

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Ronald Patten (Ron) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/675>

### Tape 1

00:38 **So Ron perhaps we could start off with you giving a brief summary of life?**

Well fine. Born in Wellington, New South Wales. Studied and rode a horse to school in Combo, a little tiny place. Then moved to

01:00 Geurie School at Geurie. At Geurie I won a bursary to come to Sydney so I came down to Sydney to go to Chatswood High which amalgamated with the North Sydney High and were in that place straight opposite the North Sydney Station. From there I was the captain of the tennis team and we won the shield that year

01:30 and it was an operation of taking the captains of each of the last two teams out to go into the Davis Cup squad at White City. And I had beaten the captain of the other team in our match and that gentleman's name was Denny Pales. It gave me a great ego boost when he went so well later in the Davis Cup. But my parents took me out of school just before the

02:00 exams at the end of the year and that took me out to White City [tennis courts]. Because they had a very good friend who was the general manager of Marcus Clarke. And he said if I employ him at this time I can retain him after Christmas, because you know you take people on a Christmas time in all the retail stores and they go off very quickly. And he, so he said bring him in, take him from school

02:30 and so on. He gave me one lovely phrase that I've never, ever forgotten. He said, "I know you're upset because you can't go out to White City and not doing the exam," he put his arm around my shoulder and he said "I'd like to tell you it's not what you know it's who you know in the rest of your life" - which proved basically so. Anyway I was out, out Marcus Clarke in the shoe department. And I used to,

03:00 I was designated by the chief to go down and buy shoes that people came in with magazines and said we want this one but I knew it was out of vogue and they want to pay you know nothing for them. Anyway I was doing that and I was also studying singing. And I was studying with Marian Marty who became Dame Marian. And everything was going well and they suggested I should

03:30 try for a radio show that was doing very well, or starting up, called the Youth Show - that was one of the Colgate Palmolive Radio Unit's productions, the Youth Show. And I went down and I auditioned and Joy Nichols was one of the leading lights in that and she came racing down after I'd done my bit saying "You're in, you're in, I heard them say you're in!" you know which was marvellous so I was in the Youth Show. And

04:00 but I couldn't get away from Marcus Clarke so Colgate Palmolive said "Oh just a cotton picking minute we'll give you a job out here" And so I went out to Colgate Palmolive. And it was an astonishing Little Lord Fauntleroy type operation because every Monday I'd go into rehearsal for the Youth Show and I'd you know turn up at the office and all the other office people

04:30 then see a hire car coming to pick me up to take me into town. So the Youth Show was going very well and all was, you know all was very happy and bright in my little old life at that stage and then along came a nasty little creature called Hitler and you know then the war started. It had just been going for a few months and I was called up for national service and I thought what the hell am I doing national

05:00 service for? And a couple of the people said well you shouldn't you should join up because you've got a reputation and all of that because I had a hell of a lot of publicity when I got into the Youth Show. So I joined up and I was out at Ingleburn, Ingleburn? Yes. And we, you know I was in an army unit and then I joined up and I was

05:30 drafted into the Seventh Field Regiment, Artillery Regiment of the Second Division. And we trained and all of, you know a great twenty-five pounder was our rifle. Anyway we were on our way to, to Egypt to relieve the Sixth Division and we got as far as, as far as Western Australia

- 06:00 and the Japanese started making nasty noises up around Darwin so we were immediately positioned just outside Geraldton and I spent my twenty-first birthday guarding some trucks at a little place called Gin Gin. Anyway I got my knee in the way of the twenty-five pounder one day and it wasn't nice.
- 06:30 And they immediately shot me down to Northern Hospital and fate has taken a lot of time with me. Every time something happens fate comes, helps me out, because a lieutenant colonel walked across the floor and said and "What's the matter with you sergeant?" I put my leg in the wrong place for the twenty-five pounder. Let me have a look at it. And I was in there
- 07:00 to have the cartilage removed and mend some bone. And he started fiddling with my leg and then he called the others over because he was doing, he was a lieutenant colonel from Macquarie Street. And he said "Sergeant do not let anyone ever, ever touch that knee." And he said "It will work but don't let anyone touch it - a lot of people will want to." And so I'm in a truck
- 07:30 heading back to Gin Gin in about an hour. I get back there and I'm summoned to the CO [Commanding Officer] and he said "Pat and I didn't know you were a singer" and I said "I didn't think that was a qualification for the Seventh Field Regiment." And he said "Well you've just been seconded" and I said "Seconded, to what and where?" He said "You're in a truck going back to Perth within an hour so I hope you can get all your gear together, you're going to be
- 08:00 in the Second Divisional Concert Party." So back to ... and I said "Who did that?" And he said "You've got a great mate you've worked with in the Youth Show called Colin Croft and George Wallace Junior and you know whatever - Mike Pate." So I'm back in Perth and I'm in a concert party. And then we went all around the place. We went to New Guinea
- 08:30 and came back and I was dead keen on learning something in regard to acting and there were a whole lot of units and we were out at Pagewood, all the concert parties and I went, I walked into the sergeants mess and there was Peter Finch leaning on the counter. And I said "Oh g'day Finchie,
- 09:00 can I ask a big favour of you?" And he said "What do you want?" And I said "Well I want to learn a lot about acting and you're going like a train, could you give me you know a few pointers?" "Oh are you sure you want to do that?" And I said "Yeah" and he said "Right I'm going make you my second in command." And I said "What are you commanding?" He said "I've just been asked to form the first Australian Army Theatre." So
- 09:30 here I am standing alongside Finch in front of the colonel, that's Colonel Davidson. Davidson said "Oh what's Patten doing here?" And he said "Oh he's my 2IC [Second In Command] sir. You know he's going to be in the unit if that's what happens." And he said "Well I'm here to tell you Finch that you are now in charge of forming the first Australian Army Theatre." And he said "Now which, which one of the female impersonators,
- 10:00 or how many of the female impersonators do you want?" And Finch looked at me and I looked at him and he said sir "We have to kiss these girls in the plays" and he said "What plays are you doing?" and he said "French of our Tears and While the Sun Shines. And you have to kiss them?" "Yes sir." And I thought gee doesn't he know anything about theatre. Anyway he said "Oh well
- 10:30 you'd better get organised, I'll send out a memo to the AAMWAS [Australian Medical Women's Service] and the AWASS [Australian's Women's Army Service] and you know the female operation and say that you're coming out to see them. I trust neither of you are thinking of a casting couch" - which always remained as a giggle for me. And the girls were finally, you know we got the thing going and everything was fine and we toured Victoria, going to all the army
- 11:00 camps in the various places and then we headed for New Guinea. And just as we were about to leave for New Guinea Finchy got sick and couldn't come. And in the play 'While The Sun Shines' Finchy and I alternated the lead role - you know which was a pretty heavy role and Finchy was giving me marvellous things of how I should do this and do that you
- 11:30 know. Anyway I go to New Guinea and Finchy stays back here so I'm playing 'While The Sun Shines' one night and playing in 'French of our Tears' the next. Boy did I lose some weight. Anyway we had a lovely thing, we'd built our stage on the back of a truck and any time someone used an expletive there would be a dead silence and someone would say, "Allow me to introduce ..." And anyway I'm up
- 12:00 helping to build the stage one night and I put my foot there and turned around and oh boy did I wrench my knee again. And they took one look at it and flew me back to Sydney and said 'You're out of it, you know you're out of the army and the lot.' They invalided me out. So I head back to Colgate Palmolive and I get back there and the chief Mr Moran
- 12:30 says "Oh good to see you back, you know you'll be in the show, we'll put you in 'Calling The Stars' tomorrow night." And I said "Sir I, you know could you tell me who is the star of Calling The Stars tomorrow night?" And he said "Oh some, some American bloke by the name of Richard Cooks but don't let's worry about him." And I thought a singer going in behind Richard Cooks and not having rehearsed for ages. Anyway that didn't happen. He said "Well what do you want to do?" And I
- 13:00 thought what does an actor need more than anything else, publicity, "Can I get into the Publicity Department?" So I'm then thrown into the Publicity Department in town at 2UE. Two months after

being 2IC to the lady who was running the Publicity Department, two months after that she falls in love with a gentleman in the show and they up and marry and she's off. So I'm now the

- 13:30 publicity chief of the Colgate Palmolive units. And you know in, you know I'm not singing because I'm going to lessons still and I'm playing bit parts in all, in all the shows. And you know I'm in the office and the office boy is Harry Griffiths and he and I are great mates and you know he became Young Harry with in, you know with Roy Rene and so on.
- 14:00 Anyway everything was going swimmingly and they then had a Friday night show because they had 'Calling The Stars' on Tuesday, Jack Davey on Monday and 'Calling The Stars' on Tuesday and they had 'Colgate Cavalcade' on a Friday. In 'Colgate Cavalcade' there was Roy Rene, Hal Lashwood and Jack Davey. One night ... and young Harry and I are picking up all the
- 14:30 bit parts. Well one night, one Friday night down the track a little, Rex Door who was the producer came galloping into the room and he said Patten come over here. And I said what's the matter Rex? He said you're supposed to be an actor, I've heard you're an actor and you've been with Finch and all the rest of it, he said now you've got something to do and I said like what? He said Jack Davey's has had an accident out at Rose Bay and the police are not allowing him to leave
- 15:00 and so we go to air in ten minutes and you're now Jack Davey. I thought holy smoke. Anyway I did it you know, hi ho everybody and away we go. And you know terrific publicity at the weekend of course of you know this young kid takes over Davey's operation. And anyway the next thing is the
- 15:30 Monday morning meeting at Colgate's and the Colgate Palmolive unit all came through George Patterson's Agency and we always had a member of George Patterson's at the meeting on Monday. So we have the meeting and you know I'm there to pick up things for publicity and what have you, and the agency chap says now this, at the end of the meeting - others had left and there was only Ron Deck
- 16:00 and I there, and he said "I have something to say to you and this is confidential and I mean confidential but it affects you Ron because you'll need to get your act together because we are closing down 'Colgate Cavalcade' in a month's time. So get your act together, don't tell anyone now but in a month's time you'll have to make sure it doesn't look like we're sacking anyone or doing anything nasty." So I said "Holy smoke."
- 16:30 So at the finish of the meeting I go back to my office and about ten minutes later there was a phone call from Ron Beck saying Ron I need you in the office quickly, come down. I thought what the hell's happened? You know we've just finished the meeting. Anyway Hal Lashwood and Roy Rene are in the office and Ron Beck said to me we have a problem because
- 17:00 Roy has said you know you did a marvellous job on Friday night and Roy turns to me and says, "Yeah Ron you did a good job son" in Roy's inimitable manner. And Ron Beck said but Roy is concerned because quite obviously the writers will write you into the show in a bigger way now and you're the publicity manager of the unit and that is a conflict
- 17:30 of interest. And so he said I, you know we'll give you a week ...

**So you were in the middle of talking about the conflict of interest thing in the publicity department.**

Yes. And you know Ron Beck turned to me and he said well you know obviously it would be difficult to make up your mind right now Ron because you don't know whether your singing career is going or whether you

- 18:00 want to stay in the show or stay in publicity. And I thought here goes fate again. You know five minutes before they're telling me that you know they're taking that show off the air so why would I want to go into it at that stage you know? So I said no I'll make up my mind right here and now, I'll stay as the publicity manager if I may and you know just appear in bits and pieces as we have done over the last few months. And Roy says, "oh you don't
- 18:30 son." Anyway that's what happened and you know so I was in you know the publicity business then. And Ron Beck took over the Colgate unit and just over that it merged with 2UE [2UE Radio Station] and so they asked me would I become the publicity manager of 2UE? So I was the publicity and advertising manager of 2UE
- 19:00 and then I went from 2UE I went to JC Williamson's as publicity manager - you know back into the little theatre operation. And at JC Williamson's I decided I would go mad and go out on my own which I, which I did. And also went up in money
- 19:30 because I was earning about thirty shillings a week or something in those days. And the Ammon Perini Show was in one of the theatres and Franklin was in another so I said that I'm going on my own and would you, you know I'd like to have you as a client and you'd leave JC Williamson's. They said, both of them said yes so suddenly I had my own
- 20:00 company. And so I, and so that's where I started you know doing the publicity operation, had my own publicity company. And then the Elizabethan Theatre Trust started. A lady by the name of Elsie Buyer came here with Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh [famous actors] and she was astounded that there

was no national theatre and she got the

- 20:30 Nugget Coombs at the Bank and they said "Right well we should start that" and she said "Yes" and she came back from England to aid and abet and she also recommended the head to be Hugh Hunt. And so being in the publicity business and hearing all this going on I trotted down to Hugh Hunt to see if I couldn't acquire whatever was started. And I was, I was
- 21:00 the, you know I had them as a client and I was the publicity director of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. And you know it started the drama ... the opera first and then the ballet and then we discovered 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' and that was a bit of fun I must, that little aside I must tell you about that because I was in Adelaide
- 21:30 with my 2IC launching the, launching the opera. And I had a call from Hugh Hunt saying Ron can you get on a plane and be in Melbourne tomorrow night because John Summer is doing a run of this new Australian play 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll.' And I said "Well what the hell do you want me there for Hugh?" I said "There's John and there's Robert and yourself and he said you're the only Australian in the group."
- 22:00 Which I thought was a great giggle. So I flew to Melbourne and you know that's when Summer of the Seventeenth Doll - I've got a long story on that I won't tell you. And anyway that you now started there and I said to Hugh I said "Well we've got Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, that's the drama thing, I said there's only one thing missing and that's musicals." And he said "Yeah we might you know ..." and I also managed Peter Skrivven and the Tentukees and there was
- 22:30 musical people there of course. But three gentlemen whom I knew came around to my place in Darling Point, almost as though they'd heard the conversation, and I thought this is fate again and they said "We've got a musical we'd like you to you know put forward if you would. Would you be our manager and put it forward?" And I said "What's it called?" and they said "It's Lola Montez." And it was Peter Stanard
- 23:00 and Peter Benjamin and Alan Bourke. And I heard 'Saturday Girl' - they had a tape of Saturday Girl and I thought holy smoke that is beautiful you know. Anyway so we started that and I, I became their manager to handle that and the Trust and then gradually I was moving away from the Trust, I had other clients, and
- 23:30 two other guys, Peter Stanard and Graham Samuelson in the Lintas Agency said "Why don't we start an advertising agency?". And so the three of us did and so we had an advertising agency going for you know quite some time. And that's about where it was at, we had the agency and then I, I started the publicity side again
- 24:00 because Jim Oswen asked me to go up to ATN [Channel Seven Television Station] because when I was manager of publicity at 2UE he was the Manager of Publicity at GB, [2GB Radio Station] so we worked a lot of little bits there, taking newspaper gentlemen to lunch, you know both of us, so that we knew how we were playing the scene. Anyway it worked very well and Jim said I've been looking for a little bloke with fire in his belly but I think two old blokes like
- 24:30 you and I should get together again. Anyway so that started me again in the publicity operation because it was, you know Bruce Gyngell came over from Nine to Seven and we, we launched a whole lot of things there - which there's a long story there but, and from there I you know I was doing my publicity operation
- 25:00 again with a variety of clients and that was right up until I retired just recently because I had the Lola Boys, you I'd been managing them and we're now working on a redo of Lola Montez so that's me up till now. As I say fate keeps stepping in and aiding and abetting. So there we are.

### **Well Ron**

- 25:30 **that's a remarkable summary, thank you, it's been fascinating. It's been like watching a film before my, you know a film. Well what we might do now is go right back to the start and we'll go into a bit more detail. So if you could tell us exactly when and where you were born?**
- Wellington, New South Wales. There's a ...
- 26:00 You know I think everyone knows where Wellington is in New South Wales and my family, mother and father, we had a property, which was finally was sold because my father's parents also had a property and they were getting old and they wanted them to take that property over and it was called Kumadila.
- 26:30 And so I was brought up on a farm and I had two horses to ride to school - use one one day and one the next because when I was going to Geurie I was going from my grandparents home because my parents moved and I stayed with my grandparents on a place called Windora and rode to school which was seven miles there and seven miles back.
- 27:00 So I had the two horses so they didn't get that tired because there were several others who used to ride to school and we'd get reported for little gallops here and there. But anyway so far so good and I, at Geurie, that was the school that I went to, rode to, and I won a bursary there and

- 27:30 from there the bursary took me to Sydney. And I stayed with various relatives in Sydney but went to the Chatswood High School which amalgamated with North Sydney and the only part of North Sydney, of the school that you can see now is that big tree when you, straight opposite the entrance to North Sydney station, that lovely big tree. I have lots of memories of chats and
- 28:00 plottings and so ons going on there.
- It's a beautiful tree.**
- Oh ...
- Just before we go on to, into more detail of your schooling at North Sydney if we can just go back to Wellington and can you describe life on the farm as you led it when you were a child?**
- Well I have a photograph of my father with seven draught horses all in a line because he was going out to do
- 28:30 ploughing and here am I at four years old sitting on one of the outside horses. You know and if you've ever seen people on a pumpkin it was that photograph. But no, to me it's fascinating - it's damn hard work but you know in the, if you're ploughing you're sitting on something but you've got to be aware of what you're doing with the horses all the time
- 29:00 And then comes the shearing time when you're rounding up sheep and you know getting them all ready and they're in pens and the shearers have to go and when they shear them you've got a great roll of wool on the floor, you have to spread it out on a ... you throw the fleece out and it spreads out on a table and they take all the edges and all the bad wool
- 29:30 away from it and then it goes into a press which forms those huge wool bails that you see. So I found life particularly interesting as a junior.
- What chores were you expected to do as a child?**
- Well you rounded up the cows to bring them in for milking and you also rode out,
- 30:00 when you could ride, you rode out to round up sheep or horses or anything that had to be brought into stables and so on. And you know cows, you learnt to milk a cow and so therefore it became one of your chores - because there'd be two or three of you milking cows or maybe only one if no milk was required. So learning all those things were, you know
- 30:30 it was fun rather than work.
- Tell me did you have any brothers and sisters?**
- One sister.
- And could you tell me a bit about her?**
- Yes, well she went with my parents when my parents moved to go, they went to Narrabri and she went with them and I stayed with the grandparents in Woodhurst and so she was with them during her school years.
- 31:00 And she was a particular good tennis player and was in lots of tournaments. And then the family eventually moved down to Mona Vale and she and my father, who was a terrific sportsman, my father partnered Crawford in the Dubbo Championships.
- 31:30 And so we were all very keen on tennis and you know the three of us were pretty good players. And she lived in Mona Vale for quite some time and then she married and lived in, lived in Manly. She has two adopted children and she now lives downstairs. So you know time marches on.
- So you mentioned**
- 32:00 **that your father was a good sportsman like yourself. Can you describe his personality as you remember it as a child?**
- Yes he, he was almost theatrical because he was a very good singer, he had a lovely voice, and at the old fashioned thing of Sunday night around the piano, you know all the family gathered
- 32:30 you know if they were staying ten miles down the track or living somewhere in the vicinity of say ten or twenty miles we'd all go to one person's place of a Sunday night and it would be singing around the piano. And Dad had a lovely baritone voice and was very good. He was also particularly gifted as a cricketer and when
- 33:00 he came down to Mona Vale he played in one match and they wanted to ban him because he bowled the entire side out in two or three overs and score eight-four before he was caught in the outfield and so had beaten them all on his own, which is a you know extraordinary thing and they did they wanted to ban him because they said he was so good. But

33:30 you know working around the farm it was, it was always fun. He always made light of it. As I say putting me on that draught horse was a laugh you know. You only have to see the photograph and you just burst out laughing saying you've got to be kidding you know. So it was all very you know, very, very pleasant on the farm.

**Were you close with your father?**

Yes,

34:00 yes with both parents but when, when I came to Sydney it was a very big rift because I was staying with other relatives and very rarely went back home because I was involved in, you know got involved in the tennis down here and the schooling,

34:30 whereas came a school time, ah holiday time we'd almost be in a state of, have to do something in the sports area and so I never you know went back. Previously our relatives in Sydney frequently came up to us in the country for school holidays but I didn't do that because I was

35:00 so involved with things down here. But we were a very close family for a long time.

**So you mentioned a rift, a rift when this sort of change in the family dynamic happened?**

Oh a rift in the sense of the dynamics. You know instead of being able to see them every so often I was down here and I wasn't seeing them at all. I talked to them on the

35:30 telephone but you know you sort of drift away when you're doing a whole lot of other things - totally different things to working on a farm.

**Tell me, tell me a bit about your mother?**

A very good country housewife, excellent in fact. A very good cook and you know looked after the family particularly well and was just a beaut lady to know.

36:00 And you know I thought she was fabulous. Again had a marvellous singing voice. She was always one of the stars of a Sunday night. But very good indeed and just you know a very capable country woman. But ah ... There was only one blemish which, which

36:30 is a lot of fun, I must tell you, it's a bit of a gag. When I was born in Wellington they drove in a sulky with me to my grandfather's place, which was her father, to her father's place and out of the sulky we get, and his name was Alex

37:00 McLeod. And so he said, "Oh a bonny baby" and "What did you call the lad?" "We called him Brian father." And he said, "Brian?!" "Good lord Brian would not go with a Scots McLeod!" "Take him back and re-christen him!" And they did. On my, on my certificate now

37:30 you'll see Ronald Alexander Patten alias Brian Alexander Patten, one and the same christened at such and such a time in Wellington, New South Wales and then re-christened a little later. So Brian is dropped out of the scene and Ronald is in because it goes with the Scottish, which is a bit of a giggle.

**He sounds like a real character.**

Oh yes.

38:00 **Now you mentioned that you went to live with your grandparents at some point. Why was that?**

Because my parents moved from the farm, which was sold, to Narrabri because Dad was, one of his friends wanted him to manage their property in, in Boggabri. And so he was up there managing properties and my mother and my sister,

38:30 the trio went there but as I was going to school in Geurie I was riding from my grandparents place because I was ensconced there to ride to school and that remained the situation. They would contact me from Boggabri and I would contact them but then when I won the bursary and came to Sydney it was just school, school, school and sport

39:00 you know so ...

**So at what point did you win the scholarship to Sydney, the bursary sorry?**

I would probably be in my ... You know how they used to have classes that you were in sixth class and seventh class well I was just on the point of going to high school and that's when I won the bursary

39:30 because you know there were the normal exams and at one of these exams, at the end of that time I won the bursary and so I had to come to Sydney to go to high school so that's how that occurred.

**Okay well we've just come to the end of a tape ...**

## Tape 2

00:33 **Just before we move onto your school in Sydney I'd like to know what impressions you and your family had of the Depression at the time?**

Very difficult. Well obviously it's difficult but it's a case of, you know you just sit tight and hope

01:00 to God everything will come right in the end. You know I really feel for the people in the country that have gone through two years of drought. When you don't see your crop growing it's a pretty depressing time. So yes we went through a couple of times but not as long as they're going through them no at this stage. But you know they're not nice things to be a

01:30 part of because you don't ... It's funny how looking at green grass is a very pleasant feel rather than looking at rubble, you know sandy stuff and a bit of a breeze comes up and there's clouds of dirt going everywhere whereas when a little bit of wind comes up with lovely green grass you just hop around in glee

02:00 you know it's very lovely. But Depressions are not a nice thing to be in.

**How did the Depression affect your family in particular?**

Well I, I really don't know the full details, I've never inquired, but I think possibly that was the reason my parents sold their property, they had to sell to do things, you know to well

02:30 keep the kids at school and you know put the bread and butter on the table.

**Do you recall seeing any examples of people suffering under the Depression?**

No not people because you're not, you know at that age you're not that aware of you know what people are doing but you are aware of sheep dying.

03:00 You know when you see a sheep that's just been born stumbling around and you think what agony is that poor beast going through and the next thing you just see him fall over and he just doesn't get up, and that's a very upsetting sight I can tell you, very upsetting.

**Yeah it would be.**

03:30 **That's, that's probably about it for the Depression but just going back a bit to your family and upbringing it sounds as though like in your formative years with your mother and father they instilled in you a passion for music and I'm wondering if you could talk a bit more about**

04:00 **the Sunday singalongs etc., how they instilled this love for music in you?**

Well you know that was it, you know you didn't have music every minute of the day but if someone started singing or if someone could play the piano and two or three people had called in for tea or coffee or whatever,

04:30 if someone could play the piano it was almost a given that at some stage of finished the cup of tea and get to the piano and have a sing because it just happened you know. And then you know as I say the Sundays and you know it continued when I came down to Sydney because families that I stayed with were going to church and they were in the choir and that you know it just went on

05:00 and on.

**Okay you mentioned that you won the bursary to high school, can you talk a bit more about your schooling at North Sydney?**

Well that was you know a marvellous time for me because I was at Chatswood, only at Chatswood for about

05:30 oh a matter of months when the two schools combined and the North Sydney Boys High is a totally different school to the North Sydney High, and the North Sydney High and as I said it was those lovely old building that are now only I think one's left down opposite the station. And when Chatswood and that school, that high school

06:00 amalgamated it was a lot of fun for me because I was staying with relatives and the two boys in that family were at Newington and my uncle he was the sales director of Slazengers. So you know it meant that we

06:30 had a very strong family situation in his house. He was an Englishman and very strict, which was absolutely marvellous, did you the world of good you know to have discipline, because if you didn't stand up when a lady walked into the room you were disciplined, because you always stood up and offered the lady

07:00 your seat, and if you didn't do it you might be washing the car for three days in a row you know. But it was, it was marvellous in that home. And each of the ones I was in, I was with you know two lots of

relatives. And the other one I was staying with while still going to school was my father's brother who

- 07:30 was Robert Patten and Robert Patten was the, what do you call them, what's their names in Taronga Park Zoo? He was, he was a Director there and you know. And hilariously when the chimpanzee, you know Keefy? Do you ever remember hearing about Keefy? He, Keefy's
- 08:00 mother rejected her and so uncle Bob bought Keefy home. And he used to bring this little chimp and we got a child's you know seat, where you know a child sits at the table with its little tray in front of it, Keefy sat with that little tray and we'd say pass the salt and if you didn't, if you said pass the salt and I passed the salt to,
- 08:30 I'd pass it to Keefy and Keefy would pass it to you. After a while if you said pass the salt and I went to pass it to you she'd slap the tray and go .... and how we never, how we never had some accident I'll never know because we used to live in Roseville and he used to drive to Taronga Zoo and drop me at school and Keefy
- 09:00 would be in the front seat and we'd go to lights, and every time I go driving up Pacific Highway you know I come to these lights or, it always reminds me, Keefy would sink right down in the, in the chair and as soon as she heard the engine start again she'd fly up and throw her arms in the air and the people in the car alongside you would go, "Oh!" How we didn't have crashed I will never know
- 09:30 but it was a fabulous little chimpanzee that Keefy. But you know while staying with that family, uncle Bob, his son went to Barker and so I had two cousins going to Newington and one going to Barker and here am I at North Sydney. But it was a marvellous school
- 10:00 that and I was, I was very sad the day I was taken out of there because you know it was a really good, good educational school. And of course as captain of the tennis team I was you know in my element - had a lot of fun.

**So what were your hopes in terms of your future before you were taken out of school?**

My hopes at

- 10:30 that stage were that I would become a Davis Cup tennis player. And you know when Denny Pales went on, you know because of having beaten him to get the shield for the North Sydney Chatswood High for the first time, I don't know whether they've ever won it again since,
- 11:00 but both Denny Pales and myself then went out to White City. And so I was going to school but on a particular day I would go out to White City and we'd be you know tutored in tennis at White City. And so I was getting very excited about this, that I was going to, because you know you had all the ... Well as you still do you have major names popping up you know
- 11:30 in tennis all around the world when you win a championship somewhere, you know the newspapers and media coverage particular, so I was very keen on becoming a well known Australian David Cup tennis player. And so it was a great wrench to leave there.

**There must have been resentment about that decision that your**

**12:00 parents made to take you out of school?**

I suppose, you know there was disappointment because although I was enjoying school it was still school and I was wanting to be a tennis player, you know I didn't want to muck around you know with all this learning stuff, I wanted to learn on the tennis court. So you know when

- 12:30 that, taking me away from the school was a wrench but while I was still going to White City to play tennis I wasn't that disappointed, if you could understand you know because oh I've got rid of all that learning stuff and now this is life you know so when I couldn't go there that really was you know a big disappointment. But
- 13:00 you know as I've said you know they took me away to place me in Marcus Clarke because they knew the general manager of Marcus Clarke and were, you know some family tie or long friendships. And he said take him out of school and I'll employ him here and so comes January I
- 13:30 won't have to sack him because if he came in at Christmas time he'd be sacked in January, so he will have a job. And in those days boy if you had a job boy you were lucky. And so when I went to Marcus Clarke's I was put into the Shoe Department. I'll never forget the General Manager he put his arm
- 14:00 around me, my shoulders and said I'll give you some advice my boy, it's not what you know it is who you know. And boy through the rest of my life has that ever, it keeps coming back because it is who you know because you know particularly in later life I found it amazingly so
- 14:30 because if you would like to get a client, when I had my company, if you knew someone you weren't going in cold and boy does it make a difference - particular if you're introduced. If someone that you know is in a particular position and then introduces you and they're also



15:00 friends of the people you're trying to get as clients it's an enormous help so it's not what you know it's who you know. It's been a great reminder to me all my life.

**So during this time when you were working in the shoe department I believe you continued with your singing?**

Yes, I was going out to Marian Marty.

15:30 Madam Marty she became down at the conservatorium – who was a fabulous, fabulous teacher, absolutely marvellous. And she had some marvellous things to tell you about the voice and how, resonance and so on. And one of the things that always used to make me laugh, "it's ngngangrah".

16:00 Have you ever done the ngngangrah? A ngngangrah, it's n-g-n-g-a-n-g-r-a-h. Because if you go ngngangrah, hear that where it goes? Right in there, right in the place where you want your voice so she'd go "ngngangrah!" Right in there, resonance, resonance, it's not killed

16:30 it's coming out.

**And so that was a warm up exercise or to practise ...?**

That was the first thing that you did, you know before you walked through the door. She was in Manning Road and I used to get a bus out to Double Bay and then walk down Manning Road. And going down Manning Road I'd be going ngngangrah, ngngangrah. People must have thought I was mad. But by the time I got there you know the voice was you know in a

17:00 resonant place and then you go through all the rest of your, you know routine. But that was, you know I've never forgotten the ngngangrah. I bet if some people in Manning Road if I walked down there now if they look they'd go oh my God it's him. Anyway that was great.

**And what was she like as a teacher?**

She was absolutely fabulous, absolutely fabulous.

17:30 Tremendous personality and oh tremendous drive and just knew where the voice was and what you were doing right and what you were doing wrong and how to correct it quickly. Oh I really enjoyed working with Marian she was just marvellous.

**So the fact that you were taking singing lessons indicates to me**

18:00 **that somewhere along the line you were pointed out as having this particular talent. Was that something that you pursued yourself? Where did this kind of follow the singing happen, come along?**

Well because of the Sunday nights around the thing or going to church and being in the choir and things of that nature I wanted to develop that and it was,

18:30 it was in the era when the Colgate Palmolive company practically ruled Australian radio because I don't think anyone went out on a Tuesday night. It could be the bleakest night for theatre anyway because it would be 'Calling the Stars.' Here's this hour of acting and singing with you know world

19:00 famous people coming to the, coming to our land. And it was, because I liked the singing operation and listening to that all the time I thought oh-oh I'm going to go and get some lessons instead of just belting it out and you know around the place or out on the paddock or anywhere go and get to

19:30 understand how to produce your voice.

**So how did you hear about the audition for the Colgate Palmolive ...?**

Who was it, was it Joy Nichols? Oh you know you're mingling around town and you know you'd go ... One of the marvellous places in that era was the Australia Hotel and Ushers Hotel and you know you were meeting

20:00 a whole lot of people your own age and people who were producing and doing things. And it was there that I heard that they were doing auditions for, they wanted to develop the Youth Show for a Monday night. Because they had Tuesday and Wednesday and they were going to develop Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and that was the Colgate Palmolive plot as it were.

20:30 And so when I heard that I decided to go to the audition and see, you know see what happened. And it happened in large lumps for me I'm happy to say which was just absolutely marvellous. The, the producer of the Youth Show was a Scot called Scott and

21:00 he had said to Joy Nichols and Robin Ordell was the compere, the link man, had said whenever I can find a really decent baritone voice he's going to sing 'Going Home, Going Home'. You know so after I'd done my audition Joy Nichols heard him say he's

21:30 in the show and he'll be singing Going Home. And so she came tearing out of the TV [Television]

studios, down Bligh Street to say “you’re in, you’re in, I know you’re in! Good luck, see you next week!” And you know that’s how I started in the Youth Show.

### **And did you end up singing Going Home?**

Yes I did and what there was another one ...

22:00 And anyway it was, oh it was a great, you know the cast was marvellous and the orchestra was great and it was just a total help and I was really enjoying it and was getting some absolutely ridiculously complimentary press things. They actually took an ad

22:30 for, for one show, is he Australia’s Lawrence Tibbit? And I’ve still got that you know in my book there and I think isn’t that ludicrous, fancy a commercial operation taking an ad, an ad like that out. Anyway it was, it was great, I really enjoyed it and I was very angry with a nasty little man

23:00 called Hitler who ruined it all for me, because as soon as The war started you know into service and then I joined up pretty much immediately.

### **Just before we do move onto the war I’d like to explore a bit more about the radio show because it’s absolutely fascinating because I grew up with television and you know the radio’s a completely**

23:30 **another entity to me. You mentioned the song Going Home and I’ve actually never heard that song before and I wondered if you’ve done your nannies ...?**

My ngngangrahs?

### **Yeah your ngngangrahs, how you’d feel about making singing a chorus or ...?**

Oh lord no I wouldn’t, I haven’t even sung in the shower for a multitude of years. But ah ... oh you know

24:00 it, that’s a joy it really is. But you know in the radio, in the radio years you know you could move around and it was a lot of very naughty things went on because you know you’d try, if you were trying to send someone up or wanted to send them up you know there were the audience out there if you were recording in front of an audience,

24:30 which all of the Colgate shows were, they would be aware you know that whatever some person was doing to one of the others they could see it and you know you always stood behind someone and you know did ridiculous things and then went around to the front and look as though nothing was wrong. Why are the audience laughing? You know what have you don’t behind my back?

25:00 And here you’re trying to concentrate on the song or whatever you know. But Peggy McDonald and I used to do duets and oh it used to be hilarious. You’re trying to, you know all in fun, because if something goes wrong in those days you can just go cut and the whole thing stops and okay we’ll take it from there, from this point or that point you know.

25:30 And so it was much better than you know appearing in front of an audience and doing a recital or anything of that nature. But oh they were marvellous shows and marvellous days – and I could strangle Hitler. But ah because you know I was living an absolutely marvellous life at

26:00 that stage. Because being in the Youth Show, having got into the Youth Show I had to leave Marcus Clarke because I couldn’t just get off and go to rehearsals and so on and Colgate Palmolive said we’ll employ you out here. So I went out to Balmain and there was a couple who were running a hotel just before you get to Balmain and

26:30 so I booked into a room there and I became part of their family actually because you know I’d come in from rehearsals and what have you and if they were going anywhere they would want to take me and you know it was a lovely family situation. But it didn’t last that long of course when that nasty little creature Hitler got us

27:00 involved and you know that was the end of the section.

### **Before we do move onto the war years. It sounds like you were a star at the time, very popular and I’m just wondering like were there, you know how was that**

27:30 **shown in a public way like did you have fans you know or a fan club or anything like that going on at all?**

Oh to a degree, you know like now, now to me it’s I must say in my opinion it’s dreadful the media just absolutely you know you can’t get away from doing something ... They’re even reporting; oh saw you walking in

28:00 you know such and such a lane of such and such a suburb you know, and we didn’t have that. We had a hell of a lot of publicity but you know we’d go, we could go out and not get harassed but you know every now and then you’d go to a restaurant and you know people would come over and say hey can I have an autograph and you know you start chatting but

28:30 it wasn't a solid every day thing.

**I know it's a bit out of hand nowadays taking the long lens photographs and ...**

Yes dreadful. It's you know, I think it must be so upsetting for some of these people who are only doing a job, a job they like.

29:00 But you know to have a camera shoved in your nose or you know you're going for a swim and you're walking down to the water and fifteen shots are taken of you from behind, well so what? It's just must get terribly embarrassing I think. But thank heaven it wasn't like that at that time.

**A bit more civilised.**

Oh very much so.

**29:30 Now where were you when you heard that World War II had broken out?**

Where was I? I recall can't recall you know because we were pretty much scheduled to a variety of things you know and your day was organised, as it were and

30:00 I really, I really can't tell you of that sort of date, it you know just didn't stick in my mind. It was over a period that you know you'd heard that war had broken out but then it didn't creep onto you until a couple of months when everyone was saying oh gosh I wonder whether they're going to do this or I wonder when they're going to do that or I wonder what we'll do here.

30:30 We were going to go to Newcastle to do a concert in Newcastle, I wonder whether it's on or oh now it's off now because there's this that and the other happening in Newcastle. All of those things so for me it was a general all over and then into that came you know being called up for duty

31:00 in the service. It was called national service. And so it's when the national service was formed and people were leaving to go into national service, and being called up and what have you. But then oh what a hell of a way to end up when you're having a lovely time you know.

**So what was your reaction**

**31:30 when you were called up?**

My reaction was. It was a sort of ah well I've been doing this, I've been out at Colgate Palmolive and I'm coming into town and doing the shows and so on. There was talk of well okay you know you'll come in from Ingleburn you know you'll,

32:00 we'll see if we can you know get off there and well okay you're out for a couple of months or something like that and that was the attitude and you'd think oh well if I'm out for six months or so I'm out for six months. And then you're doing a totally different life again. You know suddenly you're being regimented like crazy and instead of you saying

32:30 oh look I feel a bit tired I'm not going to be able to leave - you will get up and go. So it was, you know it was a totally different thing and it was during that period that I decided to join up. Because if it's going to go on and you go back you go back into what you were doing and then to get called up for

33:00 national service again what the hell are you doing, why don't you get into the real and join up and so on and ... A lieutenant once said to me out at Ingleburn he said "You know with all the bru-ha-ha that you've had if you decide to join up, you know I want to run some stuff in the press because I think that would be a very good thing for other young men." And I

33:30 thought about that, I thought isn't that hysterical me doing something that would have some affect on others other than entertainment where you entertain and that's that and you're off. So you know I joined up and then it was into training. And when I joined up I was cast into the Seventh Field Regiment, which was

34:00 twenty-five pounder guns and boy that's heavy work I can tell you when you're swinging those guns around. But I was on the theodolite working out points of where to fire the gun and so on. But one day I put my foot down and went to swing the thing with two other chaps and my foot caught on a big tuft

34:30 of grass and oh boy my knee just went chung-chung-chung and, and within an hour the doctor that was attached to our regiment shot me off to hospital - but that was when we, by then we were on our way to Egypt. But the Japanese started mucking around in Darwin and we were settled down in

35:00 Geraldton and not sent off to Egypt at all, sent down, up to Geraldton from Perth and we were stationed out at, our regiment was stationed out at Gin Gin - a lovely name. And so that's where you know this happened and they sent me down to Northern Hospital, and that's where again fate came in because as I said I was in a ward with,

35:30 I think they're were about eight of us and we were all to have our knee ligaments taken, the operations for that was all set when a Macquarie Street specialist who was a lieutenant colonel was doing a walk around, being taken around by the people of the hospital and he came over to my bed and asked what

was wrong and I told him and

- 36:00 and he said let me have a look at it and he started fiddling around and what have you and then he called the others over and pow-wow, pow-wow, pow-wow and then he comes back to my bed and said "Sergeant don't ever and I mean ever let anyone try to operate or tamper with that knee!" And I was absolutely staggered because I thought you know I'm here to have the ligament taken out.
- 36:30 And anyway I was on a truck heading back to the unit within the hour and I got back to the unit and I was summoned by the CO and he said "Patten I didn't know you were a singer." I can still hear him saying it you know. And I said well I doubted that that would be something necessary to be in the Seventh Field Regiment
- 37:00 and he said "Oh well you've been seconded" and I said "Seconded, what do you mean?" and he said "You're on your way back to Perth in an hour because you're now in the Second Divisional Concert Party." And I thought good God and I said "Who's in that?" and he said "An old mate of yours from the Youth Show, Colin Croft who's been screaming where are you?" Colin Croft and Mike Pate and George Wallace Junior
- 37:30 and so I was back in Perth and linked up with that crew and it was absolutely marvellous. We had, we had a marvellous concert party, the Second Div [Division] Concert Party was just superb and we had ...

**So what kind of performances would you put on?**

It was always on the back of a truck, you know that was your stage and

- 38:00 we had ... Oh sorry, some of the stages weren't you know they were quite large stages, some were on the back of a truck. But we had a very big truck that used to fold limbs, the sides folded out and made a very big stage that we could fit an orchestra on. We had an orchestra and not very much room in the front with a microphone
- 38:30 and there would be all sorts of sketches with George Wallace Junior. God he was a funny man, absolutely marvellous. He did some of the best prank falls I've ever seen in my life you know. And there was he and Michael Pate and Colin Croft were doing sketches and of course I was brought in to do bits and pieces in the sketches if required, but I was the lead baritone.
- 39:00 And so that was you know ... One person who was absolutely outstanding in my view in the concert party was a guy by the name of Norman Hetherington. You may have in the Bulletin and various magazines seen Heth [Norman Hetherington] and he does various cartoons and so on. I've got,
- 39:30 I've got some there that I must show you because they're in colour, and he is just brilliant - you know I'm having lunch with him tomorrow. But he is a delightful man and so talented in those sketches and you know comic operations, it's just excellent. But as I say we had an excellent team.

## Tape 3

- 00:36 **What were you first impressions of the unit?**

Which unit are you talking about?

**Sorry, when you first joined the First Australian Army Entertainment Unit what were your first impressions of the unit when you joined?**

Well I actually met Peter Finch in the sergeants mess and that's,

- 01:00 that's when it started. I was asking him to aid and abet me in acting, would he show me in various things and what have you and what have and that's when he said he'd been asked to form, and he didn't know whether it had gone through and whether it was happening, he said so you're coming with me tomorrow, let's have a few more beers, you're coming with me tomorrow and I'll make you
- 01:30 my 2IC if this thing gets off the ground. So then he explained he had been asked to form the first Australian Entertainment Unit which would do, which would be doing plays, it would be a drama operation rather than the concert party type. So it was the next morning that I fronted up with him and it was big Jim Davidson who was the colonel of the entertainment units at that stage.
- 02:00 And he told Finch that you know yes it's on and what's Patten doing here? And he said oh well he's going to be my 2IC and he said oh really, oh well good luck, do you want to do that Patten? And I said yes sir if I may. And he said "Well you'll drop out of the Second Div Concert Party?" And I said "Yes" and he said "Okay." And so then he said "Righto
- 02:30 Finch what, have you selected any plays to do at this stage while I've been you know checking whether this is going to get off the ground?" And Peter said "Yes I'd like to do two Rattigan plays sirs, he said that would be While The Sun Shines and French Without Tears." And he said "Oh, oh well that's good you're getting on with it, good on you he said so now who

03:00 are the female impersonators you want to, out of the units because we've got you know several of them in here at the moment: the Ninth Div, the Sixth Div, the Second Div and so." And ah, I looked at Finchy and Finchy looked at me and I said "Sir, we have to kiss the girls in these plays". And Davidson went oh, oh well very good, oh well I see, yes well how are you going to

03:30 accomplish that, you'll have to get real girls? And we said "Yes sir real girls". So he said right I'll send out memos to the AMWAS the AWAS and RAAF's [Royal Australian Air Force] and so on.

**Look just before we continue that I want to go back to the concert party for a moment. Did you spend any period of time with the concert party as a singer?**

Oh yes.

**You did. Okay I'd like to cover a little more of the concert party story before we move on to the,**

04:00 **to the unit, yes. Tell me about your first impressions of the concert party as such?**

Well I was ... It really struck me as not being very dissimilar from going to a Youth Show rehearsal because we were all there, we all knew what we wanted to do and what we had to do. There were sketches which you know are miniature

04:30 play type things so Mike Pate and George Wallace Junior were writing those along with a couple of other guys in the thing. I was a singer. Norm Hetherington was Heth who was Mr Squiggles and Colin Croft. And Colin and George Wallace Junior and Mike Pate we were doing sketches and so I was coming in and doing

05:00 the, similarly to what I'd been doing with Colgate unit behind Roy Rene and Hal Lashwood and Jack Davey, doing little bits.

**So you were touring with the unit?**

Yes.

**What sort of places were you touring to?**

Well we then went from Perth up to Geraldton obviously because wherever there were units, army units stationed that where we went. So we did all around

05:30 Perth and up to Geraldton and up near Broome and then came back to New South Wales. And then we went to Queensland and we played around Atherton and all around the army, wherever the army was there. And then we went from there to Merauke in New Guinea and went you know wherever in New Guinea the army units were.

06:00 And you know so it was a schedule that you, that you worked on.

**When you got to Merauke how far away from the front line were you?**

Ah ... Oh I'd say about twenty miles, something of that type and there was a river just near there that there was some action on.

06:30 **This action occurred while you were actually there?**

Yes I had a delightful experience in Merauke. I was ... we were out at some barracks and near the stage, we'd set up our gear near a stage and at this particular barracks they had the, you know the men's' showers were you know separated from the building and they had

07:00 the hessian around and you went from your tent or whatever into these showers. I was having a shower one day you know at about, they must have been putting up the stage or something, it was after that that I'd decided I'd have a shower. And I was having a shower when all of a sudden a Japanese plane came screaming out of the sky and strafed straight along past the showers and I'm you know I'm about thirty feet away

07:30 and I, you know and these things are going ting-ting-ting-ting-ting all down the ... and I thought oh I've seen front line service I'll boast about now. But it was probably the closest I came, well I know of, because there was a lot of camouflage things going on all around, you know when we were playing up there.

08:00 But as I say you went from there to various places. We went to Malaya. And you know that was it wherever troops were stationed because when we appeared it would be so that the fellows would go to a dinner or a lunch and well they could even bring it with them and sit out the front

08:30 and have a, you know some entertainment.

**Now obviously this was an essential part of rest and recreation and escapism for the frontline troops, did you have a sense of performing that kind of service who had obviously been in very stressful situations?**

Ah the main feeling I had about that was that when you first started it was

- 09:00 almost, it was almost universal. When we first started the concert there would be dead quiet as if to say you know what are you, what are you about mate? After a couple of sketches and maybe a song the applause starts you know and then
- 09:30 raucous laughter at you know some of the sketches because George Wallace Junior he used to do prat falls the magnificence of which I have never seen anyone else do. He was incredible at that. And of course with this mad George Wallace voice, you know rush across the stage and .... boomp! Well the applause and yelling and laughter
- 10:00 was just incredible. And you know he and Mike Pate and Col Croft they did some marvellous sketches, absolutely ... You know and their, their professionalism and their timing was oh just something to behold, and it got its reaction.

**So you could feel the audience warming ...?**

Oh very much so, very much. And it, from your comment of saying you know people

- 10:30 that have been you know in stress to me the beginning was almost the same universally, you know they were all tense. After, after one sketch and one song or whatever the laughter and relaxation was there and you know a couple of George's prat falls and it was hysterics time.

**And I imagine the interaction between**

- 11:00 **audience and live performers meant a lot more to them than watching a film.**

I think it did too yes because you know you make mistakes and they're aware of it immediately you know because someone's sending someone up, oh I forgot about that. It's normal, it's back to human nonsense if you like.

**Can you**

- 11:30 **describe the composition ... You've mentioned the cast members and you've given me a bit of a description about what some of them did but can you talk about the structure of a concert party show?**

Well the structure is in brief would be sketches and their little playlets and so on which would be written by George or

- 12:00 Michael, whoever, but there were guys dressed up as female impersonators and they were always used in these sketches and then following that there could be an orchestral number and then there could be Heth doing his sketches and so on and he'd, he'd of sussed out a couple of lieutenants
- 12:30 or captains or colonels and of course he had, he had a big board that they could all see and well you know Heth's stuff is just magic you know and they used to just roar with laughter about that and what and he would, he was just tearing paper off the, off the board, he'd do bom-bom-bom-bom-bom led to this and oh they just thought it was magic. So you had sketches, orchestra, Heth,
- 13:00 a vocal and then another sketch and everyone working in together in that, in that sense and the orchestra doing backups to the whole thing.

**And would there be an interval?**

Very rarely, very rarely. We tried not to do intervals because you know what they hell are they going to do? They're sitting out there, they're not sitting on chairs or lounge chairs and it's not

- 13:30 central heating so it's usually, it used to run straight through so that you got the whole lot over and they could get up and go to bed.

**How long did the show, what was the duration of each show?**

Oh about two hours, two to two and a half hours. And you know that is without applause and whatever so sometimes it stretched because you know

- 14:00 George doing his prat falls they would just, the sound was, you couldn't hear anything else, you'd have to go and turn the microphone up to hear because they'd roar with laughter and clap and carry on and that was that.

**Now of course George Wallace Junior was the son of George Wallace the famous comedian. How similar were their routines?**

Oh very. Very. And voice structure the same. I mean George Junior I think

- 14:30 stole all his old man's material and he was absolutely excellent.

**So he was every bit as good as his father?**

Oh yes, oh yes. I never saw George do a Tivoli Show because I think he would have been better than his father with that broad amount of stage to work on and the way

- 15:00 he could stumble and stutter and you know fall about you'd think he was coming apart, you know it was just magic stuff.

**Could you describe what sort of a person he was offstage?**

Oh a delightful bloke. I, I liked George very much. He was straight up and down and you know serious when serious was required but you know

- 15:30 he'd always implant a little bit of something in serious to lighten it up you know. If he wanted to, you know tell the lieutenant off or you know didn't like some particular situation he would say so in the, in the most humorous fashion you know so that you got the message but you didn't want to hit him on the jaw -

- 16:00 one of those.

**Who organised the concert parties?**

There would be a lieutenant to each of group and he was responsible for that, for that group to the army. And Jim Davidson was the lieutenant colonel in charge of all of the entertainments and so on. And ah

- 16:30 you know the lieutenants in charge of each of the parties always had something to do with show business one way or another or wanted to do it so they would be quite happy to liaise with the army for whatever. And they took all the orders, okay you're now going to be in Bulbikanka on Monday so get your act together and you're on such a such a train at such and such a time and

- 17:00 he just called everyone together and said I've got these orders and this is what we're going to do, boom, and you just got it straight, straight down the, it was very well organised.

**To what extent were the performers themselves in charge of what was happening? Didn't George Wallace Junior himself have an organisational role at one stage?**

Not as far as I know but each person in the concert party,

- 17:30 it seems a silly thing to say, but knew they were in a concert party and they were there to do their thing. They also had to live with all the other people in the concert party. And you know you did your thing to the best of your ability and the others were doing theirs but then it would be just like fellows

- 18:00 meeting in the pub after, after work you'd say ... Well I remember the old days when we were at Williamson's we always met over in Ushers, you know seven or eight blokes over in Ushers you know saying what do you know about so and so, oh boy did that happen, oh gosh you know ... Same as happens now I would assume.

**I interviewed Michael Pate a couple of years ago and he said that he, when he first joined the concert party, found**

- 18:30 **things were administratively a little bit of a mess and that he himself stepped in and helped organise things a bit.**

Well he was in the unit long before I was. Because I was in the Seventh Field Regiment in Western Australia and when they came to Western Australia that's when they seconded me to join the concert party. But I always felt that it ran particular well. But you know as a sergeant the lieutenant could call on

- 19:00 you to do various things so you virtually, if you had a very good lieutenant in charge of, he got his instructions from the army and would organise that. But without any shadow of problem he'd just say Sergeant Patten I want you to come with me and do so and so, so and so, so and so, so you'll be in charge of that. So I never regarded it as

- 19:30 saying I'm in charge of all you know train timetables to get to there - I had to fix one or two and if you'd fixed one or two then down the track you might have fixed six or seven because you knew how to do it so why give it to someone else if you knew how to do it, and that seemed to pervade the whole thing. But for Mike, Mike was always writing -

- 20:00 marvellous writer. And he and another guy used to always be sitting on a tin can with a typewriter out you know. And then you know with George Wallace you know, he's got to have sketches and so he and Mike and he and Col Croft would get together and say what about and what about and work out the whole thing and someone would have to type it up then and I think Mike did most of that, there wasn't a secretary

- 20:30 around the corner so you'd get it done.

**So Colin Croft was taking quite or Colin Croft had quite an involvement in the writing as well did he?**

I think so, yes.

**Can you describe Colin Croft for us?**

Well Col was my best man at my marriage and he is a marvellous comedian himself, he's no longer with us of course ...

21:00 but he was versatile, a very versatile straight comic. Not a George Wallace type. You know Col was delivering lines and you'd hear someone else say a phrase and you'd think what's funny about that, until you heard Colin Croft deliver those lines and you'd think oh you're kidding! The emphasis

21:30 and thing, he just, he had that quality. He was very, very good. And he was a very good actor too.

**I've seen from pictures in Michael Pate's book that Colin Croft played quite a variety of roles on stage.**

Oh yes, yes indeed.

**And you yourself what sort of songs were you singing?**

Oh try and remember the name of a song. Ah ...

22:00 I really don't know they were just you know songs that were popular at the time. I'm just trying to think of some but ...

**Were they songs that were appearing on the radio for example?**

Yes.

**Oh there's your phone. So that it was what songs from radio programs**

22:30 **and films?**

Yes the most popular ones of the day, you know as, as you've got today, you know they say this song is on the hit parade and what have you. And you know all the things that I was singing, you know the Lawrence Tibbitt and all the singers of that age were doing these songs and you know you just picked them up and did them.

**So you sang very much in the Lawrence Tibbitt, Richard Crooke's**

23:00 **style as a baritone?**

Baritone. Well Lawrence Tibbitt was a glorious baritone. You know when I saw that ad is his Australia's Lawrence Tibbitt? Some man has gone made. What a glorious voice that man had.

**And what about Bing Cosby type songs did you sing any of those as well?**

Well some ... You know the [Frank] Sinatra type songs as well. You know there are ballads

23:30 that they have sung ... You know it is in that, in that type, you know the Frank Sinatra, Bing Cosby but not the crooning type ones but the straight ones that they did were absolutely marvellous.

**Had you ever considered a career in opera as well?**

The reason I spoke to Finchy in the

24:00 bar because Marian Marty ... I took Valda Bagnall out to her and Valda Bagnall was my first wife and to me and to at least eight-five percent of Australians she had the best coloratura's voice that this country has ever had. And there was an international

24:30 singer that came to Australia at that stage and she, Marian knew her of course and made contact, and she, Valda went out to Marian's Manning Road studio and sang for this lady and this lady said "I am wearing the crown of the world at the moment so don't you hurry,

25:00 just keep on doing your work with Madam and I will hand you the crown in two years". And I thought holy smoke and Marian was elated with all that. And I was talking to Marian and she said now we'll have to organise after you get out of the army and all of this she said it will take a while to

25:30 straighten you up and then we'll go overseas. And I said "We'll be going overseas?" And she said "Yes and you are going to be a matinee idol of, you know that sort of stage work singing, and you're going to keep us for a year and then Valda and I will keep you for the rest of your life."

26:00 What a statement you know. I'm going to be a matinee idol in musical comedy. And all of those lovely plans never came to fruition. But Valda's voice was just unbelievable. I don't know whether you've ever heard her sing or heard any of her records and so on but oh a magnificent voice. And

26:30 you know Sutherland thought she was the voice here too.



**And did you ever make recordings yourself?**

No I didn't, apart from the Youth Show which they were all on acetate as you know but no I never, no because I got sidetracked. When I came back out of the army I went into the publicity business.

**Now just moving back**

27:00 **to people involved in the shows. You've mentioned on a couple of occasions the female impersonators. Did they only do female impersonation?**

Yes. Yes they were female impersonators and that was their job.

**And what was their background, where had they come from to be female impersonators?**

Well they decided that they wanted to do that to get into a concert party and how that happened I really don't know. Because ah

27:30 you know they could be in a concert party and someone might have said hey listen I'd like to dress you up and you could, they could manipulate their voices and so on and that worked for them. But I really don't know just how a female impersonator came to be classed as a female impersonator.

**Were they people that had enlisted in the army?**

Yes, of yes.

**And**

28:00 **did any of them have show business backgrounds?**

I really don't know, I you know I don't know that much about ... You know you'd see the chaps in the Second Div were the only ones that I knew and I can't even remember their names now. But there was only one that really was the female impersonator in a group and he was very, very good at it, very good. But

28:30 **What was his name?**

I can't remember, that's what I was just saying ... Oh dear, no I can't.

**What sort of, what sort of routines were they doing?**

Well with George Wallace, Mike Pate and Colin Croft.

**So they'd be doing sketch comedy as well as musical routines?**

No mainly the sketch, mainly. You know they were female impersonators to ... You know all the sketches

29:00 had something about females that they would come in to hail them down or do some ridiculous thing and George would send it all up and do a prat fall and you know the boys would be laughing their heads off out the front.

**So the audiences received them well?**

Oh yes, yes indeed, very well. Well they were very good,

29:30 they were doing some you know they were doing some tough roles in those sketches. Because you go back to the Colgate Palmolive years of ruling the radio nest, as I always say, they had Ada and Elsie. Well they were two easy people to take off for female impersonators you could have two Adas and Elsie doing a sketch in the

30:00 concert party operation.

**Because Ada and Elsie themselves had quite deep voices.**

Yes, yes and their, you know they weren't strikingly beautiful women and so you know it was that type of comedy that the female impersonators were given you know because George and Mike would write, you know could write that sort of

30:30 stuff because you know they could write and Ada and Elsie scene without any problem. And so they could do that and either Mike or Colin Croft would play Ada or Elsie and the female impersonator you know.

**So were there any actual women in the concert parties?**

No.

**Why not?**

Well that's when you get up to the Peter Finch performing the army theatre. The Army

31:00 Entertainment Unit and that was drama. First time there was you know quite a kerfuffle for Jim Davidson to get approval for these women to come out of the AMWAS and AWAS and what have you.

But in Concert Parties no women whatsoever all female impersonators.

**So in an average concert party how many female impersonators would there be?**

31:30 Never more than two, usually only one.

**And would any of them sing as well?**

They could but you know it would be in a comedy operation, it wasn't for real, it was you know a send up situation.

**Now there was a concert party known as the Islanders? Were you involved in the Islanders because I know that Michael Pate was and they actually toured the**

32:00 **islands at one point.**

Well I think, I think there were a number of people like Mike that were in the Second Div Concert Party and what happened in New Guinea is that instead of having the full concert party, I know after I was invalided out, that they were saying that they were breaking up into

32:30 you know a small group would go over here and a small group would go over there. So you could say that Mike Pate and Colin Croft and you know Heth went to this group and George Wallace and someone else would go to that group ...

33:00 **Ah it's picked up.**

Sorry about that.

**So you must have had a fair amount of joy and fulfilment out of playing to these crowds?**

Oh yes very satisfying, very satisfying. Because as I said you could almost feel the tenseness to begin with and then everything would you know settle down and they'd laugh their heads off at,

33:30 well as soon as you had George Wallace and Mike Pate at the microphone and Colin Croft they just fell about because you know it was well written stuff and beautifully done, you know they're total professionals.

**And so could you feel the enthusiasm of the audience in turn feeding you as performers?**

Oh yes. Oh yes. That you know would set George off on

34:00 three or four prat falls without any problem whatsoever. Very good.

**What did the stage consist of?**

Some stages were actually built, others was a big truck with the sides turned down and then you built a thing around it,

34:30 not calico whatever it was went over this, hessian and so on went over and formed a whole stage setting so that you know you had, you had a square thing, that there was the stage and that was the audience, that you had you know things all around the back of the truck and what have you for dressing and so on so that you went across and backwards

35:00 across a stage, a smaller stage but then when you had a very big truck it was you know quite adequate.

**Did you play to any female audiences at all?**

I can't remember ever playing to female ... but I'm sure that we did go to ... I think we went to an AWAS camp once but I can only, I vaguely remember you know doing that but

35:30 I just couldn't tell you when or why. Or I might be remembering only because the others told me after I'd left that I did go there you know.

**Were there mixed audiences in terms of women scattered in among the men?**

No, a full male audience.

**On those other occasions?**

Mm.

**I mean you must have been travelling a fair range of climates as well as locations?**

Oh yes. Oh yes

36:00 because you know playing in Victoria there's a hell of a lot camps all around the place in Victoria. There's a hell of a lot in New South Wales and there's even more in Queensland. But you just went to an enormous lots of vacations, locations not vacations. You felt that you were on vacation because you know you were in New South Wales one minute and you were at Atherton in Queensland

- 36:30 the next and you were on the Gold Coast the next and you think oh this is fun. You soon got over that.
- What about problems with malaria when you were in New Guinea? Did you have to go onto Atebrin?**
- Yes. I thought I had malaria at one stage and you know a number of different ones in the cast all felt they were getting malaria and it just seemed to stop, we seemed to grab it.
- 37:00 I was convinced I was going to get malaria at one stage and I'm not sure that I didn't but you know it didn't develop which was good.
- So the cast were all wearing the yellow faces that were associated with Atebrin?**
- Yes, yes. Oh boy didn't that turn you a colour, indeed. You didn't need makeup for a Chinese operation.
- 37:30 **Can you give me an idea of when it was that you joined the concert party and when it was that you made the transfer across to the entertainment unit?**
- When in time?
- When in terms of time and yeah, month and year?**
- Ah ... The last eighteen months of 1946, '45, '44. I think the
- 38:00 Entertainment unit would have started in about 1944/45, because that's when we came back from ... the Second Div concert party came back from Western Australia and we were back out at Pagewood and that's when I as I say I met Peter in the bar and it was formed immediately there.
- So when had you actually joined the concert party,**
- 38:30 **in terms of month and year?**
- Ah ... I had been in the Seventh Field Regiment when I joined up which was about 1942 I think, no '41 I joined up. So in the Seventh Field Regiment we then went, as I said we were on our way to Egypt when we got to
- 39:00 Perth. So I then joined the concert party in Perth and came back to Sydney and that's when we started the entertainment unit. So that would be ... I was eighteen months in it so that would have to be about 1944. Because when Peter started putting it
- 39:30 together we were at Pagewood. Oh we would have had to have been there for about four or five months. We were working on two plays, you know rehearsal, rehearsal, rehearsal every day. And as the girls came into it and as the other performers came into it you had to get to know each other. And then we had the lieutenant in charge of us ...

## Tape 4

- 00:32 **Can you describe the set up there at Pagewood with the entertainment unit?**
- Well firstly there was the gaining of the crew if you like or cast, which ever is the right word and Finchy he taught us from square one because once we had the
- 01:00 ladies who were going to play the female roles in both those Rattigan plays we were then altogether because there were other guys who wanted to join a theatre operation. And so we were altogether and every day Finchy took lessons, you know and he started to talk in the ngngangrah department of
- 01:30 how you project your voice and what you do with this and how you do that and you know it was a marvellous school of acting.
- Was there any emphasis on the Stanislavski technique [method acting technique] at all?**
- No, no he wasn't interested in that he was more interested in feel activity. You know if you felt this particular role because you'd
- 02:00 worked on it and you understood what the person was and you were portraying that person and so therefore you had to have it in you, this is the way I would react under these situations.
- I mean the Stanislavski technique involved quite extensive research into what that character might do and then an emotional response drawn from**
- 02:30 **life. Was there any emphasis on drawing an emotional response from life as far as Finch's technique was concerned?**
- No it was mainly drawn on, as I just said you know you read that character and you knew what he did and you assumed what motivated him. And it was your assumption so that if someone else played the

role it was their assumption of what motivated the same character –

03:00 but you did it this way, he did it that way or whatever. But in the main you're working as a team for the total play. The total play was the overall umbrella to everything you did because don't, don't mess it up because you want to be .... and play it like that when you

03:30 you should be playing it da-da-da-da-dee.

**So what ... could you describe a class that was run by Peter Finch? What sort of things would you do in that class?**

We're all in the class, all sitting facing Peter and he would say we will do anger. How do

04:00 you portray anger? How do you portray anger? How do you portray anger? Each person would say and he would then say to you well you were .... That's not a pretty face. There is another way of emotionally presenting anger which all of us, you know each on was learning. And that's what went on day after day

04:30 learning a situation and learning and feeling and you know and you knew it, you knew at the end of the thing your character was this in which ever play you were in – 'While The Sun Shines' or 'French Of Our Tears.'

**So presumably there was a lot of rehearsal of those plays?**

Oh tremendous, tremendous. And the first things that we did after getting the whole thing together was

05:00 we played Victoria. We went down and played several things in Victoria and then came back to Sydney and played you know around Pagewood and out to Ingleburn and various, all around Sydney. And then we went to New Guinea. But we'd done a lot of work there. I have a photograph of us all on the bus coming back from Melbourne

05:30 and we're all sitting all over the engine and everything, from a photograph. And you know it's always remained with me, what a great idea that was, we were altogether, it was a photograph that to me expressed what Finchy had taught us because he was the teacher and ...

**Now you've described to us the response of the audience to the concert parties, how did the audience react to,**

06:00 **to serious drama in this case?**

Oh to me it was excellent, absolutely excellent because comedy they laughed, drama ... dead silence. Coming out of it ha-ha-oh-oh-ah-oh, from here, from there and over there and then the audience coming up with it you

06:30 know to the comedy where everyone just fell about laughing and that was absolutely marvellous and of course a marvellous feeling.

**Now could you describe Peter Finch himself as an individual?**

Oh a delightful, delightful friend who wanted to excel, excel, excel.

07:00 Good actor, very good actor, been there done that, it's better this way than that way. Pass it on to you, go for your life, which I thought was generous, very generous for a major actor because he was a major actor at that time, a really major actor. And here we are all of us in the rest of the cast,

07:30 who are you, never heard of you?

**So by that time he had quite a major name for himself?**

Oh yes.

**Had that name come through radio or the stage?**

Stage. Oh yes he'd played the Theatre Royal, he'd played the one in Kings Cross – what was it called?

**The Minerva [Theatre]?**

The Minerva. His last play before he came into the army was at the Minerva

08:00 so everyone was totally aware of who Peter Finch was, absolutely.

**Did he seem to be a man more of the theatre than of film at that time?**

Oh very much so. Yes he didn't, I don't think Peter knew terribly much about film at that stage but he knew stage craft and oh wonderful, wonderful.

**Are there any**

08:30 **particular anecdotes that stand out about Peter Finch. I mean quite a few people have Peter Finch stories that are either dealing with this wild ways or other aspects of his life?**

Oh yes well you know he was married to Tamara who was a beautiful ballet dancer and you know I just knew him as a great friend until one hilarious,

- 09:00 well not hilarious, unfortunate situation and it took quite a while to heal. Because when we came back from playing in Melbourne we played in Sydney and the press were invited and there was a lady who was very big in the Australian press at that stage called Andrea, if you all remember. And we did this you
- 09:30 know these two plays but Peter played in While The Sun Shines and I was in French Of Our Tears - as I say we alternated. But obviously when you're playing to the press you're not going to play me when you've got Peter Finch standing in the wings. Anyway Andrea came out and said how good this development was
- 10:00 but Peter Finch had better watch himself because there's a young man in the company that did a superb performance in French Without Tears and I understand he alternates the lead role in While The Sun Shines with Peter - he'd better watch himself. Well it was hysterical, the next day,
- 10:30 we always used to have Peter give a run down on our performances and nine times out of ten, because I'm his 2IC, he would start with Ron, last night boom-boom-boom you could have done ... now if you had done that ... good but you did ... not so good.
- 11:00 Just think about it, think about it so that you can do that. He went right through the cast and not a mention of Ron Patten. He comes right to the end and Peter looks up at me and he said, "Ron, if you think you can act
- 11:30 I'll act you off the bloody stage mate". End of description, nothing about my performance. And you know it really broke a friendship, Andrea broke a friendship with Peter and I until oh several years later after coming back I produced the play French Without Tears at the
- 12:00 Philip Street Theatre and had a marvellous cast, I can show you the cast in a minute but Peter had returned from London and I thought holy hell what's going to happen here, I am greeting God coming back from, from England. Because after the show everyone knew that Peter was in the audience and after the show Peter was coming
- 12:30 on stage and I thought only one way to go in this straight up, shakes hands, how are you, bla. And I went up and Peter half turned and then he turned back and he said "Bloody good mate. Good to see you." Oh boy I tell you the weight that lifted off my shoulders, I could have gone straight through the roof I felt so light.
- 13:00 And we were good mates from that moment on. I said oh I know where it happened, it was ridiculous, he said yeah I know, I know, righto forget it not mentioned ever again but he was ...

**Fair enough. He'd played quite a manipulative game nevertheless.**

Oh just, oh you know but just a superb artist, a superb actor. And you know like anything in show business, wafts

- 13:30 and wafts and wafts you know. If you're getting the accolades and you're doing it well great you go up. And the old routine about you know the tall poppy in Australia I think just came straight out of theatre land because if you were coming up ... cut him down quickly because he might take over my operation. It's just one of those things.

**What was the most important thing that you think you learnt from Peter as an actor?**

- 14:00 Um ... To study what you were doing and get inside what you want that human being to do. You know forget all your own you know you do this or you do that or you raise your eyebrow or you do whatever, forget what you want to do, read that character, see,
- 14:30 understand, believe what that character wanted to do and then do it to your best ability.

**It sounds you both did a fairly good job it.**

Yes, yes we did indeed. You know I loved alternating the lead role with Finchy because I'd be on the side of the stage watching him like

- 15:00 mad and I'd say oh he wants to do it that way, well okay let him do it that way I, I believe, I believe the character would have done this you know.

**How confident were you when you took over the company for the New Guinea tour?**

I was scared witless because I thought gee I am going to be playing that lead role ever second night and I'm playing that minor

- 15:30 role in French Without Tears, and you know I thought this is going to be a hurdle now come on gird up your loins as it were you know. Because from a humorous point of view in French Without Tears the lady that's playing, ah what's it, what's her name?

- 16:00 Anyway it doesn't matter. The two of us are the two juvenile leads okay and we get to the scene where we're sitting at a table and it's been one of those romance things, you know you're looking at each other and you think I'd love to make ... oh I mustn't ... oh I'd love to make ... oh I'd love ... Anyway in the action that we created, all of these moves I might say Peter created these in our
- 16:30 production, and on this I flick something onto the floor to which see says "Oh we've got to get that" and we say "Oh yes we've got to get that" and we're on a stool so I have to go around this way and she has to go around that way and we kneel down but we kneel with out knees together, but I'm looking this way and she's looking that way and you know it's a romantic spot that
- 17:00 we've got to come up and that's the first time we just look into each other's eyes and we can't help it we have to kiss. This lady was romantically involved after a few months with the lieutenant that was looking after us and the lieutenant used to come and stand right at the edge of the stage and watch this
- 17:30 you know because he wasn't terribly happy about Patten kissing his girlfriend. And obviously he said something to her and you know it became a bit obvious because we'd come up and we'd be like that and kiss. Then one night she's back there and I have to lean and kiss her there. Then the next night she's about there and
- 18:00 I'm kissing her there and then she's back here and I took her aside after the thing and I said look I know the situation for God sake tell the lieutenant this is a play we do it this way and I said because if you go further back I am going to come over and I said the next thing you're going to be flat on your back and I'm going to be on top of you. And the audience
- 18:30 are not going to appreciate that we know anything about that action - we know about kissing but not that action. And it was one of the most hysterical times and you know we sorted it out but it's always remained in my mind and hers when we meet for lunch we say are we going over?

**That's great.**

Yes and lots of fun like that happened. But you know Finchy did such a good job on

- 19:00 training us all. It was just fabulous, just fabulous.

**Now who actually did play the female parts? You mentioned an application was made to the AWAS and to other branches. Who were the women that actually came in?**

Well there was one lady Gloria Berry and she played the lead in, in While The Sun Shines. And there were a number of girls you know that

- 19:30 were there and I'm just trying to think ... I cannot think of the lady who played opposite me in French Without Tears. I can get her name later in the piece for you but you know a delightful lady and she ended up by marrying and now is Mrs McKenzie because our lieutenant was McKenzie. She is now Mrs McKenzie but I don't know just where she is at the moment. Tomorrow
- 20:00 she'll slap my wrist at lunch saying you couldn't remember my name! But Gloria was marvellous because she had this marvellous part. I don't know whether you know the story of While The Sun Shines. While The Sun Shines was so, you know again Finchy's touch, While The Sun Shines is a Rattigan comedy
- 20:30 but the lead role is a gentleman by the name of Lord Harpenton. And Lord Harpenton happens to be in the navy and is an ordinary seaman but when he comes home on leave he's in his glorious units but as an ordinary seaman he's been there, he's been here, he's been all over and
- 21:00 naturally if there is a lovely lady in the room he gets to know or get her to know that he is Lord Harpenton. "And would you care next time you're in London would you care to come and visit me? Just give me a phone call because I think you are doing a marvellous job here and we're in the navy and everything is coarser." He had
- 21:30 air hostesses and naval ladies and various others coming into his apartment and that is the thing of While The Sun Shines. It's that old routine of the girl goes out that door and another one comes in this door and that one is going that way and this one is coming this way and he's riding her on the whole thing and it is
- 22:00 absolutely a lovely play. Rattigan you know wrote you know some marvellous plays as you know and in this you know that particular thing, that particular play had an enormous amount of comedy in it because if one lady, if he said well you know it's getting late you must go home, on account of he's got an air force lady coming in you know and she says "Oh no, no,
- 22:30 no I'm really enjoying it here you know I'd like to stay" and oh dear God you know. It's a lovely play.

**Asked you about confidence before, how long did it take you to gain your confidence once you were in New Guinea?**

Oh no time at all because all the ... you know I had been playing it alternate nights to Finchy. You know

we were in Victoria ... you know we did a whole lot of performances

23:00 and various army camps and then back to New South Wales and you know then we were heading for New Guinea. Now having played it and talked to Finchy over the same role night after night you know if you're playing it on Monday you're playing it again on Wednesday and you're playing it again on Friday.

23:30 You're playing French Without Tears the other two nights so that after every performance Finchy did a review and that's what I say about the one in Sydney, that's the first time we ever had any dislocation of a marvellous friendship, because he literally went through the performance you gave the night before. And you could hear, you could hear

24:00 hear everything that he said, "I thought that was wonderful, keep doing that, that's absolutely excellent but" and you'd think oh where's the but? "Oh in the second act you did boom-boom-boom-boom now that's not the same character is it?" Oh, oh no it's not really. Unless he's an f-word,

24:30 because you know you could just see yourself doing it and you felt like that, you thought gee was that right? No it wasn't, oh.

**You could feel that tremor from inside in a way?**

Yeah.

**Now you've mentioned Pagewood, what exactly was at Pagewood?**

Well when we were there all the Units came back to Pagewood before going out, I mean the concert party

25:00 Units - the Ninth Div, the Second Div, the Sixth Div, all of them came back to Pagewood and Pagewood was run by Jim Davidson who was the head of all the things, you know the famous orchestra conductor as you know and ah ...

**So what did the buildings consist of at Pagewood?**

Ah ... Well

25:30 I have to say quite frankly I can't remember any buildings at Pagewood because we were all in our tents, you know in various sections, and when we started with Finchy in the entertainment unit, which I thought was hilarious, we were calling it the Entertainment Unit and here you've got a whole heap of concert parties all around the place, we rehearsed either out in the open or in

26:00 a tent. I can't ever remember being inside a building out there when we were rehearsing because you know Finchy went through all these directions of how to do this, how to do that or why not to do this and so on and we were reading a script. And we were reading the script and reading the script until we learnt the script and then we were doing the script without the books

26:30 or the books on our lap turned you know face down, so that we knew the things backwards and he gave us all the feelings that he believed, and if you didn't believe it you said so. And he said, you know he wasn't afraid to say "Good point, you can do that better than do this? Yeah I think I could. Oh righto that's the way you play it". Because everyone

27:00 does, you play it the way you believe it should be played.

**Were there any others in the unit who went on to become professional actors after the war apart from Peter Finch?**

Ah ... No not to, not to my knowledge. You know Mike Pate came out of the ... Oh just a minute Mike Pate came into the entertainment,

27:30 into the drama unit at some stage I think after I had left and I think it was Colin Croft who took over from me when I was flown back out of, out of New Guinea. I'm sure it was Colin who took over from me but I think Mike Pate had then come up too because someone else had you know after I left because

28:00 after I was invalided out I didn't hear what the hell happened at all until we started doing the luncheons.

**Oh the reunion lunches?**

Yes. The reunion lunches were for you know everyone in the, in the drama unit, in the concert parties you know they're all mixed up and you get to a stage where you don't know who's in what

28:30 unless you had you know a personal friendship.

**Yeah. I'd like to talk a little bit more about the reunion luncheons later. You've mentioned Jim Davidson a couple of times what sort of a person was Jim Davidson?**

Talented. A marvellous orchestra leader. He lead the Trocadero Orchestra for many years and that was a major thing back in those days.

29:00 The Trocadero, oh people went there in droves and you know going back into business life and what have you I have a marvellous story of the Trocadero because I was in Adelaide, remember I said I was launching

29:30 the opera company in Adelaide with my right arm in my business who was an excellent lady – God Elsepeth Wiggen was just superb – I ended up by making her a director of the company because you know she just worked so hard and was so good. But the routine that we had was for the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Whatever company was,

30:00 where ever it was I had one of my staff there and it would either have been one of two people and then I would come in two weeks after they had been working, at least a week to ten days before the production. So that the promotional operation went you know that was a routine that we covered. And too lovely stories

30:30 there. I was in Adelaide doing that and a routine that we always did was go to the newspaper editor/chief of staff or ask the editor could he call in the chief of staff and the news editor because in promoting an Elizabethan Trust Operation it wasn't a commercial operation

31:00 as opposed to a JC Williamson's for instance. And I you to say to them we've got a whole lot of material and we'll be haunting for the next ten days or a fortnight or whatever and we didn't want to be chucked out of the corridor because we're in there every second day or something. We'd just like to meet these people and say it's the Elizabethan

31:30 Theatre Trust and it never failed. They always brought in the news editor, the chief of staff and you know we discussed yes we've got some stories and the news editor would say right I want to see you after, what this afternoon or tomorrow morning or whatever. And if we've got anyone the chief of staff will organise bla-bla. So it all used to work very well.

32:00 And in Adelaide the editor of the news was a gentleman by the name of Rupert Murdoch [media mogul], and Rupert was a very young man then and it came as a great shock to me that he was in Adelaide because his father was head of the whole chain of you know in, in

32:30 Melbourne – The Herald and The Weekly, I mean the whole lot, and I thought what in the devil is his son doing over in Adelaide? What's he done? Does his father hate his guts or whatever? Anyway I went in to the editor or the news editor rather and said my piece about what I've just been saying, and he said oh good I'll call in

33:00 the chief of staff and he said "Oh yes I'll see if the editor is in and you know get him in." And the editor was tied up with something and said I'll be in you know fifteen minutes, and that's the first time I met Rupert Murdoch. And we did our spiel and he said "Right we'll give you whatever assistance we can. I understand what you're talking about,".. bla-bla-bla, keep it. And then he said to me quite astonishingly "You'd better come in

33:30 and have a Scotch with me before you leave." And I said "Oh what a lovely idea" you know. So I went in and had a Scotch with Rupert Murdoch and I came out and I was you know telling him that the lady in charge of the opera in Adelaide was the lady that brought Olivier and wife to Australia, Elsie Buyer. And I said you know the

34:00 young Master Murdoch isn't in it, she said "Oh God, will we get anything here" and I said "Well I'd hope so." So I ploughed on the normal routine and went in and I met Rupert several times and each time he said "Come in and have a Scotch" and what have you. And that was absolutely marvellous. And the season went particularly well, he gave us a lot of publicity and promotion and so on. And we were all very happy and it was coming towards

34:30 the end of the season and again it was my instruction to the girls and so on that you go back ask the same question and say may I thank you, bla-bla-bla – courtesy, courtesy, courtesy. So I went back at the end of the season but I called into the opera office where Elsie Buyer had an office on the side and I said oh Elsie

35:00 I'm going in to the news to say cheerio to all the chaps in there because they've been marvellous and she said well give them my regards because I think they've done a fabulous job for us as well, jolly good. And I said what are you, I said what are you doing? And she said oh well I'm just going to have a brandy and dry and you know then I'll go home after the performance. And I said "Oh, oh well I might come back and join you in that exercise" and she said "Oh it would be beaut if you do

35:30 Ron." Okay alright – because we'd done it in other theatres. So I go over to the news and Rupert again says come and have a Scotch with me before you go and you know I'm glad you helped and you know I enjoyed the performance the other night that I went to and so on that you invited me to. And then I said "Rupert look could it just be a quick Scotch because Elsie Buyer is over there

36:00 and I said I would come back and have a drink with her." And he said "Elsie Buyer?" and I said "Yeah" and he said "Oh she is a big name in London town isn't she?" and I said yes she is. He said "Could I, could I join you for a drink with her because I'd like to hear, you know I'd like to get a run down on London because I might be over there ..." and bla-bla-bla. And I said terrific. He said "Righto let's have



a quick Scotch

- 36:30 and what does she drink?" And I said "She's drinking brandy and dry" and he said "Okay I've got a bottle of brandy here, I'll take the bottle of brandy with me and a few things of dry and we'll go over and do you think she'll mind if I join you" and I said "Not at all, don't be silly." So we sit down and he asks about London and she just opens up and gives him the works on his questions and he is ecstatic because
- 37:00 he's learnt so much about London and she will open doors for him and give him introductions and so on. Yes of course I would Murdoch, you know marvellous ... And we're sitting there and the bottle's going down naturally and so ... "Gee it's silent. Is that Interval or something?" I looked at my watch. "It can't be Interval, no look at the time!" She said just a minute, excuse me
- 37:30 and she goes out, comes back she says "Would you believe it the performance is over and everyone's gone home and the front doors are locked and we can't get out!" And I thought oh my God and I said "Oh yes we can Elsie" and she said "What do you mean, have you got a key?" And I said "No but we're inside, I said the stage door is locked from the outside, it'll be okay from the inside, we'll open the stage door and
- 38:00 go out into the alley and we'll be right." And I said the bottle had gone way down. And so we go to the stage door and out we go, the three of us not feeling any great pain at all. We get out and I close the door and we march up the side of the theatre and there are the locked gates. This is where the trucks come in and deliver all the scenery and so on
- 38:30 and there are locked gates. We say holy cow we've closed the stage door, we can't get back into the theatre, there's no way out there, the only way out is over the gates. And Rupert looks at me and he says "This is ludicrous we're not going to get out of here." I said "There's only one thing wrong Rupert, if there are any of your photographers around here boy if you
- 39:00 publish anything .." He said "If there's any of my photographers around here they won't have a job if I don't get their film you see, if there's anyone here" and I said "Oh right" And he said "What the hell are you talking about?" and I said "Well look put your hands like that, I put my foot in there and I hang onto the top, give me a lift and I go up and drop down." And he said "So you're out, oh that's bloody great that is isn't it?" And I said "No, hands again, Elsie goes up, I'm on the other
- 39:30 side, I can grab her and bring her down gently." He said "Oh I wonder whether it will work." And I said "Then with you I put my hands through like this, you go up, grab the top, come over, I've got your foot and we're out." He said "It's worth a try isn't it?" And I said "Well I hope so it's the only thing I can think of." And so, Elsie Buyer must have been in her mid-sixties
- 40:00 by then or early sixties, and we get a very happy lady in her sixties up the top and she does, she does come over and I grab her leg, and we're all hysterical and I mean hysterical by this time. And we all say now what? And Rupert says "Well I'm going back to the office" and I say "Well I'm going to my hotel room" and Elsie said "And I'm going to mine so goodnight."
- 40:30 And I said "Well no-one has taken any photographs, everything is fine and he said fine absolutely, see you later, absolutely terrific." And then about a year later, about a year later ...

## Tape 5

- 00:33 **Ron, you said there was a postscript to that story about a month later?**
- Oh yes. Oh ... again talking about the Trocadero Millers, Millers Brewery used to always, do you remember that Millers Brewery used to always have a Christmas Party at the Trocadero. And you know when I was in the promotional
- 01:00 business of course I knew the Millers and the publicity manager of the Millers and so on, and after that exercise in Adelaide you know I thought what a delightful young man Rupert Murdoch and I wonder, oh no-one will ever be able to say anything against Murdoch in my presence you know bla-bla. A year later Trocadero Christmas Party with Millers
- 01:30 and I walk up the steps to go in and I look across and there's is ah the Governor, the Premier, two other people and Rupert Murdoch all in a little group and I thought oh-oh, I was walking that a way and they're over here to my left and so I went ... this a way, you know I don't want to get in there
- 02:00 and whatever. And all of a sudden I hear "Ron" and I stop and I look around and here is Rupert Murdoch disengaged from that group and half way across the foyer to talk to me. He said "Hey come over here and have a drink with me, you know I'm with a few blokes over here." I said Rupert "They're out of my league, you know you, get back there and talk to them but good to see you again,

- 02:30 how are you? And he said "Oh fine and he said are you sure you won't come over?" And I said "No, no, no, you know the situation as well as I do" and he said "Yeah I do, okay righto. I'll see you inside" and I said "Yeah Rupert, have a good time and have a good day" and you know everything's marvellous. And I thought well that's the last I'll ever see of Rupert Murdoch because he was going up the tree at the rate of knots then. Would you believe
- 03:00 about half an hour later who taps me on the shoulder, Rupert Murdoch saying isn't it about time we have another beer or are we going to have a brandy and dry? And we had a chat and he said look I've got to go back to the others and he said come on join me and I said "No, no come on out of my league, your operation." And he said "Okay see you again some time." I said "Yes Rupert, talk to you later, cheers." And I thought that
- 03:30 guy is going to really go places, you know who am I by comparison to the people he's speaking to here, he is going places. And boy has he ever. He would be Australia's most successful businessman ever I would think.
- You were probably much more interesting company than the Governor.**
- I wouldn't say that, he had his points to be made as well.
- 04:00 **In terms of prestige I'm sure. Now just getting back to Jim Davidson. What can you tell me about Jim Davidson as a personality?**
- Ah really not very much. I knew him as the orchestra leader of the orchestra in Trocadero and I just had a very high regard for his, you know his conducting
- 04:30 and you know his manner. His manner there when he was on the microphone saying what's coming up and so on was always very friendly and I used to think quite marvellous. And then when I met him again out at Pagewood with Peter Finch to start the entertainment, drama section ah ...
- 05:00 you know he was very direct, you know he was the lieutenant colonel in charge of the whole lot and said so. And I thought well that's dead right, you know that's his role, do it. And I must admit when we said we had to kiss the girls you know he didn't muck around with it, you know he went "Oh! Didn't realise that, alright, mm". And then got
- 05:30 straight on to sending out signals to the women's brigade, which you know I thought was very straight forward, very up and down and very Jim Davidson - you know don't muck around, get on with it.
- The impression I have from reading Fawcner's book on Peter Finch was that Davidson could be fairly draconian and certainly gave Finch a fairly hard time at times.**
- Ah well not that I knew of apart ...
- 06:00 ..well Peter may have thought so because again you've got two big personalities and Peter had just come in from successful plays at theatres like the Minerva and the Theatre Royal and so on and he was regarded as a terrific guy, and Jim Davidson was still Jim Davidson leader of the band, he was lieutenant
- 06:30 Colonel Davidson organiser of all the entertainments and he did. So I think there could have been a clash of personalities there on certain subjects but nothing that I ever heard Finchy you know get expletives about Davidson.
- Didn't Finch make a comment on his**
- 07:00 **view of Davidson's expertise?**
- No. No he never, he never denigrated Davidson to me. He just said you know he's strict and he's you know straight forward and sometimes I definitely disagree with him, but no expletives or anything of that nature.
- Now what about romance in your life at this time. Did you have**
- 07:30 **a girlfriend or a fiancé or anything of that nature?**
- Ah I married a lady while I was in the army and Colin Croft was my best man and the lady was that fabulous, absolutely fabulous singer Valda Bagnall a coloratura soprano who I think most people regarded as one of the best singers that ever this country
- 08:00 produced. She was absolutely superb, absolutely.
- How did you meet Valda?**
- She at that stage, when I left to go to Western Australia, she was singing with the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] orchestra. They used to have you know quite a bit of airtime with good singers and their orchestra. And ah
- 08:30 when I came back from Western Australia, if you'll remember the theatres like the Prince Edward and the Regent used to have their orchestras and they always had a lead singer, and when I got back from

Western Australia with the Second Div, Valda was singing at the Regent

09:00 and there was a lady that used to stand up in the foyer of the Prince Edward, remember at one stage as you were going into the Prince Edward you'd go in before the film because there'd be the orchestra and that what have you, this lady would direct you to where you went you know. She was a friend of mine and she was also a friend of Valda's. And ah

09:30 I went into the Prince Edward and she said Valda's up at the Regent and I said "Oh really, oh well I'll go up there and say g'day" and she said "What a good idea." And so up I trudge from the Prince Edward to the Regent Theatre and knock on the door of the stage manager and say can I come in, can I see Valda Bagnall? And he said "Oh I don't

10:00 know about that, her dressing room is you know ...oh well just a minute I'll watch you, you go over to the door and knock on the door and if she doesn't want to see you I'm going to throw you out." I said "Righto" so I went over to the dressing room and knocked on the door. Valda answered the door and said 'Oh hello, what are you doing here?' And I said "Oh we're just back from Western Australia and I, you know, I would like to applaud

10:30 what you're doing here but I don't want to watch your picture so what about coming out for a cup of coffee after you finish here before the show?" She said "Oh, oh righto, righto we'll do that." And that started off quite a routine because we had coffee and then you know we wound up by getting married a little time later.

**So you were actually married**

11:00 **during the war?**

Yes, yes. As I say Colin Croft was my best man and that was you know it was a great time.

**Were you married in Sydney itself?**

In Sydney yes I was married at, in Mosman, the Mosman Church, Mosman Presbyterian.

**Can you describe the character of Sydney during the war?**

11:30 To me it was tense because at first it was very relaxed, you know we're so far away from the scene but then when the Japanese bombed Darwin and when those two submarines came into Sydney harbour the attitude change to

12:00 tense, very tense - you know it's not fun anymore at all and it's not way over there it's here, and you know that had a tension to it.

**Were you in Sydney at the time of the submarine raid?**

Yes, yes.

**What do you recall of that particular night and maybe the days that followed?**

I knew a family in,

12:30 in Manly and you know we'd decided we'd go swimming and I, you know I got over there and I was on leave and we went swimming and then we were walking back from the Manly Corso along the street from the wharf that goes back to the, it's almost another street

13:00 down or two streets down from the Manly Corso, and their place was along that street. And we were walking along there and bang, bang. We said holy cow what's that you know? I said let's get inside quick and turn on the TV quick and see what the devil is there you know.

**The television?**

Radio.

13:30 Not the ...

**So once you turned on the radio what happened then?**

Oh they said "There were two submarines in the harbour" and we said "Oh yes we heard the bangs you know" Oh we were very big then you know. And it was almost jokey time because we were outside when that happened. But you know it then started to get pretty tense about the whole situation.

14:00 Yes we went inside and turned the radio on immediately to see what had happened and it wasn't, only a matter of minutes before a news flash, there are submarines in the harbour and shots have been fired. And we said oh we were out there and heard that you know and you know we thought it was a giggle but

14:30 then after the news we thought this is not a giggling matter, not when you've got submarines in the harbour and you know everyone went a bit quiet on it and the whole of the community of Sydney I think went quiet there for a few hours - didn't believe that would ever happen here but it did.

**Were there fears after that that it was going to happen again to Sydney?**

Oh yes. Oh yes.

15:00 If two could get in there why couldn't others? You know and up and down the coast you know you had the media spreading the situation that oh boy Newcastle might be bombed out and whatever and all of Brisbane and so on. If they can get down as far as Sydney what about Brisbane, what about Newcastle, what about Coffs Harbour, you know any of that but mainly Newcastle because there was

15:30 a big contingent of shipping there and ship building.

**So did that sense of tension continue until the end of the war or did it kind of abate after a while?**

Oh it abated after a while because you know things got bad but things got better, better, better as the war went on and you know that eased a lot people's tensions you know,

16:00 despite the fact that I think everybody had someone who was in one of the forces and that sort of highlighted the fact that they're in the force I hope they come home.

**Did you lose friends and relatives in the war?**

No, no fortunately.

**That's very fortunate.**

Mm.

**What about such aspects as rationing, did that impact on you or, on**

16:30 **you or members of your family at all?**

Well everyone was rationed but you know you're in the army and you were totally used to rations that weren't you know first class restaurant number one menu type thing. So it didn't affect, to me it didn't affect people in the army because that was their life.

17:00 **Just going back to the theatre company. I believe that one night in New Guinea there was a huge amount of applause and cheering even before the show had started due to some silhouettes happening.**

Mm that was hysterical.

**Could you tell us about that?**

Well I did tell you how the stage was built and right around was the covering, what sort of material is

17:30 that - calico or some similar type product, and as I said on either side of the stage looking out, on the left hand side was the men's dressing room and on the right hand side was the women's dressing room. And they were virtually cut off by blinds here but you could walk backwards and forwards to each if you needed to, but you know no one

18:00 was game to walk into the ladies' dressing room while they were dressing and so on. But on this particular night there was absolute applause and hysterical laughter and marvellous and cheering going on outside. We had an audience of about three thousand fellows out there and everyone's saying what the hell's going on here, you know what the ...? "Oh come on we'd better have a look" ..to find this out,

18:30 and so we walked outside and walked around the back of the tent so we couldn't be seen by the audience outside, and walked to the back of the tent, and we saw all the audience moving over, you know guys getting up and going over here and then applauding and carrying on. And we thought what the devil's going on so we just walked out a bit and there is the silhouette of ladies undressing and getting into their gear and they had forgotten to turn the

19:00 the light on right alongside the canvas, canvas - got it, word, they're alongside the canvas and you know they'd left that light off and so all the lights here where they're doing their makeup, you know you've got a bank of lights here so that if you step back from the mirror and took off whatever to put something else on you were totally silhouetted on the canvas. And the guys were having

19:30 a ball outside. So we go back inside and say to the girls who organised the strip show and how much does it cost? They nearly had a seizure. They said we wondered what all that noise was about. We said look over at the canvas you know and they went "oh!" It was a hysterical night.

**I gather there was not a repeat performance?**

No there wasn't a

20:00 repeat performance but that night there were a couple of unexplained applauses when certain actresses walked onto the stage - there was huge applause. For what reason? If we only knew.

**Was this during one of the concert tours or one of the plays?**

No, one of the plays. Because the girls dress on

20:30 one side. You know with the concert tour you didn't have girls so we had the whole area to you know get dressed in whatever gear we had to put on for whatever particular act or whatever. But in the drama entertainment unit it was totally divided because all the girls were dressing there, and the girls had dressers too.

**Oh they had people to dress them?**

Oh yes.

21:00 Mary, what was Mary's Christian name because she is an absolute joy and we sent her up rotten because she married a, a very well known vineyard owner in the Hunter by the name of Muddle so she's now Mary

21:30 Muddle and we all, when she first said she was engaged to this guy, you'll do well you'll muddle through all things you know. But she was a dresser and she is an absolute joy. She's got three grown up girls now who come to the luncheon and you know it's absolutely marvellous - she is a joy.

**That's a great name. Now I believe there was a particular procedure if any men in the company swore?**

22:00 You always got introduced. You know if you were tightening a nut or a bolt and the thing slipped and you expletive about it there would be tap, tap, tap on some part of the stage, "Ladies and Gentlemen may I introduce you to ..." and you know it was the person who used the expletive because something went wrong.

22:30 Yes swearing was not allowed, we have ladies present.

**So this was not an issue when it was an all male company?**

No.

**But once the women were there it was very much an issue.**

Oh yes a great issue because you know it was, you know, in those days you didn't swear in front of women, expletives were not allowed.

**So with women being present in the company were all the males on**

23:00 **their best behaviour all the time?**

Yes, oh yes there was no ... you know it is so totally different in the world today, you know discipline has gone out the window and I think that is a dreadful shame because you've got young people acting so appallingly now because they weren't disciplined. And everyone in the units in those days had been disciplined.

23:30 You know if you acted the fool in school you got six of the best or four or three of the best you know you didn't do it again.

**It certainly doesn't happen in school now.**

No. Well they can sue you now, which I think is appalling. You know I think the thing that as soon as you stop discipline because you know the whole of the army is discipline. You do this, don't muck around you do it!

24:00 Whether it's run over there or jump over there or fall down there or kneel down you do it, you were disciplined.

**Just reverting to New Guinea. I believe you were impressed with the landscapes of New Guinea. What stands out ...?**

Just ... you know the thing before I left and you know going to Lae and so on was the amount,

24:30 the amount of trees and vegetation. It was almost like a jungle everywhere you looked and that's, that's why there was so much, so much camouflage for people doing you know shooting in singles. You know Japanese guys getting out and they could kill thirty or forty people before they were found in this, you know, jungle

25:00 type operation. You know I call it a jungle type operation by comparison with what we see in our land, unless you go to the Blue Mountains and start walking around there.

**It's certainly very different to the desert war that a lot of the men had been through previously.**

Oh yes, yes, yes indeed.

**So what would have been the most beautiful landscapes that you saw in New Guinea? What locations would they have been in?**

Ah ... Oh I can't remember

25:30 the names now but you know outside Lae and over Lae into the harbour area you know and where several boats landed in several harbours around that area was some beautiful, beautiful foliage coming down right to the beach and yet there's a lovely beach and it was ...

26:00 You know it was marvellous camouflage for the guys that came in on those boats and then dropped the front and then ran like mad to get into that foliage. Beautiful.

**And did you meet any of the locals, any of the New Guineans up there?**

No I didn't, no. Because as I say, having got part of the way through the tour I was invalided out and shot back

26:30 for discharge here in Sydney.

**Now what happened to you immediately after you were demobbed?**

Immediately after I was demobbed I went back out to Colgate Palmolive and the whole thing you know started over again from there. And it was from there that I went two or three stops and wound up starting my own company.

**Now just before we move onto**

27:00 **further details of your post-war life I'm interested in some of the people you met through Colgate Palmolive. I mean Roy Rene for instance, legendary name. What were your impressions of Roy Rene as an offstage person?**

Ah ... I got on very well with Roy because being the publicity manager of the unit I had to line him up to do a whole lot of

27:30 things and one of my pride and joys is that I used Noel Ruby a lot and I talked Roy into coming over and doing, I wanted to do some facial shots of him.

**Noel Ruby was involved in makeup wasn't he?**

No Noel Ruby was a photographer.

**A photographer right.**

Marvellous photographer. And he

28:00 a lot, and his still photography was just marvellous. And who was the other guy who was just marvellous? He's just had an exhibition here in Sydney.

**Max Dupain?**

Max, Max Dupain. I used Max and Noel Ruby when I was the Colgate Palmolive Publicity Manager and ah ...

**But just staying with Roy Rene for a moment.**

Yes I talked Roy Rene into

28:30 coming over to Noel Ruby and you know he wasn't that thrilled about this because he's giving up a morning or whatever and he said "God I've had so many photographs taken you know what the hell is one more, you know why do you want to do this?" And I said "Oh I've got a feeling that Noel will do something that will last." "Oh alright, okay

29:00 son I'll come". You know, good on you mate. And so over to Noel Ruby and Noel Ruby did and if, I would say ninety times out of a hundred that you see a photograph of Roy Rene it's a head shot, half side on with the makeup, a Noel Ruby photograph taken then. And oh he did some marvellous shots

29:30 for me you know Noel Ruby and ...

**I think I know the photographs you're talking about actually, they've appeared in a couple of books.**

Oh yes. If you see a photograph of Roy Rene now almost anywhere it's that Noel Ruby photograph because it just worked magic, it worked like magic for Roy and he was very thrilled I might say afterwards and he said "Thank you son, not a bad idea."

**He actually spoke like that offstage?**

30:00 Oh yes.

**So he spoke offstage as he spoke onstage?**

Frequently. You know his, his speaking voice was something like that, if he was speaking, but if he wanted to impress you he'd say "Thank you son it was very good of you." And you, you know you were applauding a marvellous artist immediately, you know you forgot the guy in front of you,

30:30 oh I'm talking to that great artist.

**Because I've heard or I've read that he was actually quite a serious guy offstage.**

Yes he was. Yes.

**Like many comedians. Like Peter Sellers for instance.**

Yes. But he, you know I don't think I ever heard Roy crack a gag offstage. I can't ever remember him cracking a gag. You know like lots of others you know you can't talk to them at all because they crack gags one after the other, you know that's their business

31:00 and they do it you know.

**Now you mentioned Sid Beck. He was quite a key figure in Colgate Palmolive's radio shows wasn't he?**

Ron Beck.

**Ron Beck.**

Ron Beck yes.

**What do you recall of Ron Beck?**

Oh a marvellous guy. Very good organiser and a marvellous guy to work with. You could talk to Ron about anything.

**So what was Ron's specific contribution to the Colgate**

31:30 **Palmolive shows?**

Well he was the, he was the general manager of the Colgate Palmolive Radio Unit. They formed a radio unit. And the radio unit, Ron Beck was the GM [General Manager] as I just said, but it all came from George Patterson's agency. George Patterson's handled Colgate Palmolive advertising.

32:00 When they formed the radio unit they needed a manager of the radio unit and it was Ron Beck. And the things that happened there ... Ron ran a marvellous, marvellous company and everything ran very smoothly. And then the Colgate, the 2UE operation said

32:30 they would take over the Colgate radio unit.

**It had been with 2GB prior to that?**

No it had been with 2UE. The shows, the shows, that's why Jim Oswan and I had such a rapport. 'Calling The Stars' and all of that would move to 2GB, stay with 2GB for eighteen months or two years and then move back to 2UE. Eighteen months or a couple of years later move back to 2GB.

33:00 And it ah ... You know you had 2UW [2UW Radio Station] running the, oh what's the comedian and his wife, anyway they were, they had a strong unit there. But the ...

**Oh George Edwards and Nell Sterling?**

Yes and then after that ... Oh names just go and I'll remember them soon. It's an extraordinary thing,

33:30 at this age you know the names so well and you go to utter it and it disappears. A few minutes later you say of course it was so-and-so and um ...

**But you mentioned the Unit moving from 2UE and to 2GB and then back and forth ...**

Yes, yes.

**Why was there this regular transfer?**

Because you had strong management. 2GB was a very strong radio station and so was 2UE.

34:00 They were two very strong stations and 2UW was coming in behind them. And then you had 2CH. [2CH Radio Station] I negotiated Andrea moving from 2GB to 2CH. Ah but those two stations were very strong and quite obviously the, the executives of 2GB would go to George

34:30 Patterson's and say hey look we could, you know we know how to handle this bla-bla-bla-bla and we'll do it for 'X' amount and they'd say "Oh what about it Colgate?" And they'd say oh yeah go. Out of 2UE over to 2GB. 2UE go into Patterson's and say hey listen we've been handling that so well, the ratings were great and so on and so on, what about so on and so on and we'd do it for this? Oh righto pull it out of 2GB, back over to 2UE.

- 35:00 And that's when I rang Jim Oswan who was my opposite number and I said Jim how about coming down to the pub this afternoon I want to have a yarn to you about something and he said what about? I said oh just a little something I'd like to suggest to you and he said oh okay. So we meet at the pub and he says what's on your mind and I said well you get to know that the shows are coming to 2GB
- 35:30 after the thing is done right? I get to know that it's leaving after they've done all the negotiations up there. I said what about you and I getting together because we then get flogged to get the best promotional operation going. And he said oh I see what you mean and he said well what do you have in mind? And I said well will your budget you know stick up for
- 36:00 a few bucks a week for a luncheon? He said yes and I said so will mine. So I said if we put them together what about you and I inviting you know each of the major you know Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney guys who are writing on radio and I said look when you, when you've got the things I've got a problem, I've got
- 36:30 to get some coverage for some of the things in my dilly bag here that no-one's going to talk to me about and if you shut up they'll probably take it and vice-a-versa. So we did this little deal together and then for forty-eight weeks of the following year either Jim Oswan or I had the lead
- 37:00 column story in each of the magazines because we used to go to lunch and they'd say what have you got fellows? What's coming up? What's how with you Jim because you've got the Colgate show? And he'd say I haven't got anything at the moment you know, nothing much at all, no I can't help much. Ron, have you got anything on? Oh yes I've got so and so and so on, boom-boom, you know this looks good at the moment and it's coming up,
- 37:30 it'll be in a series and so on. Oh right, okay can you give us some copy on that? Yes, yes fine okay here you are, news release and this, that and the other and I can fill you in on that. Then Jim would say oh I've got a bit that might be of some use. And they'd say oh yeah well we might be able to use that Jim, just a, you know ... When Colgate's are back with me I'm doing exactly what he did while he had Colgate. For forty-eight weeks we had the
- 38:00 top of each of the columns.
- That's great, that's a great strategy.**
- Great strategy.
- Can you describe Jim Oswan as a person at that time?**
- At that time Jim was a delight and he was very good. He knew the business backwards. He'd been in it for quite a while and was very talented, very talented and I enjoyed his company. And
- 38:30 as you know he was transferred from there to the General Manager of ATN.
- And was quite an influential figure there as well.**
- Yes, oh yes as the general manager up there he was very good.
- That was right from the very early days of television actually so ... And it was at this insistence basically or it was his drive that so much local content on Channel Seven in the early days.**
- It was yes. And that's as I say when he called me I was in our own agency.
- 39:00 And ah a lovely story there was that Jim rang me and said he was looking for a little bloke with fire in his belly and what have you but I think a couple of old blokes like you and I should do it. And he said I know you've pitched for the Woman's Day account and I can tell you you've got it, he said, so you'd better get your A [arse] up here ah
- 39:30 and you and I work here he said and you know damn well you'll have this account and the end of our, you know as soon as we pull it out of the rut. And so I spoke to my two partners, Graham Samuelson and Peter Stanard and I said I think it's a damn good idea. I said if we can get the ATN account we're you know going to go on from there. And that's when I went up to ATN and I ...
- 40:00 The continuance of that story is that we ...

## Tape 6

### 00:32 Ron can you tell us more specifically what you were doing for Channel Seven?

Well first of all I was with two other guys in an advertising agency. We had Stana, Pat and Samuelson SBS [Special Broadcasting Service] Advertising. And as I said earlier Jim Oswan was the head of 2GB when I was the head of



01:00 of 2UE and we'd liaised, and I get a call one day from Jim who tells me that you know the, their ratings are down and they need a lift and he was looking for someone that could come up and do a terrific job and lift the ratings which always on the cards.

**This is at Channel Seven?**

At Channel Seven. And he is the General

01:30 Manager of Channel Seven at that stage, but their ratings were down and he wanted a lift and he said I think a couple of blokes like you and I will come up with something to lift the ratings. And he said you know at the end of the operation all systems go he said if we lift the ratings you know you'll get the agency don't you? And I said well I'll hit you over the head with a baseball bat

02:00 if I don't and he said okay you're on.

**When you say you know you'll get the agency you're talking about the account?**

The account.

**The account with Seven?**

Yes.

**So what strategy did you adopt to actually lift the ratings?**

Well first of all we came up with something, and I can't remember quite at the moment, but we had a media conference saying that we were going to do whatever we thought at that stage and they were very thrilled about it.

02:30 And it was all systems go. We thought we had an idea that was going to work very well because we got good coverage in the papers the next day because we'd taken all the media guys to lunch and told them what we were doing. And then Jim rang me the following day to say that's not on, Mr Henderson has bought Bruce Gyngell and so Bruce is

03:00 moving from Channel Nine to Channel Seven and that is going to be a tremendous thing, we've got to promote that and do the whole box and dice because that is an enormous move. And so that's, that's what happened. And came over and then we said right we've got to come up with something that will you know be totally different and lift the ratings. And in discussion with Bruce

03:30 and Jim and myself we came up with the seven revolution and that really worked because you know we got Peter Wingard to come out to Australia from London - you know he was the lead in a major production that was on Channel Seven and it was their biggest rating show. And so we organised all

04:00 around Australia to have Peter Wingard do something in each capital city that was different that could be on the news that night. So the first ten days of Peter Wingard being in Australia every time on the news and you had people tuning in to see what he was doing, where and at what time, which you know launched things very well and you know the ratings started to move.,

**I think that was from about 1969/**

04:30 '70

Ah about then, yes, yes.

**So for how long did you remain involved in Seven?**

Oh after that it was, oh only a matter of months after that because you know they had their own publicity department and I was working with that publicity department and recommended to them what they should do from there to there to there to there

05:00 and what the next, you know we came up with other ideas of promotion and I just said to Jim I think you know we've done what we set out to do and he said I do too, shake hands goodbye, see you. And I returned to the agency.

**Now just to leap about a bit because I am leaping about a bit, I now want to soar right back about twenty years back to World War II. What was your**

05:30 **attitude ... You've expressed your attitude toward Hitler and I don't think you were terribly happy with Hitler.**

Funny you should say that.

**What was your attitude to the Japanese?**

I didn't have much of an attitude at all because I was so heavily involved at that stage with forming this drama situation with Peter Finch. Because

06:00 you know you didn't have much time to think about anything. You know, you accept in the first instance that you're not in the frontline of bullets and what have you, you are in the entertainment frontline and

there was a lot you know coming up with something so totally different to concert parties. You know concert parties are one thing but straight plays,

06:30 playing to soldiers out in the field is a totally new concept and ah ...

**I've actually wondered why the straight plays out in the field. So basically what you're saying is that it was the initiative for the plays came from wanting to do something quite different in terms of live performance.**

Mm, mm. And I don't know where that thought came from but I know it intrigued

07:00 Peter Finch and I'm not sure that Peter didn't suggest it because whoever spoke to Jim Davidson they had to get Jim Davidson's approval. Now whether the idea came from Jim or whether someone else in the army said why don't we do this? You've got concert parties going everywhere but what about ...? And you've got this bloke by the name of Peter Finch who is of world renown. Now where that came from I don't know

07:30 but you know once that had to ... You know you were starting from absolute ground level because Peter taught each and every one of us in that theatrical operation exactly what we had to do.

**Did it seem at that time that Finch was destined for greater things, including in the international sphere?**

Well we all felt it because

08:00 you know his acting was so good and his vocabulary of telling you something was so, so good - you understood exactly what he meant and you had to do exactly what he meant but in your terms. And he would say I like that. Boy I like that

08:30 yes because that's just put that little bit of twist on it. Very good, very good because that character will work very, very well - hang on to it. You know and as I say when I was alternating the lead role in While The Sun Shines watching Finchy, I would stand on the side of the stage and watch Finch do things and I'd think gee I wish I could do that. And then I'd say come on you could

09:00 do it and you'd say yeah that's copying, that's not you, don't copy, how are you coming up with, to get the same reaction? Because you do get the reaction - (a) from the audience, (b) from the people you're working with.

**But at least you're inspired to want to come up with an equivalent inventiveness in what you're doing.**

Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh yes.

**Now you've referred to doing double duty when Finch fell ill. Did this double duty**

09:30 **go beyond performing in both plays? Were there other administrative things that you had to take on as well?**

Ah not really, no. Because you could have an administrative role of saying you'll be responsible of packing up all the gear onto a truck. Well you know I don't call that too much of a strain because either you're going to do it or five or six of you are going to do it but it better be one person saying

10:00 hey listen we need fifteen on this truck and we need twelve on that truck otherwise you'll muck the whole thing up because when you take it off you want to take it off and put it in areas because you're building your stage. And there's no point in having a whole role of or a box of this way over there when you need it over here. You've got to carry it over so if someone was saying hey that one goes here, this one goes there it

10:30 worked so much better.

**You mentioned that you lost weight while you were over there ...?**

Oh boy did I ever.

**What was that due to?**

Go to New Guinea and work under lights. Oh I lost two or three stone in no time flat because you know the lights on stage you know are full theatrical, hot .... You know you'd come off and you'd just mop your face and race back on again .

11:00 You know your nose, you'd have water running off your nose and you know like that's not very enjoyable for the audience to see, you know you don't know whether it's sweat or something else coming from the nose and that sort of kills the whole operation. So it was it was just ... And you know you're in gear, you know you're playing in a London area

11:30 and it's cold over there so you've got a you know shirt and tie or a coat or open necked shirt with a lovely big rugged coat on, sports coat ... And as soon as you put it on you think oh my God how fast can I get away to get this off, you know. So yes I lost weight because there was no respite. You know down

here in Australia was playing one night

12:00 and I was playing the other you know you didn't get so worked up about it, but going on one after the other boy and up in that heat it was hot.

**Surely it must have had its own stress as well?**

Yes, yes. I'm not at all sure that that wasn't ... You know you were feeling debilitated and I think that's when I twisted my knee again and that's when they

12:30 invalidated me out of the forces.

**Now where ... Do you remember where you were when you heard that the war had ended, the Japanese war had ended?**

Ah I was back, I was back in Australia and I was out at Colgate again. So you know I probably was at 2UE

13:00 because I went straight from Colgate's to go into 2UE to go into the publicity operation. And ah I would have been in at 2UE and that would have come through on the news at 2UE and someone would have raced upstairs you know and talked to us about it saying hey it's over. But that's where I would have been but when I don't.

**Do you remember what your reaction was to hearing that the war was finally over?**

Oh cheers. You know

13:30 God everyone will be back and you know isn't it marvellous and everything is going to settle back in again. And you know everyone was talking about doing things immediately. Having been in the theatre operation with Peter Finch the first thing I wanted to do was do something at the Philip Street Theatre you know. Which I did.

14:00 I produced French Without Tears there. But ah anyway that was you know a great relief and cheers everyone will be home and you know I wonder what he's going to do, I wonder what she's going to do and where's he live and ... Because you didn't have the faintest idea where people lived. You may have asked them at some stage and they could have said oh I live in Cremorne but by the time you know a year has passed you've

14:30 forgotten where the hell they live - oh they live in Sydney, but where in Sydney you wouldn't have a clue.

**Now of course you had a number of options at that time. You could have returned to singing, you could have pursued a career as an actor, you've just mentioned that you were interested in producing plays, why did you decide not to pursue performance but go more behind the scenes from this time onwards?**

Because I got enraptured

15:00 about promotion. I would say it's a very, it's a very interesting area of business because in those days as I say you know you're working with Roy Rene and Jack Davey - all of that operation, all of the Colgate things then you know I moved in JC Williamson's - I was in the theatre operation and I really never got out of it except that I was doing something

15:30 that I ... You know you're acting your socks off in publicity and promotion because you, you know you dream up some idea and you've got to sell it to someone or they present something to you and you have to make something of it, so you know you're really an actor all over again in a different form. And after you know moving from Williamson's to my own company

16:00 and then getting the Elizabethan Theatre Trust as a client I was up to my ears in theatre but getting great kicks out of dreaming up an idea and selling it to the newspapers and seeing the box office move, you know.

**Now how could you describe the state of health of the Australian Theatre or the Australian theatre scene from say the immediate post-war period through to maybe late 1950's/early**

16:30 **sixties?**

Well the Elizabethan Theatre Trust had an enormous uplifting of the theatre scene here because you know you had the, what shall we call it, a different type of theatre in the Philip Street Theatre where they were doing

17:00 comedy and comedy one minute and hilarious stuff the next and you know you've got Gordon Chater in 'Round The Loop' and all of that with Wendy Blacklock and all of that where people are laughing their heads off but they're doing a certain amount of stage thing. The Elizabeth Theatre Trust was, "this is real theatre" because you had

17:30 the opera company, you had the ballet company and that to me is real theatre. You know you can have a comedy and you can have a drama and you can have the whole range of things - it's real theatre. And in

selling that entire concept and particularly with the opening of the theatre in Newtown.

**The Elizabethan Theatre at the beginning of Erskineville Road there?**

Yes.

18:00 And you know that was an enormous operation.

**That was a difficult location though - in terms of parking and accessibility.**

It was marvellous for the train. I went to the chairman of the railways and invited him to the theatre and you know he said right we'll promote this with you Ron and they did they promoted getting in the train,

18:30 you go out to Newtown and then just walk down the street and you're at the theatre. The trains are going every half hour and what have you and after the theatre you walk back. If you want to take your car you can and you park around whatever street you can get into. But simply you catch the train or you can catch a bus and just get out at the top and you know so ... but the railway thing worked particularly well. I was very thrilled with that because he was

19:00 a delightful guy and you know aided and abetted. And we had such marvellous people to ... You know we had Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir Lewis Casson opening it and then Florence Desmond and ...

**Oh and Ralph Richardson I think.**

Yes. Oh marvellous stuff, marvellous.

**And what were the demographics of the audience? I mean what sort of people were coming along to the Elizabethan Theatre?**

Oh you name it,

19:30 from everywhere. Absolutely, absolutely from everywhere. I'd say people came from Newtown to have a look/see and as I said to you just a while ago about the guy that did this on my head saying that introduced me to theatre, I thought I've got to go and have a look at this because there's so much promotion and what have you and everyone saying oh boy did you see and whatever. And it was

20:00 you know a marvellous time in theatre.

**Now the aim here was a national theatre. Why call it the Elizabethan?**

Ah ... Well I think that was the English influence because that's where it started, Elsie Buyer started and Hugh Hunt came here and they probably, I wasn't in on this at all, but they probably started searching for a

20:30 name - what, how would they call it and every Australian name that came up you'd probably think oh-oh why not so and so, oh-oh why not this, oh-oh why not that? And Elizabethan Theatre was at its height in England in Elizabethan times and I think Hugh Hunt probably you know brought that home very definitely to everyone -

21:00 in Elizabethan times theatre was at its zenith in England.

**Now I believe you've got quite a story about the production of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll? Would you like to share that with us?**

At the Summer of the Seventeenth Doll it was decided that it would do a trial run. Every theatre does a trial of something

21:30 before they put it on, usually if it's totally new. And John Sumner who was one of the directors of the Trust, he was going to produce Summer of the Seventeenth Doll in Melbourne because he'd been in Melbourne and at that Arts Theatre down there and he said great I'll go down there, I'll organise and do Summer of the Seventeenth Doll in Melbourne. And Robert Quentin was the head of production for

22:00 the opera company. So I'm Adelaide launching the opera company and I get a phone call from Hugh Hunt who says Ron can you get on a plane and be in Melbourne tomorrow for tomorrow night for a performance of Summer of the Seventeenth Doll? And I said "Gee Hugh we're up to our ears you know in

22:30 promotion for the opera company. Why me in Melbourne, because I said there's you and there's Robert and there's John and you'll all be there I imagine" and he said "Oh yes we'll all be there and I said "Well why do you want me there?" And he said "Because you're the only Australian amongst us." Three of them English guys and Elsie Buyer another English lady so

23:00 he wanted me in Melbourne so I duly got there. And you know fabulous performance. And after the performance was the fun bit because at the end of the play Hugh turned to me and said "What do you reckon?" I said "If you don't take it up I will." He said "Do you really think that much of it?" And I said "Yes I'll put my money

23:30 on the line and I'll entrepreneur and promote this." And he said "Oh good on you," he said "I like it too,

I think we've got something worth while here. Okay I'll ask Ray to come down to the Windsor Hotel" where he was staying, and he said "Come down and let's have a talk so that you know exactly from a promotional point of view where we're at."

### **This is Ray Lawler the playwright?**

Ray Lawler the playwright. He was in the play.

- 24:00 So we got down to the Windsor and we're sitting in Hugh's lounge room and Hugh says "Ray what percentage do you want if the Trust took this up?" And Ray said "Oh I don't want a percentage, I don't want any percentage." And Hugh said "Yes I think you do Ray but you know what percentage, just give me a figure and..."
- 24:30 And Ray said "No, no, no, no if the Trust will produce it I don't want anything, I don't want a percentage." And Hugh turns to me and he said "Ron I think you'd better take Ray outside for a walk up the hall, I think you might have a new client. You'd better tell him about percentages and what have you." And so Ray and I go out into the hall and Ray said what's this all about, I don't want a percentage and I said "Ray everyone
- 25:00 gets a percentage if you're an author of a play" and he said "Well what percentage and I said well any percentage but the norm now is five or seven and a half or ten and some people get twelve and a half" and I said "Boy you're starting to climb because that is the percentage you get on a ..." And he said "Oh I don't want that" and I said "Ray come on you've got to , don't be silly, this is money
- 25:30 and this is your play and this is going to be your life." And he said "Well what do you reckon? I said what about saying seven and a half and if that looks like being too much you can come back to five, you know you've got a movement back without causing problems." And he said "Oh you reckon that?" And I said "I reckon that." He said "Okay I'll take your advice." And so we go back into the room
- 26:00 and Hugh says "Got any thoughts Ray?" And Ray said "Yes, if you do it would you be prepared to pay seven and a half?" And Hugh said and if we weren't prepared ...?" Ray said "Oh I'd go back to five." And Hugh laughed and he said "No Ray I think seven and a half is a fair deal,
- 26:30 so would you shake hands on a seven and a half percent?" and Ray said "Yes I would" and Hugh said "Okay" And Hugh said "Have you got another client?" And I said "No" because I didn't have anything, any introduction of this and you know all I'm doing is giving a bit of advice. And I said "Ray you know it's done, you're going to put it on and Ray's going to get seven and a half percent and I don't want to get involved in that." And so
- 27:00 shook hands and that was it and the play goes on. There is a sequel to that which absolutely fractured me. It was that we are then looking for a musical and I've got three guys who come to me and say we've got a musical called 'Lolo Montez.' And so the same procedure went forward, I presented it to Hugh and Hugh said "Oh he heard 'Saturday Day Girl' " and that sort of thing ...
- 27:30 He said "But we'll do that but I'm, I'm going overseas because we want to put Summer of the Seventeenth Doll on in London" and I said "Oh great." And he said after he'd heard Lolo Montez he then said gees there's a lady of there who would be absolutely ideal for Lola and he said anyway I'll let you know. So he goes to
- 28:00 London and the play is put on in London - very successful. And then Hugh says to Ray, Ray we now want to take it New York, is everything okay with you? And Ray said no not for seven and a half Hugh, I want fifteen. And where it went from there I do not know but Hugh Hunt rang me and said
- 28:30 "What did you say to Ray about it?" And I said "I didn't say ... What is he asking, ten?" "No he said he's asking twelve and a half or fifteen" and I said "Oh you're kidding?" And he said no he won't let it go to New York until we come up to his figure. So what they finally settled on I don't know because it did go to New York. But you know I thought what a change in character Master Lawler is.
- 29:00 **It sounds like a growth of confidence.**
- Yes.
- Now just in summary for us you married on a second and third occasion. What were the names of your second and third wives?**
- Pamela Page who came out here from London to play in 'Dial M For Murder' and that didn't work out. I could tell you why but not
- 29:30 on tape. And we were divorced and I paid her out of the company because I bought her into my company which was, it was called Ron Patten Publicity Pty Ltd. And then later on, a little time on from there we were doing,
- 30:00 we did a pantomime at the Elizabethan Theatre in Newtown and I knew a lady by the name of Wendy Blacklock who happened to be in London at that stage and I rang her and said are you coming back to Australia shortly? And she said yes you know not absolutely immediately and I said well if you do we'd want to engage you to play Cinderella in

- 30:30 in our pantomime. In which case she said I'll be on the next plane out. And you know Wendy came back and played Cinderella and then moved on to all the stuff in television, then the plays and Ninety-six [Number Ninety-Six, Australian Television Series] was, she played in a hell of a lot of different plays, but in Ninety-six she was Mummy in Ninety-six
- 31:00 that seemed to go on for years as far as I could see. But you know then as I say I then married Wendy and that finally subsided not too long ago but you know we're very good friends. And I totally admire what she's doing at the moment with performing lines. She's doing a hell of a good job because that was a spin off from the Elizabethan Theatre
- 31:30 Trust. It was something that was heading in that direction and she was at the Trust at that stage and took it over and she's done a magnificent job with that.

**She sound very dedicated.**

Oh very much so.

**And how many children have you had?**

I had two, two boys with Valda, Valda Bagnall and I had two girls with Wendy. And we all liaise and

- 32:00 carry on alarmingly.

**That's quite a team.**

Quite a team yes, two boys and two girls.

**And after the war or since the war you've got together with your war time mates I gather?**

Oh yes. Yes we have a luncheon, in fact I have a luncheon tomorrow with you know both the drama, the drama crew and the

- 32:30 concert party. So there's usually anything from, oh anything up to thirty sometimes and sometimes only about fifteen. You know there dropping off a little bit at the moment, Mike Pate wasn't at the last one, he wasn't well. Oh and a couple ... You know time is marching on and people are getting older and dropping off the twig and
- 33:00 moved interstate or various places where it's difficult to ... We have our luncheon out at Redfern, The Redfern RSL [Returned and Services League] because Wally Nash who was our Orchestra Leader in the Division Two concert party he is now the President out there so where do we go for lunch? Out to the
- 33:30 Redfern RSL, which is very convenient for just about everyone - getting on trains and what have you. Just get off the station and walk two or three hundred yards and you're in the RSL. And we have a very enjoyable time.

**So for how long have these reunions been taking place?**

Oh, oh for years because from ... When Anzac Day comes around

- 34:00 you know there's a whole lot of people who march and they've been doing it for years. I haven't because of my knee. But you've got people like Mike Pate, Smokey Dawson, you know people like that that have gone on to other things in their private life and they always get coverage on television. Ray Martin grabbed Smokey Dawson and we didn't see him for ages at the last one. But always
- 34:30 on, always on Anzac Day we go out there but then usually there's about another two luncheons. There's always one at Christmas time and there's one in between usually so usually three a year.

**Just in summary how much would say that fate has played a role in determining the course of your life?**

Oh an enormous ... Every time that I've come to a what you might call a crossroad or something

- 35:00 fate has stepped in and just made it straight forward, no mucking about, you know. But absolutely marvellous.

**It sounds like you've had a very good life actually.**

Very enjoyable, yes. Some highs and lows but isn't that always the case with a lot of people, well with anybody really. But I've had some marvellous times and met some marvellous people.

**Well Ron I suppose we're coming**

- 35:30 **towards the end of the interview now and I'm just wondering if they're are any other aspects that you wanted to cover that we haven't covered during the interview so far?**

No not really because the things that you wanted to know about I think we've covered and the only other things have been in a business sense which is not related to a war effort or anything

- 36:00 of that nature. It's just again it's the fate situation moving in on my, on my business life where I think oh this is not going to happen and it doesn't and something else comes up very smartly to .... And I'd say oh my God thank God I didn't do that. But you know when you, when you're running a company and you've got other people
- 36:30 working for you, you need to you know what you're doing and hopefully keep everything afloat and touch wood, cross fingers I've kept everything afloat while I had a business. I've retired from that business now and the only thing that I am doing now is managing the three authors of the musical Lola Montez. And we are hopeful of having
- 37:00 another production of that shortly.

**Excellent.**

Mm.

**Well on behalf of Rebecca [interviewer] and myself and indeed the entire Australians At War Film Archive thank you very much for a most interesting and very enjoyable interview actually.**

Well thank you very much. Two marvellous interviewers. Thank you Rebecca, thank you Graham [interviewer].