

THE UNION DEFENCE FORCE ENTERTAINMENT GROUP IN SOUTH AFRICA (WORLD WAR II)

"Give me a thousand men who are entertained, rather than ten thousand who have had no entertainment."

— General Pershing.

South African concert parties have given shows in canteens and palaces, in magnificent opera houses and in assembly workshops; on open-air stages, on lorries and in fields and hangars. Tarpaulins have been spread on the desert sands, and tap dancers have gone into action on table tops or any available flat surface. Cafes, YMCA and NAAFI Huts, trucks and natural amphitheatres have all been used to give servicemen a show, gay bright music has rung out from a stable, a brickfield, an underground hospital and from the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. Members of the Entertainment Unit performed in South Africa, South West Africa, Rhodesia, Egypt, the Western Desert, Libya, Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Algiers, Morocco, Gibraltar, Italy, Austria, Greece, Palestine, Iran and Iraq.

Where no other accommodation was available the troops sat in a street in Volos, Greece, while the concert party put on a show on the porch of a hospital. In Prato, Italy, the company had to repair a bombed stage before a show could be given; South African concert parties have appeared in the 2,000 year-old Roman theatre at Leptis Magna; at Savoia in Cyrenaica one concert party put on a show in a chianti factory, in which men of the Royal Artillery had built a stage.

In snow, sandstorms, fair weather and stifling heat the South African Entertainment Unit put on shows. The concert parties achieved a reputation second to none in the field of troop entertainment, and received high praise from servicemen of every Allied nation. In recognition of their work with the 8th Army, they were given Field Marshal Montgomery's personal permission to wear the coveted 8th Army flash. It is interesting to note that South African concert parties performed to the 8th Army throughout its historic existence, from the early desert days until V-Day when a SA concert party was with the 8th Army in Southern Austria.

General Sir Oliver Leese presented the UDF Entertainment Unit with a piano as a tribute to their work with his troops, and it was a SA concert party which was chosen from all others to provide the entertainment at Field Marshal Alexander's famous dinner to "Other Ranks" before the final push in Italy. As a medium of propaganda and publicity for South Africa they had immense value, and on many occasions they have been described as South Africa's finest ambassadors.

The women members of the concert parties did not travel or live in the comfort enjoyed by well-known stars of ENSA or the American USO. They journeyed over hundreds of miles of appalling roads in Greece; they crossed the Appennines in the backs of trucks, and given a show immediately they arrived at their destination. They performed in flimsy costumes throughout the grim Italian winter when the snow filtered through bombed roofs on to the stage on many occasions. They have given shows in sandstorms which were so intense that they could not put on their make-up.

They lived and performed under front line conditions and no other entertainers have been further forward than South Africans. Many times illhealth has dogged concert parties but rarely indeed has a show been cancelled.

As morale builders South African concert parties have had great value. This factor has been emphasised in thousands of letters of appreciation from Commanding Officers, also intelligence and information officers in South Africa, the Middle East and CMF. The inclusion of women in the concert parties back in the "dark days" of the Desert campaign was an excellent idea from the point of view of morale and was greatly appreciated by the troops. Before the battle of El Alamein, a South African concert party gave two shows a day for 24 days on a portable stage covered by camouflage nets and protected by Ack Ack guns.

Never before has the value of entertainment been realised and understood to the same extent as it was in this total war, although the UDF authorities lagged far behind their

British and American counterparts in their appreciation and encouragement of "live" entertainment. The United States of America sent its most renowned artists to every corner of the globe where American servicemen were stationed. Great Britain's institution ENSA sent shows not only to all British troops, but did not forget to organise entertainment for all factory workers. The South African Entertainment unit was an outstanding success, but it succeeded in spite of, and not as a result of encouragement and the interest of the UDF authorities in its initial stages.

ORIGIN OF ENTERTAINMENT UNIT.

The idea of establishing an Entertainment Officer for the UDF was first suggested by the D.M.O. and I., then Col G. Newman, R.M.-Att. U.D.F. who felt that entertainment was a vital necessity in the battle against boredom which inevitably existed in military camps in the Union. This suggestion received the whole-hearted approval of Field Marshal Smuts. As a result, General Theron appointed Major Myles Bourke, the founder of the Pretoria Repertory Theatre and an amateur actor of note, as Chief Entertainment Officer for the UDF.

After a detailed survey of the aims and objects of his appointment, Major Bourke, on Dec. 7, 1940, sent a memorandum to Brig Gen H. S. Wakefield, Deputy Adjutant General, outlining his scheme for troop entertainment, and gave a draft of the suggested establishment. He paid tribute to the excellent voluntary work of the SAWAS, who at that time were organising concert parties and entertainment at the various camps. The memorandum stressed that the main object of an entertainment unit was to ensure at least one good concert per week in every camp in the Union, and to ensure that the entertainment was of the highest quality. Major Bourke pointed out that at that time entertainment was not controlled; that it was handicapped by the fact that artists were giving their services free and consequently were not subject to the discipline which would be necessary for troop entertainment on a large scale. It often happened, continued the memorandum, that voluntary artists called off engagements at the last moment, and no measures of correction could be taken against these voluntary artists.

The memorandum pointed out that under an organised MILITARY scheme, the Chief Entertainment Officer could hold himself res-



The Ballyhoos in 'Half-a-Century'

possible for the type of entertainment offered and the artists would be under disciplinary control. Being under one head the concert parties would visit all camps throughout the Union on specific itineraries, and not only those camps in the immediate vicinity of the organisers of the voluntary efforts.

On Dec. 18, 1940 Major Bourke wrote to the Q.M.G. giving the above reasons why he considered that entertainment for the troops should be on a military basis. On Dec. 20, he wrote to Mr. A. N. Wilson, Director of Information enclosing a copy of his scheme.

In Feb. 1941, Major Bourke asked for the transfer of certain members of the Potchefstroom Camp Concert party, which he had seen in their now famous revue "Springbok Frolics" which cleared £3,435 for war funds. The following members were transferred and formed the nucleus of the Entertainment Unit: —

Bombardiers Frank Rogaly, who was made Chief Production Officer, F. Stuart Needham, G. Marriott, Sgt Lionel Roche, and Gunner G. Walker. They were joined shortly after by Lt A. Swemmer, Recreation Club Hall which was attended by many senior UDF officers, and which was an outstanding success. Two more concert parties were rehearsed at Major Bourke's residence. They were the "Gypsies" who left on tour in April 1941, and the "Crazy Gang" who left for a Union tour in May 1941. A different show was released every month during the first 18 months' existence of the Entertainment Unit.

RECRUITING.

Recruits to the Entertainment Unit came from all parts of South Africa. The vast majority of them were untrained and were taught to dance, act or sing after they joined the Unit.

The Entertainment Unit discovered and presented some talent that was of first-class calibre. It also, of necessity presented some that was mediocre, but it became increasingly clever at disguising shortcomings, and frequently only those with professional experience could detect how much individual shows owed to the skilful way in which the best use had been made of available talent.

Great Britain and the USA had a vast fund of professional talent from which to draw entertainment for their troops. South African

talent was young and inexperienced and, generally speaking, could never compete against these trained and highly skilled individual artists. As a result the South African concert parties relied largely on pretty girls effectively drilled in simple but efficient dance routines, outstanding dressing, and gay "concerted" numbers. There were quite a number of outstanding artists in the Entertainment Unit, but the vast majority received their training after they joined the Unit.

To quote "The Star" in that newspaper's tribute to the Entertainment Unit on the occasion of its last performance: —

"The clothes (of the concert parties) were artistic as well as lavish, the music was well arranged and chosen, the humour was varied enough to suit general taste, and the speed at which the shows were taken was in the best review tradition.

"To sum up, the concert parties brilliantly achieved what they set out to provide — entertainment for massed troops of every standard of taste."

Drives for talent were made throughout South Africa by advertisements in the newspapers, by special recruiting tours undertaken by members of the unit, and by the presentation of shows to give the public an idea of the work being done by the Unit.

In March 1941, Major Bourke visited East Africa to survey the entertainment position, which he found to be practically non-existent. One military concert party was doing magnificent work in Nairobi, the outlying districts and on the borders of Abyssinia, but could not cope with the great demands being made on it.

Major Bourke submitted a report on the situation to the QMG, but was told that East Africa-Abyssinian requirements would be considerably reduced owing to the completion of the campaign.

Eight months later the above mentioned concert party was transferred to the entertainment Unit in South Africa.

There have been 648 members of the Entertainment Unit since its inauguration in 1941.

This figure is made up of the following:—

40 Male Officers.

2 Female Officers.

289 W.A.A.S.

317 Male "Other Ranks".

BATTLE FOR PREMISES.

The history of the Entertainment Unit's battle for suitable premises is a study in tenacity. Early in January 1941, Major Bourke wrote to the QMG saying he had inspected the premises at 15 Artillery Row and found it suitable for his purposes. The bathroom would have to be converted into a wardrobe room, he wrote, and a hut would have to be erected in the grounds for rehearsals. A wood and iron garage in the backyard could be converted into a carpenter's shop.

In May 1941, the unit moved into 15 Artillery Row. Then followed the long battle for equipment, and the unit's files reveal many seemingly strange requests from a military unit.

They include assegais, rubber stamps, sewing machines, floor polish, artificial flowers, horsehair whips, 4 pts of milk daily, eyebrow pencils, ostrich feathers, tights and brassieres. 15 Artillery Row gets the full blaze of the noonday sun, but many pleading requests for electric fans were sternly refused with the official "regret, cannot be acceded to".

The unit was rapidly expanding and the premises were far too small. Details had to sit out on the stoep, in the passages and the yard, and when it rained work often came to a standstill. The music department struggled along in a converted bathroom. In July 1941, a start was made on building two large rehearsal rooms. Before this, instrumentalists could be heard practising in three-ton trucks behind 15 Artillery Row. On Nov, 10, 1941 a request was made for increased accommodation for the unit, particularly for the wardrobe department. This vitally important section of the unit was then working under the most cramped conditions. Requests were also made for small practice rooms for soloists, and an additional rehearsal room which eventually became the unit's miniature theatre and was in constant use for rehearsals by concert parties before they left on tour. Dress rehearsals of new shows were given in the theatre and they became quite a feature of the Entertainment Unit, as senior officers in the UDF who were interested in the work of the unit were invited to see and criticise the shows before they left on tour.

In 1944 the house at 13 Artillery Row was given to the Unit and even then the additional accommodation was inadequate.

SHORTAGE OF STAFF.

Since its inception the Entertainment Unit had to work under great difficulties owing to the shortage of staff, and the files reveal one long clamour for an increase in establishment. In September 1941, authority was received for an establishment of 15 concert parties. It was not until October 1944 that the number was increased to 18. It will be remembered that Major Bourke, in his original memorandum, suggested one show per camp per week. In actual fact the Entertainment Unit was never able to give more than approximately one show a month in each camp in SA owing to the lack of establishment. Consequently the unit was unable to deal adequately with the number of troops who should have been entertained in South Africa.

UNION TOURS.

While the uphill struggle was going on for premises, equipment and establishment, various concert parties were being formed and sent out on a tour of the Union. Comprehensive itineraries were drawn up and the parties played in almost every camp in South Africa, and in hospitals, convalescent homes, soldiers clubs, seamen's missions and institutes.

Troops in SWA were not neglected and journeys of many thousand of miles were undertaken to give only four to six shows at isolated camps, where the men received very little in the way of entertainment.

In the early days the Union tours were made in station wagons and trucks — a very strenuous way of travel, particularly for artists who had to give shows on their arrival at the different camps after long arduous journeys. Later this method of travel was abandoned and all tours in South Africa were made by train.

The first Union tours lasted about three months, but the demand became so urgent that the tour was extended to approximately nine months, during which time an average of 160 performances were given. Towards the end of the war this figure was reduced to about 110 owing to the reduction in the number of camps in the Union.

It was decided that Union tours should be introduced with visits to military concentration areas, as follows:



The Bandoliers in 'Hot Air'

1. A tour of the camps in the Pretoria area, lasting approximately one month.
2. A period of approximately three weeks in the Premier Mine area, which throughout the war held a large concentration of troops.
3. Two weeks season centring round Johannesburg, and including performances at Lenz, Randfontein, Vereeniging, Nigel, etc.

After playing these areas the companies left by train on the first part of the Union tour, starting at Potchefstroom and including Kroonstad, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Koffiefontein (playing to internment camp guards) and Andalusia. The companies then visited Cape Town for a five weeks season during which time all camps in the area were visited. Robben Island was later added to the itinerary.

Leaving the Cape area the companies played at George, Oudtshoorn, Port Elizabeth, Port Alfred, Grahamstown and Kingwilliamstown. A special performance was always given at Kingwilliamstown for the SAWAS, munition workers and other war workers at their special requests and with the permission of the UDF authorities.

East London was then visited and the companies continued on to Pietermaritzburg, Howick and a five week season in Durban.

As in Cape Town, this visit included all camps, missions to seamen, seamen's institutes, naval establishments, canteens, etc. From Durban the companies visited Mtubatuba, St. Lucia and Richards Bay, all isolated camps where the shows were greatly appreciated.

The second part of the Union tour started when the companies left Durban and visited Ladysmith, Standerton, Ermelo, Piet Retief, Carolina, Middelburg and Witbank, with a final visit to Pietersburg and Louis Trichardt. The average Union tour covered about 8,000-10,000 miles (These figures include the travelling to and from camps when the parties were staying in nearby towns).

Bookings with the South African Railways had to be made three months ahead and naturally had to dove-tail into the dates when the companies were scheduled to appear at the various camps.

The officer in charge of the concert party and the women members of the company travelled first class, and the men in the company travelled second class. Complete tour tickets cover-

ing meals and bedding throughout the trip were issued to the officer in charge.

In the majority of cases the companies were accommodated at hotels with the permission of the Quartermaster General. The bookings were arranged from the Unit's Headquarters, or by the local defence authorities in the various centres.

ACCOMMODATION ON UNION TOURS.

This matter of accommodation was a problem which had to be faced right at the beginning, and was by no means easy of solution.

The situation in short was this:— If the concert parties had to be accommodated in camps, the difficulty immediately arose of accommodating the WAAS members of the party. In the majority of camps there was no WAAS barracks, and either special accommodation would have to have been erected, shut off from the remainder of the camp by barbed wire with special guards at the gates, or else the women members of the party would have had to go to the local hotel — if there was one — and be separated from the remainder of the party. In this case special S & T arrangements would have had to be made at all camps where no WAAS accommodation was available. The complications on a long tour can well be imagined.

The next problem to be faced was that of rations. As most of the camps were "one-night" stands, the problem arose on almost every day of the tour, as to which camp

should draw and provide the necessary rations . . . the camp that the party was leaving, or the camp at which they were due to arrive, usually late in the day.

Whichever method had been chosen however, it is obvious that tinned rations would have had to be issued, and the party throughout the tour would never have been properly fed, nor would they have been able to obtain well cooked hot meals, or green vegetables.

These difficulties, as well as possibly the most important problem of all (i.e. the importance of keeping a touring company together and under the control of its officer throughout the tour) were placed before the QMG by the Chief Entertainment officer, who requested a special form of mass S & T for the whole company for the duration of the tour, and permission to put up at local hotels wherever possible. The principle was agreed to but the AFS refused to consider such a form of S & T which had never before been granted, and for which special permission would have had to be obtained. The danger of precedent was also pointed out.

The difficulty was however eventually overcome in the following manner:—

Permission was obtained to pay all expenses so long as it did not exceed the sum total of the tours, including hotel accommodation, of the individual S & T of the members of the concert party concerned. The members of the concert party then agreed to sign over



The Troopadours in 'Speeding Along'

their S & T allowance to the unit, and advances were made by the AFS department to the officer in charge of the concert party, who accounted for all expenditure by voucher.

This method proved satisfactory up to a point and was indeed throughout the existence of the Entertainment Unit in the Union. Certain difficulties did however arise, and certain wastages of funds occurred which could have been avoided. The suggestions for any future organisations of this nature appear in the Chief Entertainment Officer's Memorandum.

Transport had to be arranged to meet the concert parties on their arrival at the different stations, and also to convey them to and from the camps where they were performing. It will readily be seen that a tremendous amount of detailed work had to be done when preliminary arrangements were being made at GHQ three months before the tour took place.

The details were rigidly adhered to and it was seldom that last minute changes had to be made.

The routing of the concert parties in Cape Town area was most efficiently carried out by the SAWAS, Command No. 13, in collaboration with the Cape Fortress Command. In Durban all arrangements were made through Fortress Command, by the Durban Entertainment Officer, Major A. Leslie Leon.

INFORMAL SHOWS.

In addition to the regular tours the Entertainment Unit gave informal shows in hospitals and convalescent homes. This type of work was increased in the latter part of 1944, when the artists who were not cast in any particular concert party gave many informal shows at military hospitals and convalescent homes in the Pretoria and Johannesburg areas.

It was naturally considered essential to supply entertainment for men awaiting discharge at dispersal depots. The special P.T. branch of the Rehabilitation scheme for returned P.O.W's was also provided with constant entertainment under this system of informal shows.

RHODESIA & SOUTH WEST AFRICA.

Two parties — "Hotch Potch" and the "Bullytins" made most successful tours of Southern Rhodesia where they created an excellent impression. The visits to Southern Rhodesia

were stopped when the demands for concert parties to tour the Middle East became increasingly urgent. The "Hotch Potch" tour lasted from September 6, 1943 to September 28, 1943. The performance at the Princes Theatre, Salisbury was attended by the Governor Sir Evelyn and Lady Baring, and an audience of more than 1,000. This concert party played to approximately 12,000 troops in Southern Rhodesia.

The "Bullytins" tour of Southern Rhodesia lasted from Dec. 13, 1943 to January 17, 1944. This tour was also most successful, particularly at isolated RAF stations.

Several parties visited South West Africa giving performances at Walvis Bay, Windhoek and Tsumeb. These tours to SWA were discontinued when the number of troops did not warrant the visit.

OFFICIAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS TROOP ENTERTAINMENT IN THE UDF.

At this stage mention must be made of the attitude of the military mind towards troop entertainment. In South Africa the Entertainment Unit had to fight every inch of the way to bring vitally needed relief from monotony to millions of troops.

Thousands of letters were received by the Chief Entertainment Officer from responsible officers in SA, the Middle East, Greece, Italy, Gibraltar, North Africa, the Western Desert, etc., stressing the need for entertainment and praising the "morale raising" qualities of the UDF concert parties, but the official mind consistently refused to acknowledge that entertainment was of paramount importance for men in camps and in isolated areas, and insisted on considering it a luxury.

Permission was constantly refused for the transfer of suitable artists to the entertainment unit, even when these artists were in non-combatant units; shortage of staff continued in spite of hundreds of requests for increased establishments. These refusals definitely resulted in an inadequate number of concert parties to cope with the demand.

Lack of understanding of the whole position appears to be the root cause of this unsympathetic reaction, which is in such direct contrast to the attitude of Great Britain and the USA. As has been mentioned Great Britain, at the height of the blitz remembered to enter-

tain her troops and factory workers in order to stimulate morale and to promote efficiency. America had an immense organisation devoted entirely to troop entertainment. South Africa shrugged her shoulders and even looked with condescension on the Entertainment Unit which entertained almost 6,000,000 troops — the only entertainment unit in existence on a military basis and under military discipline. Right up to the very end of the war antagonism was experienced on the part of certain officers in camps in the Union towards the parties which had come to entertain the troops.

It is safe to say that no other unit in the UDF received as little encouragement and sympathetic treatment as the Entertainment Unit. This attitude is incomprehensible when compared to the attitude adopted by the large military powers (including Germany and Russia) which was the direct opposite.

TYPE OF ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTED BY THE UNIT.

The South African Entertainment Unit concentrated on the bright light-hearted type of entertainment, which has been proved to be the most popular with troops. The concert parties include plenty of topical popular music, both instrumental and solo numbers; tap and ballet dancing; as much comedy as possible, short sketches and concerted numbers. The inclusion of girls in the show has been one of the main reasons for the popularity of SA concert parties, particularly in the Middle East and Italy. South Africa was one of the first countries to send concert parties which included girls to the forward areas in the Middle East and later in Italy.

In the early days of the Unit's existence the Chief Entertainment Officer and the Chief Production Officer visited many camps to inspect facilities available for the presentation of shows. It was decided that straight plays would not be successful in the primitive types of halls (often acoustically very poor) and also that the demand was very definitely for the gay variety type of show. The Entertainment Unit did not deviate from this early decision and has throughout its existence presented shows in the form of small revues. One straight play — "A Murder has been Arranged" was produced and toured with moderate success in the Johannesburg and Pretoria areas in February, 1944.

The length of a show is an important point in army entertainment and it was found that no show should run longer than 2 hours at the very most.

CASTING OF SHOWS.

The important question of correct "balance" is one of the first points to be considered when casting a show. Sometimes certain artists were kept for three shows ahead so that they would be cast to the best advantage. In the case of highly competent and outstanding artists certain shows were built round them. Each show had to be a contrast to previous ones — no easy matter when producing a show each month. As revues follow a more or less accepted pattern, the only way in which they can be varied is in the costuming, choice of songs, music dance routines and comedy. Although the UDF shows have sometimes been criticised on the grounds that many of the shows were too similar, the type of entertainment has been proved to be far and away the most suitable and popular for troop entertainment. Straight plays and classical music was definitely wanted by a minority, but there was an overwhelming demand for the light revue type of show.

LACK OF AFRIKAANS ARTISTS.

A shortage of Afrikaans-speaking recruits to the Entertainment Unit prevented a full Afrikaans concert party from being produced. Even if all the Afrikaans-speaking artists had been withdrawn from all the concert parties on the road, an Afrikaans company could not have been produced. As it was most Afrikaans numbers were performed by English-speaking artists so that nothing other than musical items could be present in most concert parties. An Afrikaans number was always included in the programme of every concert party produced by the Entertainment Unit.

HUMOUR.

Troops throughout the war made it quite clear that they do not want "dirt" included in their entertainment. This fact they have made particularly obvious when there have been women included in the casts of shows. Risque stories and subtle double meanings are not resented but obvious "smut" has never gone down well. There is a wide divergence of opinion as to what is "dirt" and what is not, and the Chief Entertainment Officer has had to cope



The Whizzbangs in 'Laughter on Parade'

with every shade of this opinion. Surprisingly little criticism was received from padres. In the end Major Bourke decided that in view of the widely divergent ideas on humour, he would pass what he himself considered decent and that he could do no more. All SA concert parties were censored at GHQ before they left on tour and by a picked audience which included the QMG personally and many senior officers and their wives. All parties were again censored on their arrival in the Middle East.

MUSIC DEPARTMENT.

All orchestrations and arrangements used by the Entertainment Unit were the work of members of the highly skilled music department under the direction of Lt Leo Quayle. This entailed work on many thousands of pages of manuscript. Sheet music and gramophone records were almost unobtainable during certain stages of the war, and often members of the music department would "take down" numbers from current films and from the radio to ensure that the very latest numbers could be presented to the troops. In addition several successful numbers were composed by members of the Entertainment Unit.

DANCE ROUTINES.

Infinite patience and ingenuity was expended on new and original dance routines by the Dance producer Lt Arnold Dover, who was assisted in the latter stages of the unit's existence by Lt Alf Roderiques. It must be remembered that many of the girls who were taught these routines knew very little about dancing when they joined the unit. Not only were they taught the job of entertaining troops... they also received this expert tuition free.

PRODUCTION STAFF.

Captain Frank Rogaly was the Chief Production Officer of the Unit, and was assisted by Lt Sid James. The production staff, the dance producers and the musical director were responsible for all shows turned out at GHQ. In five years of active production the production staff turned out 56 shows, besides various combined and informal performances.

This averaged more than 11 shows per annum. The Chief Production Officer never had more than two assistants during the whole of that period, and it is a most outstanding achievement to have been able to produce different

and original shows in this quantity. It must always be remembered that the unit never had a script writer, so that not only did the production staff have to produce the shows, they had actually to put them together "from scratch".

QUARTERMASTER'S AND EQUIPMENT SECTION

Wherever South African Entertainment Units performed, comment was always made on the outstanding costumes worn by the members of the company. These were been gaily coloured, expertly cut and sewn and of the best available materials. South African companies have definitely outshone all other troop entertainment organisations as far as the "dressing" was concerned, and this was one of the chief reasons for the great popularity enjoyed by the South African shows. More than 5 000 costumes were cut and sewn in the unit's wardrobe department at Artillery Row, Pretoria. Like all other sections of the Entertainment Unit, the wardrobe, equipment and properties departments started in one room at GHQ, under Lt later Capt Lionel Roche.

While the first concert party — the "Amuse-liers" — were rehearsing at Major Bourke's house, the costumes were being cut, fitted and sewn in the home of the first wardrobe mistress, Mrs Maud Cooper. Mrs Cooper and Mrs Martha Geldard, the second wardrobe mistress, had to use their own machines and worked until midnight every night to get the forty costumes finished on time.

When the unit eventually got financial authority an imprest account was granted and materials were bought "from hand to mouth." In fact considerable "scrounging" in Indian and native shops took place in order to obtain the brilliantly coloured materials needed for theatrical costumes. Many artists brought their own evening dresses and suits, and used their own shoes and make-up until it was seen that vast quantities of materials, make-up etc., would be required. The costumes for the second show — the "Gypsies" — were also made in Mrs Cooper's home and materials were still being bought in "hand to mouth" fashion.

In April 1941, the wardrobe department moved into one small backroom and one small bathroom in No. 15 Artillery Row, and then the

costumes for the third concert party — the "Crazy Gang" — were tackled. The backroom was practically useless and it took the authorities several weeks before a window was put in so that the women could see to sew.

It had become evident that a stock of materials was absolutely essential. Firstly, materials and haberdashery items were becoming more and more difficult to obtain, and it was easy to see that unless large stocks were laid in it would be impossible to continue to provide costumes for the shows. Secondly, buying materials and matching accessories piecemeal was unpractical and taking up much more time than the manufacture of the costumes themselves.

Financial authority was sought and obtained and then the problem of procuring the necessary items was tackled. Both wholesalers and retailers were keen to help, and produced items which more and more were disappearing from shop windows.

As time went on the demands on the wardrobe and equipment workshops grew to considerable proportions. There were now about five wardrobe mistresses, and with their arrival further demands were made for sewing machines. Successful efforts were made to recruit dressmakers, but accommodation was a vital problem, and the five women were working elbow to elbow in one small room. Storage space became necessary for materials etc., which required delicate handling.

Two old tin shanties were located in Artillery Row and were lifted in their entirety to the Entertainment Unit, where they were lined with empty packing cases that had been "cadged" from various firms in town. In these home-made storerooms all the unit's possessions were stored and had to be accounted for. Meanwhile the long-winded process of obtaining authority for further accommodation and space continued.

Side by side with the wardrobe department the important properties and stage equipment section was groping its way in the dark. Accommodation was provided in an old garage and in this, every item that was required by the concert parties was produced. The materials required for these properties were quite unknown to the army authorities, and were virtually raised from local amateurs and the waste materials from sympathetic business houses.

PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEMS

A vitally important piece of equipment for every concert party was its public address system (Mike). Throughout the Entertainment Unit's existence the "P.A. Systems" were extremely difficult to get and eventually supplies had to be obtained direct from America. Each concert party carried its own "mike" and they had to be handled with the greatest care and were allergic to travel.

PORTABLE STAGES

Towards the end of 1941 when the first concert party was being prepared to go to the Middle East, thought had to be given to the lack of facilities that existed in the desert. It was obvious that a portable stage would be essential, and the properties section of the entertainment unit at GHQ, with the help of an architect from the Director of Works, and a Base Workshop at Premier Mine, designed and built the first two portable stages. These were constructed of timber and although there was plenty of room for improvement, they saw long and arduous service in the pioneering days of the concert parties "up North."

Almost 18 months later, when an increased establishment for concert parties in the Middle East was allowed, a new design for portable stages was drawn up.

MAINTENANCE OF CONCERT PARTIES OUTSIDE THE UNION

Concert parties proceeding out of the Union became unattached to their HQ in Pretoria, and therefore their source of supply was almost cut off. This factor meant the necessity for equipping each unit with maintenance supplies such as sewing kit, hand sewing machine, cloth for costumes repairs, zipp fasteners, buttons, hooks and eyes, brassieres, balet shoes, tapes for shoes, rope, pulleys, timber, metal, tubing, bolts, nails, steel, cables, etc.

MAKE-UP

Theatrical make-up proved to be one of the most difficult problems the Entertainment Unit had to face. After the unit had been in existence for not more than a year local supplies became exhausted and letters were written to every supplier in all the small towns of South Africa. Even though excellent results

were achieved, continuous supplies were unobtainable. Local cosmetic manufacturers were consulted and libraries were searched for formulae for the manufacture of supplies. When this information was obtained the problem of raw materials had to be tackled. Most of these items fell within the jurisdiction of one or other of the government controllers. Fortunately, they readily co-operated with the issue of permits.

Manufacture was undertaken by the Cosmetic Distributing Company in Johannesburg, who carried out many experiments before satisfactory results were obtained. In addition, small quantities of certain cosmetics were successfully made at the Unit's HQ by using the knowledge and experience of some of the professional artists who were then members of the unit. Later supplies of raw materials became unobtainable and supplies were eventually obtained direct from Max Factor in Hollywood by the Quartermaster when he visited the States in February 1944.

CURTAINS

After a painstaking search adequate material was procured to make the stage curtaining required for each production. The quantity and cost were both factors which led the Quartermaster to experiment and find ways, other than the usual, of curtaining the UDF shows. Closely woven hessian was located in one of the army supply depots and a quantity was submitted to several dyers who were asked to dye the material in every possible colour, and submit the results and cost for consideration.

The results far exceeded expectations and 12 good colours were decided upon for stock purposes. Thousands of yards of this material were dyed and made into curtains. Many experienced people with a good knowledge of the stage never detected that the material used was ordinary hessian.

Not only was this material used for stage curtaining, but on many occasions was used for the manufacture of certain types of costumes, e.g. cowboy chaps, heavy cloaks, etc. These curtains not only pleased the eye but for durability could hold their own with the best imported curtain material. A complete chart was kept of all curtains manufactured and sent on tour so that no colour scheme was ever repeated.

DRESS REHEARSAL THEATRE

With the rapid growth of the unit the need for still more rehearsal accommodation was apparent, particularly the necessity for a stage similar to the types the concert parties would encounter on tour. It was felt that if a request were put to the powers that be for such a building it would be promptly pooh-poohed. Consequently a request was made for another rehearsal hut with dressing-room facilities, and a stage which would allow the production staff to judge their work from the "front of the house." When this request was being considered, permission was obtained for the Unit Quartermaster to work in conjunction with the Director of Works on the proposed plan. The hut was so designed that it was possible for the unit's own workshops to turn what was merely another hut into a miniature theatre.

The stage was equipped with 15 sets of "lines" which worked on a "Grid" principle. Its footlights and three sets of battens, each had a red, white and blue circuit, all of which

could be operated through a dimmer system. Within reason the stage offered most facilities that might be encountered whilst the concert party was on tour. This proved a great boon to the production department, who were then in a position to teach the stage managers exactly what to do under similar conditions to those they would encounter on tour.

ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

Each concert party carried a portable distribution board which obviated supply problems where lighting facilities either did not exist, or were extremely poor . . . which was more often than not. Only one input was required to this distribution board. One set of footlights, and two overhead battens, together with the number of floods required were provided for each concert party, and were connected up to the distribution board. The "P.A." System and amplification of electrically operated musical instruments (e.g. electric guitar) was also provided for through this board.



The Amuseliers in 'Still Going Strong'

QUARTERMASTER'S VISIT TO AMERICA

In February, 1944, Capt Lionel Roche (then Lt) was sent to the United States of America to obtain costumes, materials, make-up, etc., as the position had become impossible in the Union as supplies were almost unobtainable. The Quartermaster spent five months in America, and thanks to the remarkably fine co-operation of the American authorities he was able to purchase large quantities of materials and make-up, along with other needed supplies.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the war, adequate entertainment of South African troops depended on the continued efforts of a handful of dedicated and determined persons. There can be no question that the overall success of the South African war effort owed more to the persistent endeavours of the Entertainment Unit than was generally realised, especially in view of the unfavourable reactions of some senior persons.