. (Laughs) Hopefully ...

On your toes. Pirouettes and those sorts of things or - and turns and ...

Yes, not as many as I would have liked, but what I did was what they wanted, so I did ... To do fast pirouettes around the stage, you can't do it to a da da, really slow, you've got to have a beat, you know, to go round. But, um, first time I'd left home.

So it was a bit of an experience. It must have been a bit of an experience being surrounded by all these men as well. There wouldn't have been many women in the unit I don't imagine.

Oh, well actually we finished with four I think. There was a beautiful soprano, and Dot the contortionist. I always remember, Jimmy Davidson called me in one day, he said, 'Grant.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Go down and see what Scott's doing. There's something wrong.' So I went down and I said, 'Do your routine Dot.' So Dot did the routine and I said, 'Oh no.' She said, 'What am I doing wrong?' I said, 'Well you're doing all your up work and you're doing all your down work down all the time.' When she got up she couldn't stand up, she was giddy you see. So we put it together, you know, high and low and high and low. She was a very good contortionist but you can only stand upside down ...

... for so long.

... for so long, then you get up and fall down anyway. But, um, there was a contortionist, Jean - Jean sang, um - oh I've forgotten that number. Oh well, she had a beautiful voice, she sang with Don Belle ... Zelle, an actress. Well that's four girls, there must have been four girls.

Amongst all those men?

Amongst all those men. But as I say, they were very, very good. The only thing I did ask the Unit before I left, I asked them, 'Could we be, um, issued with trousers', and they said, 'No', and I applied again. I said, 'I want trousers', you know, and they said, 'Why'. I said, 'Well look, we're travelling with men and if I want to put my legs up or go to sleep or sit upside down, I think it would be better for us', which they did - did give us. It made it so much easier. Sitting there with an army skirt on all the time when, you know, you sit there for hour after hour, you know. You might want to sit on your legs or, you know, so we got the trousers and as I say, they were very good boys. There wasn't any swearing or ... I'm not a prude and - and I mean, some words don't matter, but, you know, they were nice, they always

looked after us and well it's the one's we see today, you know, you really get thrilled to see them after all the time.

(20.00) It must have been a bit of an eye opener for you though, as you say, you hadn't been away from home before?

Oh, no, I - I think I was stunned all through 'rookies' to start with and then I - the artillery, and then the DRO. I was just getting used to things when I was stunned again (laughs). But, it's what I was trained for. Not that particularly, but the stage I was trained for and I did enjoy it.

Did the women that were involved in the units - I know you ended up marrying another man that was involved in the unit, did - was there a lot of that? Did women meet their partners through those units?

No. No, I think - no, I was the only one, but I - I always knew exactly what I wanted. (Laughs) I remember one Christmas, Michael Pate came in and I said, 'Oh there's ...' He always wore the American thing. 'There's Mont ...' - what was his name, oh my memory's bad now.

I know who you mean too. MacArthur.

'There's MacArthur', and then five minutes after in walks another chappie and I said, 'There's Montgomery', because he'd just come back from the Middle East, Montgomery, the little moe and the black and the khaki. I was married two years before I found out that was the same chappie, that was the one I married. But I didn't see a great deal of him in the unit, but - of course he was always, you know, was doing driving or something, but sometimes he managed to travel in the bus, when one of the drivers would relieve him. But all in all it was an experience. They were so - so good to the girls and so protective and everything, you know.

And you had completely separate quarters?

Oh yes, that's what I say. We didn't get to Cowra, because that was the only place that didn't have any accommodation that they could break it away from the boys. Whereas, even if we - we'd go to a big camp - even if we had to drive two or three miles to pick up the boys to, you know, to take us to the show, because wherever the girls quarters were, we had to stay there. The only thing about that is when the sergeant came round - the lady sergeants did not like entertainers - girl entertainers - because they slept late and the others had to get up and go to parade.

So did they give you a bit of a hard time?

No, they were down - down right rude. (Laughs) You know, you'd just turn over and say, 'Entertainment Unit' and oh brother, they were really rough. Oh, I used to get upset at first but it just rolls off your back after you've been to half a dozen camps. I mean, let's face it, they were there watching the show and they enjoyed it, but you just can't travel all day and work all night and then just get up at six again the next morning. Although, some of the boys were I suppose, because we'd leave about nine. Of course depending on whether it was 200 or 300 hundred miles or 400 miles you had to travel to the next camp. Some of them were closer. Some of them were further away.

What would these sergeants say when you said 'Entertainment Unit'?

Oh, (clicks tongue) or some other thing that ....

Swear a bit.

Oh no, no, they daren't swear. Um, no it's more a (clicks tongue) or 'oh good grief', something like that, you know.

Yes, yes.

You'd have to look at their faces to see what was ... I just used to turn over and say 'Entertainment' and go back because it was silly getting upset about it, happening every morning, you know.

Would you have called the Entertainment Unit an unmilitary looking lot? There were a lot of different kinds of people involved in them, weren't there?

Not unmilitary looking, because there was a certain uniform and you - you were a soldier and you wore it. No, the only thing we didn't have the - as much training as you have in the camp. They had occasional parades but not, you know, they were busy packing and unpacking and I mean, let's face it, you're travelling in a bus, yet your frocks and your shoes, your makeup and everything you use is in a certain position in a slot, that when you get there you can just put it in your dressing room, and I mean, you can't just throw them in the back of a truck. They're in crates and wardrobes and ... We had a wardrobe with 'Hags' written on it. H-A-G-S. (Laughs)

(25.00) But, uh, no I wouldn't say they were unmilitary looking because when they went out they looked like any other soldier. But unmilitary is - well we didn't have parades but they worked all the time. You see, they're putting up and taking down. Besides they were doing their job. They had rehearsing to do too and there's the ironing of the frocks every day and there was, um, you know, well it's like anything else. There's things to be fixed up and things to be done. They were very good as regards to dress.

What were the conditions l ke that you had to perform in?

Uh, well the worst - worst night I don't think, um ... I don't know whether we performed that night, but I think we must have though, because I know I woke up and I said, 'What are you doing in my bed?' It was Hanna. She said, 'Have a look at mine.' The tent had broken that end and her bed was full of water and she finished up in my bed, but I don't remember much of it. I must have really gone to sleep. Oh, good and bad. I hate - I hate the ... the windy nights were the worst I think, particularly if it was out in the open. The windy nights when you couldn't - your voice would get blown away and your dresses and nothing stays put. But other than that, you know, it's pretty good that way. I didn't mind. I - in the other unit - the artillery, was it? Yes in the artillery, I sat in a trench with a - eight inches of water and blanket round me with an apple. That's (laughs) [inaudible] so this was much better than sitting in a wet trench. That was when the planes were coming over Darwin and had the alert, you know. It would be raining that night.

Some of those outback places must have been fairly dusty and dirty I suppose, travelling around?

Oh yes, but you have a clean bus and I mean, wherever the camp is, there may be nothing else there but the camp's there and, you know, the buildings are there. There's ablutions and there's dining - you know, your eating ... canteens and things like that. It was - all in all it was very good. I went round in a dream half of it I think.

The only thing I'm sorry about that - I'm a shutterbug now and I should have been a shutterbug then.

Can you tell me what your costumes looked like?

Oh dear. Well after wearing beautiful tutus and romantic ballerinas, it was a small tutu with just the skirt and a top. But when we finished with it, it had, what I wasn't used to, the diamante diamonds all round it in blue and gold and titivated it up, but it looked all right at the finish. But it was - I don't know what female had used it, but it was a mess when I first got it, and the tapping trousers, they were - they were very good. But I had - where I - going back to the beginning, how I got named 'Midge'. When I walked into camp and you were sent to get your clothes, the chappie gave me one look at me and he said, 'How tall are you?' I said, 'Four ten.' He said, 'Oh my God, there's your great coat.' Well you should have seen it. Nothing fitted me, nothing. Nothing at all and the 'passion killers' they called them darling, they came to my knee and it had an eight inch leg. So I cut the legs off and put the bottom of that - I'd cut the eight inches off and put it there and every time I went back for a reissue they wouldn't give me any more because I didn't get them there because the legs weren't long enough on them. But, oh, everything had to be remade. I'll never forget the great coat. When I - I cut it all ... My mother was a dressmaker and I did a bit of it myself and remade it and broke fourteen needles and ... But anyway it fitted me at last, but he just roared the whole time.

So he gave you the name 'Midge'.

He said, 'Here you are midget, try those', and everybody was there, from then on it was 'Midget' and then they cut it short to 'Midge'.

Can you remember any shows that were flops?

Not one, not one. (Phone rings) I think when you're working for soldiers [break in recording]

We were talking about any flops.

Oh no, not - not while I was there. I feel when you're - when you're all the same, you're all army and anything does happen they laugh with you. This is the beauty of it. It isn't as if they paid forty dollars to come and see you. If anything happens unduly, well they just laugh with you. I always remember George Wallace, he used to break me up all the time. I ... I rushed in and I said, uh, what was it I said, 'Oh slay me' and I threw myself on the floor and I pleaded, you know, what was it. Oh 'I've come to plea, I've come to plea', and he said, 'What.' I said, 'I've come to plea.' He said, 'Second door on the right'. Well look, I broke up, the audience broke up, then the band stopped, and we were all hysterical and I couldn't find that door because I couldn't (laughs) stop laughing. But he used to do all kinds of things, you know,

just give you the wrong line or mix you up. I'm saying, 'Oh please Mr ...'. What was his name, Mr Pong, 'Please Mr Pong, please Mr Pong', and he said, 'Ping'. I said, 'Pong', and he said, 'Forty love.' I said, 'Your serve.' Well that was - you know, where's the next line, you know, it's gone. (Laughs) Couldn't find it. He used to break me up all the time.

So you had to do straight - straight person for him as well at times?

Oh I wasn't straight man, a straight man's a different thing. I was just in a sketch. I suppose I was there to be broken up, you know, a straight man never laughs. But no, it was just a sketch. Sometimes it's three or four people in it, sometimes there's only two. But when there's two, a straight man and commedian, that's patter, you know, but a skit you have as many as you like. But he could break me up any time. But, uh, that's - that's the man I miss on ANZAC Day. He was - he was good. I think we all miss him. He was our OC and he was always very - as a matter of fact they were all very good to the girls I think, you know.

You mentioned that the 9th Division concert party that toured in the Middle East had Palestinian girls working with them over there and there was something to do with their costumes.

Yes, well, when I went to the DRO and we were dancing there and we had routines ready, they asked them for some socks to wear and they said there was a shipment that just came in and - and to go round and see what they'd give me in the way of clothes. I didn't realise then that they - the concert p rty that came back, and this is what they were going to reshuffle, you know, and so they gave us some clothes and they've all got silly looks on their face and I get to the door and I said, 'Thank you very much' and they said, 'It's all right. The wogs wore those the last time.' So I didn't know whether to drop them or take them or what. But we made good use of them, we changed them round a bit and bought little - little bits and pieces and put it together and that army ballet was - they were very good, they were very good. It amazed me. They - anything they had to learn, and they were raw, you know, anything they had to learn had to be done in their lunch hour or after and some of them became very, very good dancers. They did [mualds?], [apaches?], and Hungarians and all kinds and very good little tappers. Anyway we wore the clothes for a long time, but I'll never forget that, 'The wogs wore them last you know'. Oh, none of them fitted me anyway (laughs) they just went straight over my head and out. Luckily I had plenty of my own anyway.

I'll just ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

What sort of impact did the war have on your career as a performer?

Oh well, everything, because my ballet teacher had told my mother that they thought that I would win the overseas scholarship that year and I remembered rehearsing, even at the theatre in a tutu when the word came through to say that [break in recording] so I presume this was earlier in the piece. But the war started in '38 didn't it, overseas or somewhere.

'39.

'39, well it must have been '39, and, um, there weren't any exams that year so I didn't get the opportunity of winning a scholarship, or whether I'd have won it is another thing. I wouldn't have gone anyway if the war was on, but if the war hadn't have been on, well, I'd have got there, but - that's if I'd have won it - but I suppose it made a big impact because you take four years I was in the army. That's a long time out of ballet, you know, although I did go back for a while but then I had a ballet academy for thirty years after that so ... and my girls won the Australian Junior Intermediate, Senior Intermediate and one of my girls was the first one to ever win the Sadler's Wells (coughs) Estate Adelaide Medal in England.

So you went on to become a ballet teacher after the war then?

Yes. Yes.

And you're still a ballet teacher?

Oh no, no, I'd retired. I sold the academy about 1981, then I do scholarships or mock exams or tutoring exam kids if they're going and they feel they need to be, you know, checked over. But things change over the years of course, and certain things in ballet have changed now that I disagree with. But isn't everything made easier today? and I think the hard way is the best way, but they get by anyway.

So I just dabble in it, but the only thing it does, it keeps me up-to-date with the ballet.

Mmm. What was the worst of working with the Entertainment Units?

I can't think of a thing. I really can't think of a thing. To me they were family and I can't think of a thing that I didn't like and they ... well they were just beautiful people. Well, I found them that way and, um, I can't say one thing that I didn't like. Uh, I can't say about the army altogether, but the Units, it was very good. The only trouble I had was in the women - see, being an only child I don't know what it is for somebody to play a prank on me, you know. So the first night I go to the first camp that I'm ever sent to - not 'rookies', I mean when I came out of 'rookies', in the artillery - they short-sheeted the bed. And I mean, I came in and, um, got into bed and thought, 'Gee, they've got small sheets', but I'm four foot ten, you see and I curl up and I go to sleep. I mean I spoiled everybody's joke, I didn't know I was supposed to ... I just didn't know anything about short-sheeting beds or anything like that. I just thought, 'What a silly way they made the bed', when I undid it the next day, you know. But I spoilt people's fun that way. Things like that that came back to me after and I thought, 'Ohh, now I know', you know, but I must have spoilt all their fun, because - not that I didn't have a sense of humour - but I'm a bit dumb I think, that it didn't strike me. But I think that's not having any brothers or any sisters, you know.

(5.00) Yes. Can you remember any times in shows when things went terribly wrong?

No, only when I was supposed to throw a bucket of confetti over somebody and somebody filled it with water. (Laughs) Things like that, but they were deliberately done. No, not that I ... I mean, oh ... I had a big toe (laughs) that slipped out of joint every now and again. That was the only thing that annoyed me and there was only one person who could pull it back and that was Micheal Pate and he used to get me toe and go tch and I'd put my toe shoe on quickly and get ... That's the only time. But it didn't slip out during the day or any other time, but it had to - it would slip out when I've got my toe shoes all ready and I'm ready to go on and I'd

have to undoe it and get someone to pull it back in again. There's a knack in it and he was the only one that could pull it back in, and there I'd be with one shoe on and one shoe off. No I can't think of any other time that wasn't deliberately done, you know, for a joke kind of thing. But ... no, I ... All in all it was a fabulous time.

How long were you in the Entertainment Unit?

Well, twelve months artillery, two DRO - just over a year.

And when did you - when did you start and when did you leave?

I started in June - June '42 ... Oh no, it was June '42 till May '46, so that's a month under four years.

Right, in the Entertainment Unit?

Oh no, only twelve months, twelve months. Twelve months in the Entertainment Unit.

When did you start there?

Uh, I really don't know the date. But ...

It would have been somewhere in 1945 if you left in '46, I suppose.

It might have been the end of '44. It might have been the end of '44. It might have been eighteen months at the other. But I know I was twelve months at that place. It would have to be the end of '44.

Did you ever do any shows for civilians? You know the civilian stars?

Not while in the army. You mean while I was in the army?

Yes, while you were in the Entertainment Unit.

No, no, no. No, see, um, where Gracie Fields and those went, they were in New Guinea, not on the homeland and it was only late '44 that they were allowed - oh no, yes, late '44 that they were allowed to go up to New Guinea. So, no, I worked before with stars but - when in civie life but not in the Entertainment Unit.

What was the favourite parts of the shows for the troops do you think?

Oh I suppose Wallace. Because you only had to look at him. You know, you just had to look at him and ... There was nothing smutty about it or anything but your own imagination, you know, I think all the numbers were very good. I mean, the way Hess draws and the way the others play the marimbas and ... No, I'd say Wallace.

He was one of the greats for you?

Oh yes. Wallace - George Wallace Jnr. Yes, definitely. As I say, he's the one I miss on ANZAC Day more than anybody else. We were - he had a little ... Of course there was

George the first and George the second and George the second had a little girl first and he called her Georgia and he come over and - Georgia was two when he'd go ... He'd just sit there and he'd say 'Bang', and this kid would just go bump and it would lay there until he said, 'You're okay, get up now.' It's doesn't matter if it's half an hour or ten minutes, she would just lay there dead, you know, until he'd say it could get up. He had another boy, he had a boy - not another boy - he had another child and it was a boy but they called him Jeffrey, it was too late to call him George the third because they had Georgia. And he died rather young, George.

(10.00) I've asked you about the worst time, what about the best time? Can you remember the best time in the Entertainment Unit?

From the day I went in, apart from the first shock I got, until the day I left. Absolutely fabulous. It had it's ups and downs. I mean, like the time, um, the - what do you call this telephone - switchboard girl - switchboard girl was ill and of course they had [inaudible], you know, do this or do that, and he said, 'Great, go on a switchboard'. I mean, I've got my mouth open saying, 'I don't know a thing about it'. Well after I was there ten minutes this roaring voice came in and he said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I don't know, I've never been here before.' (Laughs) I must have pulled all the plugs out or put them in the wrong holes or something. That wasn't a very good day. Nor the time he balled me out but he's the boss so he's entitled to do that, but that's not to do with the Unit. Oh dear.

The men were expected to perform other duties, were the women also expected to do that?

Well once - once you get there and you're going into a show, you rehearse all day, you know. I mean, I - this huge room - or studio - I don't know which one it was. They were number one, two or a, b, c, I can't remember - but (coughs) there'd be Mack Jost on a silent piano, drummer on the drums up there, a trumpeter up there, a juggler up there, and me doing - tap dancing or toe dancing down here. Each one - all except Mack Jost, he was silent, all the others were - how he knew what he was playing, I don't know. But everybody's playing a different tune. But if you concentrate hard enough you - you only hear yourself, the tune you're singing, but you're all in the same room and you practise all day and then when someone's finished with the stage and it's empty you go up there and rehearse on the stage or they're doing skits ... I mean there's practice rooms and the Studio A is - was being used all the time by skits and things like that. Once they work it out, they try it on the stage to make sure it's okay. There's no - there's no spare moments.

Mmm.

No, you're always working but I know I used to do something else. I don't know what it was now. I think we just stood in for each other, like - I never stood in for the switchboard again, but I think, you know, I think Dot Scott used to do that after that, but Zelle was the girl that did the switchboard. I don't know what Jean did. No, no, but when we were at the RO you had - and we were doing the ballet - you had to do your full day's work plus that.

Mmm.

But then that was a matter of choice. If you wanted to be in the ballet that was it, you know. But that started off about twenty, we got down to ten - we had ten for a long time, then finished with the eight for a long time.

Did it stand for much after the war if you mentioned that you'd been involved in the Entertainment Unit?

Well I don't know one way or the other because I never ever ... I think, you see, my son is a young Fred Astaire, okay, so he's in the theatre world. George is in it, I'm in it, our friends are theatre. Um ... you know ... I've even forgotten the question now. Make any difference?

Mmm.

No, not at all because I think most of the friends - my lifelong friends that I have always known is either somebody I learnt with or I taught, or she went to the same school. No, I don't think it's made any difference at all, because my son's friends - because he's in theatre, you know - in *42nd Street*.

Oh really.

This time, yeah.

Mmm, that's impressive.

Oh he's been in it all his life. Actually ....

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.