

Australians at War Film Archive

Ian Parker - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:35 **We'll just start with what I explained before about your life in point form. Can you tell us that please?**
- Well I was born in a little town called Smythesdale. It's about 15kms from Ballarat on the Glen Allen Highway on the way to Hamilton, and
- 01:00 I had, there were seven in the family. I was the second youngest, and my father was a returned soldier from the 1914 war [World War I]. He was a member of the 8th Light Horse Brigade which meant that he had been badly shell shocked [affected by the war] at Gallipoli, and again in Palestine, but when he came home from the war he opened a drapery hawking business
- 01:30 with 2 horses and a wagon, and when my little sister was born I was only 4, and to help my mother out a bit he took me out on the trip. I remember that quite well I was only 4, but he used to travel all around the western district of Victoria so... selling drapery and merchandise like that, and
- 02:00 I remember that trip quite well. I can particularly remember having a swim in Lake Corangamite.
- Okay, I'll ask you the details of that later, but if you could just take us quite briefly through your childhood. Where did you go to school?**
- At Smythesdale.
- And when did you sign up to the army?**
- To the army? I moved to Melbourne. My father passed away in 1938, and I had moved to Melbourne
- 02:30 then and I was staying with my sister, and when war broke out both my big brother and I enlisted. He was a bit older than me. I put my age up but they woke up that I looked young for my age I suppose because I was a young 19 year old. I was actually only 17, and they picked me out. I got as far as
- 03:00 the Melbourne showgrounds that was all, but I got a job in a hotel in Melbourne and I was interested in show business, and my father had taught me a lot. He knew quite a bit about card manipulation and that sort of thing and he taught me, but it took me many years to accomplish it. I joined a concert party that used to go out to all the camps all around Melbourne, both the army,
- 03:30 the navy, and the air force, and I was there until I got a call up for the army. I was 19 by then, so I went into camp of the 106th Anti Tank Regiment, and they found out that my abilities as an entertainer, and of course I did a bit of entertaining for them there, and of course I had had a bit of experience of a steward,
- 04:00 and they transferred me to RAA Headquarters, Royal Australian Artillery 3rd Division, and I was stewarding there, and from there we moved up to Bonegilla, then we moved up to Maryborough, then I was transferred to 1st Army Headquarters at Toowoomba and I went there, and I couldn't get
- 04:30 sent with the rest of my unit because I developed a stomach ulcer and I had to stay there, and then we moved from there to Mareeba, that's in northern Queensland. We were then when the Coral Sea Battle was on, and I tried, they had just formed the Army Entertainment Unit, and I tried to join it, but I couldn't get away from
- 05:00 my unit. I was... they hung on to me with the excuse that they wouldn't let me go, and finally I discovered that Jim Davidson the musician was being promoted to colonel. He was in charge of the entertainment unit. They had taken over the Pagewood film studios which used to be the National film studios, where a lot of Australian films were made,
- 05:30 and I wrote to him and I never heard any more about it, and then we were transferred over to Lae in New Guinea, and it was there that this concert party, the 30 Club concert party. They were known as the 30 Club because they were recruited from the 30th Brigade in the early days of the war, and the

sergeant, the second 2IC [second in command] came to see me

- 06:00 and said, "I've had a letter from Jim Davidson, wants us to give you an audition and have a look at you, and if we think you're all right we are to take you with us to Bougainville. We are going to Bougainville. We have already got a magician and ventriloquist," which I knew, I knew them both very well but he said, "My orders are to take you over to Bougainville and transfer to another unit there," but after I went with this concert
- 06:30 party, the magician and ventriloquist took sick. He used to break out in rashes and he went to hospital so I was put in as a full time entertainer. Prior to that I had been a spotlight boy and I was doing both acts in the show until after Carl came out of hospital, and I was prepared to go back to spotlight boy, but our CO [commanding officer] Lieutenant Scott. He had been in films before the
- 07:00 war he was in the George Wallace film made early in the 1930's, His Royal Highness. He was in that, and he said, "No, you stay where you are. I've watched you from the front and your act is mainly card manipulation and doesn't interfere with Carl's act. I'd like you stay on doing that," so I was a full time member of the troop, and when we went all around
- 07:30 New Guinea. We were stationed at Lae, but went to Nadzab, and all those places around there. We had to do a show for the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels [New Guineans who aided Australian troops on the Kokoda Track]. You've heard of them I suppose? We put on a show for them, and a lot of tribesmen came down out of the hills. They were very fierce looking blokes carrying spears, and an officer from the
- 08:00 ANGAU, the Australia and New Guinea Administrative Unit, he got up on stage, and we had our own portable stage, and spoke to them in Pidgin English which sounded very cute to us. He told them all about the concert party. He said, "He no come to fight you, he come to sing sing you." Now, sing sing was there word for 'corroboree' or concert or something like that. We found out later on, if these blokes didn't like it they would throw a spear at you,
- 08:30 but anyway, they all came down at the end of the show to have a look at the back of the stage and everything. We could speak to them in Pidgin English.

Okay, we'll talk more about the details of that later. Were you in Bougainville until the end of the war?

Until the end of the war, yes.

And when did you come back to Australia?

In 1945, yeah.

And what did you do once you got back?

Once I got back to Australia...we were stationed at Pagewood. I was still in the army of course,

- 09:00 at the film studios there, and I got my discharge, I didn't get my discharge until 1946. I had to leave,... most of our boys came from Sydney. It was very sad leaving them, and very touching moment when we had to leave and say goodbye, but we went home and mother lived in South Melbourne then. She had left the house up
- 09:30 in Smythesdale, was still standing, but she was living in South Melbourne, and went home to her and I intended to spend, have a holiday with her, but, Col's Variety Show, that was the largest tin show [variety show] in Australia touring, and they asked me to come with them, so I cut short my holiday and went touring with them. We opened at Queanbeyan, and we weren't allowed to show in Canberra, no tin shows were allowed to show there,
- 10:00 and we started our tour at Queanbeyan.

How long did you tour with Col's Variety Show?

Well the tour was supposed to last for 2 years, but we did all around New South Wales and up to Nyngan, and I took sick at Bourke with old stomach trouble. I was all right there, I was still able to perform, and then we went to Broken Hill and we played a month in Broken Hill. That was a wonderful town. We changed program every week,

- 10:30 but we used to fill the theatre every night, and it was a wonderful town. We put the prices up, and they willingly paid it, and then we went down through Peterborough, to Port Pirie, Port Augusta and to Adelaide. We played a month in Adelaide and then we went over to Whyalla. That's where we had our tent blown down in heavy gales, all ripped to pieces, that's when the show had to fold up. I came back to
- 11:00 Melbourne and I joined another touring party called, Oscar's Vaudeville. Now that was run by, he was actually an Italian, the 'Zucchini Trio,' the funniest clowns I've ever worked with. I couldn't keep a straight face when I watch them. I saw them and thought they were really funny. I always thought George Wallace was our best comedian but this Theo Zucchini, he
- 11:30 was really funny. And they used to do musical acts, they had music that you would never, ever dream of

seeing before they brought out from Europe. They came out from Europe just before the war to join the circus, but they caught up in the war and they were stranded here until after the war and he started out the show on his own. I was with them for 2 or 3 months, but that show folded up.

- 12:00 By this time I had met Jack Arnold. He was an original member of the 9th Division, and he was the original concert party that went to the Middle East in 1940, and he and his wife and I formed up a concert act around Sydney, and we did a lot of concert work around Sydney and so forth, but Jack and I were doing an act out at Thornleigh one
- 12:30 night, travelling out by train, and I was leaning on my guitar and all of sudden I started to feel funny and he said, "Hang on a bit, there is a lot of people get off at the next station, you will be able to sit down," and I started collapsing and I heard a voice saying, "The girl was giving you the seat," and when I came to, I was sitting in a chair, and I knew there was something wrong. So I went on and done the show,
- 13:00 and I contacted the repatriation department and they put me in a hospital and x-rayed me and said, "You've got stomach ulcers and reflux and esophagitis, and you have to go into hospital." And I said, "Well if I have to go into hospital I might as well go home." So I went home to Melbourne to be with my mother, but very foolishly I unheeded the doctor's advice and I took up doing a double act with my brother. He was quite a
- 13:30 good country and western singer, and a magic act, and singing together which was quite good, but then I had another attack worse than the other one. It knocked me out completely. I was just lying in vomit. They rushed me to the Caulfield Repatriation Hospital and flat out I couldn't eat, just sleeping, and I'd wake up and I felt terrible, and I used to wake up at night and
- 14:00 the gases in my stomach would regurgitate up and go down into my lungs, it was a horrible feeling. But one day... I was in there for 3 months altogether, but one day, the nurse came to wake me up and she said, "You've got a visitor," and I thought, "Who?" and it was the girl from next door and I thought, "What the hell does she want?" And I put out my hand, and she held my hand and talked to me, and I went to sleep
- 14:30 again, and I woke up, and she was still talking, and I went to sleep again and she was gone, but she came back the same day, and I realised that, that was the girl I was going to marry. So we have been married for 55 years. We have two children. We lost our third one, but and that's how it came about.

That's great. Let's now go back to your childhood,

- 15:00 **and can you talk about your parents.**

Well my parents, they were wonderful parents. You couldn't wish for better parents than what I had. My father was a great singer and they used to sing as a duet. She used to harmonise, my mother, and she used to yodel too, and there were... and we would have some lovely sessions at home at night. Visitors used to come, and that's where Dad first got me started

- 15:30 on the card tricks. Whenever we had visitors I used to get up and we had a stairway, a two-storey house. I used to have to get up on the stairway to do my magic tricks and it took me years and years to accomplish the card manipulation. It was very hard and even now find it harder when I used to get a bit of arthritis in that hand and my left hand, I don't use it, and looks it's perfect, not a thing wrong with it look but that one is starting to go a bit.

- 16:00 **So you said your father was in the First World War. Tell us about him.**

Well Dad was in the 8th Light Horse Regiment, and they went to, they thought they were going to England, but they finished up in Egypt. They were camped near the Pyramids and he went right through the Pyramids. He said, "They smelt like the devil. There is a 200-foot shaft inside the Great

- 16:30 Pyramid, and they reckon they had been throwing bodies down there, and climbed to the top of the Pyramids. They couldn't climb them on their own, they had to help you, but when they got to the top there was a native boy selling water by the bucket. How he got up there with his water you don't know, but when the campaign opened up in Gallipoli the infantry, the 1st Division, made the landing there, and
- 17:00 they were pushed a bit. The Light Horse decided right to the man, to volunteer to go to Gallipoli as infantry, and anyhow a member of the Light Horse Regiment was Banjo Paterson, the renowned poet, and he was a bit old for combat duty so he was left behind in charge of the grooms. He was to take care of the horses and the Light Horse
- 17:30 went to Gallipoli. They went through hell there, and the trenches were lousy. My father used to tell the story about the soldiers. He was getting flea bitten, and he bent down to get the flea, and as he bent down, the bullet just missed his head and he caught the flea and he held it out and said, "Little flea, you saved my life.
- 18:00 I can't decorate you and I can't promote you, but I can reinstate you," so he put him back in his tunic. But they were taken, they did a lot of fighting in the trenches there. They used to go out at night. My father never ever smoked until he went to Gallipoli and he used to smoke to calm his nerves, and they couldn't get any tobacco, and of a night after dark they would

18:30 crawl out into no man's land [area between front lines of opposing sides] and go through the pockets of the dead bodies looking for tobacco, and that's where he got the belt off the dead Turkish soldier.

What kind of shape was your father in when you were a child after the war?

Oh he was very nervy, shell shocked. I remember walking through the bush with him one day. We were passing a mine, a big mine with an engine going

19:00 and the engine backfired, and Dad ducked down and started to run, and when I caught up with him he was crying, and that's how it had upset him. But he was in very bad shape, but he was quite healthy, and he died at the age of 55. That was a big shock to me. I

19:30 was only 16 at the time. That was very hard.

And what about your mum, tell us about your mother.

My mother was just a normal mother. She had seven children to look after. I remember washing days. That was a big day. She had a big wash and we used to help her as much as we could, but

20:00 she was a great mother.

And what do you remember of your school days in Smythesdale?

My school days were very happy ones I thought. We used to go home for lunch everyday. I used to,...the other kids with their cut lunch having a picnic, and at the time I used to appreciate going home. Later on, when Dad had retired and he was too sick to carry on

20:30 and he would do a lot of the cooking and you would have a hot curry and hot potatoes waiting for us and that's when we really appreciated coming home for lunch. But we used to have a football team and a cricket team, and school days were wonderful for me. The teachers were great.

What was the town of Smythesdale like then?

It was a small gold mining town, that was in the early days,

21:00 it was rather a coincidence that my great grandfather was killed there in a mining accident just a little bit out of the town. Fell out of the bucket when he was being lowered down below. He struck foul air, and he crawled out, but by the time he got up, he had fallen out of the bucket and he was dead by the time they got him to the top. That was my great grandfather.

I understand that your father found some gold

21:30 **out in the paddock at the back of your house.**

Yes, when we had a fairly 3 acres, and we had some surface gravel, and he put it in a dish, and it had some good colour to it. There was no water to cradle the gold in, so we set up the cradle at the back of the house and we had a big well at the back of the house and we used to wheel the dirt up in the wheelbarrow

22:00 and puddle it in the trough and put it through the cradle. We got enough gold there to keep us going in food there for quite a while.

What did your father teach you about magic?

Mostly with the cards. He was very good with cards. He could deal himself a lone hand in a game of euchre but he taught me how to do it, and I promised that I would never ever use it to cheat, and he taught me

22:30 how to stack the cards for a poker hand. I could deal myself a lone, deal out the cards and pretend you are going to have a game of euchre and playing euchre, and you pick up your hand and say, "I wouldn't mind betting my hand against anyone here." And he would come in hook line and sinker and that's how the peelers used to work in the early days, and

23:00 he'd put down the 4, and they'd bet up, and bet up, and put down his 4 aces, and then cover it with the lone hand, and it would be routine flush that's the highest card, that's the one you would have.

Did your father teach your brother and sisters magic?

They were never ever interested. Never ever interested in it. My brother, my older brother was,

23:30 my oldest brother played the drums in a band, and my next brother was keen on country and western music. I used to sing with him. My other brother was hopeless he didn't try anything, nor my younger sister didn't. My eldest brother used to play the drums in a band but none of them was ever interested in magic.

24:00 Never.

What games did you play when you were children?

Football and cricket mainly. We used to play all sorts of games and...

What did you do to entertain yourself?

We used to have concerts at home of a night time. People would come in. Dad would make me get up and do an act and he used to... Mum and Dad sang duets. They were beautiful singers.

24:30 They used to harmonise together, they were beautiful singers... and they used to, we had some great times. The neighbours used to come in, and I used to have to get up and perform.

What did you like about performing when you were a kid?

Oh I loved it. I was a real showman, and I used to practice card manipulation, but I was never really any good at it,

25:00 and I think back now and we have a, a historical paper that is published in Smythesdale which I get sent to me every month and I have written a few stories for it. We used to have these shows at home at night there, and visitors used to come, and Dad would get me up entertaining and so forth.

25:30 We had some great nights.

Who else from the family used to perform on those nights?

My brother on the drums and the eldest brother was a pretty good singer. I used to harmonise with him and he played the mouth organ and we both played guitars.

Where did you learn to play the guitar?

Self taught. It's a funny thing, I learnt to play the steel guitar,

26:00 a steel guitar with a steel, and I played quite a bit, so I took the fret out that raises the string and I tune it the same as a steel guitar, and I played that great. I would play that way and then I found out it was wrong. The tuning is different to what they called the Spanish guitar, is what they use now. There was no playing Spanish guitars in those days, but there is thousands of them now and I had to

26:30 alter the tuning and start all over again.

How much did your father talk to you about his experiences in the war?

I used to talk about it. It used to upset him. Yes, my father was very sentimental about the war and his mates that were killed. He used to be very sentimental himself.

27:00 **And tell us about after your father died, you and your brother went to South Melbourne. How did you get there?**

Rode the bikes for 87 miles.

What was that journey like?

It was hard. It knocked the devil out of me. We were supported by my elder sister who was married and living in South Melbourne, and we walked the streets for

27:30 3 weeks looking for work. Finally we consulted an old mate of my father's who was in the 5th Battalion. He won the Distinguished Conduct Medal in France in later years, and he got us a job at General Motors where he was working there, and that's where we were when war broke, out and I, and a lot were laid off. My brother stayed

28:00 on, but I was laid off, and I got a job in the hotel working in the city. I'd had a bit of experience working in the hotel at Ballarat until war broke out, and I enlisted, but as you know I was rejected for being too young, and I joined the concert parties that went around the camps putting on concerts.

Tell us about that concert party.

28:30 We had a lot of fun, met a lot of girls there. I was doing a ventriloquist act then. They had a magician, and I had a doll that I saved up and bought, but we had a lot of fun.

Describe the doll for us.

Well it was a beautifully made doll. It had the rolling eyes and lifting his eyebrows

29:00 and he could smile and turn his head any way, and that, and I used to practice up and use a distant voice. To make your voice appear to come from somewhere else. You don't see it nowadays. The doll would sing out to the mates upstairs, "Do you want to come down?" You could hear the voice in the distance. I couldn't do it now but you would hear the voice in the distance, "Yes," "Do you want to come down?" "I can't hear you," and the doll would yell out louder,

29:30 "Do you want a whisky and soda?" "Yes, I'll come straight down." "Well, come down the steps and count every step as you come," and you could hear the voice getting closer and pass him and go down into the floor and....

How did you learn to do that?

I learnt. There was a chap working on the goldfields taught me a lot. He taught me a lot about it

30:00 but he passed about years ago.

What was his name?

Bill Loader. He was very good on the cards to. He taught me a few tricks and that. He was a lot older than me.

What did he teach you about?

He taught me about the ventriloquism and how to throw my voice and that. Taught me that, but the only dolls they had in those days were ones I used to make myself

30:30 and they were a bit rough. They looked all right on stage but they were no good for close up work. He taught me a bit of magic too.

Do you remember how much your doll cost when you bought it?

Yes, I paid 4 pound for it. It was beautiful, beautifully made doll. Dressed in a sailor's uniform, and it could

31:00 smile like this, and I would make it smile and roll his eyes and lift the eyebrows and the head would turn whatever way you moved your hand, but you used to play havoc with your fingers each night, and we used to do the distant voice stuff he would give him a bit of cheek and I'd lock him in the case and you would hear the voice coming from the distance.

31:30 And he said he was going to sing a song and he'd start singing inside the case and lift up the lid and the voice would appear louder and I would slam it down again and it was really effective.

What did you name your doll?

Louis, he had red hair.

Tell us some more about that concert party. How many people were in it?

There were about

32:00 12 or 13. We had a magician, a card manipulator. I learned nothing from him. He would show you nothing, singers, a sketch artist. It was quite a good concert party. We used to travel all around the camps and they would take us to the officers' mess afterwards and have supper with them. It was quite good.

32:30 I didn't mind working late and start work early in the morning but I didn't mind that one bit.

What kind of work were you doing at this stage?

I was in the hotel and I just thought it would be useful, all sorts of jobs, I finished up a barman.

Where were you living at the time?

Living in the hotel. Later on, my mother, she moved to Melbourne,

33:00 and I moved in with her. My brother, he got kicked out of the army too for being underage and I got him a job at the same hotel. We both moved in with my mother.

What kind of duties did you do at the hotel?

Mostly, well I worked in the silver grill there cooking the fish and chips and things, and extras.

33:30 My brother was on the grill cooking the steaks but I used to do all the chips and the extras and that sort of thing.

What kind of hours did you work?

Used to, we didn't start until 9. Work to 7 but sometimes it was 7.30 before you got finished.

And what kind of people came to stay in the hotel?

34:00 Well it was a combination there. A lot of people used to come and stay. It was not a very big hotel, only a small one and especially the barmaids, they were all old barmaids all had to be licensed in those days and these were all licensed barmaids that had the license. If women wanted a job in the bar they had to get a permit.

34:30 **And what was your living accommodation like in the hotel?**

It wasn't bad. We lived right on the top storey. It was all right. We used to come down to another storey

to use the shower and that and so forth, but we lived up there and we used to sit up there and look down at the traffic.

Do you remember how much you were paid there?

26 and 6

35:00 and our keep. That's 1 pound 6 and sixpence.

Did you have much to do with the hotel guests?

Oh yes, Sunday morning it would be my job to do the breakfast tray, so I used to get dressed up in my tuxedo and bow tie and that and deliver the breakfast tray, and they would still be in bed, and deliver their breakfast

35:30 to them. I did a lot of that, but only on Sundays.

Did you ever get the time to practice while you were working at the hotel?

I was always practising, I never stopped. Practicing the cards, but it was a couple of years before I could do it effectively. I used to practice in front of a mirror and I could see this flash of white all the time and it used to annoy me and for a time I gave it away completely,

36:00 and then I would take it up again, and I finally mastered it.

Tell us about that, about practising, and why you gave it away.

Well it got too hard. I couldn't do it. I would practice in front of a mirror and I could see a flash of white as I tried to palm the card and I knew I couldn't do it, and then I kept trying, and kept trying, and finally I got it.

And when you finally got it

36:30 **who did you first perform for?**

Well, there was no professional work available then. Only in the concert party, and any concert at all I was always available for. I gave a ventriloquist audition at the Tivoli Theatre but I couldn't get on. There were too many ventriloquists around in those days, and I was only young then, I was only 17

37:00 and not experienced enough.

What were the other ventriloquists like?

Very good especially Clifford Guest. You've probably never heard of him. I learned this little voice throwing from him. He could imitate people marching a band, the band would play, Tipperary, and the band would start marching left, right, left, right

37:30 getting closer and closer and going past you and he was very good. He went to America, but I don't know how he got on over there.

And what was that like at the audition?

The audition? Hard, I hated auditions but you still had to give them but I hated auditions because you weren't performing to an audience. You had to have an audience to be effective. Anyone will tell you

38:00 that. Al Jolson, that was his problem. No audience, and you couldn't see across the foot lights.

Why do you need an audience to be effective?

Well, you can more or less see them and talk to them. I like to see the audience and talk to them and tell them what you're doing. They appreciate that better. I'd performed in a theatre one night in Melbourne, and the foot lights were so bright I couldn't see the audience. I was more or less talking to myself.

38:30 **In those early days did you ever suffer from stage fright?**

Yes, yes in the early days yes.

What's that like?

It's very frightening but it would get better. I was only young then and I got over that. It's only in later years when I was down with the touring shows professionally and you knew you were getting paid for it, and you had to be good or you just wasn't in it,

39:00 and you were doing the same act, and you used to come some nights and you would give anything not to have to go on, and yeah,.... but you still go on and you are acting all the time and when you have a good audience that sort of go with you, that's easy, but sometimes you strike a hard audience.

When you were with the concert party

39:30 **were you in the Melbourne suburbs?**

Yes, and all the country. Puckapunyal, Seymour, Geelong, Werribee, all those places. Air force camps and navy depot, Portsea... all those places. We used to move around a bit.

40:00 **What did you like most about moving to Melbourne having grown up in a small town?**

Yes I preferred that much better than the small town, yeah, because I was learning more about the magic. I couldn't learn much apart from what my father had taught me and that was very limited. When I got to Melbourne I found that my stuff was obsolete, and I had to start learning all over again all the new tricks.

How did you

40:30 **learn it?**

Well other magicians... I had a few good tricks that my father had taught me that other magicians didn't know and we could swap. I'll teach you how to do this and you teach me how to do that.

Tape 2

00:30 **Ian, I just want to go back a bit to get a couple more details. In the first tape you talked about your father taking you on his drapery run. What was that like?**

I can just remember it. I was 4 years old and I used to sleep in the back of the van. He started off with a wagon with 2 horses, but he only done stations. Most of all the station owners were all returned soldiers and they all

01:00 welcomed him in, and were very good to him. He always used to camp at their places, but then he graduated to a motor van which was quite new in those days, and we used to travel, sleep in the back of the van. Sometimes we were invited in to sleep. We were always invited in for meals inside. I can just remember it at 4 years old, but it was quite an experience.

01:30 **What sort of things would he sell?**

All drapery, all sorts of drapery. He used to take measurements for suits, and he'd send the measurements back to my mother, and she would get them made up in Ballarat, and by the time he got back the suit would be ready for him to take out again.

And what sort of route did he follow?

All around the western district, the same route. Down around Hamilton and that way you know,

02:00 all around Victoria, the western districts.

And how long would he be away for?

About 5 weeks. But most of the time where we visited, the people used to invite us in of an evening because Dad was pretty good with the cards and that, and he used to sing, and we used to have quite some good evenings. I can just remember that, not thinking that I would be taking his place later on in life.

02:30 **Where did you father learn his skills from?**

I don't know. My father was actually an orphan. He had 2 older brothers and his father died when he was only 4 years old, and then his mother found out she was going to have another baby and in desperation she put the 3 boys in the Ballarat

03:00 orphanage, an orphanage that had just been opened, and the baby was born, and she expected to take the boys back then, but the baby only lived for 21 days, then and she had a nervous breakdown and the boys remained in the orphanage, and it was a bit of a mystery where she went to after that, and they didn't know much. As the boys got older, the oldest boy turned 15,

03:30 he left to go out to a job, and then the next one and David was his name, and he kissed him goodbye and he never realised he would never see him again because he was drowned in the Murray River. When he reached the age of 15, he was given a job working. His exploits in the orphanage were quite interesting. He made friends with a lot of Chinese

04:00 gold diggers there. They had a village, and he used to visit them, and they used to welcome him, and he used to sit and smoke opium, and the bloke explained how they used all that and the illusions and fantasies that they had, and they used to get him food, and they were half starved in the orphanage, and make lollies, 'lomfoo' they called it, it was a soft sweet. He got on well with the

04:30 Chinese. He learned to speak the language, and there was a place called, 'The Old Curiosity Shop,' in Ballarat, and when we were visiting... It was built by a Cornish couple that came out, and it was built with, it's all decorated with china and old the old teapots in it, and the boys in the orphanage would go

and gather a

05:00 bag of broken china from the tips, and they would get a slice of bread and jam for it. That was quite a delicacy in those days.

What were you like at school as a student Ian?

Just mediocre, just your normal student. I got my merit certificate. That's the highest you could go in the state schools in those days. I got my merit certificate, but it was of

05:30 no value to me. I just went gold digging with my father when I left school.

What do you remember of school in those days?

I was great fun at schools. The teachers were very good, very. One, he was only relieving, I remember one winter's day he'd give you a smack across a bare leg with a strap, but I didn't like him, but the rest of them were all pretty good.

06:00 I played cricket and football. Of course Australian rules was the only game we played down there.

And when you left school and went to work digging gold, what was a typical day routine there?

Well we used to wheel the... my 2 older brothers were with us, and we used to wheel washed dirt up to the cradle. We came across an old puddling machine that had been there in there in the early days,

06:30 and we used to puddle the dirt, and in those days they were only looking for big stuff. We got all the fine stuff that was left behind. So we would wheel that up to the well behind the house, and Dad would be on the cradle, and I would pour the water in and the older boys used to wheel in the wheelbarrow, but we made enough of a living out of it.

Would you work at that all day?

All day, yeah.

07:00 **And what did you do with all the tailings and everything then?**

Just ran out the back of the, out the back fence of the house.

And how long did you do that for?

I did that until Dad passed away in 1938, and that's when we knew we had to leave home. We just did a bit, we scattered different ways. My

07:30 older brother and sister had already left, but the next brother, Fred and I, rode our bikes to Melbourne and boarded with my elder sister. We had to. There was no work up around there. There was none in Melbourne. We were just lucky to get into General Motors, knowing this old war mate of my fathers.

What did you do in General Motors?

I was in the storeroom just handing out the requisitions to the different men that would

08:00 come and ask for them.

What sort of stuff was stored there?

Oh anything. I was in the No. 2 Division. That was where the special bodies were made. No. 1 was where they were assembled. Bodies came from South Australia, and they were put onto the chassis there in No.1. I was in No. 2 all special bodies - very few cars, but mainly trucks.

08:30 Mainly trucks there, and they used to come to me for the parts.

And how were you treated by your older work mates?

Oh pretty good. They were very good. I was a billy [tin can, like a kettle] boy. I used to have to pick up all their billies. Me and another young fellow, and they would put their tea in their billies and take them to the canteen and fill them up and bring them back and so forth.

09:00 I was happy to have... prior to this I would go to the canteen, and they would give me a list of what they wanted, and the money to pay for it, and I was a shopping boy more or less.

And what proportion of your income did you send home?

None. I got 29 shillings a week and I paid a pound a week board, 3 shillings for insurance and 3 shillings off the cash order, stuff I bought on a cash order.

09:30 I had 3 shillings a week pocket money, I couldn't send money home until I went to the hotel and then I could help Mum a bit.

What sort of hotel was it? Was it a classy place?

No, just a pub, mainly beer trade. A good place to work though.

What did you learn about life from working in a hotel?

10:00 Oh I learnt a little bit there. After I had been there a while I learned how to pull a beer. They used to put me in the bar at 5, and mostly all the old barmaids, and work next to an old barmaid and I used to keep the counter clean and wash the glasses and that, and serve anyone that was waiting. Oh yes, I liked that.

10:30 **In those days was there a lot of trouble in hotels?**

Oh yes a lot. We had a bouncer, Albert Lloyd was his name. He was heavy weight champion of Australia from 1918 to 1933 and he could look after himself. He taught me a lot. I learnt a bit of boxing from him.

And what sort of trouble would you have in the bar?

Mostly

11:00 when they get a few in [have had a few drinks], they start fighting between themselves you know, punch ups. It was always best to let them, when I got older and I used to do a bit of floor work myself, I learned when they started a fight to let them have a couple of punches and then none of them wanted to go on with it. They usually quietened down. We had a saloon bar right down the back of the hotel and ring through, "Fight in the bar,"

11:30 and we'd just take our time and stroll down because the fight would be all over by the time we got down there, because once they have a couple of hits they didn't want to go on with it, but they were mostly mates.

Were there many female customers?

They had a lounge for the females. They weren't allowed in the bar in those days, and they used to go in the lounge.

And were there many female customers though?

Oh yes, quite a few,

12:00 they liked their beer.

Were the rules different in the lounge?

Oh no, pretty well the same as, the most popular drink in those days was the, 'gin and 2.' You never hear of it today.

What did that consist of?

Gin and 2, it consisted of sweet vermouth and dry vermouth with soda, and a slice of lemon in it, and a bit of ice, gin and 2. You never hear of it nowadays.

I'm not surprised. What sort

12:30 **of beer was being served?**

Victoria Bitter, that was the one they had on draught.

Can you remember hearing about the beginning of the war in Europe?

Yes, quite well, I was, where was I...? I was boarding with my sister then in South Melbourne, and there had been a lot of trouble.

13:00 What's his name? [he means Robert Menzies] He was prime minister, and he flew to Germany, and talked it over with Hitler, and he flew back with this paper to say there wasn't going to be any war, but you know what Hitler was like, and war broke out, Menzies was the prime minister and he made the mistake, he made the announcement over the air,

13:30 that's when we knew it was going to be on, and I reckoned it would be over in a few weeks, but Germany was more prepared than the others were.

And where were you when you heard that announcement?

I was at my sister's place.

And what motivation did you have then, to be a soldier?

I wanted to be a soldier like my father. About 3 days later they had an office opened up at the Flinders Street Station, and I went in there

14:00 and joined up and told them I was 19, actually I was only 17, but my brother found out I had joined up and he went in and joined up too.

How old was he?

He was 18. He had to put his age up too.

Even though your father had, was quite affected by the war, you were still keen?

Oh yes. I wanted to do the same as he done.

14:30 I would have been in, I had been in the militia at Ballarat as a cadet. The 8th Battalion was in Ballarat, and I caught up with them later over in Bougainville.

Sorry, when did you join the militia?

When? I was only 15 then. It would have been 1935 I think yeah.

What motivated

15:00 **you to join the militia?**

I wanted to be a soldier like my father was.

And what sort of things did you do with them?

Well, the uniforms were different. In those days you had tunics with 2 pockets, and you wore riding breeches and puttees [long strip of material serving as a garter], and you still used the old .303 rifle, and, but we found it.... We used to ride our

15:30 bikes. We lived in Smythesdale, it was 12 miles, 15km from Ballarat, and we had to ride our bikes in for drill, so we used to get a shilling, 10c so we could go and buy a pie and a cup of coffee with that afterwards.

How often did you come in for drill?

Every Monday night.

And what sort of other men were in the militia?

We were all cadets. We were in the cadet unit.

16:00 My older brother had done 12 months in the militia, he was down in 'A Company.' There was A, B, C and D Companies, and we never had much to do with him. We went into camp one Easter at Daylesford and we had a camp, and that was quite interesting, but it rained and we got washed out and we went to a church service on the Sunday morning, and

16:30 the minister invited us to come down and he had a place down there where we could camp, so we brought all our gear down and stayed with him.

And how long were you in the militia for?

Well my father died, as soon as my father died we had to move over and go to Melbourne, but I learned a lot there. Drilling,

17:00 and out on the rifle range, I was a pretty good shot with a .303.

I was going to ask you about that. How much rifle training did you get?

Quite a lot, we done a lot of drilling with the rifle and bayonet and so forth, and they used to take us out the range and fire at the targets.

And you enjoyed that?

Yes, I liked that.

Were there any World War I men around in the

17:30 **militia there?**

Yes, yes there were. The funny thing, the lieutenant in charge of our, I won't mention any names, he enlisted early in the piece and went to the war, and he was taken prisoner in Malaya, but he was known as a, 'White Nip,' [allied informer - assisting Japanese] he turned Japanese and he was helping the Japanese.

18:00 He got a bad name. I don't know what happened to him after that, but I never heard any more of him. All I knew was, he was in trouble.

That day when you went down to the recruiting office in Flinders Street, were they suspicious of you?

No, "Come in, what age are you?" "18."

Can you describe the process you went through there?

They just

18:30 took down your name and your age and gave your address and so forth, wrote it all down and, "Right, you'll get a call up."

What proof of age was required?

None.

And so what happened from there?

I went home and when my brother found out I had joined up, he went and joined up too, and waiting for the call up, but it was a couple of weeks that we got

19:00 the call up to go to the South Melbourne drill hall, and the chap on guard duty was suspicious of me and looked at me and said, "What age are you? and I think you had to be 20 in the really early days of the war, and I said I was 20, and he looked at me and I went in, and I didn't get very far. My brother got in all right, but they were awake up to me.

19:30 **When you signed up and you went home and told your mother, what did she have to say about it?**

My mother was still living in Smythesdale. She signed my papers. She was the one that sort of dobbled us in later on. She had that much worry with my father and that. She signed the papers, you can see her signature there, and at father, she just wrote in,

20:00 "Deceased Anzac."

Were you rejected straight away when you got to the training depot?

I got as far as the showgrounds and they woke up and said, "You go home and grow older," and my brother got as far as Puckapunyal. That was a new camp then, it was all bush then. You should see it now. I went up there with a concert party

20:30 a few months later and it was surprising. It was all bush country before that.

So your brother got rejected at that stage?

Well I think my mother wrote in and said, dobbled him in.

How did you feel when you got rejected there?

Oh very... I was a bit upset,

21:00 but I was working at the hotel and it was quite a good job and I didn't mind so much.

So how did you become involved in volunteering your entertainment services?

Well they advertised in the paper, in the Melbourne paper. This was, I just bought this doll, and it was really good, beautiful doll, and it said

21:30 they were doing a concert at such and such a date and to be at such and such a place, and I was in the concert party. The doll used to go down well with the soldiers. Once I got threatened to be expelled from the concert party one night.

Why?

For using a rough joke, but that's the funny part, it's hard to understand over this joke. Where was I?

22:00 At the showgrounds I think, and they roared. They all came out to see what they were laughing about and I was told to keep it down, but Jerry Lewis used the same joke on television in later years. Exactly the same joke.

Do you remember the joke?

Yes.

Can you do it for us?

Oh well we used to recite. We would make up a poem.

22:30 I'll start the poem and say the first 2 lines and you say the next 2. So, "Mary swallowed her father's watch early one summer's day." The doll would come in, "Now she's taking Epsom salts to pass the time away." "The Epsom salts didn't do their work and it came to pass," and the doll, "if ever you want to see the time... Oh you can't get me in on that."

23:00 That was the joke but Jerry Lewis put the same one over on TV. I was going to be thrown out of the concert party if I did it again.

Even though you never pronounced the final word.

No, never, no, no way.

But the soldiers appreciated the joke?

The soldiers did, they were really roared. They used to love a good smutty [dirty] joke.

- 23:30 But I was doing magic too, and that's where I learnt never borrow anything from the audience to do a trick with, because another magician was doing a show down at Queenscliff one night, and this fellow was sitting in the front row with his wife and he borrowed a ring to do this trick, and he finished the trick. I forget whatever trick he done, and he hands it back
- 24:00 and 5 minutes later the fellow says to his wife, "What happened to the diamond out of your ring?" There was no diamond. There had been a big diamond in it and searched everywhere and couldn't find it and he didn't know what to do and anyway when they swept up under the stage on the floor, there it was. It had fallen out of the ring. That's why I never take that risk. Same as Carl the other magician in the concert party,
- 24:30 particularly when you are breaking an egg and you crack into, borrow a hat from the audience, a soldier, and break it into the hat, and he used to have a recess that he would slip in beforehand, but this time he misjudged and it landed on the brim of the hat and it sat there and didn't break, and he got a card and slid it into the receptacle of the hat, and it hardly left a mark. He was very
- 25:00 lucky. I've never borrowed anything from the audience.

Can you describe some of the magic tricks you were doing at this stage?

At this stage I wasn't doing any card manipulation. I still hadn't mastered it. What tricks was I doing? It's hard to remember now what I did in those days, I used to do one with the

- 25:30 cigarette paper. You would put it in your mouth and chew it up or spit it on the fan, and you bounce it up and down like this and it gets bigger and bigger and takes on the shape of an egg and you take it and crack it into a glass.

And where would you be hiding the egg?

That's a secret. That's a secret. There are other young magicians. I never expose any tricks. I've got a young chap, a local,

- 26:00 that I teach tricks. The little boy next door comes from Colac, comes up for holidays, and he comes in and I teach him a few, but you never reveal your tricks. They are still using these tricks to earn a living.

So, what would your act consist of at this point? Some ventriloquism and...?

Yes ventriloquism was my main thing in those days, and I did

- 26:30 an audition at the Tivoli but I didn't,... I was too young, not good enough.

As the war progressed and Japan entered the war, how did your feelings change then?

Oh yes. There are certain things that I can't tell you that should remain a secret, but I can tell you after.

- 27:00 But we knew our boys were overseas, and we knew that it was going to be on, and we had been trained. I was still with the anti-tank regiment then.

Well, let's go back to when you tried the second time to join up. That was when?

I got a call up on that one. That was about 1941

- 27:30 and I got a call up, and that's when I went in and joined the anti-tank regiment, and that's when Japan entered the war.

So had you tried to enlist again, or was this still from the original?

No I hadn't tried to enlist. I switched over to the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] when Japan came into the war. I was in militia, and I switched over to the AIF when Japan came in.

So you were in the militia in '39 and '40?

'39 and '40.

- 28:00 No, I was working. I didn't go into the army in 1941, I went in as the militia, and then I transferred over to the AIF. I still stayed with that unit, but I was AIF. I could wear the Australia on my shoulders.

So, tell us about that early training and enlistment.

Well I was on the anti-tank guns. The little 2 pounders,

- 28:30 5 men to a tank, drum, gun corps [military force] to fire at that tanks. They had to take us out to the Puckapunyal rifle range for practice, but the only moving targets we got out there were going that way.

If we got into action, the tanks would be coming towards you, but we used to have a fireman, what they called the layer.

29:00 He was a busy man. He had his eye on the telescope, he had a handle, traversing gear, and then a quick traversing gear with that hand, and with his foot he had to press to get the quick crows, and then he fired with the other foot. His eyes and 2 hands and 2 feet. He was called the layer, the gun layer, and we had the observer

29:30 who used to stand and tell him, "Target left, target right," and he would line it up and tell him how many degrees to allow to let, the tank was travelling, and then allow in front of it to hit it, but mostly the tank was coming towards you in wartime. In Malaya in the early days of the war there, the anti-tank was going real good there. 1

30:00 anti-tank gun knocked out 5 tanks coming towards them. You shoot for the tracks or just underneath the turret [gun enclosure].

What was your position?

We used to change around. It was a 5 man crew and I forget what the order was in. You would change around, and then you would

30:30 be a layer, and you would have a go at everything.

What were the other 3 positions then?

Well we had to pass the ammunition up from the back and put it in the gun. There's the layer and I forget what the other one was, but there were 5 to a crew, but as the enemy built bigger tanks, we had to build bigger guns. They built 6 pounders.

31:00 They were a bigger shell. We used to practice with a blank. We had no, the real ones had the point on them.

When you were, when you were called up in 1941, where did you first go to?

Seymour, in Victoria, and that's where they found out I was an entertainer. I used to do a lot of entertaining there at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] Hall.

For who?

31:30 The officers, any of the troops there. There were quite a few units there in the army service corps, infantry battalions... they would all come to the concerts.

So you were doing that in addition to your basic training?

That's right yes, yeah. Study at night time of course, but the army audiences were a terrific audience. They would appreciate anything you done.

What did your basic training consist of?

Well,

32:00 I did all the infantry training in the militia bit in the 8th Battalion, but I did all my basic training on the 2 pounders. It wasn't until later on, they changed to 6 pounders. I'd gone then.

How did you feel about being posted to a gun crew?

It was all right. We had the shield in front of the gun, and the machine gun fire couldn't get you unless you put your head out.

32:30 **Was it hard work for you?**

No, no, no, quite enjoyable.

And what was the tucker [food] like?

Oh the food was good. Oh yeah, it wasn't what you were used to getting at home, but it wasn't bad. I didn't like the stew, and then they brought out that tinned stew, 'tuckerbox,' we called it, dog food! We couldn't eat that. It was terrible, but we didn't

33:00 get the real bad food until we got over to Bougainville.

How many weeks were you at Seymour?

I was there for about 3 months with the anti-tank regiment and then they switched me to RAA Headquarters [Royal Australian Artillery] and that was with all the big nobs of the 3rd Division artillery. They made me batman for Major Casey. You might have heard the

33:30 name Casey. There is Lord Casey. This is his brother, and I was stewarding mostly, waiting on the tables.

I believe sometime around this point, or maybe just before, you won a prize as a last minute

stand in?

Oh yes, one night the concert party never turned up and it looked like a fizzer, so they said, "There's no one coming." The

34:00 YMCA executive came out and he said, "I think we'll have a concert. What about stepping up and giving a night?" And I thought, "Why not?" So I went home and got my cards and so forth. I just did a card manipulation act, and I didn't know there had been a prize offered until I'd come to after it was all finished, and then the colonel came to congratulate me for all my card work and that, and I've never seen it before.

34:30 I could do some good stuff.

What was the prize?

I forget now, it was money. I forget what it was, bout 15 bob or a quid [pound] or something.

After all those long hours of practice,...

It was good, I enjoyed it. Often I used to put on shows for the troops in the tent,

35:00 plus I played the guitar and the mouth organ attached, and do both, and we used to entertain the boys in the tent.

What sort of songs did you sing?

I couldn't sing much. I was good at harmony, and I would sing, Obligata, they used to call it, and I used to double act with my brother, and when I joined up with the trio act later on, I used do harmonies, but I wasn't much of a singer myself. I could get up with the guitar and sing

35:30 a song or something like that, but further you got up north the dirtier the songs got.

Well you couldn't be too risqué obviously?

Pardon?

You couldn't be too risqué with the lyrics as you said.

No you couldn't, no. We did the 3rd Division concert party, and they used to put over sketch called...

36:00 what was the name of it? It was very rough, very rough, oh yes, and when we camped up at Mareeba, they came down to do a show, and all of a sudden there was a lot of civilians come to see the show, civilians and all, and they were going to put this act on, and oh my God, they did to.

And how did that go down?

It went over well. It was very funny, but it was a bit odd.

36:30 **What sort of other acts were in these concert parties?**

Oh, there were other people, magic, juggling, singing was good, dancing. Every concert party had a female impersonator who was mad too, but to be a female impersonator you had to be what they called camp.

37:00 What would you call it? We used to say, "Oh you are a bit camp," back then. To be a good female impersonator they used to dress up, they were good. Some of them were very good. They could sing and dance, and we, when I joined the concert party over New Guinea, the previous female impersonator had left, and one of our...

37:30 he had previously been with Ashton's circus. He was a tumbler, and he could sing, and he could dance too, and he took on the female impersonating, but he wasn't camp, a bit normal, he was a normal bloke. He did it very well, he used to do the comic sketches with the comedian.

We might go back to New Guinea later in the day. Why were you transferred to the artillery as a steward?

38:00 I don't know. They just transferred me to RAA Headquarters, and I was stewarding and batman for Major Casey who was pretty well up in the business. I was quite happy to do that.

You wouldn't have preferred to stay back?

I would have preferred to do that, stay with my other unit, but I had no say in that. One of the officers come to me and said, "We'll try and get you back,"

38:30 but nothing happened.

So what were your duties as a steward?

Waiting on the officers in the officers' mess. I used to clean their boots and bring them a cup of tea first thing in the morning to wake them up, and get him his shaving water and make his bed after breakfast

when I knew he was gone, I used to make his bed and tidy up.

39:00 **How did you feel about doing that sort of work?**

I didn't mind doing that. They were all good fellows. They were high ranking officers, but they were quite good.

What sort of hours did you have to keep?

Start early in the morning and you would have a bit of time off in the afternoon, and after the evening meal you would knock off and go down to the YMCA, or down to the two-up school [gambling game with the toss of two pennies].

39:30 **What sort of protocols were there in dealing with officers?**

What do you mean by...?

Were there any special rules you had to adhere to?

Oh no, no, they were pretty good. We had a brigadier in charge, and that was pretty high ranking in the army. A brigadier, major, captain and two lieutenants.

40:00 **Did you do waiting at the table?**

Yes, we had to serve the brigadier first in order of rank, with the major second, and the others, and so forth.

Were they very formal, these dinners?

Oh yes, the army is very formal.

What sort of formalities?

Well, the table had to be set.

40:30 You start from the inside and move out, and of course we had a few arguments that they start from the outside and move in, but that's how the officers done it, and I'll bet you find that's how the Queen does it. We do it exactly the same. You start with your soup spoon right next to the plate, and then you entrée knife and fork and then you're main course

41:00 ones, and your sweet spoon and fork on the outside. So start from the inside and work out. The glasses were placed at an angle. Your sherry glass first, then your whatever they want, white wine or that, or beer, and that was another one, and they were at an angle, and you always served from the left and took from the right. Naturally if you tried to serve from the right you would knock his glass over.

Tape 3

00:30 **Ian, a little bit more about working in the officers' mess. How many courses did they have each meal?**

There was 4, they always had soup, entrée and the main course, and sweets.

And how many of you waited on the tables?

Only myself, because it was in the headquarters unit, there was a brigadier, major, captain,

01:00 and 2 lieutenants.

And what sort of food did they eat?

They eat the same as us. They had a nice soup, we had a very good cook. That's all he had to cook for, was the officers and the other personnel, myself and the drivers and that, the quartermaster. He didn't have to cook for too many.

01:30 **Who trained you to do the proper waiting?**

I'd learned that at the hotel in Melbourne.

Okay, and you mentioned that you were a batman to Lord Casey.

Major Casey, Lord Casey was his brother, Major Casey was the one I was batman to.

When were you batman to Major Casey?

02:00 It was after I had been transferred from the anti-tank regiment to RAA Headquarters, that's when I took over his duties.

What did that involve?

Just wake him in the morning, bring him a cup of tea. While he was drinking his and that, you had to clean his boots, and that's all you have to do then. After he goes

02:30 in for breakfast and so forth, you have to make his bed and so forth, and just you didn't have to do the washing. We used to send that to a laundry there in Seymour.

What else did you have to do when you were his batman?

That was about all.

What about in the evening?

Nothing of the evening, we used to do a lot of army work,

03:00 like we used to go out and camp. I didn't do much work. They used to look after themselves, but we used to do bivouacs [temporary encampment without tents] and exercises and things, and at night time, you would get eaten alive by mosquitoes.

What was your relationship like with Major Casey?

Good, very good, he was a great bloke.

Did you ever spend evenings talking with him?

03:30 No, he was very, he was very, 'officer type.'

What kind of a man was he?

A real gentleman.

You mentioned before the men who dressed as women in the concert units.

Oh yes, yes.

How did they get on with the rest of the entertainment unit?

04:00 Oh pretty good, they kept to themselves and we kept to ourselves. Oh yes, we always got on well with them. One in a concert party in Bougainville, we are getting ahead of ourselves... he was very good. His name was Gus Buckham. I think he's dead now. He was a very fine looking young fellow. He was about the same height as me, and he could comb his hair

04:30 forward, and put on half a wig, and then comb his hair back, and he would have his own hairline. He looked real good. A very good female impersonator. He always used to go crook about other fellows having goes at him and so forth, because he said he wasn't camp, and he didn't appear to be because many, many years later when I was working as a drink waiter in a hotel, he came up with a group of people and

05:00 as soon as he started to get a few in him I started to talk, and the feminism started to come out then.

At the time when you were working with female impersonators, were you aware of their sexuality?

Oh yes, yes.

And how was that handled in the army?

It didn't worry us at all. They just took the part of the girl in the sketches, mainly sketches, and they could all sing and dance. They were good dancers and

05:30 good singers. 2 of them went away with the original concert party to the Middle East in 1940, and Jimmy Rickets and I can't think of the other bloke's name. I had very firm relationships with female impersonators, but very camp.

And how was homosexuality received in the army?

I never

06:00 saw anything, no, no nothing at all. Never, ever saw it, 5 years I was in the army I never ever saw anything like that.

The man that you mentioned who was in Bougainville, he said he got upset by the way he was treated by people. Do you know about the treatment he received?

That was by the other members of the concert party. He wasn't with our unit, he was with another concert party.

Okay. Now when you transferred to the

06:30 **anti-tank regiment what happened after that?**

Well, I did my training with them. That's when I was, I was transferred to RAA Headquarters, and I was with them until Maryborough. That's where I came to 1st army headquarters. They were stationed at Toowoomba, and then we moved up to

07:00 Mareeba and we were there for a while, and then we went across to Lae, and that's when I transferred to the concert party.

What were your first impressions of Toowoomba?

Toowoomba was mainly stewarding and batman. I used to do a lot of shows around Toowoomba.

What were your living conditions like there?

Pretty good, we lived in tents.

07:30 We camped right in the town. Our quarters were in the backyard of a house which was used as a cookhouse, and our mess hut was built outside that, and the cooking was done in the house, and we had all our meals there. Often when I was on duty, the mess hut that was further up, I used to have my meals up there with

08:00 the officers.

Do you know who owned the house that,...?

No, I have got no idea. Several houses there were taken over. General Lovarack was the OC [officer commanding] in charge of the whole area there. He was in a different house himself. There were quite a few places taken over there.

And what was the town of Toowoomba like?

Oh a lovely town, I loved it there.

What did you love

08:30 **about it?**

I loved... the people were so nice. I met a family of people there. This is rather hard to explain. When I was,... there were 6 girls in the family, and the boy was in the army, he was in New Guinea, and my mate was going with [courting] the oldest girl. I thought it was funny that there was no sign of

09:00 any father there. Just the mother and the girls, and they operated a fruit business. They had 2 trucks, 2 of the girls in each truck. The younger ones still went to school and didn't take long for the gossip mongers to get to us. They said their father was a German, and he was in a concentration camp in South Australia which was true. It turned out that he was as good an

09:30 Australian as any of us. The whole trouble was, I don't know if you have heard of Von Luckner. He operated a spy ship during the 1914 war, and he sunk quite a few British, and after the war he came to Australia and toured around here, and the girls' father was Strausser, Harry Strausser was his name, and he invited him there for the weekend and he stayed the weekend,

10:00 but as soon as the war broke out in 1939 everyone who contacted Von Luckner went behind barbed wire. He had contacted Von Luckner. We used to go over there and help the girls load their trucks. They used to put on some beautiful meals. They was no romance as far as I was concerned, just friendly with them. I used to play the piano to them, and they loved that. I did a few tricks and that.

10:30 I wasn't much of a singer on my own. But then the son came home on leave, and he went through to South Australia to try and get him out of the camp, and I met him in Melbourne at the staging camp. I was on leave too, and I took him home and he had tea with us, and he was going through to South Australia, but they wouldn't let the father out, and as soon as he came back

11:00 he went back to New Guinea, they let him out and he came back to Toowoomba, and he was so grateful to us for what we had done, and every Sunday we were always invited over for dinner, and he used to kill a goose or a turkey and by jove he couldn't do enough for us.

What year was this when he was released from the camp?

It would be about 1943.

11:30 **Did he talk to you about the conditions of the camp?**

No, he wouldn't talk much about it, but he was very hostile on it. He said he was, "As good an Australian as any of us and he had to be put away there behind the barbed wire and leave his family." He never talked about the conditions there, I think they were well looked after though. All the

12:00 POWs [prisoners of war] were.

How much did you know about Australians being interned in the Second World War?

I had a mate that lived here in South Melbourne, I worked with his brother at the hotel. He was with the 8th Division, and the whole 8th Division was captured in Malaya and he was in a POW camp, and every time we were over we used to go and see his mother

12:30 and discuss things with her, and I said, "Don't you worry he will be all right there," and he was too. He was in a POW camp, but unfortunately he was put on the Japanese ship to be taken back, the Maru, [also known as 'hell ships,'] they called it, to be taken back to Japan, and the Yanks [Americans] sunk the ship and he went down with it.

13:00 So that was very unfortunate, he was a real nice fellow.

What about the people who were interned in Australia, like the father of your friends in Toowoomba. How much did you know about that going on?

I didn't know much about that no. All I know was that he was a real decent bloke, it was unfortunate that they put him away

13:30 because he used to look after his family.

Now Toowoomba is in Queensland, and the weather can be quite volatile. What was,...?

Oh yes, it can be quite cool there at night. The mists used to drop of a night time there.

You said you were living in tents. How many men in each tent?

In Toowoomba we had the Yankee tents on there, and you would get about 6

14:00 in a tent. You would have a go getting 6 into an ordinary Australian tent, but the living conditions were all right. We were fed pretty well.

What did you sleep on?

A palliasse, that was a straw mattress, a mattress filled with straw. When we went to New Guinea, or up to Mareeba, we weren't allowed to sleep on the ground. We had to have stretchers.

14:30 **When you were in Toowoomba in the tents, were you ever visited by any wildlife up there?**

No, no, we were camped right in the town there, there was no wildlife, no, no.

You mentioned you enjoyed your time in Toowoomba. What kind of entertaining were you doing while you were there?

All sorts. I performed in the Toowoomba town hall a couple of times, and always a big audience, a very appreciative audience,

15:00 and there were quite a few army camps around Toowoomba. I used to go out there, oh yeah...

Who came to see you in the town hall?

All the locals, mostly locals, army personnel on leave...

And who else did you perform with?

Oh I teamed up with another soldier. He was a corporal in the army, and he was a juggler,

15:30 and he was a good comedian too, and we used to work together, but unfortunately when we were in Toowoomba he came and showed me a letter one day, and he had a wife and 2 children back in Melbourne, to say that she was going away with another bloke, and she was going to divorce him and marry this other bloke. Well, he got compassionate leave and he went back to Melbourne,

16:00 then he came back and said, "It was terribly upsetting." She just walked out and left him with the kids, so he got compassionate discharge and he went back to Melbourne, and was working in a saw mill, and I got a letter from him saying he would rather be back in the army than working in a saw mill. It's like doing 6 months hard labour.

16:30 **How many children did he have to look after?**

2, he finally let his wife take them back, and he got married again. I saw him a lot after the war in Melbourne, and he is working a restaurant in Melbourne, and I haven't seen him since then.

Was it unusual of the time that he would have custody of the children?

I don't know what the situation was, she just walked out and left him. He sort of begged her to stay, and she just walked out and

17:00 kissed the kids goodbye, and went, he just had them. But I think he eventually let her have them. They went to her, and he got married again.

Okay, what other shows did you perform around town? To which other units in Toowoomba?

I can't recall the units now. I know I performed in the hospital, and Snowy

17:30 Towers, he was a great entertainer in those days, he was a comedian, and he was with a different concert party and hurt himself, he was in the hospital, and he arranged a concert there, and he contacted me and asked if I would come there and that. But there was one young girl that I could have got very friendly with. She was a beautiful young girl.

18:00 She used to drive an ambulance, and she was doing a Hawaiian dance in the show, and I couldn't stand girls smoking, and we were going well there until she lit up a cigarette, and no, I could never stand a girl who smoked.

And was the hospital you performed a civilian or army hospital?

It was an army hospital at Toowoomba, the army hospital.

Where were the

18:30 **patients from?**

Mostly from the other standing units. I was there myself a week, with my stomach trouble, and then they transferred me down to the army hospital at Warwick and I was there for quite a while. That's where I was made, 'B Class.'

What does that mean?

Well, 'A Class,' means you are fit, 'A1,' you're mediocre, 'B Class,' you are can't be in the

19:00 firing line, in a combat units, and, 'B1,' they send you home.

So it was in Toowoomba that you first experienced your health problems?

No, I had before but I kept it quiet, you know how it is.

When did you first experience them?

Well

19:30 back at Seymour I started to feel the stomach troubles, and still had them as long as I watched what I eat. As long as I don't eat anything acidic, I'm usually pretty right, but I used to be very careful. There are some things I can't take. I don't touch alcohol of any sort, but I found out lately that aerated water. I used to drink a lot of soft drink, started to effect

20:00 me stomach a bit, so I've stopped drinking that, and now I'm just drinking cordial and water which gives me a little bit of trouble but I've got stuff to take there for it.

So when you were in Toowoomba what made your health so bad that you had to go and see a doctor?

I was... the food wasn't good.

What were you eating?

Mainly stews, but it wasn't that bad.

20:30 When you compared with food we had to have over in Bougainville you would say it was quite good. Up in Mareeba I was waiting in the officers' mess there, it was pretty big there you see, there were quite a lot of officers, and they had an AWAS [Australian Women's Army Service] cook and she was a beautiful cook. Phil was her name. I don't know if she was still around, and I used to do jobs to help her out.

21:00 She cooked beautiful meals.

How long were you in Toowoomba for?

About 9 months.

Can you describe for us your daily routine? What time would you wake up?

I would be up at 6.00 in the morning.

And what did you do?

I used to go and attend to the officers, and we had other mess stewards too, and we helped in the mess sometimes,

21:30 and others would help too, and you didn't have to do it because there were other people to help you out. Oh yeah, there were plenty of mess stewards, batman and that.

What time would you have your breakfast in the morning?

Oh about 9.

And what would you have for breakfast?

The usual breakfast, egg and bacon, or mince on toast or something like.

22:00 **And after breakfast what would you do?**

Just go back to the mess hut and help to tidy up and so forth. There was a lot of work to be done around the mess hut and so forth.

Did you help cook?

No, no they had a cook.

What was the hygiene like in the mess hut?

Pretty good, oh yeah very good.

22:30 **And then what time would you serve lunch to the officers?**

The officers would come for lunch about 1.

What time would you have your lunch?

I'd have my lunch sometime before. When I was on duty at the officers' mess, we always ate there, and ate the same food as the officers, and I would usually have my lunch before them.

23:00 When they used to come back of an evening, we used to make them up cheese savouries on toast under the griller. They used to like that. They had that, and a bottle of beer. We used to have a little bar in the mess hut, and that's about all.

How much did the officers drink?

They didn't drink much. They were very,

23:30 well they have some intoxicated officers, but very few. They all liked their drink, their beer and that, but there was never any there at Toowoomba. I saw a bit of it up at Mareeba.

Okay, your ventriloquist doll was sent to you while you were in Toowoomba. Tell us about that.

That's right. I got my mother to pack

24:00 it up, and send it up to me. It's funny, I had a friend who was a family of people there in Toowoomba. I got friends wherever I went because entertainment was very scarce, and I was an entertainment, and it arrived that day and I went to pick it up and went back to their place and they were having lunch. I'd had my lunch, and I unpacked it and I did a impromptu performance while they were having lunch.

24:30 He was having chops at them [criticising] sitting there feeding their faces and he was hungry and hadn't had a feed for a week. But they were very nice people.

Tell us about your first show with the ventriloquist doll in Toowoomba.

My first show, yeah, dear me. It was

25:00 the, the comedian I was working with there, he was a ventriloquist too, and I'm not skiting but he was not at my standard, and he had a smaller doll, and I used to borrow his doll and use that, and I used that, but I done lots of shows at the town hall there. There is a pretty big town hall in Toowoomba, and mess huts and so forth.

25:30 **What was his ventriloquist doll like?**

Well, it was not as good as mine. Only a small one, and just mainly the mouth moved, the mouth and eyes moved, but mine had everything. I could lift his eyebrows.

How much did you practice before you did a show?

I didn't have to practice the ventriloquism. I used to practice the cards. I used to

26:00 loosen up my fingers.

And did you ever encounter a hostile audience in Toowoomba?

No never, ever, not while I was with the army. They were appreciative audiences. Oh yes, only after, in civilian life, that we struck hostile audiences. They were pretty particular. I used to have a few quips [jokes]. I used to say,

26:30 "Is there a cowboy in the audience? Can you lasso that donkey and get him out of here?"

That's how you dealt with,...?

The rest of the audience would laugh and that, and I would sort of win them over.

What did you think of the Brisbane Lions when you were in Queensland?

The Brisbane Lions? I don't think I ever encountered them there.

27:00 Okay, what did you do when you left Toowoomba?

I went to Mareeba. It was a 3 day trip on the train sitting in the one spot all the way. It was a shocking trip. Only get out of stations for your meals. We travelled right up to Cairns, then across. The train only goes as far as Kuranda now, but it used to go right through to Mareeba and we had to go right through, but it now only goes as far as

27:30 Kuranda. 2 or 3 years ago, my wife and I went when I was working at the hotel at Burleigh Heads, we went up there for a holiday, and my daughter came up and she brought her two boys. She only had the two boys then, and we stayed in Cairns, but we made the train trip to Kuranda and back. Kuranda is a beautiful station, it is all decorated.

28:00 Whoever is there is a bit of a gardener, and we came back, and one day we got in the car and we drove over to Mareeba and I looked up some people that I knew there during the war and found a little girl, she really used to adore me, Margie was her name. Anyway, when we went to visit, after the war this is,

28:30 she walked in and she is 46 years old and got 6 children.

What were your first impressions of Mareeba?

It's a lovely town. They had a picture theatre there, and we camped right in the, actually the army took over the school, the Mareeba School, and we had our own camp. We had our own tents and we had to set up and sleep on stretchers

29:00 and there was a bit of a big creek in between the officers' part, and where we were, and we called in the army engineers and they built a bridge there, and when I went back the second time it's still there, the same bridge.

What was the landscape like around Mareeba?

Oh pretty good, I went horse riding one day. We hired a horse and went for a ride and

29:30 saw the Barren Falls and all that, but I was, it took me about 3 days to get over, I was that stiff and sore.

How was your health when you got there?

Oh well, I still had to watch my diet. I was suffering a bit, but I always kept it quiet. I wanted to stay because I tried to get into the entertainment unit but the unit I was with wouldn't let me go. I think that was the main reason I never done any good.

30:00 I wrote a letter to Jim Davidson and he was the CO of the entertainment unit at Pagewood in Sydney, and it wasn't until I got over to New Guinea that he arranged a transfer for me.

What kind of training did you have in Mareeba?

We didn't do any. We did very little. We had a parade ground where we used to do a bit of drill, but it was no training really.

30:30 How much time did you spend maintaining your uniform?

My uniform? I used to wash, we had 2 uniforms, we were in sort of summer dress and I had to wash that twice a week. When we, they took us over to Lae we had to leave our uniforms behind. We couldn't take them to Lae.

And while you were

31:00 in Mareeba what did you hear about the progress of the war?

Well we knew the Coral Sea Battle had just finished. I was talking to a Yank in the street one day, a pilot, he said, "There is a hell of a fight going on. We are giving them a hell of a hiding. I don't know how we are going yet," but that's all history now. A lot of the Jap navy is at the bottom of the ocean there.

31:30 What did you think of the Japanese at this time?

I didn't like them very much no, no.

How aware were you of prisoners of war at that stage?

I didn't see. It was only when I was over in the hospital one day, they had some Japanese prisoners there in the hospital and they were all set up in nice beds and all beautiful, mosquito nets, and our boys complained they didn't have a mosquito net

32:00 but the Japs had them. I never had much to do with them there.

How many Japanese prisoners of war were there?

There were about 6. Every time they wanted to go they had guards over them, and when they wanted to go to the toilet they would have to call a guard and the guard would come in and slip a bullet into their barrel and march them to the toilet and back again.

How long were you in Mareeba for?

32:30 Only about 4 or 5 months.

And what did you do each day there?

Stewarding - I was helping the girl in the cookhouse, she used to look after us with the food, she cooked some beautiful food. She used to cook cakes and things like that for us.

And what did you do with your spare time to relax?

To relax, well we used to practice, practising a double juggling act with

33:00 this mate of mine. We could use six balls between us bang, bang, bang, bang, but we never really got very far with that. It wasn't really an act, but he was quite good doing a single act.

How many men were in Mareeba?

There was a couple of hundred I would say, a lot of AWAS.

33:30 **What were the AWAS doing there?**

Mainly office work.

How much did you have to do with the AWAS socially?

Only when we were putting on a concert in the Mareeba town hall. We knew this girl, she was a bit of a singer, and I asked her if she would come and sing and she agreed to do it. That was about all I had to do with the AWAS apart from the cook, she did all the cooking.

34:00 **Were you aware of romances between the guys and the AWAS?**

Oh yes, there were a lot of romances there.

And how was that received by the officers?

All right, yeah, all right. They used to take them out, and it was only when the AWAS came to New Guinea they kept them under lock and key.

Why did they do that?

Oh well... which was proved eventually, they had a big high

34:30 barbed wire fence stockade around them, and they were only allowed out the gate. They did all office work and I was only in there once when a couple of my mates had dates with girls there, and I went there as a second thought, but it was an American Negro tried to get in there one night.

35:00 They had guards, and he ran and they shot him. There was the talk about that, that they hushed up, but I believe it's right, yeah.

How did you get news that you were going up to New Guinea from Mareeba?

It was a rumour, everyone,... I think the security wasn't really good.

35:30 Everyone knew where we were going to be, to Lae.

Tell us about the letter that you wrote to Jim Davidson.

I just wrote to Jim Davidson. He was very high up in the music world, and he joined the army and he had been to the Middle East and he was made the CO of the entertainment unit, and they were stationed at Pagewood film studios

36:00 at Pagewood, and I just wrote a letter and told him that I would like to join the entertainment unit and I never heard back from him. I had written to the Tivoli and they have sent me a lot of scripts and things that we could use in our shows, they were very good. Greg Parsons was the stage director there then, and he was very good.

Do you remember what the scripts were that they sent you?

Mainly

36:30 comedy sketches and musicals, I couldn't remember now, it was sort of a big manuscript, it was. He asked me to send it back, and when I finished copying it all I sent it back. Mostly comedy sketches and things.

So you never heard from Jim Davidson?

It wasn't until I was in New Guinea. I never heard back from him, but this concert party had arrived there, the '30 Club.'

37:00 As I told you they were drawn from the 30th Brigade. That's how they got their name the, '30 Club,' and there was some really good artists in it. Dennis Scott, he was the CO, and he was in the George Wallace film in the early '30's, His Royal Highness. That's the name of the film. It's probably in the library in Coffs Harbour, I had it once.

37:30 You could see him as a young fellow, but he wasn't a very good actor, but he was the CO of the unit. He took no part of the unit, of the concert party. He only come out at the concert at the beginning.

So, when you got to New Guinea how did you hear that he had been in touch with the entertainment unit?

Well the 2IC [Second In Command] of the concert party, his name was Scott

38:00 too, Frank Scott. He had been a pianist with 2UE [radio station] in Sydney. He was a beautiful pianist and he came to see me there one day and he said, "I've had a letter from Colonel Davidson. I have to give you an audition, and if you are suitable we'll take you over to Bougainville with us and join another concert party." So I went down and did the audition both magic and ventriloquism,

38:30 and they said they would attach me to the unit and take me with them, so that's when I transferred over to there. I was made a spotlight boy because they had a magician and ventriloquist, so I was a spotlight boy, but I became very proficient at it, and Carl this magician took sick, broke out in a rash, and they took him to hospital

39:00 so they put me in as a magician and ventriloquist and I was going very well and I did a lot of shows with them that way. Someone else was operating the spotlight, but then Carl came out of hospital. I was prepared to go back to spotlight boy but the CO, Dennis Scott said, "No, I want you to stay in the concert party. You won't clash with

39:30 Carl. I've already spoken to Carl and your act is different to his, so I would like you to stay on and do your card manipulating and a few paper tearing tricks," that I used to do and that, and so I was one of the fully fledged members of the concert party.

When you were told that you had to do an audition for the concert party what did you think?

40:00 I thought, "This is great." I was very nervous because I had to do the audition in front of all professional entertainers. Most of them were professionals and had been professionals before the war and performing in front of professional entertainers, I felt very nervous but it went over all right. Card manipulating was always something that went over very well because there were not many done it.

How long was your audition?

40:30 Oh, it went for about... I was there for about 20 minutes altogether, and I was out in the open too. I hated working out in the open.

Why did you hate working in the open?

I don't know, but sit out here in the open and not inside the huts. I just did what I was told.

How many people were watching you?

All the concert party, no one else. Here's me performing,

41:00 a rank amateur performing in front of professionals, but I went over all right though.

Tape 4

00:31 **All right Ian how did your life change once you were accepted into the entertainment unit?**

It changed completely, I was full blown entertainer. I had been an amateur before now, but I considered myself a professional now, and all the other boys worked in well with me, and I took part in other things too. In sketches and musical acts and a quartet, On the Banks of the Nile.

01:00 I don't know if you have ever heard of it. It was very comical. We used to dress up in Egyptian costumes, "On the banks of the Nile where the Pharoahs of old did their worst, and they'd eat crocodiles," how did that go? It was very comical, "And they would eat crocodiles if the crocodiles didn't eat them first. You could go for a ride on the big camel's hump, if you went very far you would soon get a lump,

01:30 on the banks of the Nile," and it used to get a bit dirty after that.

Do you remember the rest of it?

Oh yeah I know it all, yeah.

Can you recite the rest of it for us?

No, well, "On the banks of the Nile came a girl from Australia one day, but she left all her boys to return to the country one day. Now she went to Egypt

02:00 she really was a rummy, she went there alone but came back as a mummy, on the banks on the Nile where the river comes back to the sea." We used to sing it in a line, and the comedian always came in with the punch line at the finish. We had a very good comedian Dixie Kid we called him. He's dead now, he died. I struck him in

02:30 Ballarat. He came there to do a show, and I struck him there, and we did a show together, but he went to England and like all Australian comedians flopped in England. George Wallace went to England and flopped.

Why do you think they flopped in England?

Oh well our type of comedy didn't go down in England. Mo, Roy Reeve, Mo, he never ever went overseas. He reckons he'd flop, but the others did, but he didn't.

03:00 **What other acts did you do in the entertainment unit?**

I used to do my magic, ventriloquist and magic, but I used to act in sketches. We used to do a lot of sketches and I took part in that quartet. What else did we do? The other one was, Sweet Sue, we used to do that, that was a good one to.

What's that one?

Oh well, it's a

03:30 we sing,...there's 4 of us, and we would sing a line each, "Every star above knows the one I love, Sweet Sue." It used to get a bit dirty at the finish. I really forget now. It's hard to remember.

04:00 **Did the people you were performing for sing along sometimes?**

Only, no, no, only if we had a community singers which we never had any in our concert party. The others did, but we never had community singers, we were quite content. We had a really good band and a pianist, string, bass, drums, 2 clarinets and a saxophone. They were very good.

04:30 **What kind of piano?**

An upright piano, normal piano.

How often would you have to move the piano?

Almost every day. It used to take us half a day to put up our stage. I've got photos of it there with the dress rooms behind and the canopy right over and so forth, and a generator that could generate the light and the spotlight and overhead lights

05:00 and all that, all the curtains and tabs and all that, we had everything. It was hard work, it wasn't easy. We used to put it up and pull it down the next day, but we got the idea of pulling it down at night time, and we would circle all the trucks around and put the lights on the area and dismantle it then. It was quicker to dismantle, put it back on, and then we could have the next day off.

05:30 It was a great idea.

What did you like the most about being in the entertainment unit?

The friendship. They were all a terrific bunch of blokes. There's only one I kept in touch with. There's a photo of him there in that album there, Marty O'Sullivan. He was a Canadian and I went down to the Anzac march a couple of years ago, and he said, "I've lost my Canadian

06:00 accent," and I said, "That's what you think."

What was a Canadian doing in the Australian army?

Funny, he was... Michael Pate wrote a book, An Entertaining War, I've got it, and Marty's got a bit in that. He was on ships, merchant ships sailing around, and he was in Australia when war broke out, and they dumped him here

06:30 so he stayed and he joined the army and he was a singer, a crooner I suppose you'd call him. He was quite good. That's how he got into the concert party.

Can you describe your daily routine once you got transferred to the entertainment unit?

Get up in the morning, have a shower, cold shower of course

07:00 and hot breakfast. Wherever we went we attached ourselves to some kind of unit, and we used to dine with them and sit down and eat their meals and that, and practice up. The juggler, he used to practice 8 hours a day. He used to go out and come back for lunch and go out and then knock off at 4. Keith Seastro was his name, and his family was known as the, 'Tossing Seastros,'

07:30 and they were a juggling team. I've got posters in the album there of his mother and father showing in Belgium. He was a great juggler. He was the youngest of the family, and his brother, his elder brother, he was with another concert party. He went to the Middle East with the original concert party and we were good mates.

What sort of things would he juggle?

08:00 He could do 5 balls and the cigar boxes. He didn't use cigar boxes, that was someone else I'm thinking of. Cotton, big cotton reels like that, and juggle them like that, and 2 over and drop the 2 outside and still catch the middle one. It was a good act. He used to balance, he used to balance a

08:30 billiard table on his chin. Would you believe that? By 4 billiard cues and he had them recessed into the corners of the table and the billiard table on the top of them and a little thing on his chin or he would put it on his forehead and balance, but 2 of his assistants used to have to go out and lift the table up and take it off again. That was a, it wasn't a real billiard table. It looked like one but wasn't as heavy

09:00 as a real billiard table. His father used to balance a rickshaw. There's photos with him balancing a rickshaw on his forehead and do it over in the Middle East when he was travelling around over there.

And the man who you replaced who went away into hospital for a while,...?

Carl.

How was your relationship with him?

Oh pretty good, we were good mates.

09:30 Actually he taught me a lot, lots of things that I didn't know. He didn't do any card manipulation, he knew a few good card tricks, but mainly illusions. He used to make all his own illusions. The funny thing about Carl, Jim Davidson called him, 'Crafty Carl.' The real reason, back in Pagewood, Carl put in for a grant, he needed some money to buy some illusion

10:00 equipment and he always used to work with big stuff, and Jim Davidson gave him a grant of 50 pounds. Well he stuck the 50 pounds into his pocket and went into the workshop and built the illusion himself. He was very good with tools, and Davidson knew but he couldn't do anything about it. He always called him Crafty Carl.

And what costumes did you wear when you performed?

Oh we had proper full wardrobe. We used to carry our

10:30 portable wardrobes with us. It was a great big trunk, and you could open it up like that and everything, all the clothes hung inside it, and one member of the party was in charge of the wardrobe and we always used to wear white shirts and he used to wash all the white shirts and iron them. I never actually had a proper outfit, I never had a suit that fit me. I used to work with the one shirt,

11:00 with either black trousers and a sash down around. The sash was handy because I could always stick things in it and pull them out when I wanted them. That was handy. We used to have a full wardrobe. The female impersonators all had beautiful dresses and things like that. The makeup was lousy, they used to send over

11:30 suntan makeup and white powder to go over it and the paint would get into the pores of your skin and you could wash and wash it and still have it on your face the next day. It wasn't until after the war that I learned the problem. I used to make up a mixture of white vaseline and paraffin oil

12:00 and wash your face and get a big wad of cotton wool and dip it in water and squeeze and used to wipe it off as clean as a whistle.

How did that affect your skin?

I don't think it affected my skin in any way.

And how many vehicles did you have to get around and carry all your stuff?

We had the portable

12:30 stage, it had sort of big high sides on the side of it, and a hinge, a double hinge, and it pulled straight out and jacks under it to hold it up, and the front put on the front of it, and the scaffolding was built over that, and then big canvas covers pulled over that and we had the 2 dressing rooms at the back and room at the back,

13:00 and oh, it was....We had footlights and back cloths, front tabs, and we had everything that you use in a theatre, just about everything you wanted. The tabs are the ones that just open like that and close. The

curtains are the big ones that open and close.

You mentioned previously that you

13:30 **started as a spotlights?**

Mmm.

Can you explain to us what you had to do?

I just had to hit the spotlight and hold the focus on it to a small spot or a big one, and I learned when the orchestra was giving a rendition I got the knack of switching from one to another. The chief musician congratulated me one night

14:00 because I was doing a marvellous job there, but I bent it so often that I could switch straight to the musician when he started to play.

What was the light like to manoeuvre?

The light? Quite simple, quite simple, it was on a stand and we often done shows for the Americans, for the Yanks. They were a great audience, especially the Negroes, you heard the old saying that

14:30 they were, 'laughing in the aisles,' well this were, the Negroes. They would start laughing and fall out of their seat. They were really terrific to entertain. We done a lot of shows for the Yanks. I got on well with the Yanks, they were great. I've got a photo of a Yank there, he was a ventriloquist. Later on he sent me a photo of himself,

15:00 and there is one of them there taken with Bob Hope when Bob Hope toured the islands. He had a photo taken with Bob Hope. I wish I would have got that one.

Were there entertainers the likes of Bob Hope that you had all heard of, that you wanted to meet?

Oh yes, well I didn't,... the only show, American show that I ever saw, was the Irving Berlin show, when Irving Berlin brought

15:30 a show to the south west Pacific called, 'This is the Army.' They made the film, This is the Army, have you ever seen it? No, it would be worth seeing because this is the same show, and there was a magician in it, and a juggler, and a choir. A cast of about 100 in it altogether. Beautiful singing in it, beautiful. It was a good show. Irving Berlin came out himself, he made a film,

16:00 he didn't, but he composed the music for it in 1938, called, Alexander's Ragtime Band, have you seen it? There's a song in that, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning, Jack Haley used to sing, and he'd get out of bed and sit on the side, and sing the song, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning, and Irving Berlin came out and sang that song to us, and

16:30 that was probably right, and he said, "I'm glad I met up with you Aussies at last," but we really appreciated it. He's such a great composer. He sang several songs from, Alexander's Ragtime Band, and he said, "I've just composed this, I need my glasses for this," and he pulled his glasses out and started to sing it, and it was about this, these AWAS girls that all wear pants. He said, "This song is about

17:00 the AWAS who all wear pants."

Do you remember the song?

No, no, I remember one line, 'We finished and we're standing pants to pants,' is all I can remember of that, and he sang that, and it was a really terrific show. They put on 2 shows and it was put on in an aeroplane hangar and they used all parachutes for curtains, and

17:30 it was a terrific show.

What kind of distances did you travel to perform in New Guinea?

Not far, only short distances. We were stationed at Lae, and we used to go to Yalu, Nadzab, and only a few miles. You couldn't take too long to get there because you had to put your stage up, but it

18:00 got that way in the finish there were too many of the concert members sick. I was sick myself, but I was cracking a hardy [being tough], because I didn't want to get out of the concert party and go back to Australia. I just wanted to stay with them, but it finished we couldn't use the stage there. There wasn't enough people to put it up. We used to carry the stuff on our backs. There were Jap patrols, Japs patrolling all around through

18:30 there. We never encountered any, but after the surrender one of the Japs told the interpreter he had watched our show through the field glasses. If they didn't like the act, 'bang,' popped you off!

Did you ever feel

19:00 **in danger from the Japanese?**

No, not until we got to North Soraken, that's right at the top of North Bougainville. We had to stay there. That's the funny thing, when I was in the militia, the Ballarat, the City of Ballarat Regiment, their colours were red and white, called the, 'blood and bandage,' and we got up to... this battalion

- 19:30 was holding the Japs back on the peninsula, the Bonis Peninsula and that's where Frank Partridge won his Victoria Cross there. He was the 8th Battalion and I saw the red and white colour patch and I said, "My old battalion from Ballarat," and saw some I knew. That was incredible, but one of the most, the tucker [food] was crook over there. Tinned margarine, tinned fish,
- 20:00 goldfish, we called that, tinned stew, tuckerbox we called that. It was terrible, and I was walking down the beach one night and there was a group of soldiers cooking over a fire and they said, "Would you like to join us? We've got plenty of fish," and I said, "Oh yeah, for sure," and I said, "Where did you get it?" and they said, "The fish come in in shoals of a night, and throw a hand grenade in, and it stuns them, and just got down and pick them up," and they brought out a feed of fish and bread and margarine
- 20:30 there, and the best meal I'd had in ages, but they told us they paid the native boys to get the fish for them. They taught them how to use the grenade, take it in, pull the pin out and throw it in, and the explosion would blow the fish up, and catch them, and bring it back. Pull the pin out and throw the grenade in and it didn't go off. It was a dud, but he dived in
- 21:00 after it and he got it, and brought it back, and took it back to them and he says, "Bugger finish," it's broken, "Bugger up finish," and he put it on the table, and they never reported in the history of the AIF, was a mess hut emptied so quickly. It was a dud, it didn't get rid of it.
- 21:30 It was a funny experience, but I really enjoyed my feed of fish.

When you travelled around, what protection did you have against an ambush?

303 rifle. My, our CO asked for an Owen gun, that's an automatic gun that was invented by an Australian, but they said, "No, the .303s will do," so

- 22:00 one in the spout, and 9 in the tin box. That was our protection.

How much ammunition did you carry?

Just a full magazine, '9 in the tin,' we call it, and, 'one in the spout,' but Carl started doing his bullet catching trick up there, and this night, I don't know what happened, but the bullet fired from the audience and he used to catch it on

- 22:30 a tray and stop it, but it must have ricocheted and bang, it got him in the side of the face, and I went out to help him with the next illusion and he was covered in blood, but he wouldn't stop. He just went on and did the next trick. I was helping him with it, and he was nearly collapsing when he came off. We had to rush him to hospital.

How did the audience react to that?

They thought it was part of the act. They laughed, they thought it was funny, "The odd bloke with the beard!"

- 23:00 Carl had grown a little goatee beard, and beards were prohibited in the army. You weren't allowed to grow a beard, but he had one, and he used to get away with it, and the officers used to look at him and say, "He's got a beard, how can he have a beard?" but he had it. He got away with it.

Do you remember any of the songs you would sing?

Oh yes, our opening chorus was,

- 23:30 "We're off for the big show tonight, so keep us company. The songs and the music are bright, a swingsters symphony. The atmosphere's just right, and all our plans are made. For the laughter packed, bring them back, in the victory cavalcade." That's our opening song. The, Captain of the
- 24:00 Clowns, was the name of the song, and we used to sing that, and we had a closing chorus, but I forget that. "We've come to the end of the show..." and I really can't remember that.

When you travelled around to the different units, who did you eat with?

The unit we were at, we were likely to eat anywhere. When we were up at Soraken

- 24:30 in North Bougainville, the Japs were only just not far from, we could hear the guns going off, and the 8th Battalion was there holding them back, and it wasn't until later in the war that the Japs,... we used to go to South Bougainville... that they found that the Japs had tanks down there, and we never had a tank on Bougainville. That's when the 100 Armoured Division was brought across, and were landed, but they could have made an attack I
- 25:00 reckon. But when the surrendered, I was lying in bed asleep at night and heard the rifle fire. 'Bang, bang, bang,' and fellows yelling out, and I jumped out of bed and pulled on my pants and reached for my rifle and heard the voice saying, "The Japs are here," and oh hell! It wasn't, he was saying, "Peace was here," that's the words, and it was. They opened up the canteen

25:30 and everybody got a bottle of beer, and I didn't drink so I just gave it to the other boys, and that was the end of the war.

Well we have a lot of ground to cover before we get to the end of the war. You were in the army and you were doing this, what kind of drills did you do?

What kind of...?

Did you do drills?

No, no, occasionally when our CO had anything to promulgate to us, he'd

26:00 line us up at, 'attention,... stand at ease,' and read it all out.

And, when you were coming over from Australia to Lae, you weren't in the entertainment unit at that stage. What were your first impressions of New Guinea?

I hated it. The smell was horrible, this stale smell kept coming, and you'd get used to it after a while that you wouldn't even notice it.

26:30 **What kind of smell was it?**

Real, very smelly, rotten fruit or something like that, but just a jungle smell. But we picked up some Japanese silk which we used a lot in our magic act, and the Yanks used to use a flare chute, and it was a flare, it used to shoot a flare up into the air, and a chute would open up and float

27:00 down slowly, and I got hold of one of them and it was made of Japanese silk, and I brought some of that home after the war and I gave it to a girl I used to know, and she said, "It has a jungle smell about, it hasn't it." I couldn't smell it.

What did you see when you first arrived in Lae?

What did we see? I was sick. I was a terrible sailor; I was seasick all the way

27:30 over, and got loaded off the truck, and we had a truck to take us to our camp, and I was really sick and staggering along, and a fellow yelled out, "Hey Parker," and it was a chap I hadn't seen for a long time. I knew him in Toowoomba, and he said, "Come on over," and I was that sick I just collapsed on his bed, and he gave me soft drink, 'lollywater,' they used to call it over there. They used to make it in New Guinea because they only had half the

28:00 gas in it as an ordinary drink, and he gave me a drink of that, I never forget that, I really appreciated that. We could buy the lollywater for threepence a bottle, 3 pennies. I dug a hole really, and we had a ground floor in our tent, and I dug a hole and put a box the size to fit in it with a lid on it, and I used to keep my drinks in it to keep them cool.

28:30 But I used to keep a box alongside my bed, this is very interesting, and put your odds and ends in it, and one day I decided to clean it out, and there was this dirty big snake coiled up asleep, and he had got into the box. He was a big 8ft, and I called the other blokes over and said, "Have a look at this," and they said, "Good God," and I got the butterfly net and

29:00 got him into the butterfly net, and he was awake then, and he was about, we knocked his noggin off and measured him, and he was about 8ft, but I often think afterwards if I had had a cold night, he might have climbed into bed with me. I had the mosquito net over it, but what I should have done was just take him over and put him in the jungle somewhere and let him go.

29:30 As far as I was concerned then, he was just like Japs, the only good one was a dead one.

What was the reaction of the snake when it was in the butterfly net?

Oh he was, I couldn't see, I just showed him to all the other boys. He was a big one all right, 8ft long and pretty thick. I don't know what sort he was.

30:00 **How did you adjust to living in New Guinea after Australian life?**

You get used to it, funny how you get used to these things. I got on to 2 mosquito nets. They had a cloth top and a drop around the outside, and I cut them up and I made a pair of sheets out them. I used to sleep between them like sheets. Fancy sleeping in New Guinea in sheets. I used to wash them every couple of days and

30:30 it was nice sleeping in them. Never got myself a pillow. I used to use me kit bag for, we never had a kit bag. We got them from the uniform office before we left, but I managed to make up a pillow and sleep in it.

And how was it different from Australia?

I hated it, it was a clammy atmosphere. Not hot,

31:00 humid! You were sweating all the time. Every soldier you saw had the back of his shirt was all wet. We used to have to take these Atebrin tablets [anti-malaria tablets] too. A lot of them used to dodge taking them, so they used to line us up with our water bottles and come and put the tablet in, and you used to swallow it with your water bottle and it turned your skin yellow.

31:30 When you came home on leave the girls wouldn't look at you, yellow looking sort of skins we had.

Why did people dodge taking them?

They had a horrible taste. You had to get it in your mouth and swallow it, if it stayed in your mouth it left a horrible taste, oh yes.

Did you see men

32:00 **who had malaria?**

Oh yes, I've seen a bit of malaria, they sweat all over, and they shake, and shaking.

What about men who had been wounded in battle with the Japanese?

Well I, I saw very few of them. They were taken say to hospital ships,

32:30 and I saw a few sick ones in hospital. I used to put on a good show in the hospital wards just down the end of the hospital wards. I used to go over with my cards and that. I don't know if you know Luthien Para? He was a champion accordion player, and he was the best accordion player in the world, he was very good, a great musician, and I went to the pictures one night and

33:00 I heard a Mary Casey tune called, How Little We Know, It was in a Humphrey Bogart film, and I told him about it and I whistled it to him, and he wrote down the tune, and then he wrote out a full orchestration for the band. He was a very good musician, but he used to play for me while I did my cards silently in the background.

33:30 **What had happened to your ventriloquist doll?**

He got smashed on the way over to Bougainville. It just about broke my heart. It was our men who done it I think. When the boat came in, we were taken off the ship and into a staging camp, and finally we got into a camp of our own, and the doll had

34:00 been taken out of the case and something had been dropped on the head and it was smashed. I had to put him out of the show for the rest of the war, but I got him repaired when I got back. I got him repaired and fixed up. I gave him away eventually to a young chap who was learning to be a ventriloquist, he was still working all right. I used to do the two acts.

34:30 One act was to make the doll talk which was very good, but the other one was to make your voice come from a distance and the doll would sing out, "Hey you up there," and the voice would come down. I can't do it now. The voice would come down, "What...what are you doing up there? Do you want to come down?" "No," "What are you doing, come down?" "No!"

35:00 "Would you like a whiskey," and, "Yes," "All right, you'll have to come down the ladder and count every step as you come." And you could hear the voice very soft getting louder, and louder, until it went past into the floor and the doll would say, "Where the hell are you going?" and "Down here." I can't do it now, but you do it in the back of your throat. You take a deep,

35:30 a deep breath, and you talk from the back of your throat and it gives the appearance of it coming from a distance, and I could do another act where the case would be sitting on the stage and I would walk out and you'd hear this voice singing, and I'd be looking around, and then, "It's coming from the case," and I'd go over, and you could hear this voice singing from a distance in the case, and as I opened the lid,

36:00 the voice would boom out, and then I'd close it again, and it was the doll inside, and then I'd open it again and he'd go into the act. I was quite good at that, but I can't do it now, I've lost the knack of it.

Is that something you had to practice a lot?

Oh yes, yes, I practiced that every day. I used to hold your breath and take from the back of your throat and keep your lips still.

When you were working

36:30 **as a ventriloquist, would your mouth be open at all when the doll was talking?**

Just slightly, just a natural look, I can try, I think I can still do it, I'll see, the doll would come in, "Late again, always late. Can't you get changed? Where have you been?" "I've been outside talking to a young lady." I say

37:00 "Well, what did she say?" "No." It was the start of the act, but I can still do, I had perfect lip control. I can still talk without moving my lips.

Is that something that you practice in front of the mirror?

Oh yes, I had to practice in front of the mirror same as my card manipulation.

How much did you have to do with the natives in New Guinea?

Oh a lot, we saw a lot of the natives,

37:30 they were terrific. They always called me master, they always called me master, and the doll, Master Bluey. That was his nickname, Bluey, he had red hair, and I got on well with the natives.

What was your relationship with the natives?

No, I used to, working parties around the camps and that, but oh yes, because they had been in the Solomons and

38:00 they spoke a different Pidgin English. It was called Melanesia Pidgin English, but we soon learnt it. We soon learned to speak to them. We found a lovely swimming pool in the jungle there one day, and we used to go down there for a swim in the nude of course, and we used to, we went charging through the jungle and into the pool and we saw a black

38:30 bottom sticking up out of the water and it was a native boy and he came up out of the water, and stark black naked he was, like we were, and, "Ah, concert party." He recognised us, "You know us do you?" "Yes, yes." To the juggler he said, "You," and "What do I do?" and, "You,"

39:00 and imitating us all, he was funny.

Did the members of the entertainment unit, did you teach each other your own tricks? Did you ever learn to juggle?

Yes, I could juggle, I could, four was the most I could do, but my mate, he could do five which was very hard to do.

Do you think magic is something that is in the blood?

39:30 Yes, I think it was born into me. My father was very good at magic. Never professional, but very good on the cards. He taught me pretty well what I knew, and he even taught me, and he made me make a solemn promise never ever to expose how to stack the cards in a game of poker which I can do, and shuffle the cards, and of course, the spielers used to operate on the trains in those days.

40:00 Just playing a game of card, or a friendly game of poker or something, and they used to fleece [take your money by fair means or foul] for their money, but they got wary of this and they wouldn't play, so these spielers got on and would say, "Do you want a game of euchre? Would you like a game of euchre?" and my father showed me how to do it. You shuffle the cards and give one of them four aces

40:30 and yourself a bad hand and you just pick up your cards and you say, "I would like to bet my hand against anyone else's hand." And the one with the 4 aces would come in hook line and sinker. He's got his 4 aces and you would put down a, 'lone hand,' not a, 'lone hand,' there's no, 'lone hands' in euchre. In poker, it's a, 'routine flush,' a, 'royal routine,' that's what you'd have.

41:00 Dad showed me how to do that on the promise that I'd never use it in a gambling game, which I kept to. That's why I made the promise to him that I would never smoke or drink. I still kept that promise.

Tape 5

00:31 **Ian, I wonder if you could describe to us what a typical program was for one of your entertainment nights.**

Well we usually open up with a band number. We had a very good band, all were professional musicians, and then the singer would come out and do a song and

01:00 then usually a comedy sketch, and then a specialty act like ventriloquism, or magic or something, or juggling. Then, we used to put in a lot of comedy sketches, because the boys loved that, especially if it got a bit rough. There was the 3rd Division concert party used to do a sketch. It was more like a melodrama. It used to go for ¼ of an hour, it was terrific.

01:30 What's the name of it? I forget what they call it. By gee, it was funny, but rough, and when I was at Mareeba that concert party from the 3rd Division came to Mareeba to put on a show, and we were camped almost in the town, and a lot of locals came and I thought, "Oh my God, they are going to put on that sketch."

02:00 It was terrific.

So you would have some comedy sketches interspersed.

Yes.

What else would be going on in the program?

The juggler, the magician, the ventriloquist, we had a very good singer. He used to come out dressed in the robes with all the holes in the back, and he used to sing the Lord's Prayer. By jove that went down well. He was a great singer. What else did we have...?

02:30 Mostly comedy, and songs, and that.

What about popular music of the time?

Well, popular music was non-existent then. I'd never ever, I didn't like pop music.

But what about songs that were popular back then?

Paper Doll, not the one that Slim Whitman sings, but

03:00 the other, Paper Doll, "I'm going to buy a paper doll that I can call my own," that one if you remember it. That was popular back before your time.

And would there be an intermission?

What do you mean?

An interval in the middle of the show?

Oh yes, we used to have an interval, yes.

And how would the evening wind up?

Oh, we always finished with a closing chorus,

03:30 then we'd start packing up.

Was there any audience participation?

Oh yes, the magician, Carl doing his ventriloquist act, he used to get someone up out of the audience and he'd get him to be like a doll and he used to touch you on the back when he opened his mouth, to open and shut it and it was very well thought. One night over in Bougainville, he chose a man who had been celebrating.

04:00 He was full as a boot [intoxicated], and he completely sabotaged the act, and when they finished Carl was smiling to the audience and dragging him off by the scruff of the neck, and he was going to thump him, until 2 or 3 of us stopped him.

How did the drunk man sabotage the act?

He kept saying the wrong thing and doing the wrong thing. He kept opening his mouth when he should be closed, and completely sabotaged the act, yeah.

04:30 Carl was very upset about it, but these things happen. One night he was doing a trick where you borrow a hat from the audience and you break an egg and so forth into it, and you finish up by pulling out a pudding, and he broke the egg and it fell on the brim of the hat and it just sat there. Borrow a hat from the audience mind you, and he got a playing card, it didn't break

05:00 luckily, and he just scraped it like that into the container already in the hat that, I shouldn't be telling you this, but it hardly left a mark on the hat.

How many guys would be watching the show?

Anything, sometimes we did little small shows, and sometimes we did big shows, there would be close to 1,000.

What were they sitting on?

05:30 We a lot of places we had to... they had stages built, and lots of seat, plenty of accommodation. If not, they would sit on the ground. I remember one night I went to the pictures and there was rain all...the rain didn't make any different to the pictures, but you put your feet on the seat up in front, your hat down, and your coat around you like that. That's all you done. When I stood up to go home, I was up

06:00 to my knee in water.

That didn't worry the audience?

No, no, not a bit.

In a big area with 1, 000 people, what challenges did that present to you, because with your cards?

The bigger the audience the better, I liked it.

06:30 They could see what's happening. The cards looked small, but they could see what was going on. Oh yes, it always went over very well. One night we did a show for the, I'm not skiting, we done a show for the air force, and they always give you a cup of tea and a biscuit or cakes or something afterwards, and one of our men was talking to one of the air force blokes, and I was just standing back, and

07:00 I heard them talking, and I heard this air force bloke say, "Oh, your magician is good." I really threw my chest out [proud].

Did you ever have any rowdy audiences?

No, not in the army. I had plenty in civil life, but none in the army, they were very appreciative.

What do you think the soldiers thought of the shows?

They loved it. They loved vaudeville shows.

07:30 They used to like their pictures too, but where we were stationed in Lae, you could go to the pictures every night if you wanted to. All you do is just go out on the road, and a truck would pick you up. You didn't even have to hitchhike. They would take you up and drop you off where you were going, and there were a lot of picture theatres. The Yankees had a good picture theatre, it was wonderful. One at Lae base, one back up where we were camped, and we used to

08:00 get the pictures before they hit Australia. They would come show them up there first before they come to Australia. After I came home I was seeing pictures that I had seen over there.

How long would a typical show run for?

Usually only short, they had a main film. About 2 hours.

I'm talking about the shows that you did?

Oh, that I did.

08:30 About, it would start at 8, and finish at 11, about 3 hours.

Was there any problems with insects with all these lights in the jungle?

No, they didn't worry us, we were used to them. We had mosquito repellent on and stuff. No, they didn't really worry us. One night out on manoeuvres,

09:00 we just had a sort of an exercise, I wore shorts. This was in Queensland before I went to New Guinea, because you weren't allowed to wear shorts in New Guinea, and we were doing a raid on another camp, and we had to go around them, and we even sent in one of our men, and found out what the password was, and the mosquitos were biting me, and I thought it's no

09:30 good going in now, wait until they all go to sleep, and the idea was to go in and pinch something. The main objective, it was an artillery regiment, and we were to pinch a gunsight, unscrew a gunsight off one of the guns. You couldn't, we had no hope. The gun crew were sleeping around the gun, and I just said, "All right," and I got and have a bit of a sleep...and the mosquitoes were still biting, but I got used to them.

10:00 How many entertainers were in your troop?

I've got a list of them in my scrap book. The CO, the 2IC, and the pianist, two clarinets and a saxophone player. Carl the magician, the singer Norm,

10:30 Marty the crooner, and Tic the juggler. I think we had fifteen altogether because we had a couple of drivers who used to do all the driving.

What about other technical crew?

An electrician, oh yes that was essential, that was about all. Just three others, plus the electrician, four altogether, that weren't in the show.

How did you get on

11:00 **with everybody?**

Oh real good, we were all perfect mates.

There was no one you didn't get on with?

No.

Why were there no women in the troop?

Oh well, it was army. No women in the army, it was only later on they brought over the AWAS in New Guinea, and they were only working in the offices and sort of thing like that.

11:30 **So all the female acts had to be male?**

We had at least two female impersonators in each concert party, but there used to be two in our show, but they left for some reason or other, and then there was only one, and he wasn't actually a fem [gay / female impersonator], he was a singer, he could sing. He used to be with the circus, he could acrobat, tumble, dance, and sing, but he took on the female impersonating. He done a very good job, but he definitely wasn't a fem.

12:00 **The other female impersonators, what sort of background did they come from?**

I wouldn't know, I never associated with them.

Why didn't you associate with them?

They just kept to themselves, and we kept to ourselves. There was one, Mary Page, we used to call him Sadie. He was with the 6th Division Concert Party in the Middle East,

12:30 and I didn't actually met him until after the war. I was talking to him in the hotel one day where I was working in Melbourne, and a fem walked into the bar down the other end, and just walked in and went like that, and Sadie said to me, "Oh Christ, look at her!"

What do you mean when you say a fem?

A female, well they are other cases.

13:00 Well, gay is the word they use now.

Do you think those men had a hard time in the army?

No, oh no, they got on very well with everybody. They were always good friends. They never exploited their talents or anything to us. Oh no, I used to be able to pick up a photo of a female impersonator and say, "Oh look at her," and that sort of thing, but

13:30 oh no, we always got on well together.

What sort of wardrobe resources did you have available for these skits?

Pretty well everything. We had dinner suits and ordinary suits too, with collar and tie. The femmes had a wardrobe of clothes and proper dresses and things, different wigs...

What about for all your sketches?

Oh yes, we used to dress up in,

14:00 whatever the part was. If you, whatever you had to be, you would dress in that part.

Who kept all these wardrobes organised?

We had a wardrobe, one person in charge of the wardrobe, and he used to do the washing and ironing of the shirts, so anything I needed washing I would give to him.

And he was full time in charge of wardrobe?

Yes, that's all he done.

14:30 He didn't have to help put up the stage.

How big was the wardrobe packed away into?

Oh well, we had the portable wardrobes that looked like a big box that opened in 2 like that, and here's all the things hanging inside on hangers. We kept it upright all the time.

How many vehicles were needed to carry all your gear?

Well, with the portable stage,

15:00 2 trucks and a jeep.

And where would all you entertainers sit?

Pile on anywhere, hop in the back, or the front, or anywhere.

How rough were the roads?

Very rough.

And what sort of typical distance would you be travelling around?

Oh well, it wouldn't be very far. We didn't travel very far to

15:30 different units that were around, and on Bougainville we used to have to go down in the trucks to the south, but up north where there were Japs there, we used to go by barge. As the comedian used to say, "We'll barge in on them." We used to travel by barge around to there, and we stayed up there for a few

days. There is a naval unit stationed out on a little island called

- 16:00 Sapasa. We call it Saposa, but I struck a sailor in hospital after that and he said, "No, it's Sapasa, not Saposa, Sapasa," [actually Saposa], and we done what we called a troubadour show. That's where you don't have your stage, and done a show for them in their mess hut.

So how was a troubadour show different?

Well, you didn't dress up and just went on and done your show.

- 16:30 This night we done our show for the navy, our female impersonator was sick, and believe it or not, our CO, Lieutenant Scott, he was a pretty hefty sort of a bloke and he had done it before, so he dressed up and he looked the part real well, but pretty hefty. But he got through it all right.

Under what circumstances would you do a troubadour show?

- 17:00 When you had to travel to a place where there was no stage and you couldn't get your own stage there. It was rough, and we knew there were Jap patrols in the vicinity, but they weren't looking for a fight. They were well out of it.

What fears did you have about being so close to the front?

Not worried. We went up north to Bougainville, you could hear the guns going off in the distance and that, but it didn't worry us, no.

- 17:30 **Can you describe to us the show you did for the New Guinean natives?**

It was just our normal show, and they really loved it.

Who had organised this?

ANGAU, that's the Australian and New Guinea Administrative Unit, ANGAU. They were in charge of the natives, and they used to love it.

Whereabouts did you do that show?

The big show we did,

- 18:00 that was at Nadzab I think, Nadzab.

Can you describe to us how the natives arrived, and so on?

It's hard to see, you have got the foot lights in your eyes. There was a pretty big audience, and of course there was a lot of Australians there to, Australian soldiers, but there was a lot of natives, and Dixie the comedian, he played up to them a lot, using native words, and a bit of Pidgin English and that.

- 18:30 **You said earlier on, briefly, that they looked quite fierce when they arrived?**

But these were the ones up in the hills. We hadn't seen them before, and they came down from up in the hills and they were all in their fighting gear. Spears and so forth, and they got the ANGAU Officer got up, and said to them, "He no come to fight, he come to sing sing you."

- 19:00 **What did they think of you and your dummy?**

Oh they thought, Master Bluey they called him, they thought he was funny, oh yes. That went over very well. They could never make out how he talked.

Explain to us again when you went to Bougainville, what part of your equipment was lost or destroyed?

All my magic gear,

- 19:30 my camera, I was carrying a camera. I wasn't supposed to have a camera, but I had one, and it got stolen, and a girl had sent me over a film. It was very hard to get film, and she had it all waterproofed and everything and that, and I had an antique gramophone. Small, have you ever seen one, it's the size of an alarm clock, but you opened it up and the arm folds back and you put an ordinary

- 20:00 standard sized record on, and it could play it. That was stolen.

How did that affect your act?

I never used that in the act.

I mean with the magic gear and so on?

I just did a manipulation act, and got some newspapers, and did paper tearing, you tear it up and restore it, that sort of thing.

Who do you think was responsible for this loss?

I don't know, I don't know.

20:30 One of the boys reckoned a lot of stuff was left in the camp where we were staying, but I couldn't say who done it.

What other things were lost from other people?

Carl lost a lot of stuff. There's nothing else like costumes, they wouldn't bother pinching them. Things that they wanted themselves.

21:00 **How was your health at this time?**

It was still, sometimes I used to line up at the cookhouse and put my meal on the plate and 2 slices of bread and a hunk of butter or grease as I called it, and just went and dumped my meal in the bin, and go to the fire we used to wash our dishes at, and make toast, and that was my meal, 2 slices of toast. I couldn't eat anything else.

21:30 **Were you worried?**

No, I wasn't worried. I thought if I squeal [told anyone] they would send me back to Australia, and I didn't want to leave the concert party.

Why were so desperate to stay?

Show business, the show must go on!

Do you think other members were suffering in different ways?

Well all had something wrong with us. Carl had to go into hospital again in Bougainville. He finished up,

22:00 he was shipped back home to Australia. The CO was shipped back to Australia. Frank Scott, the 2IC, took charge, and he actually done a better job than the CO. Frank was on, I run into him, I was doing a radio show in Sydney, and I walked into 2UE in Sydney and here was Frank sitting there having a yarn.

What chance did you have to meet up with other entertainment troops?

22:30 There was only one other entertainment unit in Bougainville. They called them the 'Kookaroos'. They were a great act, a great show, but the, 'Shipway Twins,' were there then. They were a circus act, but they were a horizontal bar act, and it was set up outside the stage, and they put lights on it. They were very good, but daredevil sorts. If you picked

23:00 a fight with one, you had the 2 of them, and remember Sid Heylen on TV [television]. He was Cookie on, A Country Practice, he was with that co. [company], and he picked a fight with one of them one night, and had to fight the both, they were bashing him up. Cookie he was a good comedian, but there was a bloke called Jack Coglein. He was a very good actor and comedian from Sydney radio and that. Most of these boys came from Sydney,

23:30 but he, they used to do a good double act, he and Sid Heylen. He was a Middle East man, and his time was up, and he came back and was discharged from the army, so Sid was on his own. Sailor we used to call him, that was his stage name, but Cookie in Country Practice, so he had to work out an act on his own, but he did very well. He was a good comedian.

24:00 **How did the acts differ between those two troops?**

Pretty well the same. Each one had a ventriloquist, a magician. There were a lot of magicians around, but lucky for me, I was only a young fellow then, and it was hard to get any good stuff, but my father taught me a lot of very good stuff which I was able to swap. They wouldn't tell you something

24:30 unless you told them something, and my father taught me how to do a trick with a cigarette paper. You just pull the cigarette papers out of the packet to show what they are, and then you chew it up and you spit it onto a fan and bounce it up and down, and it gets bigger and bigger and it takes on the shape of an egg, and you can crack it into a glass. That used to go over well.

When you first joined the army you were desperate to

25:00 **follow in the footsteps of your father.**

Yes, I wanted to be a soldier.

How do you think your service compared to his?

Oh he was a fighting man, I wasn't. He was through a lot of fights and battles, he was wounded, and in Gallipoli and Palestine he was with the Light Horse, but they never ever fought as mounted troops. The idea of the Light Horse, was to take a position quick.

25:30 If they had to get to a position quick, they could gallop there on their horses.

Did you ever still dream about being a fighting man?

No, no, that's all gone. Sometimes I still get that regurgitation in my sleep. If I'm lying back and it goes down my windpipe and nearly choke you, it's a horrible thing.

And when you were in the entertainment party did you still think I should be out there fighting, or you thought you

26:00 **were doing something different?**

Oh no, I done something I wanted to do. I wanted to be an entertainer, and I intended to follow that up after the war too.

What contribution do you think you made?

I think I made a good contribution. I've got 5 medals up there.

What I'm trying to ask you is, how do you think, what difference do you think you made to people in the war?

26:30 We were greatly appreciated. We were over in Bougainville when Bob Dyer brought his troop over, Bob and his wife Dolly, and 2 or 3 others. Our accordionist, Luke Impara, went with them and they were doing shows, and Bob used to carry a Japanese flag, he got off one of the fellas, and they said, "What do you do with that?" And he said, "I've got a good place at home,

27:00 it will just fit the toilet seat."

What do you think, how do you think you helped people, helped those soldiers?

I helped them, I did, especially those soldiers in hospital. I used to just leave the group and go and sit, and those that couldn't sit up, I would just go and sit beside the bed and show them a few card tricks. That helped them a lot.

27:30 **Do you think you were an important contribution to the morale?**

I was yes, I'm sure I was.

Who were some of the other famous people we would know that served in those units?

Michael Pate. Norm Hetherington, that's Mr Squiggle on TV, Smokey Dawson, Sid Heylen. There's lots and lots of special...Grant

28:00 Taylor, Peter Finch. They were all with the entertainment unit.

Have you subsequently met any of those men?

No, well most of them are dead now. No, not really, I very seldom met up with them over in... I never ever met Peter Finch, or what's his name? I met a few of them at the reunion. I went down to the reunion

28:30 2 years ago. I got a lot of photos of it there, and I marched with them. Smokey marched, he's 90 and he marched without any trouble, but a lot of them didn't march, just went to the reunion afterwards at the Redfern RSL [Returned and Services League]. But Michael Pate, that's the one I was trying to think of, he was there with his son, and I was wearing the Turkish belt which my father took off a dead Turk at Gallipoli,

29:00 and I was wearing it, and I took it off just to show it to Christopher, and he was looking and he said, "Look everyone," and everyone was eating their Chinese food and he said, "Look, this Turkish belt came off a dead Turk," oh gee!

How were all the entertainment units organised higher up the echelon?

There were 20 detachments altogether, and we were number 20. We all had a name. It was called the, '30 Club,'

29:30 because initially it had been drawn from the 30th Brigade, but their headquarters were at Pagewood in Sydney, at the National film studios. They weren't making any films during the war, and Colonel Jim Davidson, he's the great musician, he was there, and he was the colonel in charge, the CO, and there was a lot there. We had to go back there to reorganise and

30:00 new equipment and that. Occasionally you would met up with some of the others, but we never saw them out on tour, because some, like the 3rd Division concert party, they spent a lot of time in Darwin. They got to New Guinea eventually, but they never came near us.

What about your brother, did he end up serving in the army?

30:30 No, he stayed out of it. In fact I got him a job at the hotel where I was working, and he was right through, and after the war I went back to the hotel just to work as a barmen but, you mightn't believe this but within 2 years I was managing the hotel.

I believe anything of you Ian. How much could you keep in contact with your mother

31:00 **and family?**

Only by mail. The one time I didn't get leave for 2 years, I was in New Guinea then, in Lae, and I come home. It was enough, I was going to do a Bing Crosby I was going to be home for Christmas, and my mother had been over to Smythesdale where we previously lived, and had done all the house up, and when I got home we were all up there, and I spent Christmas there. That was

31:30 the best Christmas I ever had.

Did you have Christmas' away?

Yes.

Can you describe what that was like?

New Guinea, I don't think I had, not in New Guinea. I had one at Seymour and one at Toowoomba, I just forget. I don't think I had any Christmases

32:00 in New Guinea.

How long were you in New Guinea and Bougainville for?

I'm not sure. It's written in my discharge certificate in days, but I was there for quite a few months, 18 months altogether I would say.

And at what point did you hear about the end of the war?

I was asleep and I heard the guns going off and shouting, and I

32:30 jumped up and pulled on my pants and looking for my rifle and I heard someone say, "The Japs are here," and I thought, "Oh my God," and actually he was saying, "Peace is here!" and we had a great celebration. They opened up the canteen and gave everyone a bottle of beer, I just handed mine over to my mates, I didn't drink. That was a promise I made to my father that I would never drink or smoke.

33:00 **And what were the other men doing then?**

They were drinking their beer and celebrating that the war was over, but the funny part is, down in the south they wouldn't believe that the war was over. I've got a photo there I'll show you after, of an aeroplane, and they painted in Japanese, "Japan Surrenders," that flew over their lines, and they still weren't convinced, so they printed pamphlets in Japanese

33:30 and signed by General Savage, and they dropped them over the lines. I've got one in my scrapbook there, and finally the Mivo River, they were on one side of the river, and we were on the other side, and you at times of the day, the river was fordable and the Japanese type of jeep coming across with a driver,

34:00 an officer and a sergeant sitting on the back, and they come in and said they were prepared to sign a preliminary surrender, and the officer said, "Yes." They had an interpreter interpreting everything, and he said, "You will have to go to Torokina," that's the big place, but he wouldn't go to Torokina and he said, "We can't sign the preliminary surrender here," and finally the officer just pulled out his

34:30 .45 and pointed it at the officer and said, "You will go to Torokina or else," and he said, "We will go to Torokina if I can go back and get a higher ranking officer." That was agreed and away they went across the river, and an hour later back they came with another officer, and they put him in a staff car and took him away to Torokina to surrender. The actual surrender actually took place a few days later.

35:00 They came down and surrendered, and there were things they had to sign and so forth, and there was a whole line of allied flags flying outside the main office building, and when the Japs came out they asked if they could pay homage to our dead, and they all lined up and bowed to the flag.

35:30 That was the end of it, and the Japs treated our Australian prisoners very shamefully because they reckon it was dishonourable to surrender, but in Bougainville I saw thousands of dishonourable Japanese coming in with their hands up. But a lot of our boys, not members of the concert party, but other units, they

36:00 built big compounds for them and they used to sneak in and pose as official searches and come out with terrific souvenirs. Field glasses and other gear, and they always had their medals with them. Took them medals and anything else. Funny we never saw any Chinese until after the surrender, and then all these young Chinese come up. Couldn't speak a word of English and we couldn't speak Chinese, so sign

36:30 language, but the Yanks had gone previously, and they had left, they gave us a lot of stuff. They gave us a big drum of lemon squash powder. Just mix it with water and it made a beautiful drink and we gave them all a drink of that and, "Number one, number one," that was the Pidgin English word for good, very good, "number one," but they couldn't speak

37:00 a word of English. But they had rolls of money. They must have got it off the Japs. I've got a couple of them there, and they'd buy anything off you like they wanted clothes. I sold them a couple of shirts. I

knew we were going, and trousers. I took Japanese money for it, and I've still got it here.

What were your impressions of the state of the Japanese when you saw them?

I didn't see much of them, only from a distance, I didn't go into the compound.

37:30 Only from a distance, no, not up very close.

Why didn't you make an effort to see them close up?

I didn't want to, I didn't want to. They didn't appeal to me, but even then we didn't know how shamefully they had treated our prisoners. We didn't know about

38:00 anything about that then, it was only after the war when they started to come home, but as General Blamey said when he signed the surrender he said, "I do not regard you as an honourable enemy." That's what he said to them.

Do you think that was a fair criticism?

Yes I think so.

The POWs,

38:30 **the Japanese prisoners that were taken into your compound. They were treated fairly by the Australians?**

Yes, they were treated well. They were in a big compound, they put them on working parties. I've got photos of them there, and made them work.

What sort of jobs?

Working out on the roads and that. I've got photos of them on the airstrip, but don't tell me they are all little squat blokes, because I've got a photo of a bloke who was a 6 ft there.

39:00 But it's a very sad experience in New Guinea, going back from New Guinea. When I came from Smythesdale, the captain of our football team there, he had joined the army, and he took the 39th Battalion, and when the Japs landed on northern New Guinea, he was the 39th Battalion,

39:30 he was the only available, and they shot them straight up the Kokoda Track there, I don't call it trail, that's an American word, the Kokoda Track, and they met the Japs at a place called Gona, and that was a hell of a battle there for 3 days, and this chap I know, Doolie we called him, he got 7 machine gun bullets in his legs and he was carried down the Kokoda Track and they flew him back.

40:00 I was in Brisbane then, and I heard he was there and I went out to see him in hospital, and he told me all the wonderful job these native boys were doing. They sit and nurse your leg all night if they thought it would give any relief. He was dying of thirst, so I went to the canteen and got him a couple of bottles of cold soft drink, and after I left I found out he died that night.

40:30 It wasn't his wounds that killed him. He caught pleurisy [inflammation of the membrane enclosing the lung] on the way home and that killed him eventually, but a strange thing to say, his older brother was a mate of my fathers and he won the Distinguished Conduct Medal in France, at Bruston Bridge.

How often would you go and visit the hospital?

Not very often, no. Once in Bougainville I think

41:00 but mostly casualties would go to hospital ships and that, but I did a couple in New Guinea but they were hard shows. You are working between the rows of beds. You couldn't set up a stage or anything, but mainly do comedy sketch and that and have a compare, and the comedian would crack a few jokes. That always went over well.

41:30 **It only hurts when they laugh.**

Tape 6

00:31 **Okay Ian, while you were in New Guinea, what were you frightened of if anything?**

I was never frightened of anything, nothing really. There was no fighting in New Guinea then. The Japs had been driven out.

What evidence could you see of the fighting that had gone on before?

Oh not much because the jungle grow so fast over there that,...

01:00 I saw plenty of it in Bougainville, but not much in New Guinea.

What evidence of violence did you see in Bougainville?

Bunkers. They used to build a bunker which was sort of a big slit trench, and they would build it up with trees, the limbs of trees, and then they would put a roof over it and they would get inside it. They were kamikaze blokes, they would fight to the end.

01:30 They would hold the advance up, they couldn't get them out. The Yanks came up with the best idea, a flame thrower, and burn them out.

What did you hear of the kamikaze fighters?

Not much, just that they were prepared to stay there and die just to hold up the advance, but the flame thrower was the thing that got them out.

And apart from the bunkers that you saw,

02:00 **did you see other evidence of battle?**

No, only a few souvenirs that the others brought back. We were never ever close to the real action.

How big were these bunkers?

How big? About as wide as this house. They used to get inside them with the machine guns and that,

02:30 and rifle fire and that, and stay there until they burnt them out.

Okay, and did you take back any souvenirs after your time in Bougainville?

Yes. A bit of Japanese film, I haven't got it here, it's out of the, Japanese film, 35mm film.

03:00 **How big, how long was the piece of film?**

Not big, just a little roll about that big. There's some photos in it with Japanese writing.

What are the photos of?

Just some Jap as a civilian, just a civilian, not in uniform.

Have you ever had the writing translated?

No, no, never interested in that.

03:30 **Did you bring anything back apart from the film?**

Not really, only the surrender pamphlets and the Japanese money. I had a lot of coins, and their coins were made out of cardboard and just lined with some sort of silver metal. They were very light.

04:00 **Where did you get these coins from?**

The Chinese, they had pockets full of them. I don't know how they got them, but they had notes and money, plenty of money.

Did you practice any kind of religion while you were over there?

Yes, I'm a Church of England, although they call it Anglican now. I got into trouble for that.

How so?

I used to go to church every,

04:30 we had a lovely little chapel built there. We had an organ, a little dais built for the organ and that, I used to go to church every Sunday. One day they made it compulsory, the order came through it was compulsory, you had to go to church, and I thought, "That doesn't matter to me, I'm as a devoted follower as it is," and Sunday came and they lined us up on the parade ground, "Attention, quick march, march down to the chapel,

05:00 break off." I thought I'm not going to be stood over like this, so next Sunday I didn't go to church. I stayed in my tent and another chap was sitting there with me and along came the regimental police, not the military police, the regimental police, and the other chap said, "I'm a RC [Roman Catholic]," and he said, "Show me your

05:30 meat ticket," and my meat ticket was over there, and it had CE [Church of England] stamped on the back of it, and I had to admit, and I said, "No, I'm a Church of England, not a Catholic," so he took my name and about 2 or 3 days later up on the charge, and I marched into this room and I was sentenced to 3 days CB [confined to barracks]. They said, "There's no good fining you blokes over here because it's taking money from you doesn't help at all."

06:00 CB, that means confined to barracks. I had to report to the orderly room after 4pm. That was the finish of our working day. I had to report with all my packs, rifle, bayonet, everything, respirator, the whole lot, and parade up to the orderly room, and a corporal would come up and inspect me and break off, and

he said to me, "I don't know who is going to get

06:30 sick of this first, you or me." And come picture night on Tuesday night, and I came up, and the corporal inspected me and he said, "Now I don't want to see you until after the film," so I went over and got undressed, went to the pictures, and then run home and got dressed and parade back afterwards. That's how we got over that.

How much did you have to do with the officers and men in charge?

I had a lot to do

07:00 with the officers because they were a great bunch of blokes the Australian Officers. I was battling there sometimes, and they used to give me things, and one officer I was batman to, he was with ordinance. That's the, they do all the repairs on the trucks and guns and things, and he was excellent. He gave me a lot of stuff. We were always making souvenirs to send home

07:30 and stuff, and he brought me over a lot of stuff to use.

Like what?

He used to take an old rifle and take the bolt out of it and grind it down and he used to make an engraving instrument out of it. He could engrave into the perspex we used for souvenirs. When an aeroplane claimed [crashed], it was stripped before it stopped smoking,

08:00 and we used to get the duralium, which is light, like steel, but very light, and the Perspex was like glass, but you could cut it up. I made a lot of things. I made a pair of, my young sister was getting married, and I made her a wedding present. I made two salad servers out of perspex with beautiful hooks on them, and I shot some, toothbrush handles were all

08:30 brightly coloured, drill a hole through, 3 holes through the handles of the servers, and then I'd cut a piece of this toothbrush handle and push it through, and saw it off both sides, and sand off, and it would have red, white, and blue in the handle. I think she's still got them. I made her a pair of butter knives too.

How long did it take you to make those?

Not long because we

09:00 had patience. A lot of the boys used to use tooth paste to polish, and that used to take 2 or 3 days using toothpaste, but this officer I knew from ordinance said to me, "Get a hold of a tin of Brasso," and that does the same job in about 2 or 3 minutes. I made a lot of stuff. I had a lot of the souvenirs stolen when I went to Bougainville.

09:30 I got a lot of cowry shells, a very small shell, and I made, I got a Yankee, the Yanks, they had an identity chain, and I got a hold of a few of them and I sawed the back of the shell and put the chain right around and fill that up with plaster of Paris and make a necklace send over for my niece, but that got pinched.

10:00 I never ever saw it, but I made her a lovely little brooch. I suppose she's still got it, out of Perspex. Where you could, I would cut up a 2 shilling piece and cut it in the shape of a double heart, and polish it up and put it on top of the piece of perspex and put a clamp on it to hold it tight, and put it in boiling water, and it compresses itself right into it,

10:30 and then I cut out a double heart around the perspex and polish it up. I sent it to her. She's probably still got it. I told her mother to get it engraved, get her name on it. She's probably still got it. She lives in Wangaratta in Victoria.

How did you learn to do this sort of thing?

You just learn. I had a bloke there that used to make rings out of duralium, he used to sell them, he used to get 30 shillings each. He

11:00 just get a sheet of duralium, and take it to ordinance, and sling the bloke something, and get all the different size holes in it, ring size, and he used to cut them out with a jigsaw, and cut a piece into the head of it, and he used to leave a sort of lump in it, and then he'd cut a groove into it, and then put a toothbrush handle into it, and polish it off.

11:30 Then you'd get a threepence, and he'd cut it into the shape of a heart or whatever they wanted or the fellows initials, and sit it on top of the perspex and stand a hot knife on top, and it would melt into the Perspex, and he used to get 30 shillings each for them. He would take his money and get straight over and do it on the two-up. I talked him into selling me one, one night for a pound, so I got one. It was a beautiful ring, and I gave it to my brother when I was home on leave,

12:00 but he went straight over and put a pound on the two-up. He was hopeless.

How prevalent was the two-up?

Oh very prevalent, two-up, and dice. They used to have the dice marked heads or tails so you could play

that. I used to play that, not too much of it.

Where would you play dice or two-up?

Anywhere around the camp. It wasn't stopped.

12:30 **Nobody had a problem with gambling in the camp?**

No, no.

Okay, now the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, how much did you know about their contribution to the war effort?

Who's that?

The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels.

Oh, they were marvellous, as I told you, that friend of mine Doolie Willis, he received the wounds on the top of the Kokoda Track

13:00 at a place called Gona, and he was carried down by the Fuzzy Wuzzies, and it took 3 days. They would sit and nurse your leg all night if they thought it would give you some sort of relief. He said they were wonderful.

And much Pidgin English did you speak?

It's actually an easy language. You learn all the swear words first, and then it's easy from then on, but

13:30 over in Bougainville it's Melanesian Pidgin English which is slightly different. You soon learn it though.

Do you have other funny stories about your travelling around up there that you haven't told us?

Oh yeah, but a lot of them up there aren't worth repeating. No, I don't think I should.

14:00 There are a lot of butterflies in New Guinea, I had one, they used to catch them, they were beautiful, but they had one they used to call the, 'Blue Emperor,' fairly big butterfly with a big wing span, and it was black with blue inside, and he had hairlines on the back of his wings. They were a beautiful butterfly but very rare, and there was an American WAAC [Women's Auxiliary Army Corps] there told an Australian if they got her one of these butterflies

14:30 she'd look after him, so anyway I was sitting in my tent and at the back reading, and I saw one fly past, and I grabbed me net and off after him, and a mate of mine is singing out, "Catch him, get him quick. You know what it's worth if you get him!" I wasn't interested in that, but they used to put things in our food to retard us a bit up there I think. I was just starting to work now,

15:00 but I caught him, and I took him over the RAP, that's the regimental aid post, and I knew a young fellow who worked in there, and I got him to embalm him for me. They give him a needle and I packed him up and sent him home to my mother. I don't know what became of it. It disappeared. Someone must have it, but I can't find out what happened to it, a butterfly!

15:30 **What else did you send home to your mother?**

Lots of things, I used to make all sorts of souvenirs, brooches out of Perspex and that. I got a penny and cut it out to leave the kangaroo in it and a, 'V' - 'V' for victory and the kangaroo, and I used to press that into perspex and cut it out and polish it and paint in the kangaroo in the V, and put a little bit of

16:00 pin on them, and I sent them to a lot people. I used to write to a lot of girls. I loved writing letters and I used to receive about 3 or 4 a day and answer them the same night. A lot of girls used to write to me.

Who used to write to you?

Different girls, funny who you get to write. There was one girl. She worked in a factory in Sydney she used to write to me. She sent me a photo and so forth,

16:30 and she gave me the address of another girl she worked with, and I used to write to her too, and when I was passing I thought I would just call in and see them, and she come out and I told her who I was and so forth, and she said, "Elaine is here," that's the other girl, and she went and got her, and apparently her boyfriend was very jealous and she was frightened there might be some trouble.

17:00 I found this out later on, but to cover up, Elaine asked if I would like to go over to tea with her, and I said, "Sure." Her family lived over in Campsie, so I went home with her and met her family and had tea with them. When I came off the boat and my head was still spinning and I was sick, I was in the barber shop having a haircut and the barber said, "Are you all right?" and I said, "Yes, the barber shop's going like this,"

17:30 and anyway she serves up stew for tea. I ate it, and I said, "I'm sorry, you'll have to excuse me, I can't eat all of this," but they were a lovely family. After I was discharged I came back to Sydney waiting for

discharge, I went out there. It was Christmas time and I could get a week's leave from camp, but I wasn't allowed to go home. I had to stay in Sydney, and I told her mother this, and

18:00 when I was getting ready to go back to camp she said, "Come and stay for Christmas with us, for the week," and I said, "Is that all right?" And she said, "Yes," so I did. I spent Christmas with this family in Campsie. A lovely family, but never any romance with the girl, she was very nice and that, and had a lovely little sister and brother, but we used to go all out together. Go to Luna Park and

18:30 go swimming. As far as it went, but later on in life after I was married, I took my wife and 2 children up to Sydney for a holiday, and we went out to see them and stayed there for a while. I never saw Elaine. The younger one, she was married and lived up the coast somewhere. Her mother rang and told her, and she hopped on the train and came down to see me.

19:00 **What difference did getting these letters make to your,...?**

Oh a big difference, the letters were beautiful. We loved getting letters no matter who they were from, and I used to write every night over in the YMCA. They used to have a record player going, and they played and used to serve up hot coffee. It was beautiful coffee.

19:30 I couldn't knock it back, I had to drink it, and I always got prickly heat the next day, but I couldn't knock back the coffee. I would think no more coffee the next day, but I couldn't knock it back, but it still brought on my prickly heat.

What about other stories from your performances? Can you think of things you haven't told us?

One I wouldn't actually... in New Guinea.

20:00 We used to do a sketch, a courtroom sketch, it was very hilarious. The comedian was the judge and he used to wear the wig and gown, and he'd be up in the box there, and we were all the prisoners, and that was very hilarious, and we used to get some really good jokes. One fellow was charged and he'd come in smoking, and he says, "No smoking in court," and he'd throw the cigarette down,

20:30 and of course everyone dived for it, including the judge, and he'd come in with his hammer and get it back, but one night one bloke, he was a singer, and when they threw the cigarette down he rushed in and he grabbed it. He got the laugh, and Dixie didn't like that, but Dixie hit him on the knuckles with his mallet and must of hurt him, and got

21:00 the cigarette off him and when they finished off and the stage is up high with steps going down, and Dixie was walking down, and Leighton whack and split his lip right open, and of course, Dixie couldn't finish the show and the other fellow was instantly dismissed from the concert party and transferred somewhere else, but that's the

21:30 only incident really. Carl finished up with his own bullet.

Was that incident with Dixie the only time you saw friction within the troop?

Yes, yes, that was the only time. There was never any friction, all good mates.

Was there a favourite act you liked performing the most?

Me, like myself? Just my

22:00 cards. The cards used to always go over well. It was clever, it wasn't just fake magic stuff, they knew it was all clever manipulation and they liked that. That always went over well.

Was there anything about army life and your entertainment unit that you didn't enjoy?

Oh the, I didn't really like army life, but when I joined the entertainment unit it was different. I thought the war could go on forever.

22:30 **Even though you had been very keen to follow in your father's footsteps and be a soldier?**

I wanted to in the first place, but I was, 'B1,' made, 'Class B1,' I couldn't have gone to a combat unit anyway.

What were the wounds that your father sustained when he was in the war?

Shell shock mainly. His hand, those two fingers were bent in like that.

23:00 He couldn't straighten them, but he could still do the card manipulation. His right hand was all right, and shell shock. I think I was walking through the bush with him one day. We were passing a mine and a big mine where they had an engine going and the engine backfired and he ducked and he started running and when I caught up with him he was crying.

23:30 **In your experience in the army did you ever see men with shell shock?**

No, no, Dad did. He said he saw soldiers sitting in the corner trembling like this, useless. In the early

days of the 1914 war, shell shock wasn't recognised as anything. They reckoned they were only malingering,

24:00 trying to get out of it, and in the French army soldiers were taken out and shot because they wouldn't fight because they were suffering from shell shock. They were shot. I know that happened in the French Army. My father was blown up with a shell at Gallipoli, and when he come to he didn't know how long he had been out and his mate, Ian Smith was his name. He come from

24:30 Smythesdale in Victoria, and he could see his legs sticking out, and he grabbed them to pull him out and he legs came away from the body. He just collapsed. The shock was too great for him, but he got some of Ian Smith's...he named me after him actually, but he got some of his shaving gear. He brought it home, and took it down, and gave it to his mother.

25:00 He's also, I've got a lot of photos that he sent to Mrs Smith, she passed them on to her sister still living in Smythesdale, and I got them from there, and they've got my father's handwriting on the back. One of the Turkish prisoners there they captured on the Suez Canal being escorted through the town into the camp.

You mentioned previously that you heard that the Japanese had said that they

25:30 **watched some of your shows through the field glasses.**

They could, just through the interpreter they said they had watched us, yeah.

What did you think when you heard it?

I was horrified. They couldn't do anything, that was after the war was all over. We never accepted the Japs as friends or anything, so I kept out of the compound and right away from them. I've nothing against them now.

26:00 That race of Japanese are gone, they are all new Japanese now and in Japan at the moment. Japanese children that there was a war on, and we had to defend ourselves, that's what we are told.

What do you think of that?

I don't like that at all. Japanese children know nothing about the Japs bombing Pearl Harbour and trying to get to Australia. They got as far as half way down the Kokoda Trail,

26:30 track I should say.

After the war ended how did you get back to Australia?

By ship. We got word that the ship was waiting for us, so down we went. The only way of getting aboard was a scramble net they dropped down. Had to climb up that like a monkey, and all our stuff was taken up with a hoist. The trucks were left there. They came back later I think

27:00 all our trucks and that. We all put on a concert on the deck on the way home. I was on my back with seasickness on the way home. I couldn't take part in it. It's a funny thing, the chap who compered, Marty O'Sullivan, the singer, the Canadian bloke I was telling you about. He was at the reunion a couple of years ago. He said he can't remember leaving Bougainville and coming back to Australia. I said, "You can't remember? You

27:30 compered the show," and he said, "I don't remember a thing about it," funny, isn't it.

How long did the trip back take you?

Usually about 3 days. I thought it might help my seasickness a bit, I got on a Yankee stretcher. I took it on board with me, I set it up and thought this was going to be nice and comfy, and the movement of the stretcher accentuated the movement of the ship,

28:00 it was worse, so I just packed it up and I threw it overboard. It's at the bottom of the Coral Sea somewhere.

You have said before that the war could have gone on forever, you were having a fabulous time.

I loved the entertaining and that, yeah I didn't mind that one bit. I could have gone on.

What were your thoughts when heard that the war was over?

Oh great, I thought I could go home. We were told we wouldn't be going home straight away. We still had a lot of concerts to do,

28:30 shows, and we still carried on doing shows even though the war was over.

What was happening around you while you were doing that?

What do you mean?

After the war was over?

They were bringing all the prisoners in, and putting them in the compound, and the Yanks had a tip there where they used to dump all their rubbish. They had gone, they had left, but by jove they threw out some valuable stuff.

- 29:00 I got a beautiful big trunk. I got that home with me, back. I used that when I went on tour with the shows when I got home.

What else did they throw out?

Nothing startling... we just continued doing our shows until it was time to come home for about 3 days.

Where did you first land?

- 29:30 At Brisbane. There was something I forgot to mention. One night between Milne Bay and Lae, the captain of the ship got a wireless message from the shore patrol that there was a Jap sub on our tail, so we were all taken from down below and put on the deck. We slept on the deck, but my mate said, "No, I'm staying down here," I said, "If they hit that night, I would have a better chance
- 30:00 of recovery up here," but the only thing we hit that night was a tropical thunderstorm and I got drenched. I had to pick up all my gear and get out, and was drenched wet, but the next day the ship... no sign of the Jap sub [submarine]. Next day, the ship turned into Aurora bay, the Yanks had that, they had driven the Japs out of there, and we stayed with them for 3 days, and I liked being with the Yanks, they were terrific fellows.
- 30:30 Their food was much better than ours, and we were there for 3 days, and when the coast was clear, we went back onto Lae. But we came back on a ship called the River Burdekin, and we sailed up the Brisbane river, and as we came into the wharf there was a British naval ship tied up, and we had to pass them, and this British sailor jumped up
- 31:00 and he called out, "Three cheers for the AIF." It was very, very moving. We gave three cheers for them too.

Tell us about arriving back in Australia again.

The band was playing on the shore, that was great,

- 31:30 and we got onto trucks to take us to the staging camp and one of our boys had a Jap flag, and he tied it to the top of his rifle and he flew that up, but in our camp one night one of the concert parties was showing there. One of the originals that went to the Middle East in the early days, and I knew most of them, and they put on a good show because they had a very good magician. He was a good card manipulator,
- 32:00 Jean Raymond was his name and he came from Adelaide, he was very good. He had a little moustache too, he looked the part. Everyone reckons I looked like a kid on stage, so I grew a moustache to offset it, but it was a disaster so I shaved it off.

You went back to the Pagewood film studios. What did you do there?

- 32:30 Nothing really, just filled in time. Put on cookhouse duty occasionally, but this Jean Raymond, he was the magician. A fine looking fellow, good entertainer, and I would try to talk magic with him, but he just didn't want to talk about it. I passed the kitchen one day and he was sitting there peeling spuds, and he said, "Now you know why I'm not interested in magic."
- 33:00 You see, we had a fire there one night out in the scrub. It was surrounded by scrub, and that was where a lot of the filming was done for the film, 40,000 Horseman, it was just like a desert outside there. In those days I was,... and the firecart drove straight in, and the fire was out there, and they got the firecart, and rushed out to fight the fire out there, and 2 of our blokes had come home half full [half intoxicated], and one of the them, Reggie Thorpe,
- 33:30 I knew him quite well, he used to do a drunken trombone act. Pick up the trombone and pretend to be drunk, so he put on the fire hat and jumped on the firecart and went around the yard. If Davo had been there, there would have been hell to pay.

When were you discharged from the army?

It was in January or February.

- 34:00 January I think, I've got the date in the book here. It was very sad leaving the boys behind, because most of them were Sydney boys, and travelled home to see Mum, and there were placards all over the house.

34:30 What did the placards say?

The placards said, "Welcome home to our glorious AIF." They are still the things that would upset you. It brings back memories, my father and I were very close. All brings back memories and I intended to stay and have a good holiday home with my

35:00 mother, but, Col's Variety were the biggest tin show operator in Australia, and they offered me a job to go with them, so I left and I went to Queanbeyan.

Tell us about that.

Queanbeyan, just out of Canberra. The reason we opened in Queanbeyan, tin shows weren't allowed to operate in Canberra.

Why not?

I don't know.

35:30 I just don't know. We visited Canberra, visited... the War Museum was open then, and we had a look at the Jap Midget subs that were sunk in Sydney, they were there then but they weren't set up. We had a good look through. Later on I took my wife, and we had another look through.

Were there other returned servicemen

36:00 **in the, Col's Variety Show?**

Yes, Freddy Meredith, the comedian. He was a very good comedian. He was... heard of Jim Gerald? He was a great comedian in Australia, he was Jim Gerald's nephew. His mother and father were on radio in Sydney, Cy and Maud Meredith, Uncle Cy and Auntie Maud. Didn't do a radio show with them, but I was there one day when they did a radio show,

36:30 one afternoon at 2UE.

Did you ever have a stage name?

Revella, R-E-V-E-L-L

I just go under the name of Ian Parker they said, "You will never get anywhere with a name like that," so I picked that name out of a book and used that.

Tell us about opening with the, Col's Variety Show?

37:00 Oh, very nervous that night. Oh gee, my first show I had been practicing a top hat and tails act it was. The old tails were still there from before I joined the army, and top hat and so forth, and I was very nervous, but luckily I was working silently, just to the music, and didn't have, when I got off I was really down, I thought I had

37:30 had it, but there was a young girl standing at the side of the stage, her and her father were doing an acrobatic act. Her name was Pauline, and she said, "By gee, I liked that last trick of yours," and that sort of gave me a lift and we became very good friends. 15 year old girl, and her and her father went overseas after that and played in Calcutta in India, then went over to France,

38:00 and they were in a film Gene Kelly made, Invitation to the Dance. Have you ever seen it? I've got it on tape, it's all dancers, it's a beautiful film. There's all dancing through it, well Pauline got a small part in that film, and just as a clown juggling. You can't tell it was her, but I could tell it was her. There's 2 good shots of her! I've still got the film.

Now you brought back your ventriloquist doll,

38:30 **but when did you get it repaired?**

I got it repaired, compensation paid for it. The army paid for it, they got it done by one of the magic shops in Melbourne, and they put it in, but it wasn't nearly as good as it was originally, it was still useable.

And what was your act in the, Col's Variety program?

39:00 Just doing magic, manipulation. I was top hat and tails and I, the curtain would open, and I would come on just producing cards in the air like that, and wear white gloves and not many can manipulate cards with gloves on, but I could and do fans of cards, just dropping them into a hat, fans of cards. Pull the glove off, and produce another fan, that was a good trick.

39:30 **How did you do that?'**

I'm not telling you. There's too many listening.

And where did you travel?

We started at Queanbeyan and we went around all those New South Wales towns, Wellington, Dubbo,... It was coming on Easter, so we broke for Easter. I went home for a month. One thing I didn't mention, Athel Thompson, the armless artist,

40:00 I done a lot of shows with him before the war, and he wanted to go out on tour but he couldn't unless he had someone to go with him, so I said, "Come with me, I'll look after you." And I took him with me, and

we roomed together, and I used to bath him and dress him and shave him and clean his teeth. That's one this,... he didn't like me to do, was to clean his teeth. I didn't like cleaning his teeth,

- 40:30 but he used to do a sketch with a brush in his mouth. I used to set up his easel and mix up his paints and he'd use his own paints, and it was incredible what he could do himself. He could strike a match and light a cigarette and he could change a needle in a gramophone with his teeth. It was incredible what he could do, it surprised me. He'd, of a night... I'm going to have a bath,
- 41:00 and, "All right then." And I'd just put his dressing gown on, and tie the thing around so it would hold, and you never have a bath unless you wash the bath out with Dettol, and he would have a bottle of Dettol in his coat pocket and a cake of soap in the other, and I would take him down, and about 10 minutes later I would go down. He'd leave the door open, the bath would be washed out with Dettol and filled, and he'd be lying back in it waiting for me to come over.
- 41:30 And I used to have to feed him at the tables. We stayed at motels mostly, and I used to feed him. I didn't mind it one bit. He finished up, he got friendly with one of the ballet girls do you believe it, and they got married after the tour finished. She was a lovely girl. She come from Brisbane and they settled in Ferntree Gully in Victoria, and he became a Ferntree Gully councillor, and
- 42:00 often my wife and I, I used to call in and see them.

Tape 7

- 00:30 **What was the routine with the, Col's Variety Show? What was the day and the routine?**

The show was 4 nights in each town. In fact we played Orange for 4 nights, it was in '46, so before your time. But we'd change the program each night, so I had to rustle up some new tricks and that so as I could

- 01:00 change, but I still did the card manipulation, they liked that, they appreciated that. We started at Queanbeyan. After Easter, we had an Easter break, we opened at Orange after the Easter break. That was in 1946, and worked our way around and finished up at Nyngan, Bourke. That's where I took crook at Bourke. I was horribly sick, horrible place. It's climate seems to be...

- 01:30 anyhow I got over that, and we went across to Broken Hill and we were there for a month. We played a month in Broken Hill.

So usually what days of the week would you travel on, and what days would you show on?

Oh well you only show on the week days and on Saturday night, and nothing on Sunday. We always travelled, always travelled by train. They always paid our fares

- 02:00 just in between towns. I struck a crook one, one night in New South Wales that, where was I? Harden I think, Athol and I, the armless chap, we had to change trains with 2 big suitcases, and the train pulled into the station, but our carriage was no where near the platform,

- 02:30 so I threw the 2 cases out and I jumped out, and had to help Athol and balanced him because with no arms he was likely to fall over, but that was a hard one, but we got out of that all right.

How big an operation was Col's Variety Show?

Pretty big, we had a very big tent, the largest in Australia. Funny thing, Col began back in the early days, 'Long Haired Col,' they called him.

- 03:00 He had hair down to his shoulders Buffalo Bill style, and that's the sort of show he used to put on, and it was just called a play, he used to put on plays and it was called a play, and when we went out the people called us, 'The Play,' but that was,... it was not uncommon for him to drive a 4 horse coach onto the stage in some of his plays.

- 03:30 Funny thing too, they were playing in Forbes, New South Wales, and he cut out the, his play was the, Kelly Gang, and he put on the, Kelly Gang, and this is going back a few years before my time, and the audience applauded that much, he called the producer onto the stage, and he came onto the stage, and he said, "The real hero of this play

- 04:00 is sitting in the audience, Kate Kelly," and there's Ned's younger sister. She was married of course, but she stood up and acknowledged the applause, but the next day she was found floating in the Forbes River.

How big was the tent that you were performing in?

An enormous tent.

Like a circus tent?

No, more like a theatre, it was a canvas theatre

04:30 actually, not like a circus tent. It had 2 king poles and the usual.

Were you required to help in setting that up?

No, no, not in that one, no. I was a bit busy looking after Athel, and no, I wasn't compelled to do anything else but my act in the show.

How much would people pay to come and see it?

Oh well, it was 4 shillings was the front seats then, but we could always charge them 6 shillings and they were still happy to pay it.

05:00 Plenty of money there.

And what did you make out of it?

I was getting 10 pound a week. That was good money in those days because you got full board in a hotel for 2 pound so I was doing all right. I could send my mother home 2 pound a week. Oh yes, I done all right.

Were you happy in that lifestyle?

Oh yes, yes, it was very enjoyable. Pretty nerve racking. Sometimes it would hit you, and you would

05:30 get a nervous reaction, and I would give anything not to get up on that stage tonight. That's how it used to get you. I've seen acts come off and cry, the nerves were getting to them.

Can you tell us about some of your bad experiences on the road?

No, I never had any bad experiences. No romances of course. Too busy to get mixed up with girls.

06:00 We worked our way over into, I told you, over into Whyalla, and we struck a storm there, and the tent blew down and was ripped to pieces. That sort of finished the show, and we came back to Melbourne and I went back and worked at the hotel where I had been before the war, and the, 'Zucchini's,' approached me. The, 'Zucchini's,' were a trio of clowns. They came out

06:30 from Europe during the war, and they were with a circus, and they were a terrific act. Theo Zucchini was the funniest man I've ever seen but when war broke out they were stranded here and they couldn't get back so they just took on jobs here and there and after the war Theo had saved up enough money to buy some equipment. A tent and so forth and he took a show out on tour and he took

07:00 me with him and I went with him but every night he did this act. I had to laugh. I couldn't help it and he'd pick out a kid in the audience a bit of a giggler and stare at him you know and then he would go back and carry on his act and then go back and stare at him again and it would only make the kid laugh more and finally he would say, "Oh shut up!" and the crowd would roar.

07:30 It used to go over so big. He was a funny man, but they were a musical act. They did 1 or 2 musical acts, and they had instruments you'd never ever seen before. One looked like a coronet [brass wind instrument], but it was a reed instrument, it had a reed, and the other 2 were basses, they had reeds too, and 2 of the other clowns would, were brothers, they were Swedes, Herman and Oscar,

08:00 and he'd played the melody, and they played the bass. It went over real well, real good.

Whereabouts did you travel for them?

Around Victoria, we went around and worked our way around, and finished in Ballarat, in our old home town, and they all came around to see me, and of course I could get them all in free. It didn't cost them anything, and the same thing when I

08:30 was with, Col's Variety. I got to know the woman on the door very well there, and anyone only had to mention my name and she would let me in but yeah, we had a good tour, and that's only around Victoria, and we finished up in Colac, in Victoria, and then I came back to Melbourne, and by this time I had teamed up with Jack and Lavinia Arnold, they were doing a double act, they were country and western style. I played the guitar too. I took my guitar

09:00 with me and we practiced up and I went back to Sydney and we performed a trio act called the, The Overlanders. Now, The Overlanders, had just come out, and we got the name from that. I believe there are a couple of different acts have called themselves, The Overlanders, since then, but we are the original ones. I've got a photo of us in there. The book of Australian country music with a photo of Slim Dusty on the

09:30 front, and I've got the original photo there too.

And what were you doing as part of that act?

I was playing the electric steel guitar and the Spanish guitar, and I used to sing with them too. The

three of us used to sing, and I used to get a lot of children's parties Saturday afternoons. Sometimes 2 in the one afternoon in Sydney, but performing the magic and that, and I was doing that on my own,

- 10:00 and then Jack and I would go off and do a double act at RSL's and that. We were going real well. I got a job down at Wollongong and they paid our fares down, and after the show was over, moved us up to the mountains, Mt Keira, there and they got an RSL rest home there, but at that time Wollongong was the biggest RSL in Australia, and
- 10:30 we stayed there the night and the next morning they came down for breakfast, and they gave me a plate of razorblades because that was one of my main tricks, swallowing razorblades. They gave me a big plate of razor blades for breakfast, but apart from that,...we done a lot of work together around Sydney. We did a lot of charity work, too. One night Jack and I were booked to do a show out at Thornleigh,
- 11:00 and we were standing up on the train. I was balancing on my guitar, it was pretty crowded, and I started to feel a bit funny and I said to Jack, "I feel a bit funny, giddy." And he said, "The next stop a lot of people get off and you can sit down." But my knees buckled from under me and down I went, and I heard a girl, a voice say, "The girl was giving you a seat." And I remember hearing that, and when I came to, I was lying back in a seat
- 11:30 and the fresh air was blowing on my face, and that's what brought me around, but I knew there was something wrong and I went on and I done the show and I reported to the repat [repatriation nurse] the next day at the Prince of Wales Hospital, and they told me, they x-rayed me and told me I had trouble with my stomach, and they said, "You'll have to go into hospital." And I thought, "Well if I have to go into hospital, I may as well go back to Melbourne to be close to Mum." So I went back to Melbourne, but like a fool I went straight back into show
- 12:00 business and didn't bother about the hospital or anything else. I teamed up with my brother who was a country and western singer, and we were doing a double act mixing country and western singing and magic, card manipulating, and that went over very well.

Where were you doing that mostly?

All around, any bookings we could get, theatres, or dances, or anywhere at all, we'd do it...private parties. I used to do a lot of private parties just with the magic and ventriloquism.

- 12:30 **What sort of money would you earn for a children's birthday party?**

2 guineas was the standard fee, which was 2 pounds, 2 shillings. That was a fair bob worth of money in those days, and if you did 2 in the one day... Actually, next time the thing hit me, it hit me a lot harder. I went down and I

- 13:00 just lay there vomiting. I couldn't do anything, and they got me into the Caulfield Repatriation Hospital and I was there for 3 months, and I used to lay there asleep, and one day the nurse woke me up and said, "There's a girl here wants to see you," and I looked out of one eye and it was the girl from next door and I thought, "What the hell does she want with me?" and I put out my hand and she took my hand and
- 13:30 we started talking, and I went to sleep again and I woke up and she was still talking, and when I went to sleep I woke up and she was gone. The same night she was back again, and I realised she must have sat in the park somewhere and waited until the hospital was open again to come back, and needless to say, that was the girl I married. We have been married for 55 years.

How well did you know her before that?

Just the girl next door.

- 14:00 My mother had written and told me about her she said, "She comes in and sets me hair for me, and does messages for me," So I just knew her that way, and I didn't meet her until I came home, and here she is.

Did you know her before the war?

No, she came from Castlemaine in Victoria, and they were a lovely family. Her mother died when she was 4 years old, and...

- 14:30 actually I did a lot of charity work around Melbourne then at that time, and I was made a life governor of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind there, and when the Queen, and the Duke arrived, the first royal visit in 1954, I got an invitation and my wife and I to the Royal Reception. That was great!
- 15:00 Got close up to the Queen, and I got a spot on the day of the opening of parliament, I was on the movie camera then, and Melbourne, '9.5,' which is probably foreign to you. It's a French film, you spot the holes in the middle of the picture, and only one claw, and...

To what extent do you think that

- 15:30 **your war service contributed to your illnesses?**

It did. It has been accepted by the repatriation department which is called veterans affairs now. I was

living in Queensland then. I left the hotel back when we retired. No, let me see...we had come down to Coffs Harbour and

16:00 my son and daughter had moved up here, and my son played the guitar in a group, and so did my son-in-law. That's why I moved up, because they were getting a bit of work around Coffs Harbour. I moved down here with them.

So how do you think that what you were doing in the army made your sicker?

Oh the food, oh the food we were getting over there. I couldn't stomach it. As I told you, I used to,...

16:30 was living on toast, just couldn't eat it. We used to get this fish we used to call goldfish, and the stew we called tuckerbox. We just couldn't eat it, oh no.

Do you think stress was a contribution?

I don't think that's stress. No, no, I was happy as a damn boy.

17:00 But I often felt that crook, but I wouldn't let on I was sick because they would send me back.

When you did get discharged from the army how did you feel saying goodbye to all your detachment friends?

That was very hard because we had been so close together you know. Became close friends, and one of them is still in Sydney which I saw at the reunion. I haven't seen

17:30 any of the others. Most of the others are dead. The juggler is in Melbourne, and I saw a lot of him while I was in Melbourne, but since then I have lost contact with him. When my first child was born, him and his wife came and stayed at our house while June was in hospital.

Did you ever run into any of them professionally?

No,

18:00 no, not really, no.

What was the,...?

Only the, Col's Variety, Freddy Meredith the comedian, and also... I'm sorry, I forgot to mention this Viv Sanderson, the juggler. He was a Middle East veteran too, and they joined, Col's Variety.

What was travelling with, Col's like, compared to travelling with the army?

A lot easier travelling by train than the army

18:30 in the trucks, a lot easier.

What about the spirit between the performers, how did that compare?

The what?

The spirit, the atmosphere between the performers at, Col's compared to the army detachment?

It was completely altogether. I was more or less an amateur in the army and a professional with, Col's Variety, and I knew people were paying money to come in and see me, and I had to impress them

19:00 and it went over well so... changed the acts every night, I was alright.

What was the standard of medical care like that you were given for your ailment?

Excellent! Lately I've had my gallbladder removed, and my prostate removed. They always put me into

19:30 the Baringa, that's the best hospital in Coffs Harbour, and they always put me into there. It's \$1,000 a day there, but get beautiful treatment.

What about when you were in the army, what was the treatment like then?

All right, all right, they would look after you. I had a week, 2 weeks in the Warwick Hospital there,

20:00 and the colonel used to come around and inspect us once, and he'd come around and you used to stand at the end of your bed in your pyjamas and he said, "What's the matter with you?" And I said, "Stomach trouble." He said, "How old are you?" and I said, "22," he said, "22, with stomach troubles, God!" and he walked off, and next time he came he said, "Still 22?" but he made a joke out of it, but I was suffering,

20:30 but I got over it. Put me on the right diet, that's all they could do, and I'm still on it now. Acid is the only thing that sort of stirs me up now, if you have things like vinegar and things like that.

How do you think people or the public's demand for entertainment has changed over the years you were in business?

Definitely changed, it's all

21:00 television now. I wouldn't like to go and do a show now to the public, because they wouldn't be appreciative.

Do you think that vaudeville style [dramatic entertainment dispersed with songs and dances; variety entertainment] will ever come back again?

No, no, it's gone for ever.

How does that make you feel?

Very sad, because I remember all those old vaudevillians, and all those comedians of those days, George Wallace especially,

21:30 and he was very funny. He made quite a few films. He made a film just before the war started, no, in the early days of the war, *Gone To The Dogs*, I don't know if you have heard of it, but funny, very well worth seeing. Stevie Doo, the Chinese singer was in the picture with him. I remember Stevie when he was a young fellow. I remember just after the Japanese invaded Pearl

22:00 Harbour, and he sang in the floorshow at the State Theatre in Melbourne, Remember Pearl Harbour, gee it went over well. They made a film recently on George Wallace, and they have Stevie Doo in it, questioning him, and it was quite interesting.

We talked earlier on in the day how there was a certain level of censorship of what you could and couldn't perform on stage.

22:30 **What was the sort of line? What could you do, and what couldn't you do?**

You could do anything in the army, in the army you could get away with anything, but in the civil life you had to be careful, you couldn't crack any dirty jokes.

What was considered dirty though?

Oh well, just dirty, that's all.

And in the army, if you were performing for the army, what level of bad language was tolerated?

23:00 No bad language used at all, even the word, "bloody," which was often used at the Tivoli, you would never use that at all. I got the shock of my life when I was at the Tivoli show. This night, this bloke dressed as a Salvation Army band, banging the tambourine, and he says, "I've been saved, I'm happy, I'm happy, I'm that happy I could put the stick right through the bloody drum," and that was the first time it was used at

23:30 the Tivoli.

But those, that bad language would have been in common use by soldiers?

Yes, but not to be used on stage. Oh no, we couldn't use any language on stage, no!

Did it ever strike you as strange that men were killed and killing other people, but you weren't allowed to swear in front of them?

Yeah, that's right, didn't worry us though. I don't like using bad

24:00 language, I never use it here in this house, anyone that uses it, I pull them up.

And do you think that has changed today, bad language?

Oh yes.

In entertainment I mean.

I got pulled over the coals for cracking a bad joke in Queensland. This was before I joined the army, and I was told I would be thrown out of the concert party

24:30 if I use it again, but Jerry Lewis cracked the same joke on TV. That's after the war.

Can you remember any of your other standard jokes in the shows?

Oh yes, I remember them all.

Can you tell us a couple?

It's a bit,...

Go on, perform it for us.

About the gentlemen went to a Turkish bath, you know,

25:00 where you go into the sweat rooms, and he walks into the office and there is a big notice on the wall, 'Beware of poofters'. And he thought, "That's only there for a joke." So he paid up and went in, and there was another big notice, 'Beware of poofters'. He saw there was no one around, so he got changed, and put his towel around him, and walking through the sweat room, and another big notice, 'Beware of poofters'. This is just a joke, and he walked into the next room,

25:30 and no notice here at all, then he saw a small one on the skirting board and he bent down to read it and it said, 'Serves you bloody right, you were warned 3 times'.

Would you get away with telling that in an army show?

No, I didn't know it then when I was in the army. I didn't crack jokes. Only with the doll, and that. But the one, the 3rd Division did,

26:00 that was a bottler of a skit, it was terrific. It's the year 2007 or something, and the law has just been passed, 'If you don't produce offspring within 5 years they will send down a government serviceman to force the issue,' and that's the whole lead up to it, and then this fellow the husband, is there on his own, she's off stage, and the photographer comes and

26:30 finished untouched photos of your baby, and the bloke says, "Oh get out of here." And throws him out and says to his wife, "I'm going to work now." And she says, "Don't worry, cheer up, a government man will be around today, everything will be all right." And he goes, and his wife comes back, and the photograph bloke comes back, and he says, "How about a photo?"

27:00 and the wife says, "My husband told me you would be here." He says, "Oh good, we had better get started then." "How do you get started?" And he says, "Just leave it to me madam, I've been in this year for many a business, I know exactly what to do." And she said, "I'm sure you do." "Now I want 6 shots..." That's how it goes on, on like. Really funny, but that's one they put on in front of the locals over in Mareeba

27:30 and I thought, "Holy hell!"

And how did the locals appreciate that?

They laughed, they thought it was funny.

Do you think maybe the public was more broadminded than the censors thought?

Probably, yes, yeah, that was a good show that, yeah, but it finished up that when she woke up he was the photographer, and she said,

28:00 "Just who are you?" And he said, "Oh, I'm the photographer. Take photos of babies." And she said, "I thought you were the government man coming around to increase the population." And he strips off his coat and says, "Well I don't think it may be a bad idea." And that was the end of the show. But it was a terrific sketch.

Where did, who did all the writing for these sketches?

28:30 Well I just don't know. Comedians usually supply their own scripts, but generally, if... jokes here and there you pick them up wherever you go. My father was a great storyteller.

As your show, as the, 30 Club show went around, did you change the acts in anyway?

Oh yes, we changed the program.

29:00 Once we just changed program, but we were doing the same show in New Guinea, and then we changed over. When we went to Bougainville, we were doing the same show there. We never, ever changed again.

Were you a professional entertainer for all the rest of your working life?

No, no, I finished up after I came out of hospital

29:30 I knew the jig was up and I couldn't go on, and I went back to the hotel where I worked and they were glad to have me back, and I stayed there and I did shows like Christmas parties and things like that, and I was a member of the Masonic Lodge [Freemason society], and they used to give me a lot of shows to do in there. No, never really

30:00 got back ... Young & Jackson's on the corner, well just down from there, opposite the Flinders Street station and a good little hotel, and I finished up, well I moved my way up and I became the assistant manager, and when the manager left, I finished up managing.

30:30 I did very well. The hotel closed down in 1960, surrendered the licence, so I took the licence of a hotel in Footscray, and I was there for 7 years.

What was the name of that one?

The Exchange, and it was a good hotel, clientele was pretty good, but

- 31:00 my wife, we had no accommodation there, just bar trade and counter lunch. We had a chef that used to come in and do the counter lunches for us and that, and he got all the money for that, and we got free meals, but no accommodation.

And then after The Exchange?

I left there, the 10 closing, killed it. It made it so hard working until 10,

- 31:30 and I left the job at the hotel and I finished up at the Gold Coast, at the Burleigh Heads Hotel as assistant manager there of the licensee, and I was there for what? 7 years I worked there. It was lovely working there. It was right on the beach and you could look out on the ocean. Good clientele, and I enjoyed it there, and I still did a lot of charity shows around
- 32:00 there too, for the surf life saving clubs. I used to help them out a lot, and the local lodge [Masonic Lodge] and so forth.

How do you think the pub business has changed over the years?

Oh it has changed. I would hate to go back into it these days because the clientele, they do lots of things they can get away with now that they couldn't in the old days.

Such as,...

There was many a dust up [fight] in the pub. I used to do a bit of amateur boxing in my young days,

- 32:30 but if a fight started you always let them have a couple of hits and neither of them wanted to go on with it, so it was easy to break up, but you always let them have a couple of hits.

And you think that's different today?

I don't know, I don't go to hotels. My son is a member of the Coffs Harbour golf club, and I go up there about once a week. He only goes up once a week.

- 33:00 That's Mum's orders, and I have a couple of cokes and play the pokies, and he likes a drink and he smokes. I never, ever smoked or drank, but he started in his young days and can't give it up. That's all right, he lives with us.

What do you think the toughest audience you ever faced was?

Toughest audience?

- 33:30 I think some drunks when I was travelling with Zucchini, with his show. They kept slamming back at us, and Jack Arnold, he was a veteran of the Middle East, he was with the 9th Division and he cracked an army joke, and one of them yelled out, "What, were you in the QM [quartermaster] store?" And he said, "No, 9th Australian Division and proud of it." And luckily we were all
- 34:00 carrying our medals with us and we used to put them on when we came out for the finale. That's the toughest, they shut up after that.

What about doing shows for kids?

Kids are hard to entertain, they watch you closer than adults. Kids are very hard to entertain. I usually get a kid up out of the audience

- 34:30 and I used to have to pick one out beforehand, and tee them up beforehand, and use 2 chairs on them, on the stage, and every time you sit on that one jump up and pretend there is an electric charge through it. So I would call someone out of the audience, "Right," and when all the hands come up I'd say, "You'll do." And I pick out the one I have already spoken to and up he comes and,
- 35:00 "What's your name?" and so forth. And, "Oh, that's my second name." And I'd have him spin me around and put me with my back to the audience and, "Where is everyone? Where has everyone gone?" And, "You sit in that chair and I'll sit in this chair." And he would sit in the chair and jump up and I'd say, "What's the matter?" "I don't know." "Well sit in the chair." So he'd sit in the chair and he'd jump up again and, "What's the matter?" And I would go and sit in the chair, "There's nothing wrong with this chair. It's a beautiful chair. Come on you, sit there."
- 35:30 And he'd hop in the chair and jump up again. So we were all staged, but the audience wouldn't know, and I'd say, "You have this chair. Is that one all right? It's all right." And I'd sit in the chair. "This chair's all right. It's a beautiful chair." And then I'd sit in my own chair and jump up and, "Now you've got me doing it." And this would carry on for about 5 or 10 minutes. It's used to get some terrific laughs, the kids loved that. The kids loved the
- 36:00 other sort of stuff I did with the doll and the magic, but never had any trouble with them.

You mentioned when you were in New Guinea you got a lot of letters from females. Where had you made their acquaintance?

Mainly through other soldiers, "I'll give you the address of this girl," and they were girls you didn't even know, hadn't even met most of them, but some I had met

36:30 down where I come from in Melbourne, and Smythesdale where I used to come from.

What sort of things were in the letters?

Oh, mushie stuff.

So they were romantic letters?

Romantic letters, but both of us knew we were only romancing. I used to enjoy getting letters from the girls

37:00 in the war.

What sort of stuff would you write back?

Just tell them what was going on, and what we're doing and that, particularly, especially when I was with the concert party up in New Guinea I used to tell them. I used to get 4 or 5 letters a day sometimes.

You must have had a lot of free time to write that much.

Well yes, we had a lot of free time. We used to do it in the YMCA hut at a night time. They always put on writing

37:30 paper, and they had pens, and you could get anything there. No such thing as a ball point pen in those days.

I know that you have 2 grandsons who are in the navy today, or have been in the navy.

They still are.

What message would you give other people watching in the future, about serving your country?

I think it's a great thing, it's a wonderful thing to serve your country,

38:00 and I know how much appreciation,...I've got certificates there from John Howard, signed by John Howard, thanking me for the part I played.

Would you serve again with the opportunity?

No, I'm too old, I'm still only a boy at 83.

What I meant was, so you had no regrets about your service?

Oh no, no regrets. I'm glad I went through it, I was there.

38:30 At least I can say I was there. I didn't do much, but I was there, and my father, he done all the fighting that was to be done in our family.

This tape is about to finish. Is there anything else that you would like to say that you haven't told us already today?

Only that I know you come from Orange, and I thought Orange was a lovely town. I played 4 nights there, and I had wonderful audiences.

39:00 **They still are wonderful audiences in Orange.**

I met some nice people, I just forget their names now.

All right, well we'll finish up here, and I'll get you to do on the next tape some tricks for us.

Okay good, thanks.

Tape 8

00:30 **Okay, if you could do some of your tricks for us then.**

I would like to introduce to you something you've never seen a magician do before. A pack of cards which as you see is just an ordinary pack...shuffle...I used to be able to stand on one knee, but I can't now.

01:00 Various designs can be obtained by fanning the pack in different ways.

01:30 This one is called the fan, inside a fan. Rather a silly idea if you ask me, but of course no one is asking me. This one is known as the rising sun, followed by the sunset.

02:00 Give the cards another shuffle, a bit hot in there today.

02:30 Now I would like to show that both hands are empty back and front. I'll take his handkerchief out of my pocket and place it between my fingers. Between the fingers, and my hand is a bit sweaty, and now we have the

03:00 cards. Now this is a very painful movement. It has to go through the body. A little practice and it is quite painless. Take them in the left hand, pass them across the body, and not there. Anyway what's we'll do? Oh they aren't there either. All you need for that one, is a big mouth and an empty head. Now I hate to be doing silly things like that.

03:30 But if I knew of any other way of making an honest living, I would hate it just the same. They came out back the front. Quite, stick to the hand a bit.

04:00 That's all there is too it.

Okay

Oh start again.

04:30 My hand gets sticky when...

05:00 I didn't work properly then. Can I do it again?

Yep.

Usually just pull it out of my pocket like that.

We'll just got through it one more time and I want you to,... go!

I would like to introduce to you something, you have never seen a

07:00 magician before. A pack of cards which is just an ordinary pack, I'll give it a shuffle. By fanning this pack in different ways you can get some very pretty patterns.

07:30 This one is known as the rising sun, followed by the sunset.

08:00 The fan inside the fan, rather a silly idea if you ask me, but of course no one is asking me. Give them another shuffle.

08:30 A bit hot in here isn't it? That's about it.

Just try that.

Just fan it, drop it down,

09:00 that's it.

Okay, can we do that routine all one more time please.?

09:30 Once more?

Once more, like that, with the pauses.

10:00 **Can you do the rising sun one as well?**

Yep. This one is called the rising sun, followed by the sunset.

You have to do it a bit higher up, lower.

This never worked properly, I'll have to do it again. The rising sun,

10:30 followed by the sunset. I can't do it like I used to.

The double fan.

I used to do it on one leg, but I'll fall over if I try it.

11:00 I was passing through

11:30 Ipswich recently and I called into a fish and chips shop, and she had this notice stuck on the window, "Fresh Fish Sold Here Today," and to you that might seem intelligent, but to me it's just plain, damn

stupid. Naturally anyone knows she is selling them today, and not selling them tomorrow or yesterday. So, "Fresh Fish Sold Here," now, she is not selling them around the corner or on the other side of the street, so can get rid of this too.

12:00 "Fresh Fish Sold," now she couldn't very well sell them, give the fish away for nothing, She would have to sell them otherwise she would be out of business and she would have to go into politics or something. 'Fresh Fish,' now, have you ever tried to sell stale fish? You can't, so technically speaking all she needs on her window is a little sign saying, "Fish," and after all, she doesn't need that, because you can smell

12:30 the darn stuff a mile away, so actually speaking she doesn't need any notice at all, but knowing Pauline Hanson being the tenacious little lady she is, I passed the shop tonight, and that notice would still be there, "Fresh Fish Sold Here Today," she'd like that one!

INTERVIEW ENDS