TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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Description	George Pomeroy, 1st Australian Entertainment Unit, interviewed by Sharon Davis for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939-45 Discussing pre-war service with CMF; enlistment and service in Middle East during 1941; joining the Entertainment Unit; entertaining Australian troops in North Australia and islands; visit of Gracie Fields; impact of weather on performances; transferring from fighting unit to entertainment unit; importance of entertainment units for troop morale; loan shows; maintenance of instruments on tour; improvisation; health; popular songs.

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Identification: Interview with George Pomeroy.

George, if I can just ask you first of all about your background, where you were born and when?

... Pardon me, I've got a cold. I was born in England in 1919 in Reading in Berkshire in England. My family migrated to Australia in 1920 when I was only about eighteen months old. I've lived my life in Australia since then. We went to Victoria when my family came here and I grew up in a town called Gerang in Victoria and I went to school there. I went to high school, eventually leaving school I became an apprentice butcher. I did my trade as a butcher and became a master butcher. I joined the Militia in 1937 prior to the war and on the outbreak of war I was called up on three months' emergency service. I continued to serve in the Militia for a short period and then I was ... joined the AIF. From there my army experiences took me to the Middle East and into New Guinea and various other places. Pause in recording.

Anyway, my family migrated to Australia here. I was one of six boys and my sister. Unfortunately only a short period after we'd been in Australia, my father died when I was the age of three leaving my mother with six boys and a girl - the eldest one being eleven years of age - whom she raised very successfully and they all become professional men and achieved ... did very well in their own professions through life.

In my own ... for myself, I was one who always when I heard the bugle I wanted to follow it. So I was very much taken with the military side of life. I think it came from my grandfather who had been a soldier in the Boer War and had served out in all those strange places in India and other various locations. So it wasn't anything undue that I decided eventually when I had joined the army, and after doing a stint of some nine years, I was discharged at the end of the war in 1946. It wasn't long before I heard the bugle again and I decided I was going to go back and I joined the CMF, which is a part-time military organisation. However, the bug caught me again and it wasn't long before I was back in full uniform and I served for another twenty-two years, eventually being discharged in 1974.

During that period of time I served in many locations. I rose to the rank of WO1 and I finished as the command sergeant major of Eastern Command which entailed all military other ranks in New South Wales. That was my last posting at Victoria Barracks which I concluded in 1974.

Since then I have been very interested on the army side of it and for the past some forty years I have been associated with the Dawn Service at Manly, various other services, memorial clubs and RSL movements and, even this year, I was associated with five different ANZAC services. And as long as I can still wear the uniform, and it still fits me, everybody says that I must still continue to go on and keep doing the job that I've been doing. So heaven knows how long it will be before this uniform of mine wears out.

Before we go to the entertainment units you mentioned that you served in the Middle East. When did you go to the Middle East and who with?

I went over as a reinforcement to the 24th Battalion in 1941 and I served at the battle of Alamein was the last activity or action we'd seen over there before returning to Australia. Of

course, everybody knows well by now that the 24th Battalion was part of the 9th Australia Division.

(5.00) It was commanded in the Middle East by the 8th Army and part of the 8th Army whom General Montgomery was the Supreme Commander. It was there, while I was in ... strangely enough that I first saw the 9th Division concert party. It was after the battle had been concluded that I was told to drive a carrier - a Bren gun carrier - which I'd been driving during the campaign to a certain location and it had a ... twin Bren guns mounted on it and a Vickers machine gun and we were there to do anti-aircraft protection for a group of people that were coming up to entertain us and this happened to be the 9th Australian Division concert party. They arrived at a feature behind where we had had, only a few days previously, been ... blasted out of the place. They arrived in a truck, a couple of vehicles and a bit of an old battered-up bus.

They dropped a few floor boards onto the ground; they brought out a piano and a few other instruments and odds and ends (coughs) ... pardon me ... and then they started off with their concert party. They entertained us with singers and musicians and comedians and it was quite a ... quite a ... well ... I'm sorry you might have to ... to find a concert party so close to the forward lines. It was only a matter of a few days, as I said before, when the place was being blown out. Anyway, they did their job; they packed up their kits and away they went.

And that was the last I thought about them until on my return to Australia we were then moved up into Queensland into the tablelands to prepare for jungle training before moving up into the islands. It was there that a friend of mine, Wally Nash, who happened to be a piano player - pianist - came to me and he said, 'George', he said, 'They're looking for people for the concert party', and he said, 'Are you interested in coming along?'. I said, 'Oh well, I'll give it a go'. Anyway that's I first became a part of the 9th Divisional concert party.

We showed around the tablelands to various groups and then we were called to Sydney and were based at the Showground for sometime and this was when the 1st Australian Army Entertainment Group came under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Jim Davidson. It was there, whilst in the Showground, that all the various units were gathered together. They were then divided up into what was known as detachment, giving an equal share of personnel to each group of musicians and entertainers and from there they disbursed and they went on their various ways and visited wherever Australian troops were ... engaged, then the Australian concert parties or the entertainment units went into these locations. For myself, we went up to Cape York Peninsula on one occasion, we did all the islands up there from Hammond, Entrance, Good, Horn, Thursday Island, and eventually we finished in Dutch New Guinea - Merauke. We were there for several months and then eventually we finished up in Rabaul in the area up in a place called Wide Bay where there were ... the troops were there.

In some of these locations you cannot describe the conditions under which the troops were living and they were certainly very pleased if at any time they saw anybody, or that they heard anybody was coming to entertain them, they threw out the welcome mat for us. But it was in some of places where some of the worst atrocities ever happened as far as Australian soldiers were concerned and it wasn't unusual for us, when we were having a show, that I'm sure some of the people in the far background had different uniforms on than the ones of our own soldiers. This didn't happen ... this happened on several occasions.

You mean the enemy were watching the show?

Yeah, I'm sure they were because we could ... you must excuse me (coughs) ... but anyway, yes, I'm sure that, I mean, we had a few unwelcome ... well, they were welcome guests, but they didn't cause us any trouble. So, as far as we were concerned, they never bothered us in any way.

Later on we did a second trip there and we went into Lae, Port Moresby and various groups. It was there that, whilst we were doing a visit in Lae that we were ... received the word that Gracie Fields was going to come along and be part of the entertainment and I recall quite clearly that we had ... they had a stage - they built a stage with a dressing room and various things like that - and came the time for the show, our show which included such identities as George Wallis Jnr, Michael Pate, Mr Squiggle and several other well-known artists who are still working today, it was our job to perform in the first half of the show.

(10.00) Well, you can imagine what it was like. There were 10,000 troops in the audience and all they wanted was, chanting, was 'Gracie, Gracie'. So we did it hard for the first three quarters of an hour or so, but eventually when Gracie come out, she killed 'em. She was the best entertainer, or one of the greatest that I've ever had anything to do with or been associated with, she was just a wonderful woman. The irony of it is that when they came along there was all the big heads and red caps and brass buttons around and she came out and said, 'Who is the compare of the show?', and somebody said 'Corporal Mike Pate'. So she said, 'Well' ... she asked him if he'd be good enough to introduce her to the troops, which he did, and all she said was, 'Can your band play *Wish me Luck as you Wave me Goodbye*?'. They said, 'Yes' and so the show went on much to the chagrin of some of the senior officers that were present.

One of the funniest things that were there, that they thought that perhaps Miss Field, while she was there, might want to go to certain places a lady goes to at various times so they set up a one-man ... what was known as a one-man 'thunder box', this was a one-man toilet. And somebody said, 'Well, it looks rather bare', so some wise character went out and got a five-pound prune tin and filled up with wild flowers and stuck it on top of this thing so that it wouldn't look so bad when she arrived. And the first things that Gracie said when she saw it is, 'What's that', much to everybody's delight. And we worked with Gracie around the hospitals and various areas at the time she was married to her first husband, Monty Banks, who was quite a brilliant comic in himself. And we carried Gracie's piano all round the place and took it off into waras but she was a wonderful lady and she brought a lot of joy and cheer to the boys up there I'm sure and it was quite an experience to work with such a wonderful girl.

> Tell me a bit about your own act, George? What did you do in the entertainment unit?

Well, I was basically a singer - a baritone - and apart from that I worked in the sketches with Wallis - George Wallis - and Michael Pate and I was, what they call, I was known as a utility man. In other words you were expected to do a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of everything. But, basically, I was first as a singer which I have been practically all my life.

When somebody was missing or happened to be sick or that we were ... you had to be quite universal in your ability to be able to take over because when Mike was there, Mike Pate got out, I took over as a compare of the show and Vernon Haycroft who comes from Victoria -

another very good little comic - he took over from George Wallis when George left the show. So you had to be a jack-of-all-trades in every way. Also my other job at the time was that I used to drive the ... the OC of our group, a delightful old English chappie by the name of Lieutenant Frederick Hughes, and it was my job to take him in advance - we were sort of advance agents - and visit the forthcoming locations where the shows were to go on. So I used to take dear old Freddie, as he was known to all of us, and we would scout out and find out where the shows were to be and where we were going to find accommodation at that sort of thing and I had many pleasant hours with dear old Freddie.

Can you remember any of the routines that you did with people like George Wallis now?

Oh yes. There were various skits, a Middle East, *Solome*-type of thing and the incidents that would happen in the Middle East and various places of ill-fame and what have you. And ... but generally it was basically a variety of bright comedy. They were all skits. George would always work with a stand-up comic or straight man and also we had those other ... well, he might have known or called them stooges or other people to support his act. But, oh no, you had a bit of ... you did a bit of ... I also used to dance with some of the female impersonators. We used to do our little turn and some of them ... something I hadn't mentioned before, that some of the female impersonators were brilliant or most of them were very good. They could sing and they could dance and they also added a big variety to the show and were very well accepted. But the only thing about them, we had to make sure that when we were in the islands we didn't let the native boys and that get too close to them because they thought they were the real thing and they used to go a bit crazy at times when they saw these female impersonators doing their jobs - doing their bit. Oh dear.

What sort of songs did you sing?

Oh, musical comedy; mostly musical ... modern ... oh well, you know, popular songs.

(15.00) What were the favourite sorts of things that you did with the troops?

Oh ... favourite things. We used to get into all the trouble around the place. I don't know about favourite things, you know, but ... Oh, well, you'd stand up anywhere. I mean, there were times when you walked out in the middle of the street or the middle of a paddock or somewhere and started to sing. I mean, sometimes you never had props; there was very little ... it depended on what location you were and whether you could get your equipment in or not and if you couldn't, you just went in there with a guy with a piano accordion or someone who could play a violin or something else and you went in there and did your thing and that was it. But it didn't matter what you did, the boys appreciated the effort you had. We used to entertain on the boat - a friend of mine - oh, going over onboard ship we used to sing to the troops and that on board ship. There was always a piano there and do various things like that. Help out on the church parade, we were good boys occasionally and did the right thing now and then.

But, oh no, in all it was a wonderful experience, it was. It was something that I remember very well and I loved every day of it. There were many incidents of course which I can't very well repeat here but on many occasions where the old sense of humour came to the fore because if you didn't have a sense of humour you wouldn't have been there in any place because some of the situation when you could see the female impersonators coming off the

stage and grabbing a shovel or a spade and digging trenches to the water could run away from out under the dressing rooms and things like that. It's hard to imagine but that's what sort of thing happened ... that went on.

Some of the places we went to we had forty-eight inches of rain ... forty inches of rain in forty-eight hours on one occasion - the rain never stopped - and it didn't matter what you did. And sitting there watching the canvas started coming down and down and down and we knew it was full of water and once you touched it, that would be it. And there was the drummer underneath with his kit of drums and his looking up there and saying, 'God, don't let it fall'. (laughs)

So you performed in those conditions?

Oh, in any; in anything, oh my word, it didn't matter where we went. On one occasion we set out ... our set up was we had a mobile stage which was built on a vehicle, on a truck, where you could drop the tailboard down and the side down or the sides came out and you set up a canvas top and you rig it up on a framework and when we went into ... and it was all held up by jacks or jacked up under the front and things like that and wherever possible we'd find a location which was an amphitheatre where we could be in a raised position with the troops below us where they could see what was going on or vice versa. On one occasions we set our equipment up and set the stage up and, of course, when we opened the show and the boys bounded onto stage and all the troops come out and do their little bit and we used to open the show with *Strike up the Band* and we'd all canter onto the stage and on this occasion the whole thing started to move. And at one stage it looked like we were all going to career down the hill with this stage and the whole lot going but fortunately it stopped and we all breathed a sign of relief 'cause we could envisage the whole lot of us all finishing up down the bottom in a great heap of mess at the bottom of the hill. That was one occasion that really stood on our end. But some of the conditions under which you ... you just cannot explain or believe some of the conditions under which we played, I wish they did. But that was it and you took it as it came - you did your job.

But, oh, we had it good and we had it bad but that's the way it was. On one occasion, I mean some of the incidents that happen in the shows, I mean, everybody's got there own, but on one occasion we were in the islands and the magician used to do this brilliant act of changing places with his assistant. He had him in a trunk, and he had it chained up with chains and he was in a bag inside the trunk and all the rest of it. So they go through this great routine and he says to the audience, 'I will change places with my assistant within two minutes'. Anyway, the only thing he'd forgotten to do was to take the keys out of his pocket and give them to the assistant so that he could change places with him and, unfortunately, the magician was still in the box and we had to carry the whole lot off the stage and break the chains open to get him out of the thing or he would have suffocated and died in the box. (laughs) And these are the sort of things that used to happen. Thank God it didn't happen too often.

And, oh, we travelled from ... you know, on another occasion a friend of mine - a dear friend in Western Australia - he ... we were at Merauke and we were going from there up to Rabaul, up to Wide Bay in there, further up to do a show. And anyway they had to put someone onboard ship as a guard for the night to keep an eye on the boat and this barge. Anyway, we had to leave early in the morning at four o'clock so we get down there and we heard a dreadful noise coming from the boat, this groaning and moaning. When we arrived there we said to him, 'What's the matter, Smithie?'. He said, 'How far at sea are we?', I said, 'We're still

tired up to the bloody wharf' - he was seasick. (laughs) Poor old Smithie. Anyway, we got under way in this barge and all we did was travel up in the ocean swell just by the coast, like we go up there and it took us several hours to get up to this place, and if you could see a sixteen stone man, eighteen stone man being ... having all sorts of troubles and hanging on the back of this barge with his pants down and being sick at the same time, you can imagine what sort of a trip it was.

(20.00) They were all sick and, oh dear oh dear, it was a dreadful old show. But this is the sort of thing that used to go on. I was very cunning, I sat in the middle of the ... in the barge and I sat in the truck in the seat and I was sort of in the middle so I got an even flow backwards and forwards but the other poor blighters they really suffered on that trip. And that was a dreadful place up there; it was one of the worst places we'd ever been into - it was a shocking place.

Did you get very close to fighting?

Oh well, we dodged a few bombs occasionally and the odd shot and shell but unfortunately there was a couple of major disasters in New Britain where mortars had hit amongst some of the Americans over there and killed quite a number of them and that. But, oh, we were never far away, we got up as far as we could. But a lot of the Troubadour troops or other groups that were more or less travelling on foot, they were actually up with the fighting themselves. We virtually couldn't get ... we could only go as far as our equipment. Well, on some occasions we'd break up the show and go in smaller groups and get up. That was when you were getting close to the .... But we were always there with the bombs around and the anti-aircraft was blown and that sort of thing, so you were never far away. And you never knew what time ... if you might be called upon. I mean, we were all soldiers ... originally they all were trained as soldiers, as fighting soldiers and they all came from various groups, whether they were engineers or infantry or whatever the case may be and we always carried our equipment with us and we always had our weapons with us so that if it was ever decided it was ever needed, even a female impersonator and everybody else would have to drop their gear and get stuck into it and that's how it was. So ...

Did that ever happen in your unit?

Not to my ... not as far as I know. We only got close enough to get a few odd shots here and there and that sort of thing and .... But we weren't actually forced to actually that hand to hand combat. But we were always sort of on the verges, on the edges of whenever the troops moved on a little bit further, well, we'd be following them up and following them up. We weren't never far behind. Sometimes our troops were used as porters or labourers to unload ammunition ships or cargo and boats and stuff like that. But we worked independently, we were an independent group, and wherever we went we went solo and we made our own arrangements and did our own ... virtually did our own thing. But we were always under whatever commander was in that particular area and before we did any shows in many locations we had to do a ... we had to do a ... what do you call it ... we had to do a preview of the show - sorry - before it went before the troops and if the commander - in one particular incident there, a very fiery old gentleman by the name of 'Red Robbie', General Robertson, if there was anything in the show that he thought was slightly of ill-taste it never went in the show and you could always be sure that everything was really checked out before we went on. But we never had any of that sort of trouble because I believe our show was a good clean

show and we were welcomed wherever we went and the troops always got their money's worth. We felt we were doing a pretty good job.

> Yes, you were mentioning before that the troops were very particular about what kind of show they wanted.

Oh they were. There were a couple of incidences, it wasn't the army side of it, but a couple of instances where civilian concert parties or groups visited various parts were not ... they weren't well received because they didn't appreciate some of the stuff that they were putting over and the diggers didn't waste any time showing their attitude as to what type of show they wanted to here and what they wanted to see. They didn't want any rubbish or any filth, they just wanted good, plain old entertainment. The sort of thing they could see when they went home when they got home or at home with their own people. They were most particular in that.

> How much singing had you done before the war?

Oh, I was involved in local ... oh, in school shows and in local entertainment groups and that. I didn't really ... I did a lot of singing but I didn't really do that amount. I sang for pleasure and most of it I was always asked to sing here and sing there and sing something else. But it was a musical comedy and we used to put on shows and that sort of thing. But I got my experience when I came out ... oh, I sang through the war but afterwards I studied with a very well-known teacher in Sydney for three years and then I did my examinations at the Conservatorium afterwards. And that gave me quite a good depth and good range in voice production which has helped me through the rest of my career.

(25.00)I don't know whether going back in the army and being a warrant officer or an RSM bellowing and bawling at troops has done it a great amount of trouble ... or good. But, anyway, it's still there and I still sing and I still get a lot of pleasure out of doing it.

> Did you take up singing as a career after the war, after being in the units?

I had visions of doing that at the time but, unfortunately, there was very little money about and there wasn't a great amount in it and if ... you had to be reasonably good at your trade but, I'm afraid the bugle came first and when I heard the band playing I went back to my old love of being a soldier again. But I don't know how I'd have gone but when you go back into the late-forties and early fifties there wasn't much about at that time as there is now. There's a much greater scope for it. But it was a great experience and it just helped me considerably through my career and the old voice is still there.

> You mentioned earlier that you'd been in a fighting unit before you went into the entertainment unit. How did you feel about transferring over to the entertainment units from a fighting unit?

Well, I don't know. I thought it was something that I've always liked to do and if there was another way of being able to be useful and do something to entertain the troops, it's something that I'd always been - even with the groups that I'd been with earlier, prior to joining the concert party - I was always involved in that sort of thing and I was always very keen on singing and that type of business and show business, so I think it was only sort of a natural

thing for me to go on and say, well, if I can do something and help to entertain and do something with the boys, well, why not do it.

(Interruption from third party)

Oh well, I'd had a reasonable war ... I'd never had any great problems. But I think I had a fairly good war, but I mean, doing something that you like, I suppose, is a lot better than doing something that you don't like, isn't it? I mean, it's better than probably slogging around the jungle carrying a great pack on your back, not that the conditions were any different, we still had to suffer the same conditions but we probably never had to suffer under the same circumstances. But, oh no, it was a good group and it was most enjoyable, the years and that. Well, one thing that I got out of the concert parties or being in the entertainment unit, I eventually ran into a little girl in 1945 and I married her in 1946 and I've been married to her now for forty-three years. So that was something that came ... something good that came out of my war years or my concert party years.

How important did you think the concert party or the entertainment units were?

I think they were most important. I think they were of a vast importance to ... or a great importance to the troops because morale. You must maintain morale, you've got to keep up the diggers' spirits and if there's any way you can do it, it doesn't matter how or why but you must. I mean, it's pretty tough slogging and pretty tough going in some of those places and they're away up there. Some of those guys were stuck away for four and five years without getting home or getting away. And anything you could do to make them happy, well, it was worthwhile and I'd say that the concert parties did a magnificent job. Not only that but they had some of the best entertainers that were around at the time. You've only got to ... and the names you will find in due course as this goes on further and the people up there were the best in their trade. They're the best musicians, they were the best comics, they were the best singers, they were the best ... well, the best of everything. So, I mean, the troops were getting good value for their money.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

START TAPE 1, SIDE B

... performed a lot to the troops. Did you ever perform to civilian audiences?

Yes, we did on some occasions. Towards the end of the war when they formed a group called a 'Loan Show'. This was to get money for war loan bonds towards the latter part of the war or when the war had finished and they formed a very large group which entertained in such places as the Town Hall, in Brisbane - in the Albert Hall in Brisbane, and various places in various cities and mostly it was for, well, it was for everybody but civilians as well as other people. Also there concert parties when they were located, if they were located in towns or places, wherever they went, not only the latter part of the war, but if they were in a position where they could entertain the local people were always invited to come along to see the show if it was practical for them to be there, right. Because a lot of times if places would be in ... you might be in Bathurst or you could be in Singleton or a place where you could perform in a local hall, where they had the facility to do it on more of a permanent basis than putting up

your old truck and your canopy, but wherever it was possible to perform in a hall, quite often they did entertain the people and they appreciated it very much indeed. It was great.

Did you get a different response from civilians than you did from troops?

No, no. They all loved it; they thought it was great. No. Well, it was virtually the same sort of entertainment if they'd have gone along to some show that they'd paid to go in. They were getting the same type of entertainment - virtually the same because it would be the same people that had been entertaining them for the last forty years, they are still entertaining them and some are still in the business. Right, so they'd be getting the same type of a show - maybe there weren't any real girls in it, there weren't until the latter part of the war but apart from that all the rest of it was the same.

Can you tell me about some of the people that were involved in your entertainment unit, who were in it?

Oh, there were various characters. Well, as I said in the start, there was George Wallis Jnr who was probably one of the ... very clever comic and a very talented man who used to be able to do sketches and draw for the artists like Mann and various things like that. He could also play piano, he was a good tapper - he was a bit of everything - he was very good, George. Of course, then - he was our comedy - then we had Michael Pate who was well-known to everybody who later became quite a well-known and prominent film star. Michael was only learn ... well, not learning his trade but he had been in show business prior to that. He was a very good writer and a very good as a straight man and compare. He was excellent in his work. Of course, then we had a chappie by the name of Norm Hetherington who goes under the name now of Mr Squiggle of ABC fame. He was a sketch artist and did various types of work and that and he was also a top line artist in his trade. We had a second comic by the name of Vern Haycroft who comes from Victoria. Well, Vern had been a radio announcer for many years who later on became the manager of various radio stations throughout Victoria and he was very good. He was also a drummer, he had been previously a drummer and played the xylophones, so he was quite a talented bloke as well.

And there was ... our band consisted of a number of musicians. At one time we had a chap by the name of Neville Chynoweth who was an excellent trombonist and organ player who later became a bishop, right, and he has just recently retired - became a bishop in the Anglican church.

(5.00) And then you have your breakdown of your musicians but most of them were multi instrument players. They could play various instruments. Then you had a piano player, Darcy [Capery] and he also played bass fiddle. We had ... well, you had a variety of musicians who were interchangeable and you had violinists from Western Australia, from Perth, Eddie Smith, was an excellent violinist and he was also ... he did a role, he was the driver of the bus that carried all the personnel around and then we all had various jobs. Vern was the transport sergeant, right. So you doubled up in all your work. As I said, I drove the old man around and we did all the bits and pieces that way. We had another very good singer by the name of Don Bell and very delightful tenor from ... comes from South Australia. Well, Don, he was the orderly room sergeant and he did all the paper work. So, in most cases, you find that everybody is doubling up on some other role or doing some other job as well. So we all had our little jobs to slip into. Then you had an electrician because we towed our own portable generator with us wherever we went and Freddie Fisher, he used to set up all the lights and

have to set up all the works and it was a big job to get all this done and have it all ready for the night to open the show with and then with all your ... and all the boys that were involved in the show, they all worked in putting up the platform; they worked in putting the tent up - everybody worked, there wasn't anybody that sat on their bottoms and did nothing because everybody had to work otherwise the show didn't go. And then when you've got rid of your dirty old shirt and your trousers and you went in and you got your ... and your pink dinner jacket on or whatever it was you were going to wear for the night in the show, you came out there all done up like a ... you know, and away you went.

But I talking now of my own personal experience with our group which was known as 4 Detachment and we had ... oh, there was quite a variety of chaps in there. We had a ventriloquist by the name of Frank McGarn, Frank was very good and he had a very good act. I remember on occasion we were in the islands and he had this dummy and we took her down on the beach - a jeep load of us - and a lot of the native little boys came down there and they were watching and, of course, Frank was doing his ventriloquist act and when he made the dummy's head swivel completely around all the kids run for the bush and hid because they thought it was some sort of a voodoo or some sort of a weird and wonderful thing and so we had a great deal of fun with the kids with that. And Frank was excellent, he was very good.

And ... who else have we got. Oh well, we've got ... there are a number of others but time and the memory fades a little bit. But, as I say, everybody had a job and they all did it and they did it well, you know. We had one chap there by the name of Greg Guinery, he came from the YAL boys - that was the Young Australia League - and they toured in South Africa in the pre-war days. It was a group called the Young Australia League, I don't know whether ... you may not have known that, but they were. And they were selected. Colin Croft was another one of them. They were a group of young lads and went and toured overseas. Well, Greg was a beautiful trumpet player but all Greg wanted to do was get a hammer and drive nails into things. So I think we was happier with his hammer than he was with his trumpet, anyway ... but .... Oh we had some real characters and you made your own fun and there were times at different shows, if it got a bit boring, somebody would decide to say, 'We'll all do different parts tonight. You do my bit and I'll do somebody else's and we'll all do a thing' and I think the audience must have thought they were all mad because they were all performing various acts and doing everybody else's parts and it became a real nightmare to us. (laughs) But it was great fun. It sort of relieved the boredom quite a bit when they put on these sort of acts.

Would you have called yourselves an un-military lot?

We weren't terribly regimental at times, I can say that. But when the time came and if it was necessary we could front up and we could stand up and we could do our drill and we could do it all. But we had a certain amount of ... well, because of our situation that we were working ... I think some of the local troops used to get a bit browned off at times when they'd see us probably in the morning not getting up when the bugle went. Because if you were working all night and we might have to move out that night and move to a different location it meant that you had to pull down the whole works and stack it all away and put it onto trucks and get and be ready in the morning and not only that, you had tents to carry - you carried tents to put up - I mean, we had to be self-sufficient within ourselves. We had to be able to do it. The only thing we required when we went any where to go to allocation was to be fed by whatever location we were in. So we were always attached to some group and we went there for their

meals and that sort of thing. But apart from that, we had to be self-sufficient in everything else we had. So that's the way it went.

(10.00)With some of the locals I think they were a bit browned off with the concert party. They'd say, 'Oh, this bloody concert party mob, they don't get out and do this and don't get out and do that' but, by the same token, they pulled their freight and they did their jobs.

It sounds like you would have been working long hours?

Oh, there were many times we were. You could be going there, particularly if you had to pack up sticks and get out in a day or so and move somewhere else. It's ... they don't realise just how much involved in putting a show on until you are part and parcel of it. I thought to myself, you know, well ... you know, 'It looks all right' and in my own case I suppose I was a little bit on the favourite side because being the old boss's right-hand man, I wasn't terribly involved in putting things up and putting them down. But my job was to take the boss and make sure that we had our accommodation was right and we had places to go and stay and where our next set-up was going to be. So, we were sort of an advanced agent for the lot as well as having to take part in the show when the show turned up. But, no, it was good while it lasted.

How often would you have been moving from place to place when you were in the islands?

Oh well, in some places we might have been located in a place for a couple of weeks. It would be in a situation where the troops could come to you. In other words, in a headquarter's location where there were a larger number of troops which could be ... oh, you know, trucked in or they'd come on vehicle or something or even in local localities where people could come to you, then you might stay in a location for a week or you might stay there for a fortnight. But in the cases where they were isolated you had to get out and go to them and that meant you would up stakes and moving out and moving on.

It wasn't a great number of times that we were located for any amount of time because of the situation of having to move and, of course, then when we did move it meant that we had to get barges ... to put our trucks on barges and our jeep or whatever we were going to take with us, and they had to be loaded onto barges and then off-loaded at the other end. I remember on one occasion the only time we could get off the banks of the ... the shore was so steep that the only way we could get off was that when you went in on a wave you dropped the tailboard down and if you got off you were lucky, 'cause I left the spare wheel of my jeep in the bottom of the ocean somewhere and I think it's still there 'cause I don't think they ever found it. But I mean, they're the sort of things that you got involved in, you know.

But, you were kept on the move; you were kept going which is a good thing because you're better off if you're busy than you are sitting around doing naught, but that wasn't very often because if we had any spare time someone of the locals would suggest, 'Well, why don't you do this?' or 'Why don't you do that?', so you'd find yourself involved in something else anyway. So even if it was only a few of you. I know I would go out to the hospitals here at various times when I was hospitalised when I came back on a couple of occasions, some of the boys might just come out into the ward and entertain there. But this was all off the cuff stuff, this wasn't part of the regular business. It was only doing it off their own bat type of thing.

It must have been fairly difficult too to get instruments repaired or to get new bits and pieces for your acts as well?

One of the biggest trouble - not so much nowadays because of the ... particularly with drummers with skins. I mean, in those days they were made out of pig skin. I mean, the drums and the snares and that type of thing, today they're made out of plastic and the whole thing set up is quite different. But you could imagine the stretch ... and things like bass fiddles and things of stringed instruments and that and pianos and things, they were constantly .... You can imagine in the atmosphere up there and the humidity how things stretch and then they warp and then they stretch and thing. There were great difficulty, and, of course, instruments that have ... saxophones would have felt pads and various things like that, and clarinets, all these things come unstuck and you certainly had a nightmare trying to keep all your stuff in the condition ... you know, in a reasonable condition. And there was very seldom you could get any replacements because they just didn't have them.

When we came back ... After we'd do a tour and we'd come back - we'd come back probably ... eventually after a show's got on the road, they moved our headquarters out to Pagewood, right, Pagewood Studios, the old film studios, and when groups, or a detachment returned from a tour they came back there, they refitted out and possibly there might have been a change of personnel or something else and refitted and probably got up to date with your instruments and various other stuff - rekitted out and then you'd be on your way again and then you'd be on your way again and go somewhere else. So ... It wasn't so bad on the mainland here where there was more chances you'd be able to get replacements or get something done or fixed. But the boys were left virtually to their own devices in the islands and had to maintain their own instruments and equipment. So ... and there was a lot of ingenious people that had to provide bits and pieces to keep things stuck together and what have you because things fell apart very quickly up there, particularly your clothing.

So how did they go about doing that? How did they go about improvising when those things happened?

(15.00) Oh ... What is it? Necessity is the mother of invention - right. So, I mean, the boys always found some way. Oh well, they always had kits of their own and as they travelled and moved around they'd pick up a bit of this and they'd had their own pieces and bits of gear. No doubt there'd be a bit of swapping going on if they ever found anybody and, of course, if they got to a place where they might have been a ... where a battalion or a unit had a band of their own, then that would be the time when they could probably go and cannibalise some of their bits and pieces from them if they could get near the instruments but otherwise you were on ... virtually on your own, to make their own repairs and do it. But, oh, there were ways and means and there's nothing like the Australian soldier when it comes to doing a little bit of, you know, improvisation or, what should I say, very mobile lifting things and that type of thing, you know. The hydraulic troops - they'd lift anything that isn't nailed to the floor. That's what they used to call us anyway.

How did people get on in the unit?

Oh, we got on very well. We got on fairly well. I think in the majority of cases they all pitched in and everybody ... well, we knew what we were in ... we knew the situation we were in. But there were very seldom any friction amongst them at all. There was, in my own

personal experience, I don't think in, what, three or four years there was any more than a couple of times when tempers might have got a bit frayed over something. I mean the poor old drummer's frightened he's going to get himself flooded out with water or something else's going to happen or something doesn't go wrong. We had a couple of female impersonators and they used to get a little bit fractious at times, you know, they'd get a bit uptight about things. If their wardrobe was getting a bit wet and damp and various things would happen to their gear and that. 'Cause this is the sort of thing you had to maintain all yourself. They'd press their own c othes. It was nothing to see one of them sitting down there sewing a few buttons on or fixing up something that had gone wrong - that type of thing. But, in all, they got on very well ... we got on very well together. You had you, probably, particular mates that you probably knocked about with more than others but in all you were just a family, right, and you had to be that way otherwise you just didn't ... it didn't work. You can't have friction amongst a small group because, if you do, you're going to have problems and you don't want that type of thing.

And we had a very good old boss - oh dear, he was lovely - old Freddie and he used to make sure that his boys were always well looked after and, you know, he wouldn't stand any business where we were being pelted into some half baked place. He always made sure that his boys at least got the best that he could get for them. Nothing too good for his boys.

Are there any shows that really stick out in your memory?

Oh ... on a couple of occasions where I said, one up in the Wide Bay there where everybody was digging furiously to save the place from being flooded from being washed away virtually. I mean, the water was running through the back and it was coming through one side and out the other of the dressing rooms. And, of course, when our magician goes mad and locks himself up in trucks and sort of things like that. But, oh, it's hard really to pick and choose but I suppose when you can look back over it I suppose there were occasions when ... It's nice to know the show goes over well and it's well received. I mean, sometimes you strike all sorts of problems when the lighting goes bung or the generator bungs out in the middle of something and you've got all sorts of problems. But, oh no. Of course, the occasion when the stage nearly took off, that was a rather exciting experience. I thought we're all going to finish up down the bottom of the hill in a great mangled heap but fortunately she just held together.

And, oh, there was ... not so much as a show but it was a very interesting occasions where we were in Jacquinot Bay and the highest part of the land there was eight feet above sea-level. The place was nothing but a swamp and it was full of snakes and various other things ... (coughs) pardon me ... and we were in the (coughs) ... we were billeted in a big type of hut with mesh walls and canvas roof, right, and it was our usual custom as we usually worked late of a night time, the guys would have a bit of a nibble at something going to bed, and they'd have a bickie or something if they could find something and have a bit of a gnaw or something like that. Anyway, apparently it attracted the mice and that was all right but then one morning one of the boys got up to put his hand underneath his tent to get his groundsheet out and he spotted, what, one of those things like a snake, you see. So somebody yelled out, 'Snake' and it was rather interesting to see sixteen blokes trying to get through the door at the one time to get out of the place. So anyway it so happened that we found two of these - they'd come in there looking for bits and tits and the mice and one another - and when the native boys ... we eventually got 'em out and annihilated them, but when the native boys came along they pointed out these things and did all sorts of gyrations implying that they weren't very nice things to have in the tents. So, after that, it was ... it was a religious ... a ritual of a night time

when you went to bed, you virtually nailed your mosquito net to the side of your bed to make sure there were no intruders coming through of a night or any nasty-nasties getting into bed with you at night time. That really stirred a possum in the place; it was a real circus, that. But they're the sort of things that happen. That's the sort of thing that went on most of the time, you know. There was always incidents like that that would happen just to keep things on the move and keep you entertained.

Do you think you ever had any flops?

(20.00) Oh there are times I suppose you didn't go over so well as you normally would. It's hard to judge the audience reaction. There are times and I think the only time when possibly this would occur is if the troops get too much of a feed of entertainment. What I mean by that, you might have toured somehow or other, by some means or another, where you might tour a couple of shows might clash at the same venue. We were in a couple of them, I know, we were in Lae at one time when we had three shows there. There was a legit. show, there was our show and someone else. But they were only there ... virtually they came together for onward movement to go out but while they were there we entertained the troops and they get a bit blase then because, I mean, they sort of get a pick and choose what you can have a look at. But that only would have ... wouldn't happen more than three or four times in the whole of the time I was with the show. But, no, on the whole I think that they were very well received and, no, I don't think there are any real occasions. We never ever got any boos or we never got kicked out of the place or anything like that, I think in most cases. And we were always entertained afterwards. I mean, we were always invited to the sergeants' mess, it didn't matter what rank you were and whatever you were, you were all invited to the sergeants' mess and you went and had a ... there and they entertained us afterwards with supper and things like that, so, no, we were very well received.

Did you ever perform for native audiences in New Guinea?

Oh yeah, often times. Well, not so much independently to them but they were always invited to come along wherever we were in a position in the islands wherever the native troops were around. Because a lot of the native troops actually worked for the defence department by clearing the area and all that sort of thing and doing menial jobs around the place and they were quite welcome to come along. They used to think it was wonderful; they laughed their heads off at anything at all. They were the greatest audience of all times because they'd laugh at anything. They were all ... they were like children, they were, they were delightful they were. They'd come along with their flowers in their hair and their lap-laps on and whatever on and they'd come along to this sing-a-long. They used to think it was great; wonderful. No, they were very good.

Did you perform much at hospitals?

Well, wherever possible. As I said, there was a smaller group type of thing where a Troubadour, perhaps four or five, or a smaller group could move independently. We had some guys that used to - and one fellow, I think his name was 'Happy' Hammond or ... I've forgotten now, a piano accordion player would just turn up at a hospital or some venue and just start to play there, you know, quite unannounced and that sort of thing and the patients thought that was wonderful because I mean ... but it was more or less the individual or a smaller group that was in that. I mean, you can't ... it isn't easy, as I said, when we were doing the ... working with Gracie up there in Lae and various places having to cart a great piano and

unload it off a truck and then put it into a ward and then lift the thing up and cart it somewhere else, I mean, it wasn't practical to do that. But where it was possible with a guy with a guitar or maybe a violin or a ... as I said, the old piano accordion was a great piece of entertainment and that was more conducive to that sort of thing. But we did, wherever possible, we went in and we worked with a hospital.

That must have been harder, I suppose, because you're looking at people that are sick; that are wounded?

Oh yes, but I mean, whether they had a broken leg or half a foot here or something, they all sat up and they all enjoyed it, and they really did. I mean, it didn't matter what you did, you went there to entertain them and unless they were in a position where they couldn't even see or stand up or do anything, they appreciated it and applauded everybody that ever went there, they did. And I think they appreciated it more than anybody else because of the situation they were in, you know. Oh no, they thought it was great.

It must have been harder for you as entertainers though?

Well, you had to be ... as I said, I could walk out in the middle of the street and start to sing now, I know people would think I was mad, but, I mean, that was the sort of thing. You just walk out there, cold turkey. You mightn't have any musicians or you mightn't have any accompaniment at all but you just went out and you did it and I mean it got that way that after a while, as I said, I'd walk out in the middle of the street and start to sing. People would probably think I'm crazy but that's the sort of thing you had to be able to do and it wasn't always on a stage or somewhere. So, as I said, when we were working up in New Guinea, had a couple of floor boards on the ground and you got out there and you did your thing, right, and that was it.

Were there times, George, when you didn't want to perform?

Oh, it didn't matter whether you wanted to or not. You've got to be a trouper. Yeah, that's one reason why if you join a concert party, you know what you're there for - you're there to entertain people and whether you feel ... I mean, there were times ... I had a mate, I had to hold him up in between his turns because he was full of malaria but he still went on and did his thing, you know, and in between that he was bursting out in fever and sweat and all that sort of thing but he still got on there and played. He played his violin but he still did it. But you had ... that was it. I mean, troops did it hard too but I mean you did your share but that's what you were there for and you went out and did it and that's what it was all about.

Did that happen often, people getting sick in the islands?

Oh, we had people with various things. I mean, you get ... up there once you get in the tropics. I can tell you an incident at one place there where the boys were getting this tinea under their arms and various things and various other crucial places on their body and if I'd have had a coloured camera or a video I would have been able to make a million dollars out of it because if you could see them going down of a morning - we went to the RAP on sick parade - and these guys were all painting each other in various parts of their anatomy with blue dye and pink dye and then you would've really seen something that was worthwhile. (laughs) It's the funniest thing you ever saw.

(25.00) But you live with these things because ... and your toes and your feet ... oh, mosquitoes. I mean, you just had to put up with it and everybody had something wrong with them at some stage or another. I know in my case I had ear trouble. I had what was known as tropical ear - it's like a form of tinea in the ears and nearly drives you round the bend. But, I mean, that's the sort of thing that happens and I didn't have malaria till I come back to Australia and we took off taking atebrin tablets which they used to give us and that sort of thing. I stopped taking them and as soon as I stopped taking them I bust out in malaria. But, I mean, all the guys, we were all faced with the same problems. The water, the heat ... you know, the humidity. Your clothing, I mean, you put a clean set of clothes on and a half an hour later on they were all dripping wet, you might just as well ... And we got to a stage there in one place there - this rain, it would never stop raining - and we never used to go up to the showers, we'd just open the back of the tent, get a cake of soap, walk outside and have our shower outside the tent because there were no sense in going up to the showers further up. We could soap ourselves down and have our shower and that was it and away you go. You had to make use of the conveniences that you had. (laughs) But that's the way it was and, oh dear, that's funny. Many incidents, there's thousands of them, but I mean, those sort of things, you know. That's the type of thing that happened.

How do you look back now on those years?

With a lot of ... well, with a lot of pleasure and a lot of satisfaction and sometimes, probably a little bit of sadness, you know, because even though they were tough days, they were good days; they were wonderful days. And as I said, you made some wonderful mates and it's forty-five or forty-six years. One of our boys at our last ANZAC Day just past, he came from Western Australia and I haven't seen him for forty-four years and we still have our little group and we have our gets-together and they're still the old troupers and no doubt in your travels you're going to move up with a lot of them and they'll probably be telling you the same stories that I've been telling you, or much the same. But, oh no, they were great days and I've made friends that I've had and still have and probably will have until the day I die.

When you say, 'You look back with a little bit of sadness', sadness about what sorts of things?

Oh well, perhaps you might have thought you might have been able to do more somewhere else or done something like that, you know. I mean, you can't do everything for everybody and sometimes there are times when you're in a situation when your in a position when you can't do something which you would like to do. I know in my own instance it was sadness when my brother got killed and I wasn't able to do anything about it. You're stuck somewhere else and something happens and you're not in a position to do anything about it. But I mean, that's the way it was. As I said, I was one of six brothers and they were all in the army at one time. At one time three of them were overseas. So there were various things and times when, you know, there's a bit of sadness about it. But when you weigh it all up the good times outdo the bad times. So ... and I'll never regret it as long as I live.

You mentioned that after the war you went to the Conservatorium and did your certificate. Did you use that for professional reasons?

No. Well, when I was studying through a teach in Sydney you had to take your exams at the Conservatorium, right, even though you might not have studied at the Conservatorium, you had to go there for it. But I was doing popular concerts at that time - I just started to break out

in what was known as popular concerts and you'd appear somewhere where your teacher had set up for you. But I didn't go on with it. As I said, I got the call of the bugle and I went back into the army again. So that didn't do much good as far as the singing is concerned. I never ... I never ... I didn't pursue it any greater length than that, about three years I suppose.

So, in those years that you were in the army, that was really ... you were really a professional singer for that time?

Well, you can say that, yes.

How do you judge that period in terms of your career as a singer? How did you like it?

Oh it was good; it was good. It gave me the opportunity of doing something you liked best to do. So, I mean, what can you be more happy than doing something you like to do, right. So, I don't say that I was singing at my best, probably not. I mean, you didn't have a great opportunity and there wasn't a lot of rehearsing and that but, I mean, you were showing ... you were working in the shows all the time, so I mean, you were actually ... you were doing a trade and that's the way it was.

You mentioned that you sang songs from musicals, which musicals were popular at the time?

Oh, there's *Showboat* ... gee, I can't even thing. Just hang on a minute, *Maree*. *The Desert Song*, well, that's the type of thing mostly and any pop songs, in those days they were modern songs, they weren't called pop songs but all the old numbers that used to come out in all the latest films. You know, the various films that came out, well then everybody was singing whatever songs came out in them so they were the ones that were always popular at that particular time, so they're the type of songs that I used to sing.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

START TAPE 2, SIDE A

You were with the unit when women joined your unit, weren't you, George?

That's right, yes. They came into it later in the ... I think it was 1945. We'd returned from doing a trip somewhere or other and on my return I was taken ill and ... oh, this tropical ear broke out and I put into hospital out at one of the local army hospitals at Marylands and when I returned to Pagewood there was ... I'd seen these women, real live women, running around the place, you see. And there was one little one in particular used to run around there and a couple of others and I didn't take much notice for a while but I said, you know, 'What's going on now?' and they said, 'Oh, they've no allowed that women can join the concert party', because they had then, what, they had a legitimate show and I think they had a musical comedy show and they had various other groups. They had people that could dance; there were ballet dancers, and there were contortionists and singers and types of things like that, and actresses, right, and they were absorbed into the various groups. And it was there that, when we went out on this loan show that a couple of the girls that came with us, one of them was a little lass - they used to call her 'Midge' - her name was 'Midge' Grant. Another one was Dot Scott who was a contortionist, 'Midge' Grant was a ballerina and Dot Scott was a

contortionist and Jean Sinclair was a soprano and there were a few others. But ... Oh, there was another one, there were straight - as I said there were actresses and various people - but it wasn't until we were on the road that - I had very little to do with them, as I said, I was always travelling with the boss wherever it was and used to ... all the other members of these concert parties or group troupe used to travel in a bus, right, so I didn't see very much of them at all except when we were actually in location where we were showing, doing a show. It wasn't long before I got to know ... we were thrown together in some particular blind date or something with one of these girls and I finished up I married her and that was 'Midge', that was 'Midge' Grant. So that came later in the piece, but I had nothing to do with them for a long time but it was only sheerly by accident that I was asked to go along on one occasion to make up the numbers. And they said, 'Oh, bring old Pom along, he'll do, he'll always fill in the gap somewhere', so I mean, they trundled my along.

And we started off on this brother and sister act because I had been involved somebody else and also my now wife I think she was involved with somebody else, we were only virtually brother and sister. But unfortunately ... I won't say unfortunately, fortunately that didn't last too long and we decided to, you know, we'd become more than brother and sister, so we finished up getting married. My wife came out of the army in 1945 and I came out in 1946 and we were married in 1946. So that's my part of the women's side of it; that's about all I know about 'em too and as much as I want to know about these women, (laughs) if you know what I mean.

What sort of difference did they make to the shows do you think?

Oh well, they were most ... well, in some cases they were most welcome and in others I don't think they were because I don't think the guys were used to having these, what did they call 'em, real live females or real females in the show after having all these other birds that we had around the place. But they fitted in all right and, as I said, they were only ... oh, I think it was only under duress that they were permitted to go anywhere else outside of Australia, right. They were mostly where they were located and, of course, wherever we went and wherever the show was the women in the show or the ladies in the show were always billeted amongst the females of that particular ... you know, with the army women there. So we were always separated and segregated from one another and that sort of business. So ... and they had to be very well taken under the wing because of the situation they were in. But, no, they got on very well and the blokes ... particularly the boys looked after them and always looked like big brothers and that sort of thing and made sure that they were not, yo know, annoyed or molested or knocked about or anything like that. And they became quite a happy part and an integral part of the show.

When they went to the islands I guess it would have been a while since some of the troops up there had seen Australian women?

(5.00) Yeah, well, the only show that went up there with women was the legit. show. (Third party interjects, I don't think any women went up there.) Yes, they were. Do you remember one came back? There was a legit. ... what were they doing? *French without Tears* I think was the show they were doing up there but they were in Lae. That was the advance headquarters at the time and that was in 1944 was it, or something ... no, it would be '45. But I think that was as far as they went. They didn't go out of the location; they didn't go out into various bits and pieces of places, they only showed in the headquarters situation where they were ... Well, there was a large AWAS group up there who were virtually impounded behind

a great barricade, you know, a log wall around them all over the place and there was also a military hospital up there as well. So there were always the nurses and the sisters from the hospital and they were absorbed in that environment there. So, I mean, they never ever got into the location where they'd be put out into ... like the shows we were out in the various locations. It would only be under those circumstances they would be permitted to go there. I'm sure.

> I suppose once women became involved in the unit there was a lot more discipline amongst the units as well, it would have been a different thing altogether really wouldn't it?

Oh, no, I don't say there was a great amount of change because the guys, strangely enough, there was ever any great problem as far as that was concerned. I mean, discipline, you were on your trust and you were on, you know, your best behaviour because if you fouled up at all, you were on your way pretty quick smart because you couldn't afford to have people fouling up in the business. I mean, not under circumstances like that. So we very seldom had any problems, and if there was any problem or any family or domestic situation which called for anything at all, well, each member would be packed up and sent on his way. But this, in my time, very seldom anything like that ever happened because, as I said, you were on your best behaviour and do your own thing and as long as you behaved yourself and you did your job well, you didn't ... we didn't any of that great problem.

> What was the period like, that period after the war in the entertainment units travelling around? Was it different?

Oh, that was more free. That was ... well, it was a sort of an anti-climax really because a lot of the guys were waiting on getting out. I mean, this was sort of a ... I think sometimes I feel that some of the guys were imposed upon to stay with the situation because a lot of them would have been able to take their discharge. It didn't bother me in any way because I didn't have any immediate plans other than getting married - what I was going to do or where I was going to go. But, no, it was very pleasant actually. We went to some nice places and they put on some very good shows, they were very good - excellent.

> How often did you change your shows?

Oh well, it would depend on your locations. I mean, you wouldn't be backing up in the same place as you'd have to .... Oh, you mean you long. Well, it'd all depend on how far you had to travel and where you had to go to. I mean, you might be away for twelve months or eighteen months or two years and never hit the same spot twice, so, I mean, you'd virtually be carrying on with the same, you know, program. We often changed it; change different numbers in the show or you might add various comedy skits and things like that that you could chop around and change around and they wouldn't put the same stuff on all the time ... pardon me (coughs) .... But, as I said, it would depend on how often you hit the same locations as to whether you'd want to change or not. And, as I said, you might be out on the road for ... some of them might be up there for twelve months or eighteen months before they even got back ... hit the mainland. So, it would depend basically on those circumstances, right.

> Did you have a hand in writing the shows?

Oh, well, we always had bits and pieces. If you had anything to contribute, well, it was put in the melting pot and if they thought it was good, well, then they'd include it in the show and if they thought it wasn't, well, they'd try it out and see how it goes, see, because a lot of the guys wouldn't write and we had good music writers and that type of thing and we wrote out all our own parts for various instruments and what have you and so on, like that. And, as I said, we had three or four good guys that had material for comics and that sort of thing, so they put their heads together and if you had anything or had any ideas or you might have done something in civvy life - well, a lot of these guys that had come from civvy life had been doing the work so obviously they had something to contribute towards it, right, and if it worked they used it and if it didn't, well, if didn't work, well, you didn't keep that going.

> You say after Michael Pate left you were compare for a while. Can you remember your opening spiel to the show?

Oh, we all used to run out on the stage and do *Strike up the Band* and all that sort of jazz and then we'd get out there and you'd open up with a 'Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen' - the usual old stuff, you know - and so forth and so on. I just can't remember now, it's that long ago. But then you'd very soon get into your first act or whatever has on, right. You might introduce someone to kick the show off, the start the show off, you'd introduce somebody or the band or something or other and away you'd go. You wouldn't be out there too long on your own - too much of spiel.

> Aside from that story you told me before about the magician in the box, can you remember any other acts that went terribly wrong?

(10.00) Oh, I'd have to think. What else have we got. Switch it off - but don't record it. He was very old ...

> What was your group called?

We were known as 'The Islanders'. This was a name that was tabbed, I don't know how it came about but I think Norm Hetherington or George Wallis or Mike might've even got their heads together and they came up with the idea or the name of 'The Islanders' and that was painted on the front of our marquee when we put it up - on our tent. Wherever we showed we were known as 'The Islanders' but our official capacity was 4 Detachment.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A