



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00729
Title	(NF455903) Wilson (née Scott), Dorothy May (Private)
Interviewer	Stokes, Edward
Place made	Not stated
Date made	15 August 1989
Description	Dorothy May (Dot) Wilson (née Scott), Entertainer, interviewed by Edward Stokes for The Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in The War of 1939-45.

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Dot Wilson (nee Scott), the entertainment unit. Tape one, side one.

Dot, just to test the record level could I ask you where you were born and when you were born?

I was born in Junee in New South Wales on the 26th of the tenth, '24.

Right. Dot, just going on a little bit. You were born in Junee; lovely country down there.

Oh, it's beautiful.

Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood and going to school down there?

Well, real country bumpkin. I went to Junee Primary School, Junee Intermediate High. Junee's a small town in the Riverina, on the edge of the Riverina. It's sheep and cattle country ... sheep, wheat and cattle country.

And I understand your father worked for the - or certainly at some time - for the railways?

My father worked on the railway: he was a guard on the railway. We were a very close family. Oh, there were only the four of us. My brother, George, is two years older than me and there's just my mum and dad and my brother and myself.

Right. And what level did you go to in school before you left school?

Oh, like most girls at school in those days, left school about fourteen, fifteen. Yes, I went till I was fifteen and went to work.

What did you do in those first years? I know later, of course, you went into the army, but before you went into the army what were you doing?

I worked at the local egg board for a while. Oh, I left the egg board to go into the army. Before that I was working at a department store in Junee selling sweets and then I went over to the egg board which is just across the road, candling eggs by hand. There were no machinery then; everything had to be done by hand. I worked at the egg board and then I joined up from there when I was eighteen.

Mmm. That's interesting. Just one other thing perhaps to ask a little bit about before going on to ... well, we'll talk about your early dancing and contorting and so on in a minute in the period before the army. But just thinking of the army, in those years before the second war you were obviously quite a young

girl. Do you have much memory of the ANZAC tradition? Was that a big thing in that country town or not?

Oh, yes, always. Always has been and always will. There's always an ANZAC Day march right from littlies. We went to the service. We had the memorial is the clock in the middle of the town and then, as kids, as Brownies, Guides, Cubs, Scouts - I went through the brownie/guide period like most girls do in the country - and we marched and then we had a service at the local theatre and ... and, oh, it was tradition. More tradition I think in the country towns than it is in the city - or was in the city - I don't know what it's like now.

Were you very conscious of - I mean, besides marches and so on, that sort of thing - were you very conscious of the general tradition of ANZAC, of the exploits of Australian men and women in the first war, or not?

Well, ... in the first war? Well, we as little kids we didn't know much about it but as we grew up it was drummed into us at school what it was all about and as we got older and went to different services, memorial services and that, on ANZAC Day and Armistice Day and so forth.

(5.00) We knew what it was all about because we got it in our history lessons at school. And we were very aware of what happened and what our forefathers had done to ... and what they'd given up for our country.

Mmm. The declaration of war in 1939 ... well, first against Germany of course and a couple of years later with Japan, do you remember those events at all clearly or not?

I remember excitement, strange as it may seem. I was about fifteen then and it is an awful thing to have to admit but it was excitement.

Quite a lot of people say that.

Because, I mean, we didn't know what it was all about. We didn't have any idea just what was going to happen. But I must admit that it was excitement.

And do you remember young men going away from Junee to enlist and so on, or not?

Yes, I do. Quite a few. As ....

Was that still exciting or was it sadness?

No, that was sadness; that's when it came home. I mean, declaration of war was exciting, why I don't know, but it came home when the boys started to go away. And the girls too; the nurses, sisters that were quite a bit older than us of course - because I wasn't old enough to go then - but some of the sisters went away with the early ones that went. But, no, that's when it hit home that, you know, it wasn't exciting at all - it was tragic.

Your brother, did you say he was older or younger than you?

My brother is two years older than me.

Did he enlist?

Yes. He ... no, he didn't go out of Australia, my brother. He went to the West. He didn't get out of Australia because of his eyesight.

Mmm. That's interesting. Let's just go back a little bit ... back to your childhood a little bit because, of course, it links in with what you did later in the army. When you were growing up I understand, first of all, dancing was quite a big thing in your life?

Oh well, most ... you've got to live in a small country town - well, I suppose the area is big, but the town itself is not very big - most girls, when they are growing up, if they show any talent at all go to the local dancing teacher and they learn to dance and I went. I started when I was two and ....

I think there's an amusing story about it, isn't there?

Yes, I blotted my copy book beautifully. I stood in the middle of the hall and wet my pants.

It must have been somewhat traumatic for a two year old!

It was very traumatic. But I was never pushed to dance. I loved ... once I got past that stage, I loved it and I loved dancing. I loved national dancing and ....

What do you mean by national dancing?

Oh, Highland dancing, like the Highland flings and [inaudible] and sword dancing and then the Irish dancing - the jigs and things like that. I loved them and I've got an apronful of medals to show for that from my childhood.

Mmm. And I think the dancing lead on to some ... well, there was some skill and then, no doubt, a lot of hard work in contorting.

Yes, that's right (coughs). Pardon me. Tap dancing I did too and ballet but then I found that I could do the splits and from there on I was taught to do bend-backs and chest rolls and quite a few skills I learnt and I found ... they found that I was pretty good at it and so concentrated on this more so than my dancing from there on. And every amateur show that was on around the place, I was in.

These are local charity events and so on?

Oh yes, yes. Little amateur shows all round the area. But that area covered ... we'd do a show for Junee and then we'd take it out to Illabo and ... out to all the country areas and put it on for, you know, different charities.

That kind of community show ... events, they were very much a feature of life in those days. Is it so much today, do you think, when you go back there, or not?

Oh no, no. No, people sit at home and shush you when somebody walks in the door because they're watching something on telly. No, we used to have ... oh, two and three nights a week rehearsals and then the big night came and everybody was just rapt in it. And it wasn't only just the performers, the whole town would be behind it. Now it doesn't happen these days; not to that extent anyhow.

(10.00) Yes, I was just going to ask you a little bit more about contorting. It's not something I know much about and I don't know if it's a common a thing these days. What were the main skills, what were the main attraction of it?

Oh, twisting of the body, I think. Doing things with your body that nobody thought was possible.

So it's really going beyond straight gymnastics?

Oh yes. It's ... I've often had it said to me on many occasions, 'Oh, you must be double-jointed', and when you stop and think you'd look pretty silly if you were double-jointed. There's no such thing as double-joints. It's loose joints, supple muscles. I mean, for gymnastics you don't try ... you lay on your tummy, bring your legs over and ... oh, sorry, and tie your feet round your neck or ... no, it's a lot of skills.

How much ... how much of contorting is just some individuals being born with looser bodies than others and how much of it is hard work and discipline and practice?

Well, I think anybody could do it if they started young, while they're nice and supple but regardless of when they start, it's still a lot of hard work - a lot of hard work and practice too to perfect your act. I know I can't balance and I could have done a lot better if I could have balanced but I can't balance but my tricks were all done on the floor.

Did you teach yourself, Dot, or was there somebody else teaching you and motivating you and keeping you up to the mark in terms of training?

Well, when I was little I found that I could do the splits and then I found that I could do other things and I did catherine-wheels and bend-backs but I used to do my bend-backs just straight over and straight down. I didn't have it perfected - nothing I did was perfection that I taught myself. But when I went into the army it was [Russell Gough?] that perfected my tricks for me and he was .... I went in to go in with the musical comedy and I did my tricks for Russell and he showed me that my hands should have been closer to my ... touching my heels in a bend-back instead of straight down in a U and lots of things like that. He sorted all that out for me but then I found I was no good for the musical comedy because they wanted somebody that could balance and I nearly killed Russell trying to balance. But I ... with him trying to

hold me and I was a deadweight because I just couldn't balance; didn't know anything about it. So ...

> Just before we go on to talking about the army, did you ever think of using ... following contorting as a life? Perhaps joining a circus, that sort of thing, or doing it on the stage in civilian life?

After the army or before the army?

> Well, before. I mean, say, as a teenager, was this ever an ambition?

No, I didn't really think of it as that. It was just something that I amused myself with and I entertained other people with and it kept me fit. No, that never ever entered my head before I went into the army.

> Mmm. That's interesting. Well, just going on to the army. I think you were ... you joined the army first at ... hang on. Yes, I know it was Ingleburn, Dot, that you first went when you enlisted. I was just wondering if I could ask you why you enlisted?

Oh, I was very patriotic. I was out to do my bit for my country and that's what it was all about. Very, oh, just normal I suppose; normal Australian girl. I wanted to be in and do my bit and the thing was that we were told that by going in we'd release a man from duty in Australia to go overseas and do his soldiering on overseas. So this was the idea to release a man; each girl that went in released one man to fight for his country.

> And when you made your decision to enlist was there support from your family? How were they involved?

Oh no. No, no. I was the apple of my father's eye; no way, I had a big job. I fought all the way and I think it was just for peace sake that they let me go in the finish because we, as I said before, we were a very close family and never any problems and, no, they didn't want me to go.

(15.00) Mmm. Obviously you wouldn't have served overseas. I don't think that was ever envisaged for women. So was your father worried or were his thoughts more to do with family closeness were they?

Just me leaving home; I'd never been away from home before. Other than the fact that he didn't think I'd manage and, I mean, I used to come home from a dance or a ball and just walk of my evening gown and drop it on the floor and my mum used to come in and pick it up. I never did ... I'd never washed a thing. I never had do anything for myself: spoilt brat that I was.

> Mmm. That's interesting.

Never had to do a thing for myself.

So they were being rather protective.

Very protective; over protective. But as it turned out, you know, they were right to start with because I was so homesick. I'll never forget it. I wrote home and said, 'I've got my tin hat, my respirator, three needles and a 'vac'. That was the text of my letter and I was so unhappy that I'd ... at that stage and I'd got a palliasse with half a dozen straws in it to sleep on.

Mmm, yeah. Just going on to actually enlisting. Where did you go to enlist? Did people come out to Junee or did you have to go to Wagga or Sydney to enlist?

I went to Sydney, on my own, first time. I went to ... I think it was Vic Barracks, I'm pretty sure it was Vic Barracks where I enlisted. I had written away. I had written an application form to go into the army. It's a long time ago and I've got no records left after Tracy so I just can't remember but I'm pretty sure I got off the train in Sydney and had to go to Vic Barracks.

Just to clarify by the way, after Tracy is after Cyclone Tracy. Do you remember the details of the ... I guess there was some interview and medicals and that sort of thing. Do you remember that at all?

Oh yes. We had interviews and medicals and I had rheumatic fever when I was eight years old and I was always lead to believe that I had a rheumatic heart and this, I think, was a lot to do with why my parents didn't want me to go. But it never ever worried me. I didn't worry about it so my heart didn't worry me and it wasn't picked up when I went into the army. I went to ... I went down to Sydney and joined up. Was accepted into the army then I came back home to wait my call-up and in that time I went to the dentist and had my teeth fixed up. But I got my call-up a bit soon and I had a temporary filling in my tooth and I went in and was passed DP1 with my ... with the temporary filling in my tooth which lasted me a couple of years until it fell out ... oh, well, it didn't last me a couple of years - I'd put up with it a couple of years with it driving me up the wall - and I finished up I was terrified of dentists but I did eventually put myself on a dental parade and went out to the main camp and a [Doctor Pompenov?] pulled it out for me after blasting me about leaving it so long and I didn't even notice him pulling it out. I put up with that aching tooth for twelve months or more.

Right. People were quite a lot more stoic in those days perhaps. Dot, going onto training. You joined the army, I know not initially as an entertainer, just as a straight, you know, woman ....

To do my bit.

What was training like? What did you do?

Oh, basic training was pretty well the same as the men do. Perhaps not quite as hard. We did our physical training, our route marches, our ...

Lots of drill I would imagine?

Oh, lots of drill; yeah, lots of drill.

Do you think that was worthwhile or not?

Oh, yes, wonderful. But not at the time, we resented it but I can see what it was all about now. There was a lot discipline attached to that too and discipline was something that I'd never had. I learnt that the hard way. I learnt how to wash when I put all my clothes in the copper and boiled them all up together - woollens and everything - and then had to pay for what I ruined out of my first pay which was three bob a day. So, I learnt that the hard way and I learnt that you just couldn't drop things on the floor because the sergeant wouldn't come round and pick them up like Mum used to.

I'd imagine you were living in some kind of barracks with other women, were you?

Oh yes. Oh this is ... after I went to ... oh, this is at Ingleburn, yes, you learn all those things there and you learn to - not that I was backward in making friends - but you meet all types and you've got to live with people to know them and I made some fantastic friends. Friendships that haven't carried on through basic training camp or even up to Bathurst but my friends that I made in the entertainment unit, there is still very close bond there between most of us.

(20.00) Yes, you were saying that before. I was just wondering if there's anything more you think you could add about, you know, the whole process of getting into the army, the discipline and how that affected a young woman who was obviously used to a much freer and, I suppose, a freer life?

Well, I wouldn't say easier life. I was over-protected. If I went to the movies, right up I think until my brother went into the army, oh, there always had to be somebody go with me. I was over-protected. I think I was over-protected. I loved my parents for it though. It was very hard when you were spoilt and everything done for you to go into the army and find out that you've got to do things for yourself but you learn the hard way and by doing it that way I think you appreciate it more. I can remember when I was in Bathurst I'd never seen snow before and I can remember being locked out of the hut in a pair of milanese pyjamas when I went out to have a look at it. They locked me out just so I'd get the feel of it too.

What about men? I'd assume where you were training there were men training too and a lot more men than women I imagine. How was that, getting on with a bunch of strange men?

Well, there was a funny story I can tell you about and I suppose it happened to every intake. When we were going into Vic Barracks, still in civies, and there were some soldiers walking past and every one of them sang out 'You'll be sorry' and 'Don't forget to eat that stew because if you don't eat it tonight we'll get it for breakfast in the morning'. No, but as far as the men were concerned, they were fantastic; they were wonderful. They looked after us. Like once we got into a situation where we were with the men all the time, like in ordinance stores and that, they were good; they were really wonderful. I couldn't say anything too highly about them. There was ... they were fantastic to us.

So was there ... in your training and then when you first went to, say, for example, to Bathurst working in stores, was there a lot of shared social life with men and women in the army?

Oh, yes. We had a dance once a week out at the main camp at Bathurst and the men ... the soldiers out at the main camp used to come to the dances and, oh, we went out with one another to local dances. We weren't terribly popular at local dances at Bathurst. They didn't like the army in Bathurst because the 9th Divi. I think had gone through and smashed the place up and so nobody was very popular up there ...

Mmm. That's interesting.

... even the girls.

And that really was a fairly solid feeling, was it?

Yes it was. It's strange but it bonded the service personnel together all the more and then, I suppose, because of this they disliked us that much more. We were supposed to assimilate as such as we could, to a certain extent, but we weren't accepted up there.

Did the army make clear efforts to encourage contact between the civilian population and the service people, or not?

Oh, yes, yes. We were supposed to. We were supposed to fit into the community but I can remember walking down the street in Bathurst with a friend of mine one day and I was ... felt faint and she propped me up against a fence and raced in and asked the lady for a drink of water for me and she came out empty-handed.

Mmm. That must have been rather galling. How did people in the army feel about that sort of thing given that the general motive for most people I imagine was to join the army to serve their country and getting that sort of treatment dished back to them?

(Coughs) pardon me. I think it all went back ... I think it was the 9th Divi., I'm not sure whether it was the 7th or 9th Divi. marched through Bathurst and they did a lot of damage. It was the first lot of men that went overseas and I'm not sure which one it was, but I know they did a lot of damage and I think this is why, on the whole, the army wasn't accepted in Bathurst.

(25.00) And could people in the army just accept that that had happened and therefore understand the feelings or was there resentment back towards the civilian population?

Oh, well, I think we all realised that none of us were going to be there for any length of time so that it really didn't matter and we had one another and so I think they led their lives and we led ours. But it bonded us - the service personnel - together. I don't know if this happened in every town. I didn't notice it in Albury when I went to Bandiana but then that's country too, which is different. I know that it happened with the air force in Wagga.

> Just staying in Bathurst for a moment, Dot. I know you were saying that you were often homesick and there was a rather ... I thought rather touching story of how you used to sometimes just go down to Sydney to look at people coming from Junee.

No, that's when I was in Ingleburn, when I was in basic training camp. On my rest-day I'd spend it in on Central Station under the clock looking at the timetables the trains were coming in and I would wait to see if anybody from Junee got off the train. I used to shoot through from Bathurst and do the same thing I must admit but I'd become a soldier then and I could sleep on the racks - the luggage-racks - and I could walk up to somebody on the station knowing that I didn't have a leave pass or ticket - this is at Bathurst - and I'd walk up to a military policeman and say, 'Look, is there any seats? Do you know if there's many seats on the train?' and I've been taken and put into a seat by an MP and ....

> And they, of course, knew you were ....

They didn't know I was shooting through, no, but I was so ... I was so definite about it that I just walked straight up and they would just take it for granted that I had all of my papers and everything that ... but if I'd sneaked on that would be a different story.

> And these disappearing acts to Junee, they were fairly regular from Bathurst, were they?

Yes, on a pretty regular basis. But I used to always strike some ... I could pick out the kind eye on a man that was on the barrier at Central Station without too much trouble. It used to be somebody old and most of them were older men, but I knew that I could walk through there. And then I had a friend in the RTO's office, if I wanted to nick through home to Junee I had him there to help me. And then when I got home to Junee there was no problems at all and it was only a matter of ... because I knew everybody at Junee and everybody knew me and everybody was so pleased to see me when I came home that I ... I ... it was no question of whether I had a leave pass or a ticket or anything and I was always back in camp for rollcall when I was supposed to be.

> It was quite a long journey for a short time in Junee?

Oh, it was always worth it.

> Just a moment. I was just seeing how that tape was going. Just going back to the period when you were in Bathurst, I think working in stores there, there was a interesting anecdote I thought of the Japanese breakout from Cowra. Where were you when you first heard about that?

We were out at the main camp at Bathurst at a dance and there was an announcement made - no reason given - but all the boys were called out and we were all sent home and then we heard the news that the Japs had broken out of Cowra and then that they would make for - I don't know who put the story round, but the story was - that they would make for where there were a lot of women and I suppose Bathurst camp - AWAS camp - was a lot of women. So

we put up ARPs all over our windows and doors and not standing for was it normally stands for in the army but 'already pregnant'.

> You did mention that before and I was going to ask, was the, I mean, was that ... were they put up in a serious kind of way, or as a joke?

As a joke, of course, yes. No, it was a joke. We didn't think for one minute that the Japs would come all the way from Cowra just to find us. I didn't think that they would make for women either but that was just a bit of rebellion against the powers that be.

> I think that episode petered out fairly quickly, didn't it?

Oh yes. That didn't take long at all. They sorted that one out quick smart. I don't any of them got - I wouldn't be sure - but I don't think they got very far out of Cowra.

> No, I think that's the story.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Dot Wilson. Tape one, side two. The entertainment unit episode.

> Dot, just before we go on to talk about your audition for the entertainment unit and so on, was there anything else that you'd think of as significant of the period when you were at Bathurst and the ordinance depot and Bandiana and so on? Is there anything that stands out in your mind?

No, not really, only the fact that, as far as Bathurst is concerned, when I watch the races on telly - that's the car races, the Bathurst car races on telly - once a year it brings back memories. I can say, 'Oh, the sheds aren't there any more', but I can pick out, oh, that's where that shed was and that's where this other shed was as the cars go round sometimes. No, only getting onto the business about the Japanese breaking out as I was saying before, we were put in a closed ... we were in a closed camp situation where ... oh, it was Marsden, it was an old girls' school - the name has just come back to me - where we were. Headquarters was in Bathurst itself but we were out at Marsden, this girls' college, and we were in the stables. We were billeted in the stables. And at that period we were ... it was a closed camp situation, or they thought it was. We had guards round the perimeter of the college and we soon worked out how many steps it took the guard to walk that way and how long it would take us to go the other way. So we used to sneak out and we'd get back in the same way.

> Mmm. That's interesting. Well, going onto the entertainment episode. During this period when you've been in the army ...

That must me annoying you? Sorry.

> What the smoke?

Mmm

No, no. That's all right. During that period at Ingleburn, Bathurst going onto Bandiana, had you been involved in any impromptu performances and that sort of thing, or not?

Oh yes, yes. We used to put on our own little shows and we'd ... if I had the time to practice I could tap dance. I'd get the steps set in my mind and in my feet and as long as I could remember which step came after which, which I always did if I had plenty of time to do it, we had our little ballets - our tap ballets, our kicking ballets and I would contort.

And these were done for people within your own unit, were they?

Only in the unit, yes. And that was in Bathurst. I can't remember doing it in Bandiana.

Did you have ... what were the facilities like in Bathurst for putting on that kind of show? Was there a stage - a real stage - or was it just a set-up platform of some sort?

I can't remember to be quite honest, Ed. I know that we did have a stage and it was ... it might have been at the Q store hut or something like that where it was all army. I think that's possibly where it was. But I know that we didn't put on any shows for the locals; we did it for our own benefit and there was no charge to go in so it wasn't for a charity or anything like that - it was just for our own entertainment.

Mmm. To fill out the social hours.

Fill in, yes.

(5.00) Just one other thing that perhaps is interesting having come straight from home. People often talk about army food. What was that like and what were living conditions like generally? Were they inadequate, adequate, good - how do you recall that?

Oh, basic. We did have sheets. We changed them once a week but we - sheets and pillowslips - but we didn't have mattresses, we had palliasses. And I can remember once finding nest of mice in my palliasse and it nearly killed me. I'm terrified of mice.

Sounds a somewhat unpleasant experience?

Absolutely shocking. And, of course, you had to fill your own palliasse and it was ... all depends how many had been there before you, how much straw was left. So, I was a bit slack I suppose and I emptied my palliasse out and found all these mice in it and then was very ... didn't like the idea of sticking my hands into the new straw or hay or whatever it was to fill it up again, so I just put a little bit in.

That's rather an interesting sidelight, Dot ...

Very uncomfortable.

... because a lot of people, well, you know, palliasses were part of the pattern of life, but were they ... the straw was changed from time to time was it?

Oh yes, yes.

Why was that? Did it crush down or something?

I think it might have been the mice. I'm not sure about that but that was only in training camp that I struck that with the mice.

And what about food?

Well, stews. I'd never eaten stews. Oh well, I'd eaten stews but like Mum used to make and they were so much different. So I lived on bread and butter for the first ... oh, six weeks. I went to ... I did my training which is three weeks, I think it was three weeks, in Ingleburn and then in holding company in Ingleburn waiting to be placed somewhere. So I was at Ingleburn for six weeks and for those six weeks I lived on bread and butter and I ....

Do you mean that literally?

Literally, yeah. I couldn't eat the army food. I suppose because it was cooked in bulk and needless to say I put on so much weight. I went up to ten stone six ... from eight stone three to ten stone six in six weeks. Then I used to go out ... I used to run then but once ... it's amazing that the drill and that in basic training camp didn't get it off me. But then in holding company it did because we had to do so much more because there was nothing else for us to do. We did a lot of drill and that and I suppose I just got used to it and then I started to eat the meal. But ... only because it was cooked in bulk. It was all good and wholesome food but ....

Just institution food.

Yes, it wasn't like Mum used to make and I think that was the problem. But, on the whole, it was pretty good. There was good cooks and that in the army but ... and it was varied but you knew that you were going to get so-and-so on Monday. There were set meals for each day and if you didn't want to have corned meat and cabbage well then you didn't go on Wednesdays for lunch.

You went and found the bread and butter. That reminds me ... I could tell you a story about ... I'll just switch off.

We were just, to get the context, talking about this recent ABC program on Kapooka, I think, and sort of women being harassed on their training in the army. Going back to your days, was there any harassing of women on the parade ground or off, for example, subtle sexual pressures that, you know, men wanted things that women didn't want to give them, or not?

No, never; never. We were treated like buddies ... oh, by the ordinary enlisted man and we knew that rank ... like we were privates and all new to the army in our basic training and we knew that a corporal and even a lance corporal, they were higher than us and we had to do what we were told but it was in a disciplinary manner, not anything else. We soon knew that as far as we were concerned we were there to do a job. We were being trained to do a job and that was it; that's what we trained for. We weren't ... we had CSMs that had loud bellowy voices but he bellowed at the lot of us just so he was heard. But there was nothing ever personal in it. It was ... we were a platoon and we had to do our training and for him to be heard he had to yell. But there was never ever any one person picked out, no.

(10.00) And no open victimisation or bullying, no bullying of people?

No, no, no. No, certainly no harassment or anything, no.

That's interesting, Dot. Well, just going a bit. Let's go on a bit to the period when you decide to try for the entertainment unit. You're at Bandiana - that's incidentally for the record is B-a-n-d-i-a-n-a - where abouts is that roughly by the way?

It's just over the border from Albury. Well, Albury's one side and Wodonga's the other side. So it's near Wodonga. So it's in the Victorian side.

So you were back in your home territory or close to it.

Close to it. I was just out of my home territory. I was in Victoria and I was a New South Welshman - but not far from home.

Anyway, it was there that you decided to try for the entertainment unit. What had you heard about it? Why did you decide to do that?

I think there was something came through when we were in Bathurst about - I can't remember just how it came through - but there was something came up in order somewhere along the line and asking for anybody that was interested and talented enough to join the entertainment unit. So I made application while I was in Bathurst and then in the meantime I was transferred to Bandiana and I was called up from Bandiana to Sydney for a ... to have an audition.

How did you feel about that?

Oh, absolutely wonderful, on top of the world but worried whether I'd make it or not. But I went down and had the audition with Jimmy Davidson and with the specific purpose of going into the musical comedy. But after training with Russell Gough for a few days found that I couldn't balance and I couldn't be taught to balance and that's what he needed a partner to work with him. But he sorted my tricks out for me as far as my contorting was concerned and I'd never been stiff in my life before but after working for a week with him, oh once the week was over I was all right, but the first day when he took me through my tricks and started perfecting them for me the next morning I had to roll out of bed and I'd think, oh, he won't

make me do them today but he did. He made me do them and each day a bit of stiffness worked itself out of me.

So, just to clarify, when you went down to Sydney, there was some kind of audition was there with Jim Davidson?

Yeah, yeah.

And then they decided that there was a potential that they wanted to ...

They wanted me in the musical comedy show. See, there was three different areas: there was the legit show which were plays and so forth and so on; and then there was the musical comedy which is the singing and dancing, oh, perhaps, ['*Maid of the Mountain*'?] or something like that; and then there was the review which was just the ordinary different acts. But they ... there was nobody back in camp and they hadn't got any girls in for the review show at that time, so when I didn't work out with Russell Gough then I stayed in camp and waited for them to audition and some other girls to come in. And when the detachment came back, the men - it was wholly men - George Wallace's crew, when they came back then the girls were already there and we worked with them and rehearsed with them and they worked out the routines and everything. Midge was a big help to me, she ...

This is Midge ...

Pomeroy - Midge Grant that used to be. She was a big help to me. I used to just go on and do my tricks and one after the other and she worked out a routine for me. You know, I used to dance on with Frank McGarn as my partner. We did a dance and he'd take my skirt off and leave me there in my costume and then I would go straight into my contorting act.

Mmm. Perhaps if we could come back to the actual act and the different ways it was done just in a minute, you mentioned Jim Davidson going down for the audition, he was obviously a fairly important figure in the whole army entertainment scene, I think?

He was the boss of the ... he was in charge of the whole of the army entertainment.

(15.00) What sort of man was he?

Oh, he was a funny man. He's a ... I can remember my brother was getting married and I was very upset about it because he didn't ... my brother didn't know ... he thought I was away somewhere else and I didn't get an invitation to the wedding and I went and saw Jimmy Davidson - Colonel Davidson - and he told me that was one time that he was sorry that he didn't have an AWAS officer, that I could have talked to her. But no way in the world was he going to let me go out and ruin my brother's wedding by going crook because I didn't get an invitation. There was only two of us - my brother and I - but I don't know why it was that I didn't get an invitation. I think it was because - it was so long ago - I think it was because the invitation went home to my parents and I was included and I just ... it happened like at the drop of a hat they decided to get married and they got married and I didn't know, that's right, I didn't know until after they were married.

So, from that anecdote, are you saying that he was ....

He was very understanding if you needed something ... but he used to do some funny things. I complained because he called our swimming parades off. We used to go down to Maroubra - not that I went in the water - being a country bumpkin I was terrified of sharks. So he said, 'Do you want to go swimming?', and I said, 'Yes'. And he said, 'Right, you can go swimming' so he sent me down on my own in his staff car with his driver which I felt like a red woman afterwards, but that was just something to prove a point to me somehow that you just don't ask the Colonel why you can't go swimming. That was a punishment.

But you were saying before he was very understanding. That doesn't seem a particularly understanding thing to do?

That was the other side of Jimmy Davidson. He ... I was on the switchboard while I was waiting for the other girls to come into the unit, while they were being found and auditioned and came in, and he would ring me up and say, 'Get off your bum and do so-and-so', you know, and he'd have me in tears and then he'd put his head in the switchboard door and say, 'What's the matter with you?'. But there was a kind side to him but he was a very strange man and he was a very talented man. Of course, he was ABC Dance Band leader ...

Do you think a man like him, being ... we were talking about this a bit before, he obviously was a professional entertainer himself before the war, one might tend to think that people like that have fairly strong characters and they are fairly individual people. Do you think people such as him found it hard to fit in to the much more disciplined life of an army or not?

Oh, I don't think so, not with him. This was Jimmy Davidson: there were quite a few different sides to him. Like for me to keep my figure he gave me his cigarette ration and took my chocolates. So I had double cigarette ration and he took ... and I gave him my chocolate ration. So that my figure had to be perfect while I was contorting. He'd think about things like that. Well, it didn't worry me about my chocolates; it worried me if I couldn't get my smokes. He was a very thoughtful person in lots of ways but he was a very hard man to really know, you never really knew him. A strange man but very talented man. He couldn't read a score, so I've heard. I don't know whether it's true or not but he ... no, but if that's the case then nobody ever knew that he couldn't read a score.

That's fascinating. Just a moment. Just add a clarifying note there: Dot was saying the business with her brother was that he got married extremely quickly and she found out afterwards and was understandably upset.

This is just going on with Dot after lunch. Dot, there was ... you asked just to remind me about that amusing anecdote of waiting at Central Station when things went wrong.

Oh, when I was waiting at ... on one of my many trips, homesick trips, to Central Station under the clock looking at the timetables for the country trains to come in. I used to wait to see if anybody got off the train from Junee and I was standing there waiting in a great coat,

full uniform, and you've got to understand that army issue knickers have one button on them and that button at a crucial time in my life, the most embarrassing time I think, gave way and I finished up with my nickers down round my feet and I took one foot out and flipped with the other foot and in one movement had it in my great coat pocket. I don't know if anybody saw it and I didn't wait round to find out if anybody did, I took off.

(20.00) It's handy to be a contortionist in those situations. Just before we go back to talking about the contorting in the routines and so on. Once you'd been accepted into the entertainment unit and you were basically doing that, were you still involved in other army duties or were you completely freed from other chores, whatever they were?

In the entertainment unit?

Mmm.

I did the switchboard while I was waiting. As I said, I went in specifically to go into the musical comedy but couldn't manage the work because I couldn't balance and so I did the switchboard waiting for the girls to be recruited for the review show. So I worked on the switchboard.

I see. But apart from that there were no other general duties?

No. No. I did guard duty once but that was as a punishment.

I think that was after you'd gone AWOL to ....

Went out to check on ... I'd seen my uncle's name in the prisoners-of-war that had been released and so I just walked out and took off to go out to Padstow to see my aunty and ran into Jimmy Davidson and another big brass ... Colonel Davidson and some big brass from amenities and was asked what I was doing and I was sent back to camp on my honour because I didn't realise, I didn't even stop to think - not that it probably would have made any difference - but it was a closed camp night and I wasn't supposed to be out anyhow. But, I went back on my honour and then, as a result of that, I had to do guard duty.

Mmm. That's interesting. Just going back to your contorting. We might talk in a moment about some of the different places that you went to as an entertainer and the reaction of the people there and so on, Dot. But the basic routine, you said you developed a routine where you danced onto the stage with somebody, could you tell us a little more about how that evolved and what it was like in the end?

Well, when I first started out, when I was first contorting, I just used to go on and just go through my tricks as they came. I worked it out that this one came here and that one came there and I just did them. But visually I don't suppose it was spot-on, but that's where Midge took over and she worked out a routine for me and then Frank McGarn and myself, we did a dance - me with a long skirt and my very brief costume underneath and when we finished the

dance Frank would take my skirt off and take it away with him and I just would go into my routine.

> And the routine contorting, can you ... is it easy to describe what you did or is that difficult unless you know the language of contortionists?

Well, perhaps if I still remember the language of contortionists or if the language was still the same, which I doubt, but I used to do lampposts which entails a bend-back and then down on your elbows with your face going out between you legs and then you've got your head in between your legs ... oh, I don't know how to explain this, but it's a backward ... a back-bend, a crawl around and then between your legs on your elbows and then one leg up in the air - that was called a lamppost. And there was chest rolls and splits and round splits, side splits, straight splits ... oh, I can't remember.

> That's fine.

Because I don't do them any more, you see, only the splits. At sixty-four I think I'm not doing too bad when I can still do the splits.

> Mmm. I'd say so. Well, perhaps we can move on. I mean, the general picture is obviously there of ....

But it was worked out into a very nice routine that was very visual and very good with thanks to Midge.

> Yeah. Well, you were saying that after you'd become a full member of the unit you did really quite a lot of travelling around, I think, mostly New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. You used to go to army bases, I think detention camps. What's you're general recollection of those visits? Which, for example, were the most enjoyable places to be?

Oh, the hospitals I think were the most enjoyable.

(25.00) Why was that?

Oh, I suppose because most of the people there were sick and they needed a bit of boosting, although we had lots of fun wherever we went. I can remember at one the detention camps, army boobers we called them, I had to ... the men had never seen a bikini before and my briefs were very brief and they started coming up onto the stage and I had to have a man at each side of the stage at the finish with a loaded revolver.

> Where was that? Had that been thought out beforehand or did that just evolved as the audience ....

That just evolved. Nobody even though that that might happen.

> Did that ever ... I mean, that obviously was a very male situation and ...

Yeah, all males there.

> ... men cooped-up, you know, in military prisons aren't exactly, I'd imagine, thrilled at being there. Did that situation worry you at all or not?

No, no. As I have said before. We had such good backup from our blokes, they treated us like sisters and nobody did the wrong thing by us. If you walked down to one of the orderly rooms and somebody was swearing or something they were put in their place, you know, before you walked in. They weren't allowed to say anything out of place in front of us and nobody would have. If anybody ever did it was just an accident that we were there at the wrong time. No, they were fantastic. But as far as this other business was ... once they settled down, once the men settled down, they sat back and watched the show and everything was wonderful.

> This is in the detention camps?

Mmm.

> Right. So they just had to be kept in check a bit. Well, if hospitals were the most satisfying place to work, where did you - apart from that prison story - where do you think you had the most challenge, the most difficulty in putting on a good act? Would that depend on the kind of audience or the place where you had poor facilities and so on?

Well, we always ... oh, there were times when we had to ... like in most cases we went to we had stages and that. But there were times when we went to a camp where we had to put up our own dressing rooms and that and we'd be walking through the men's dressing shed ... dressing room - that's a swimmer talking, dressing shed - all the men would walk through ours with their eyes shut or say, 'I'm coming through, cover yourself', but there was never any problems.

> What about the general facilities of stages and facilities for making your costumes and props and so on? Was there a lot of improvising or did you have quite good ....

Oh, we did a lot of improvising for different things. But as far as our wardrobe was concerned, we had a full wardrobe at Pagewood and wardrobe mistress and everybody was set out very well with their costumes and fitted up well. No, that covered the whole of the entertainment unit. You see, we had our full wardrobe there.

> Did you have much input into the design of your costumes or was the wardrobe mistress?

That was the wardrobe mistress. Oh, perhaps ... I don't know about Midge, but I would reckon that Midge would have a lot of input into her costume because she was in show business before she went into the army and she knew what she wanted and as far as I was concerned what they did just went over well with me. If it hadn't have been right I'm sure Midge would have sorted them out but I didn't know a lot about that sort of thing but I was

very happy with my costume. It was apricot satin covered with black lace and from a distance it looked like leopard skin; it was beautiful.

> Mmm. It sounds lovely. Talking of costumes, there is one story that I must ask you to tell because it's so, in its own way, so humorous really but I can imagine at the time very ... more than a little humiliating?

Well, it was funny after it was all finished and we all laughed about it and nobody was terribly embarrassed about it - nobody was embarrassed only me to start with. I was so excited, my first show, I was so excited and everybody was looking after me and helping me and my hair was being done and this was being done and we did all that ourselves - we didn't have hairdressers or anything following us around - that was something we did ourselves. We did everything for ourselves except wardrobe and this particular time it was my first big show and I went on and I had a standing ovation and I was so thrilled, going out on the stage, doing my job, did it perfectly and I had a standing ovation but what I didn't realise that - until I got off - and Mike told me that I'd forgot to put my knickers under my costume. So, yes, it was embarrassing. We can laugh about it now. And they all laughed about it and they all made me feel good about it, so.

> Yes, well, it must have been a rare treat for those fellows anyway.

(Laughs) oh, they didn't see too much.

> There was one other very amusing story that sort of follows on from that of how things can go disastrously wrong when you've got ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Dot Wilson. Tape two, side one, or side three of the whole lot.
>
> Dot, yes, I was just saying how things can go somewhat wrong under the pressure of performance and this was the story of the magician. How did all that begin?

Well, Midge and I were the magician's assistant and it was the Chinese head chopper and we had this new little fellow in - I can't even remember his name - he'd just recently joined the unit and, so, he was being used ... he had to put his head in for the ... it's like a guillotine, and he had to put his head in and he was assured, you know, that the magician knew what he was doing - DeMe knew what he was doing - and there would be no problem. He had previously cut a turnip or something in half and we had the basket underneath - these are all props to make it look good - and something went wrong, I don't know what it was but the chopper came down and it cut into his neck. But anyhow, we got him off the stage and Midge and I were doctoring him up and telling him not to worry that everything was all right, he was fine, that there was nothing to worry about. He might have a bit of a bruise or something but nothing to worry about. And Hannah, our trumpeter walked in and threw her arms in the air

and said, 'Oh, look at all the blood' and he fainted and she fainted and that was all our good work gone for nothing.

> Do you remember many other stories, you know, in this kind of vein of performance somewhere along the line coming unstuck?

No, we were ....

> Or were you fairly ....

We were pretty professional. Off stage lots of things would happen. We worked out a double talk that we used to talk to one another and we had the muso's whistle that you could be walking down Pitt Street in Sydney and get this whistle and get an answer and find somebody wrapped round you, it was one of your mob. I did that on a tram one day when I thought I saw somebody I knew and I wasn't quite sure and I think it was Mike Pate was going to play golf and he came down in the middle of the bus after he'd heard my whistle and he had his golf bags on his back - I think it was Mike - and knocked people flying to get down. He ....

> So it sounds as if there was a very strong bond of camaraderie between people in the unit?

Oh, then and now still. Yes, there still is. I can remember once on, I think it was when we were going down to Victoria and we took over a little cafe somewhere in the back box - I don't know how we arrived there or where we were ... we were heading for Victoria but there was a piano there and Billy Cathcart played the piano and somebody sang and George Wallace got up to antics. You know, he'd put pepper and salt on somebody's arm just to prove that he was hungry and his lunch wasn't being delivered on time quick enough and he'd start hoeing into somebody's arm and silly things that probably wouldn't mean anything unless you were there and saw it.

> Sure. Just the sort of bond between people. One of the interesting aspects perhaps is the reaction of audiences. You've said before that although you were quite young I know you did do quite a lot of work entertaining in Junee and so on. In your memory was the experience of playing to servicemen and women, I think mostly servicemen, was that very different to playing to a mixed bag of men and women, young and old in Junee or not?

Oh, definitely. Well, not so much in Junee because ... oh, I can't say definitely there because everybody knew everybody and they clapped because they knew they had to. If it wasn't good, if some act wasn't good, they felt sorry for you and they'd clap anyhow because you were part and parcel of the community. But with service personnel, they clapped because they like it and it was a good show.

(5.00) And if they didn't like it they didn't clap.

Well, I never ever struck anybody where we didn't get ... anywhere where we didn't get good applause. They appreciated what we were doing. No, it was a very professional show and I think perhaps I might have been the only ... oh, and Hannah, Hannah didn't come in till quite a

while after us but I think perhaps I was - although, Hannah played the trumpet so I'd say she'd be pretty professional. But I'd only done my act at amateur bissos [sic] and that before and thought I was good. And found out when I got in and started working with Russell Gough I wasn't as good as I thought I was. But I ... I would be the only one I would say that wasn't professional before I went in and anything ... any applause I got went well and I got some applause. I finished up, with the help of Russell, Midge and Mike, pretty professional and, as Mike says in his book, I was pretty good.

> Could you predict how audiences would respond - servicemen? For example, were there certain kinds of acts that they generally preferred above other acts or not?

Well, I'll say this, that Colonel Davidson wouldn't have anything blue. He reckoned if a soldier had to be entertained by dirty things then they didn't deserve it and a soldier was no different to any other man and if something was good and professional and clean then he should appreciate it which is the way it went. We had things that you could take two ways but never anything straight out blue and ... oh, I've got away now, I can't remember what the question was.

> I was just asking you whether there was certain kinds of acts, not particular acts but kinds of acts that were more appreciated than others by servicemen?

I don't think so. I think they just appreciated anything we did and I don't think any act got any more applause than the other. Norm Hetherington was my bane of contention at one stage of the business. I came on after him and he was the quick sketch artist and he did his sketches in chalk and I used to roll round on the floor after Norm had finished and I'd be covered in all different coloured chalks - I'd be a contortionist in technicolour. So they reorganised so that I had first spot on in the second half and we could clean up after Norm beforehand.

> What about outright flops? We've talked a moment ago about funny disasters but not ... perhaps they weren't really flops as such, were there many cases where the whole thing just fell apart and missed the point or were you so well rehearsed on the kind of knowledge that the audience was so good that that didn't happen?

There weren't any flops as such but there was a boo-boo. We went to Melbourne and there were certain rules that applied no matter where you were but more so when the boss was around and we didn't know that Colonel Davidson was bringing some big brass down from Sydney and so the boys in the band were sitting up there and just before the curtain went up they put their cigarettes down on the end of their music stands and there were curls of smoke going up and when the curtain went up, here's the boss, Colonel Davidson, and all this brass sitting in the front row. So that was a big boo-boo and everybody got into strife about that and that never ever happened again.

But we did in Brisbane once something funny happened, we ... I think it was the Oasis Swimming Pool. There were two privately owned pools and one either side of the road and we all went out to this pool and we had a swim ... and we paid our way in and we had a swim and then we put on a little act and contorted and dived and sang and we put on a little act and

we were asked to leave. I mean, the general public thought it was beautiful, the people that were there, but the management didn't appreciate it. So, on the way out, we put a notice up - we got a piece of cardboard and put a notice up on the gate - 'This pool closed for cleaning for a week'. So the next day we went across the road and the management over there thought it was wonderful.

That's lovely.

It wasn't a very nice thing to do though but it wasn't very nice of him to ask us to leave. We hadn't done anything wrong.

(10.00) Oh, it's fairly humorous and harmless. Dot, do you remember any performances where you had perhaps there was a particularly enthusiastic audience where the people on stage really did go too far where people were egged-on? I'm thinking of servicemen being on their own and rather cooped up, say, for example, those men in prison where people really ... and whether the entertainers were ever reprimanded for that kind of thing?

No, no, never. I am sure I can say never without being contradicted. It was only that once in ... at the repatriation hospital in Melbourne that we had just that one problem and that was our own fault. And we were hauled over the coals about that. But, no, I'm sure that was the only time. We've been appreciated and things did start to get a bit out of hand at one stage, the business at that detention place but it didn't go very far and they were put in their place and they sat back and enjoyed the rest of the show and were grateful for it.

That's interesting. Just turning for a moment to people such as, for example, army chaplains, perhaps elderly matrons, people like that who one would imagine would have a somewhat more conservative outlook on life than young entertainers such as you and your friends. Was there ever any conflict there or difficulties where people in those roles felt that entertainers were stepping over what they, eg. chaplains, regarded as moral niceties?

No, never. I've seen chaplains sit up there and clap with the rest of them. I was taught when I first went to Bathurst I think it was ... I can't think of his name, a chaplain up there. I complained because my shirt was taken off the line and he said, 'Well, take somebody else's', and nobody's stealing anything. It's a vicious circle, it goes round, everybody finishes up with a shirt. It's not ... it mightn't be the right size but everybody finishes up with a shirt. He said it's called pilfering and it's not stealing. No, any of the chaplains I met in the army were very understanding and very with it.

But in terms of acts that, for example, might have been regarded as some people as slightly risque ....

We never did anything that was slightly risque. As I said, some of the jokes that were told could possibly be taken two ways but even the worse way that it was taken couldn't be classed as dirty. No, no, we never ever gave anybody a chance. As I say, Colonel Davidson was very particular, he would watch the final dress rehearsal and if it wasn't right, if it didn't come up to his standard then he would wipe it and say, 'Righto, that's got to be fixed up'.

I do know - it's just in these notes here - that there was some, well, obviously rare incident I think with Bob Dyer. He did rather go over the top and there was quite a lot of flack about that.

Oh, I thought you were talking about the entertainment unit that I was concerned in. Oh ...

No, I was. But I was just saying in passing that I have read about this incident with Bob Dyer who ...

Well, I was in ... when I was in Ingleburn, I think it was, it wasn't Bob Dyer, it was Jack Davey came out and did one of his radio shows. Before we went on the air it was ... you felt like getting up and walking out. When it went on the air it was clean and nice and afterwards it was, yes, I took exceptions to that and I was one there. But, see, it wasn't Bob Dyer, that was Jack Daveys [sic]. I can't think what the name of the show was but I know that as a kid I used to listen to it on the radio and think it was wonderful and I felt very let down when I was a participant in the audience and listened to this.

The people in the group, the entertainers, as a whole you obviously spent a lot of time living and working together, travelling ....

And sleeping in a bus together, yeah. Mmm.

(15.00) You know, a fairly trying life in some ways. Did you always get on well? Were there sometimes moments of difficulty between people in the group?

I don't remember any. I suppose somebody might get a bit snaky or something at some time but it was never anything for anybody to worry about. We ... Eddie Smith was our bus driver and he had a relief driver - I'm sure I can't remember - I wouldn't be surprised, I think it might have been George Pomeroy. But we slept in the bus; we hung our washing out the windows when we couldn't get them dry from one place to the other; and ...

It sounds rather interesting.

No, it was just like a big happy family. We had our ... I suppose we must have had our differences but it couldn't have been anything bad enough for me to remember ... bad enough, you know, that I can't remember it. It's nothing that sticks out in my mind.

And during this period when you were doing a lot of shows round New South Wales, Victoria and so on, you were mostly travelling in a bus, not by public transport?

No, we travelled in a bus.

It sounds rather ... I was just picturing the washing hanging out the window. Do you remember anything else about those journeys?

I'm sure there lots of stories to be told if I could only think of them; I can't remember them.

What did you do on the bus during long journeys? How did you while away the time?

Oh, we sang, we ... slept. Because you've got to realise that we used to work late at night and then we'd be entertained in the officers' or sergeants' mess for supper and it would be the early hours of the morning when we'd have to get to bed and then we'd get up and get on the bus to go to our next show. And mostly we slept a lot on the bus but we ... oh, some of the boys might take an instrument into the bus and play. I'm sure there's lots of beaut stories but I just ... you know, it's so long ago I just can't remember. But I know that, you know, I remember we were at a camp in Brisbane and my girlfriend, one of the other girl's parents had come down from ... oh, come down from somewhere to be there while she was there and they were stopping with her uncle so I used to stuff my bed and - because we didn't have to go on parade, because we kept such late nights - and so I used to stuff my bed and go out and sleep out there at her place and then be back in time for parade in the morning. But that's got nothing to do with the bus, but I did have to ... I accepted a ride in a car once with a Yank and finished up having to threaten to jump out while the car was going. I never ever accepted a ride again. I caught the bus back from there on. Got back a bit late once and I just had time to race in and come out to get on the bus - race in and grab my things, come out and get on the bus - and I was just nearly caught doing that. But I never slept in the camp at all.

Did you have much contact with Americans?

No, no. No, not ... oh, I don't mean the way that sounded.

No, no. I meant did you have much working contact? For example, did you ever work with American entertainers?

No, no. We were our own little group.

There must have been some quite well-known performers, I mean, Jim ... Jim Davidson I think you said, well, was very talented. Were there other well-known ... people well-known in their right who you worked with?

Oh yes. Michael Pate: everybody knows Mike from his telly and movie career. George Wallace Junior. Now you are making me think.

Do you want me to pause for a moment?

Yes, please.

You were just saying about your musicians, Dot.

Oh, they were all absolutely fantastic, they were a beaut band, beaut lot of blokes and those that are left we see on ANZAC Day every year, oh, every second year for us. But we used to have some fantastic jam sessions after the shows and that. And I was camped in camp, where Midge lived out at Manly, she could go home every night but I was camped there, not actually at Pagewood but not very far away. And ... but we had some ... Midge was always there for

the jam sessions and that though. This was more or less when we were on tour. No, they were beaut; they were very professional and I don't think anybody lost out once they got out of the army. I know that Jimmy Davidson couldn't get a job but ...

> Just going on a little bit, Dot, towards the end of the war. It was in the lead up to the end of the war I know that you were doing these shows all through New South Wales and so on ...

No, that was before the end ... that was after the war that we were doing those shows. The war ended when I was at Bandiana.

(20.00) Oh, I didn't ... I've got the chronology wrong then. So the war ended at Bandiana.

Mmm. When I was at Bandiana 'cause I remember that because I did catherine-wheels for a mile down the road.

> I was going to ask you about that because .... Anyway, just to clarify the record, these other shows then were in the period after the end of the war?

Just after the war, mmm.

> Going back to that day when peace was declared first with Germany, later with Japan and the story of the catherine-wheels. There must have been a feeling of great exuberance?

Well, I'd threatened that I was going to do it, you see. I said, 'When the war was over I'll turn catherine-wheels for a mile down the road' and didn't think anybody would remember it but they did. Anyhow, I didn't take any talking into it, I turned catherine-wheels for a mile down the road, one after the other and I didn't stop. It was a wonderful feeling. And then the victory march in Albury when my father got involved, he was down there and he wanted to talk to me and kiss and cuddle me and, of course, I was marching, I was on parade and I couldn't do that even though I hadn't seen my dad for a few months, I couldn't do that. And I saw him after the march was finished so ....

> How did people, well, yourself, other people you were with feel thinking back over the war years? Some people had had, you know, relatively easy wars, other people had had hard ones, some people of course hadn't come ... would never come back. How do you feel looking back on it all? For example, you said at the beginning that when war was declared there was a feeling of some excitement.

Yes, because we didn't realise then what was going on, what it would involve. Oh, relief and after it was over was excitement of course - that was excitement - and then relief and tears and then we started thinking about, you know, we're going to be separated. We thought well the wars over, we'll all finish up we'll get out but it didn't work out that way. I was in for another couple of years after that in the entertainment unit. In fact, I was the last girl to go out of the unit and some of the boys had made me a ... we were classed ... in the entertainment unit we were classed as key personnel, we had to stay in there while there were troops there to

be entertained. So we didn't go out until most of the troops had been discharged and one of the boys made me a key personnel key, like with all the ribbons and everything on it and I treasured that and that's one of the things that I'm snaky on Cyclone Tracy for because I looked after that and treasured it and I'll never ever get another one. But I lost that.

Mmm. Those things are very precious, aren't they? That's sad.

Yes.

You were saying you stayed in the army for quite some time after the war. It must have been quite important, I would imagine, to keep entertaining men who were a bit ... who in a sense had lost their purpose but they were still in the ....

This is right ... this is right. They were still in the army and still with the same discipline and wondering, I suppose, why, when the war was over, they couldn't get straight out. But I suppose they'd understand it more than I did. I was wondering the same thing. But it's something that you just don't do overnight, I suppose. Got to go through red tape and the right channels and that. I know when I came out I ... Wacka Dawe gave me my costume, my dancing shoes - which were my own anyhow, but the costume wasn't - he gave me both my costumes that I'd had in the show which were both exactly the same, like my dancing costumes. But ....

You were saying before, Dot, that when it was all over you wanted to go to Japan to entertain men I think who were in the peace-keeping force there?

I wanted to go over in the occupational force but ... Colonel Davidson said that it wouldn't be fair because we were all only kids. I was twenty-one. And that he'd looked after us and even though we didn't ... he realised how hard it was without an AWAS officer. But he felt that being in the army and having civilians looking after us, it wouldn't be the same. There wouldn't be the same discipline. So he talked me out of it.

Were you sorry about that?

No, not really I suppose. I went home and went nursing. I was to go with Jim Gerald's show and do a tour of Australia. A lot of our people out of the entertainment unit went with Jim Gerald but I made the mistake of going home first and, of course, couldn't leave there - I went nursing.

Right. Yes, I know you went nursing. I was just going to ask: was the decision simply that you wanted to go home to see your parents and so on? Or ....

Yes, but actually I didn't want to stay. I wanted to go ... keep on in show business but I realised that I'd been away for so long and my mum and dad had missed me and the longer I stayed the harder it was to get away. Mmm.

I know as well as going nursing I think it was there that you ... well, you didn't meet Fred then, you'd always known him ....

Fred and I went to school together, yes.

When did you marry?

Um, can you turn that off for a minute, I have to stop and think.

This is just picking up on a few dates. What were these, Dot?

I was discharged on the 17 May 1946 and I was married on the 15 March 1947.

Not quite a year later.

Mmm.

That's interesting.

But then we'd known one another all our lives.

Well, that must have ... as well as the change following being discharged from the army, there was obviously another great change in your life. Did that make it easier to adjust to a new civilian life or not?

Oh ... you mean, after I got married?

Mmm.

Oh, well, there was Fred wasn't there and there was still communication with Midge and George and quite a few of the other group ... the rest of the group. But, no, I had a lot of pleasure in taking my husband down to Sydney to introduce him to my two best friends, Midge and George Pomeroy, and I had my first son two years after I was married and as soon as we could travel we were down to Sydney to show them Freddie and, of course, Grant, their son, I think twelve months older ... perhaps twelve months older than Freddie. Midge and George got married just as soon as they came out of the army.

I've got the impression talking about it that as a group of people, the people in that entertainment unit were bonded fairly tightly. Have those ties stayed through the years or not?

Well ... oh, definitely. Especially, like when we get together ... the first time we got together it was just a reunion at Midge and George's place at Manly and I've got a cutting out of the paper that I could show you there if you can turn that off for a while.

This is just a reading off the cutting that Dot's given me, this called 'Reunion of Old Troupers' ... it doesn't say, it's a Sydney newspaper ...

Manly.

> Manly paper. Was a reunion by George and Ena - E-n-a - Pomeroy celebrating ... it was based on their thirty-fifth wedding anniversary but this is really a reunion of the eleven former members of the First Australian Entertainment Unit of which Dot was a part and it was the first time most of them had seen each other since 1946. Well, that must have been a very emotional moment?

Oh, it certainly was. As I was saying before, that somebody would walk in and you'd think, 'Oh, it can't be', you know, you're remembering them as you saw them last. So how I got everybody to know who I was, as soon as anybody walked in I just went straight down in the splits and they said, 'Oh, Dotty' (laughs) so that was an easy way of working it out. But, oh, it was very emotional. It was absolutely wonderful. I think it's a real highlight, one of the biggest highlights in my life.

> Mmm. That's lovely. So there must have been a very close connection with all those people.

Oh, there's no doubt about that. I mean, the other places I've been to in, like, say, Bathurst and Bandiana and even Ingleburn, you sort of lost a few along the road each time. But we were together all this time and we were very lucky. We did lose one of our members in a car crash ... in a bus crash. We split up to do lone shows once and we went to Queensland and they went to Victoria and a bus crashed near my home town of Junee, actually it was, and one of the members was killed. But that was very sad.

> I might just turn this tape over.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

> Perhaps just to end, Dot, I understand, although you live a long way away up in Darwin, you still get down to ANZAC Day periodically in Sydney?

Yes, we try to get down every second year because being pensioners we ... and no trains up here, we get a half fare and the Government allows half fare down - half return fare - and so we usually get down and we march on ANZAC Day and we have our reunion dinner at the Journalists' Club and then we choof off to Melbourne and have Fred's reunion because they don't march and they don't hold theirs on V Day. They wait until ... they know when we can get there and arrange things around us.

> Mmm. That's interesting. Well, I know you two have had a very full life later with all your work with swimming and so on but perhaps we'd better not delve into that here. But just something I like to ask anybody at the end of these sessions: is there anything that you feel you'd either like to say or should be said that you feel hasn't been covered?

Well, I think we've ... I'll probably think of lots of things once you've gone and I'll think 'Why didn't I say this?' and 'Why didn't I say that?', but at the moment I can't think of anything that ... only to say that from watching that ABC program - and I seem to harping on this, I don't know whether I've done it on the tape or not, but after watching that - our life in the army was discipline and we did all the right things. But we were never screamed and yelled at and I would hate, if that's the way the girls are going into the army, the conditions they are going in now, I'd hate to be one of them.

Mmm. So there was dignity while you were ...

There was certainly dignity; dignity all the way through. We were treated like human beings not animals.

Mmm. That's interesting. Well, Dot, on behalf of the War Memorial, thank you for these tapes.

Thank you for seeing fit to come all this way to take the tape. I think I'm the only one up the top end, aren't I, in Darwin?

In the entertainment unit, yes. There was the pilot I mentioned before but you are the only entertainer. Thanks a lot.

Okey-doke. Well it's been a pleasure to meet you, Ed.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B