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ACTS

PATRICK B. O'NEILL

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THE HALIFAX CONCERT PARTY IN WORLD WAR II.

Although most Canadians have heard of Meet the Navy and The Army Show and the entertainment they provided during World War II, few are aware that numerous civilian concert parties operated at the same time. This article describes one such company providing diversion for the Canadian troops, and traces the growth and history of the Halifax Concert Party.

Bien que la plupart des Canadiens a entendu parler de Meet the Army et The Army Show et des divertissements qu'ils aient fourni pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale, peu d'entre eux sont conscients des soirées de concert civiles nombreuses qui étaient opéré en même temps. Cet article décrit une telle compagnie qui a amusé les troupes canadiennes, et esquisse de plus la croissance et l'histoire du Halifax Concert Party.

In 1842, Sir J. E. Alexander advised officers trying to decrease the desertion rate of the enlisted men in British North America to encourage entertainment in the barracks:

Music has a most humanizing tendency; it would be well to encourage that in a corps: and if theatricals can be conducted with the strict propriety of dialogue they will have a beneficial effect, and amuse the men in the long winter evenings. (Alexander 4)

By the end of the century, these regimental entertainments increased in popularity and were widely known as "at homes," "Smokers," or "Concert Parties." During World War I, the Canadian military realized the full value of such concert parties in bolstering the morale of Canada's fighting men overseas when some thirty concert parties operated in France--the best remembered being the Dumbells.

An initial survey of theatrical activity in Canada during the period 1939-45 would suggest that with the outbreak of World War II, the Dominion Drama Festival and many amateur community groups across Canada ceased to operate. In reality, with the help of the military, the amateurs had restructured themselves into new forms to organize entertainments for Canadian men and women in uniform. Largely forgotten by Canadians today, the entertainment provided by these performers rivalled that provided to the British military by the Entertainments National Services Association (E.N.S.A.),^[1] and that provided to American service personnel by the American Theatre Wing and the United Service Organization (U.S.O.).^[2]

Soon after the outbreak of the war on 10 September 1939, civilian groups throughout Canada quickly organized and began offering their services to entertain the military forces mustering in Canada. The Victory Entertainers of Hamilton presented their first show on 28 September 1939 in Stanley Barracks, Toronto. Then, in October 1939, the Montreal Repertory Theatre created their famous "Tin Hat Revue" made famous with John Pratt performing the show stopping act of "You'll Get Used To It" for which he wrote the words to music by Freddy Grant. This was followed in December 1939 with the "Chin Up Review," directed by Roly Young, columnist with the *Globe and Mail*. Starring four of the original World War I Dumbells--Pat Rafferty; Ross Hamilton; the female impersonator "Red" Newman, and Jack Ayres--their show began with a two week run at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto and then entertained troops between Montreal and Winnipeg. Other groups across the country quickly followed: the Calgary Elks Concert Party which began in 1939; the Victoria Girls' Drill Team, British Columbia, which began the task of entertaining troops in 1939; the Freedomaires, who performed their dance numbers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan between 1939 and 1945; Hamilton's "Thumbs Up Review," which began in March 1940; the Carry On Revue (also known as the "Merry Madcaps Revue"), which began operations in early 1941; the Stand Easy Concert Party from Petawawa, Ontario which began entertaining in 1941; Hamilton's "Whiz Bang Review" (1943-1946); and the Rythmcade, a group of high school students from Toronto who performed throughout Southern Ontario between 1943-45. Unfortunately, no complete list of the hundreds of amateur concert parties exists, and their contribution to Canada's war effort has largely been forgotten by Canadians. As more and more amateur groups offered their services as troop entertainers, the military authorities realized the need to supervise and coordinate these groups properly. In 1939, therefore, the Department of National Defence organized a Directorate to

supervise and co-ordinate the work of all those who had offered to provide welfare and auxiliary services to the troops in camp and barrack areas of the Army, Navy, and Air Force in Canada and overseas. Established at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa as part of the Department of National War Services and headed by Brigadier H.W. Foster,^[3] the Directorate placed an Auxiliary Service Officer from the Army in each of the Military Districts of Canada to coordinate the volunteers' efforts with the military's needs.

As the service expanded, the three branches of the Armed Services became increasingly involved with the administration of the Directorate, and set up separate Auxiliary Services to provide entertainment to their own branches of the Service. With the appointment of additional Auxiliary Service Officers from the Air Force and Navy within the Military Districts, the work of the Directorate became increasingly more difficult. After a great deal of consideration a new coordinating committee, known as the Joint Organization and Services Committee, was established late in 1942 and headed by Lt. Col. James Mess, the Deputy Adjutant General. Composed of representatives of the Navy, Army, Air Force and National War Services, as well as six National Service Organizations (the Canadian Legion, the Y.M.C.A., the Salvation Army, the Knights of Columbus, the Y.W.C.A., and the Navy League),^[4] the new committee met monthly to exercise a continuous supervisory control over all the Auxiliary Services Organizations.

In one of their earliest meetings, the Joint Organization and Services Committee adopted the policy that "Expenditures for paid performers should be curtailed and the organizations be requested to substitute free talent for concerts." This was not so much a criticism of the prior Directorate, under Brigadier H.W. Foster and Colonel E.A. Deacon, but a recognition of their work in organizing the amateur performers on a national level. To accomplish this, the Directorate had set up a National Citizens' Committee, chaired by Jack Arthur, an Executive with Famous Players Theatres who became the Executive Producer of the Grandstand Shows at the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, in 1952. His Committee became the umbrella organization (similar to the Dominion Drama Festival) that divided Canada into smaller regional groupings based on the Military Districts of Canada, which themselves closely mirrored the Dominion Drama Festival Regions. Each region—that is each Military District—had a regional Citizens' Committee similar to the Regional D.D.F. Committees, with sub-committees as needed. For example, Military District 13, which was Alberta, headed in Calgary by Alfred Savory and J. Christie, provided entertainment to Army and Air Force Stations in Calgary, Claresholm, Penhold, and Red Deer. Entertainment for service personnel in Edmonton and Camrose, however, was handled by a sub-committee, called the Edmonton Council for the Co-ordination of Auxiliary War Services under the chairmanship of Harold Weir and H.C. Wright (Miller 24).

These various regional committees mounted large numbers of productions during the war years. At Lady Kemp's Garden Party held at Castle Frank in Toronto, Military District 2 honoured twenty-two groups who had performed 1902 shows between November 1939 and 1 July 1944 (Sperdakos 138). In Military District 6, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the Halifax Concert Party Guild produced over 2300 shows and played to an audience estimated at over 500,000. When amateur band concerts organized by the committee are added to this figure, the estimated audience exceeded 1.5 million. The Halifax Concert Party, however, was not alone in supplying entertainment to Nova Scotia. The Canadian Legion Theatre Group (Halifax) was also quite active and marked its 783rd war-time performance on 24 August 1945 (*Mail* 25 Aug. 1945).

In addition to these productions, the various regional committees provided assistance to military concert parties in their particular areas. *The Halifax Chronicle* reported at the time of the Halifax Concert Party Guild's 2000th performance on May 21, 1944, that the Guild had collected supplies valued at \$11,510,000, which were made available to ships of any country and to all military units in transit through Halifax. The papers of Hugh O. Mills, the primary mover behind the Halifax Concert Party, include a number of letters from military units, Canadian ships, merchant marine ships, and foreign war ships thanking the Halifax group for their assistance in helping to organize and to supply the military entertainments. The items supplied included curtains, costumes, furniture, radios, sewing machines, organs, pianos, sheet music, piano rolls, phonographs, records, spotlights, and lighting equipment (Fisher). Beginning in 1944, many of the costumes came directly from New York productions since Hugh Mills had made arrangements with the American Theatre Wing to supply costumes from former Broadway theatre productions to the Halifax Concert Party (Mills). Unfortunately, many of these supplies were lost at sea when merchant and navy ships encountered enemy submarines (Jeffries).

Not only did the Halifax Civilian Committee assist military officers in the organization of these concert parties, but once prepared, it also arranged for such Military Concert Parties to perform at other venues. Thus, a Concert Party from any ship in port on a given evening might be found entertaining at an Air Force base, and on the same

night, an Army Concert Party might be found entertaining on board a ship. The Citizens' Committee also arranged for the more talented military performers stationed in the Halifax region to perform with the Civilian Concert Parties or to perform as the opening acts for visiting stars.

Although the Military Concert Parties did much for the morale of the Canadian fighting forces, the Civilian Concert Parties were even more active. In Nova Scotia as elsewhere, the initial support for the Halifax Concert Party Guild came from the Board of Trade. During the final stages of World War I, incidents of brawling between civilians and servicemen had increased until May of 1918, when the problem came to a head at the "Servicemen's Riots of '18" in the streets of Halifax. Hoping to avert a similar situation during World War II, the Board of Trade, when asked by the Adjutant General, endorsed and supported a Regional Citizens' Committee to create a harmonious relationship between the city and the military.^[5] Thus, the Regional Citizens' Committee was established in the fall of 1939 for Military District 6. The committee's membership was composed of Hugh Mills, Chair; Senator William H. Dennis; Carl Bethune, Halifax City Solicitor; H.C. Murphy, Provincial Registrar of Deeds; R.B. Murray, Manager of the Royal Bank; Howard B. Elliot, Managing Director of Aqua Electric; and F.W. Johnson, Halifax Shipyards (Mills).

The actual organization of shows, however, fell to the Mills family who had been active in the Halifax Theatre Arts Guild during the 1930s-Hugh Mills had helped establish TAG in 1933 and was well known throughout Nova Scotia from his radio performances as "Uncle Mel." Throughout World War II, a little office in the rear of Mills Brothers clothing store on Spring Garden Road was action-central for the far-reaching Halifax Concert Party Guild. Beginning in January 1940, the Halifax Concert Party provided as many as seven shows in one day, and throughout the war averaged 10-15 shows weekly with some 20 artists in each concert. When a request for a show came to the Halifax Concert Party office, Hugh Mills, his wife Jean, and his sister Gertrude swung into action. Phone calls were made to a roster of more than 700 civilian and military performers who had indicated their willingness to perform. Singers, dancers, yodellers, musicians, magicians, actors, radio personalities, operatic stars, entire dramatic plays, and a complete Chinese opera depicting the destruction of the Japanese invaders by the Chinese-every kind of entertainment possible was ready at a moment's notice to be performed anywhere and everywhere-church halls, social clubs, military bases, ack-ack batteries, ships, hospitals. The roster included such Halifax notables as Abbie Lane, Andrew Cobb, the Dalhousie Glee Club, the Y.M.C.A. Orpheus Male Choir, and the Halifax Herald Harmonica Band. It also included yet-to-be-famous performers such as Gordie Tapp, J. Frank Willis, and Murray Westgate.^[6]

Although talent was not a problem, transportation was. Since shows were often cast on the same day as the performance and since most of the performers did not leave work until five or six o'clock, the Mills crew had to arrange civilian passes, transportation, and pick-up points for the performers, and ensure that everyone arrived at the concert on time.

Performers, costumes, props, and musical instruments might be taken to the docks and loaded into motor launches. Performers then found themselves on board a ship in Halifax Harbour entertaining troops waiting to sail with the next convoy to Europe. Charlotte (Guy) Jeffries, who performed as an accompanist with the group over 1000 times, still remembers those evening jaunts: "Every night we would be off on one of these concerts and get to the most peculiar places," such as the SIR JAMES CLARK ROSS, a Norwegian whaling ship; the PASTEUR, a Free French battleship; or the LADY NELSON, a Canadian Hospital ship. She also remembers winter visits to various ships and islands in Halifax harbour and the hazards of climbing out of a motor launch and up an ice-covered ladder while wearing an evening gown and high heels (Jeffries).

Other times, Jeffries and other performers piled into the two station wagons maintained by the group or into borrowed army trucks for a long drive to some more remote military installation or coastal battery-York Redoubt, H.M.C.S. Dockyard, Fort Ogilvie, Sandwich Battery, Camp Hill Hospital, Camp Aldershot. It may sound like fun, but it was quite a struggle for the Mills family and the performers. Today, however, Charlotte Jeffries can laugh as she recalls, "we never went to the air base at Stanley without getting lost," before launching into the story of an evening when they were returning from York Redoubt. It was pitch black and the road was icy when they came upon a convoy travelling out from Halifax, and their station wagon spun out of control. She was certain that they would end up at the bottom of the ocean in the North West Arm.

On another occasion, while members of the Halifax Concert Party were relaxing with a few drinks after a performance on board the hospital ship LADY NELSON, discussion between Hugh Mills and the ship's officers focused on the various Special National Concert Parties that were bound for Europe to entertain the troops in 1944. When Mills mentioned his desire to take some of his company to Europe, the officers of the LADY NELSON

offered to transport them since there was ample room on board their hospital ship when bound for England, and the Halifax Concert Party members could supply welcome entertainment for wounded servicemen on the homeward voyage (Mills).

In the sobering light of day, Mills realized that he must first seek military permission for his scheme, and busied himself writing letters to Ottawa offering the services of the Halifax Concert Party for a tour of England and France. The arguments he made to the Adjutant General in his August 1944 letters in support of his plan can be summarized as follows:

1. The Halifax Concert Party had provided more performances than any other group in Canada;
2. that to be permitted to render this service overseas would be a fitting climax and reward for the people of the group;
3. the small size of the party-12 members-would require little shipping space;
4. the group would be primarily women, and it had already been demonstrated in the case of the Army Show units that had included members of the C.W.A.C., the soldiers overseas preferred concert parties that had Canadian women in them and that the value of such parties exceeded by far the value of all-male groups;
5. and finally, there would be virtually no cost to the government. (Mills)

The major objection to his plan, suggested in a letter he received from Captain William Fields, of the Auxiliary Services (Army) was that,

to permit you to send a concert party abroad would open the floodgates to every other civilian group in Canada that might want to do the same thing. (Mills)

The military did recognize the value of such entertainments, and did not reject the plan entirely. One year later, as the war neared its end, the military was faced with the problem of maintaining the morale of the service personnel awaiting transportation home. At the end of World War I, the natural homesickness of the men, the monotony of the waiting period, and the long delay in demobilizing the forces had occasioned riots by Canadian servicemen in Kimmel, Epsom, and Witley in 1919. Hoping to avoid similar incidents, the Canadian military authorities realized the necessity of supplying suitable entertainment in the camps for the morale of the Canadian soldiers. Unfortunately, there was a problem. Since most of the members of the veteran bands and soldier concert parties had been overseas since 1939, they were to be among the first to be returned to Canada. Lacking the time and means to train additional military concert parties, the military decided to recruit a number of civilian concert parties and send them to Europe (based on Mills's suggestions of a year earlier) to supply a variety of entertainment to ease the boredom of the troops.^[7] Thus on 24 June 1945, the Bluebell Bullets, sponsored by the Auxiliary Aid Association of the Telephone Employees of Montreal, and the Eager Beavers, sponsored by the Sun Life Assurance of Canada, departed for England and Europe on board the *Ile de France* and became the first two Civilian Concert Party attached to the Canadian Army. Other groups quickly followed: the Legion All-Stars (sponsored by the Canadian Legion); the Masquers (T. Eaton Company); the Lifebuoy Follies (Lever Brothers), and the Combines (Massey Harris Company).

Nova Scotia efforts were not forgotten. In May 1945, the military authorities asked Hugh Mills to assemble a Concert Party from his list of performers to tour bases in England and Europe where they would entertain the troops awaiting transportation home and those forming the occupation forces in Germany. Leaving Gertrude Mills behind to continue organizing Concert Parties in Nova Scotia from the roster of over 700 volunteer performers, Hugh "Uncle Mel" Mills, his wife Jean, and 11 performers (Ginger Fraser, Charlotte Guy, Dorothy Hamilton, Genevieve Lockervie, Janet MacPherson, Doris March, Julius Silverman, Irene Spence, Lila Tredwell, and Marjorie and Mary West^[8] left on July 19 on board the *Ile de France* bound for England, billed as the Halifax Herald Concert Party because of financial assistance from the Halifax *Herald* and its publisher Senator William H. Dennis. During the Atlantic crossing, trunks were recovered from the hold, and the Heralds performed daily to an audience composed of "troops from all services, men and women from various walks of life, and last, but not least, children of all ages" (Mills).

As temporary active members of the Canadian Army, the Halifax Heralds were inoculated, fitted for uniforms, and issued a book of the standing orders drafted for all European-bound military personnel including all the Canadian Civilian Concert Parties. As surrogate fathers to the young ladies in the company, the military also issued an additional series of rules specifically drafted for the Concert Party members that contained such orders as:

1. members are not allowed to attend entertainments, dances, or parties;
2. hospitality offered the units must be offered to all personnel or none;
3. personnel must go as a Unit and return as a Unit;
4. personnel must leave no later than 2300 for the return to their billets. (Jeffries, Mills)

They were also ordered to follow all Army directives. But from their first contact with the regular army in Aldershot, England, this last order proved impossible.

Upon their arrival at the camp, a Sergeant met them and proceeded to issue a string of orders, but his attempt to parade these new female troops met with total disaster. Although they performed beautifully on stage together, the raw recruits simply could not fall in or march in unison. Rather than have the parade rejects remain at Aldershot during preparation of the equipment and transportation for their tour, the camp commander granted the group a week's leave in London. Since they wore the standard Canadian army uniform, but with a maroon beret, Charlotte Jeffries remembers that "Everywhere we went, people on the street thought we were Canadian Female Paratroopers" (Jeffries).

At Aldershot, Mills supervised the four enlisted men who prepared the company's traveling show, consisting of a bus for the performers, a heavy utility personnel vehicle towing a portable generating plant, and a 60 cwt truck carrying a mobile stage, lights, costumes, and sound equipment, with a former mobile dental trailer that had been converted into a dressing room in tow. Meanwhile, the cast gave a series of informal concerts in the Aldershot area. On one occasion they came to the aid of an English Concert Party that had arrived at Aldershot without an accompanist and two of its star turns. The Canadian Legion, who were sponsoring the English performers, asked for assistance from the Halifax group. In Halifax, the performers routinely assembled shows on an afternoon's notice, so it was not difficult for the two groups to combine into one company for the evening. At the end of the performance, the British M.C. addressed the Canadian audience and paid tribute to the audience and the Halifax performers simultaneously:



Johnny Agnew, "Babe" Ruth, Flora Montgomery, Bret Fader, Hugh "Uncle Mel" Mills, Irene Spence, Air force Officer, Charlotte (Guy) Jeffries. Photo courtesy Mrs. Charlotte Guy Jeffries.

Some six years ago Britain got into difficulties-They called on Canadians-Today, in a smaller way, we got into difficulties-we again called upon Canadian Troopers and so the show that might not have come off was presented to you tonight. (*Mail* 18 Aug. 1945)

On 7 August 1945, the Halifax Herald Concert Party's tour officially began with performances to Canadian soldiers waiting to be sent home and demobilized—an afternoon performance to the 4th Canadian Repat at Witley Camp, Witley, and to the 1st Canadian Repat in the evening at Huron Camp, Bramshott. [9] The troupe was well received

everywhere in England, and numerous letters were sent back to Canada commending the company, such as this one from Corporal Erskine Cumming of Halifax:

Went over to the garrison theatre here in Aldershot tonight and saw good old Uncle Mel plus his exceptionally talented supporting company put over a grand show to a really packed house. Don't know when I've ever seen a show go over so well here. (*Mail* 27 Aug. 1945)

The most popular number with the audience in England was "The Lord's Prayer," sung with Dorothy Hamilton at the mike and the entire company singing backstage (Jeffries).

On 10 August, the group played their first hospital in England. Lieutenant Donald J. Oland, a member of the Halifax brewing family and a patient at the Taplow hospital on Lady Astor's estate, was late arriving and could not find a seat. Since he was a personal friend of many cast members, Mills arranged a seat for him in the wings. As Irene Spence finished her dance number and exited the stage, her loud shout of delight carried through the auditorium as she recognized Oland, her friend from Halifax.

The auditorium at the 11th Canadian General Hospital at Taplow had been filled with walking patients and those whose beds could be moved. After the stage show, the hospital supervisor asked if the performers would visit one or two of the wards whose patients could not be moved. Lila Tredwell and Charlotte Guy had been selected as members of the troupe not only for their piano-playing ability, but also for their skill on the accordion. In situations such as ward shows where a piano was unavailable, the two accordions substituted. Although they had been asked to perform in only one or two of the wards, the Halifax Concert Party gave concerts in all fourteen wards. The hospital supervisor was amazed at the stamina of the performers, and noted that no previous concert party had ever presented so many shows in one day (Jeffries).

The ten young women performers were contemporaries of the young soldiers whom they were entertaining, and everywhere they went they met former Halifax schoolmates, friends of family, or neighbours as this letter received and published by the Halifax *Herald* from Lieutenant Austin Hayes to his parents in Halifax indicates:

I really enjoyed myself last night. Our unit had arranged to have a Canadian show for the boys and it was published under the title, "Uncle Mel." That struck me as familiar so I went out of curiosity, and sure enough, it turned out to be the Halifax show. I knew several of the performers and was talking to Hugh Mills, Janet MacPherson, Charlotte Guy, the West sisters and Bret Fader. It was just like Old Home Week.

Without a word of exaggeration, it was one of the best shows ever seen over here. All the boys agreed on that. They are still talking about it this morning. I was really proud of Halifax last night. One look at those girls and boys forgot everything else.

Julius Silverman was there and played some wonderful numbers. I think they are going to Europe pretty soon. Hugh Mills was telling me all about the family and I've got to hand it to him, for getting together a group like that.

It certainly was a very wonderful show. (27 Aug. 1945)

After every performance, numerous Maritimers waited at the stage door for a word with the performers about friends and family back home (Mills, Jeffries) because, as Private V.D. Curley would write, "it made us all feel we were back home last night and boy, honest, it still thrills me" (*Herald* 10 Oct. 1945).

Although the cast had hoped to be permitted to spend V-J Day (15 August) with friends or in London, the military had other plans. They were ordered to perform throughout the day at Cove Camp for the servicemen still on duty. In the evening, they were asked to perform a special show for British civilians. The town of Leatherhead, Surrey, held a special place in the hearts of the Canadian forces because of its marked hospitality to Canadian troops in the area. The town was having a special V-J day celebration, and the Halifax Herald Concert Party was asked to give a concert for the townspeople as a token of Canada's appreciation. The group arrived in the evening and members quickly found themselves swept up into a street dance. At 10:30, their show began "in one of the most beautiful little theatres in which we ever played." The theatre sat 1300, but, counting those standing and children sitting on parents' laps, Jean Mills estimated the audience to number over 1500. Unaccustomed to playing to civilian audiences and especially to English civilians, the performers were apprehensive as to their reception, but the audience loved them. At the end of the performance, the entire audience joined hands and sang "Auld Lang Syne" for the performers (*Mail* 27 Aug. 1945).



Lila Tredwell and Charlotte (Guy) Jeffries. Photo courtesy Mrs. Charlotte Guy Jeffries.

The evening, however, was not over. Returning to camp, they were met by the six English Concert Parties stationed in the area. The seven companies merged in a spontaneous performance featuring one number from each Concert Party's show. The 2300 hours curfew was forgotten, and the party lasted well into the night (Mills, Jeffries).

The Halifax Heralds remained in the Aldershot area and gave thirteen shows during the next ten days. They were then ordered to London for transportation to Europe. The group consisted of the thirteen concert party members, a military stage crew of twelve men headed by Bret Fader who had worked with the Guild in Halifax and had been transferred to England on the request of Mills, and a liaison officer, Major Peters.^[10] Arriving at Ghent, Belgium, on 29 August, they set off on a seventeen-hour trip through Holland, their announced destination, and on to Aurich, Germany.

Each of the members was issued a book with the standing orders for all military personnel on how to behave in the Occupied territory, but military discipline ran contrary to their youthful enthusiasm and natural friendliness.^[11] As temporary members of the Canadian army, each performer received an allotment of 900 cigarettes a month. Since most of the performers were non-smokers and failed to realize the importance of this allotment, they often made presents of these cigarettes to people they met. At the end of their first performance in Aurich, they watched an elderly German man and woman carefully moving up and down every row of seats "butt snipping"-that is picking up every cigarette butt left behind. Granted permission to do this by the Salvation Army Supervisor, the couple removed the tobacco from the butts, and traded it for food.

No wonder Mrs. Mills in her letter home would write of their stay in Aurich that the "barracks itself was quite comfortable, but we felt surrounded by unfriendliness and an atmosphere of unhappiness" (*Mail* 22 Sept. 1945). Since the "Standing Orders for Occupying Forces" demanded that they not show any warmth toward the German people, as performers they found dinner at the officers' mess difficult at times. Bands of German musicians played classical music throughout the meals, but applause for the performers was forbidden. Life in Canada during the war had not prepared the young performers for the enforced tension between the German people and the Canadian Occupying Forces. On a tour of Wilhelmshaven harbour, they turned and saw hatred in the eyes of former German sailors as the group enthusiastically viewed the ruins of sunken German ships. After only ten days

in Germany, everyone was looking forward "to the day when we can again be friendly and not have that guilty feeling if a smile happens to creep out." In her letter home to the *Mail*, Mrs. Mills attempts to convey the group's sense of unease regarding their stay in Germany:

Right here I want to say that little did we realize back home how much the occupational forces here in Germany are going through. Here they are in a hostile country where it is at least unwise to be friendly and where one's natural impulses have to be quelled. It does something that cannot be explained and although there are many times when we are lonely, too, we feel very thankful that we are here doing our small parts to while away the odd tedious evening. (22 Sept. 1945)

The other Canadian Concert Parties that toured Germany also experienced a similar sense of unease. In his 10 August 1945 letter from Oldenburg, Germany, T.V. Mounteer, the manager of the Bluebell Bullets reported to the President of Bell Telephone:

At Bad Salzuflen, army personnel carried arms at all times and we were not allowed outside the army compound without armed escort. [...] On the highways large numbers of people of all ages and types are trudging apparently toward their former homes, most of them carrying their possessions on their backs. They are a sullen lot and many whom we have talked to do not feel that they were fairly beaten.

Although letters from performers and official and unofficial reports tell of the enthusiastic welcomes and receptions accorded them by the Allied servicemen, the massive destruction and living conditions in Germany and the relationship with the German people weighed heavily upon the Civilian Concert Parties. As Mrs. Mills would write, "We feel sure that if we were here too long our naturally bright dispositions might be spoiled" (22 Sept. 1945).

Perhaps realizing the effect that Occupied Germany would have upon the young performers, the military limited the stay of most Civilian Concert Parties to two weeks. Thus on 16 September, the Halifax Heralds departed Varel, Germany, and travelled to Groningen, Netherlands. Mrs. Mills wrote:

I don't think we will ever find words to describe the feeling of relief when we crossed the border into Holland. Everyone began to laugh and almost fell out of the windows waving to people and throwing candy out to the children as they ran out eagerly to meet us. The clip clop of their wooden shoes was music to our ears and when they would call out "chocolate." (*Mail* 9 Oct. 1945)

Based in Groningen for a week, the troupe's spirits revived as they came into daily contact with the Dutch people. In Holland, it was the custom to allow each man to invite one civilian guest to the performance, so that nearly half the audience were Dutch civilians. During their first performance at Winschoten on 17 September, they added a new number to the closing of the show. Just prior to singing "God Save the King," the twelve-member stage crew went into the audience and each brought back a Dutch girl to the stage. The cast then began to play a familiar Dutch tune and the selected members of the audience and the cast (and at times the entire audience) joined together in musical and spiritual harmony (Jeffries).

The highlight of their first week in Holland was a visit to Akkrum where Halifax's own Princess Louise Fusiliers were stationed. Asked to give a performance for the citizens to repay their kindness to Canadian soldiers, the Herald Concert Party obliged and performed in a temporary theatre created in a large factory. At the end of the show, the citizens presented everyone in the cast with a beautiful array of flowers. Then, as their flower-laden bus drove off, the people of Akkrum lined the sidewalks and cheered them, giving thanks not only for the concert, but also for Canada's contribution to the liberation of Holland (Mills, Jeffries).

The Halifax Herald Concert Party's tour was to end with a week's run, October 15-20, at the Tuschinski Theatre, Amsterdam, "one of the world's most beautiful theatres" (Jeffries). The military, however, directed otherwise. Recognizing the value of the Civilian Concert Parties in providing suitable entertainment for the occupational forces stationed in the various military camps throughout Europe, the special services branch of the Canadian Army asked the Halifax Heralds to extend their tour and to return to Germany. Thus, after their performances in Amsterdam, the troupe boarded their bus and headed to Schleswig, Germany, to perform for the 83rd Group Royal Air Force in the afternoon and for the 406 Group Royal Canadian Air Force in the evening of 23 October.

Despite their previous experiences in Germany, the trip "was not as unpleasant as we had imagined" (Jeffries). With the leaves turning colour as the Halifax Heralds travelled through the German countryside, they were reminded of Canada, but the approach to Bremen, Kiel, and Hamburg drove that impression from their mind:

[I]t is difficult to picture the absolute destruction of these cities. We wondered as we drove along if they could

ever be built up again in our generation (*Mail* 13 Nov. 1945).

In Hamburg, the Canadian Legion Supervisor arranged a visit to Hamburg Harbour where the group boarded a motor launch and cruised the harbour for an hour and a half viewing the sunken ships and submarine pens. At the end of the tour, the motor launch stopped at a large white ship with the words "Allied Merchant Seaman's Club" painted on it. Dressed in raincoats with their hair tied in brightly coloured bandannas ("Hair must be kept curled for the evening's performance"), the Heralds' appearance did not elicit a positive response from the first Lieutenant who met them. "Can any of you speak English?" were his first words in a rather rough tone of voice. When they told him yes and that they were Canadian, everything changed. The officer had mistaken them for a German Concert Party. All the entertainment being supplied to the ship until then had been German Concert Parties, and, although of a high quality, the merchant seamen had difficulty in relating to the German performers. They warmly welcomed the Halifax Herald Concert Party (Jeffries).

After Hamburg, they travelled on to Celle, Germany, where they performed on 26 and 27 October. The R.C.A.F. station at Celle was only half an hour from Belsen, and the Canadian commander arranged a visit to the concentration camp. As one of the first groups of Nova Scotian civilians to visit such a camp, they were unprepared for the gruesome horror of the Holocaust-the mass graves, the gallows, and the crematorium:

[...W] e moved on to Belsen. Of course all the buildings have been burned down but as we stood at the entrance and were told that sixty thousand people had "existed" in this small place we were literally speechless. Here there are mass graves neatly terraced with signs on them reading "2500 bodies buried here." We saw the crematorium, where they burned the bodies as they died and standing out in grim outline was the gallows (*Mail* 13 Nov. 1945).

Upon leaving the camp, they stopped again "in front of a brightly painted, cheerful looking house bearing the sign Children's Home." Once inside, they "were almost immediately surrounded by eager, affectionate children":

As a matter of fact, I don't think we have ever seen children so starved for affection-Just go near to one and their arms are tight around you and it is with difficulty you tear yourself away from them.

These were all Jewish children who had lost their parents in Belsen-in fact many of them had known nothing but concentration camps themselves. They showed us their numbers tattooed on their arms and told us of having had to give their blood for the German soldiers. We gave them a little show and when we left we gave them all the chocolate we had with us which was painfully inadequate (*Mail* 13 Nov. 1945).

Next came a visit to the hospital where survivors from the camp were being treated. Here they gave one of their most moving performances. Julius Silverman and his violin were featured. Both he and the audience were moved to tears as he played a selection of every traditional Jewish song he could remember (Jeffries).

After their visit to Belsen, the Halifax Heralds remained in Germany for another week before returning to Holland. The week of November 5-10 was spent at the Grand Theatre, Hilversum, where they were again eagerly received by the Dutch people and the Canadian service personnel. After travelling a total of 6316 miles through Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, their official tour ended with a performance at the Canadian General Hospital, Nijmegen, Holland, on 17 November. The next day, they traveled to Ostend, Belgium, where fog delayed them for three days. Hundreds of men were waiting transport to England, and the Halifax Heralds were once again asked to entertain. Travelling in their military uniforms and separated from their costumes, the troupe was at first reluctant, but then simply billed themselves as "The Halifax Heralds in Battle Dress." Their last performances in Europe were at the dockside, Ostend, to very appreciative audiences (*Mail* 1 Dec. 1945).

With Christmas fast approaching, the group was anxious to return home. After a brief stay in England, they returned on the QUEEN ELIZABETH to New York on December 8 after performing over 100 times throughout Europe. The next weekend, they had assembled again and were performing on board the Canadian hospital ship, the LADY NELSON, where their tour of Europe was first discussed (*Mail* 17 Dec. 1945). As the flow of troops returning home through Halifax slowed during the winter of 1946, the Halifax Concert Party closed its operations. Costumes were packed and sent to Norway where they would be recut into clothes for children. The 700 performers began a more normal life in post-war Canada, justifiably proud of their contribution to Canada's and the Allies' war effort. Lt.-Col. James Mess gave the following tribute to all the civilian entertainers across Canada:

The entertainments that have been given voluntarily in time and expense have done much to raise the morale of the troops. It is astounding how many of these people who volunteered entertainment have gone through all sorts of difficulties and discomforts to bring laughter and joy to the men. (Miller 24)

By using their performance skills to brighten the daily routine of service personnel, Canadian amateurs such as the Halifax Concert Party not only helped ward off the lethargy of idle hours among troops and bring the solace of laughter to the lonely, but also demonstrated that Canada possessed the ability to organize a network of Canadian amateur dramatic societies to achieve a massive mobilization of unpaid volunteer talent on a scale that rivalled the efforts of E.N.S.A. and the U.S.O.

At the outbreak of World War II, the Canadian Army Command decided against the creation of any Canadian Military Concert Parties abroad, but agreed with the British Military's decision to give E.N.S.A. overall responsibility for supplying entertainment to the troops of the British Empire and Commonwealth nations. The willingness, however, of the amateurs to volunteer their services in Canada and the positive reception of those efforts made the Canadian military realize the foolishness of their original decision regarding E.N.S.A., and the critical need to provide entertainment specifically geared to the Canadian forces. The professional music hall entertainers provided by E.N.S.A. displeased Canadian servicemen because of the accents and dialects and the risqué nature of the humour. Agreeing with his men, General "Andy" McNaughton noted, "I am not satisfied with the type of show that E.N.S.A. is giving which from my own experience [...] is quite vulgar" (Stephens 101). Thus, on 5 May 1941, Major J.M. Humphrey, Assistant Director of Auxiliary Services, convened a meeting in his London office with representatives of the organizations who provided the funding for the professional entertainment parties supplied by E.N.S.A.-namely, the Y.M.C.A., the Salvation Army, the Knights of Columbus, and the Canadian Legion. Everyone at the meeting agreed to abolish their formal relationship with E.N.S.A., and to establish a number of Canadian soldier parties to entertain the Canadian Forces Overseas base on the model of the National Citizens' Committees in place in Canada. This led to the formation of the Joint Organization and Services Committee that was charged with the task of providing everything necessary to guarantee the morale of the troops.



Halifax V-E Day Celebration. Uncle Mel's Artists Entertain. Photo courtesy Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management.

In England, Captain F.C. Anders of the Canadian Legion organized the first five Soldier Concert Parties-the Tin Hats, the Haversacks, the Kitbags, the Bandoliers, and the Forage Caps-all of which began performing by the summer of 1941. Other Military Concert Parties followed. A reluctance, however, on the part of some officers to permit good entertainers to transfer to the Concert Parties forced the Auxiliary Directorates of the Army, Navy, and Air Force to begin the process of organizing shows in Canada-"The Army Show," "Meet the Navy," and "The Blackouts"-as a training ground for performers who would eventually travel abroad and divide into smaller Concert Parties once there. The various Civilian Concert Parties around the country, such as the Halifax Concert Party, willingly and joyfully gave their talents and expertise in helping to prepare these military shows in Canada. Without this cooperation, it would have been impossible for the Joint Organization and Services Committee to assume E.N.S.A.'s role in supplying entertainment to the forces abroad. Then as the war came to a conclusion, the military was faced with the task of entertaining the large number of service personnel awaiting transportation

home. Again, the Joint Organization and Services Committee turned to the amateurs, and enlisted them as temporary members of the Army to provide the performers needed in Europe.

Although their efforts are now mostly forgotten, civilian volunteers during the war mustered the amateur talent and the organizational framework to produce a continually changing roster of performances over a six-year period. Not only within Canada, but throughout the world, countless soldiers, sailors, and airmen stood and offered their sincerest appreciation and warm thanks for the efforts of the Canadian amateur performers who traveled onto the world stage to offer their talents in aid of the war effort. Although the Canadian Military routinely today contracts professional performers to entertain troops abroad for short engagements, it was the amateurs who provided the talent and the organizational skills to show the military how to entertain the troops at home and abroad.

NOTES

I am indebted to Charlotte (Guy) Jeffries for meeting with me on several occasions and sharing her personal papers and photographs. Two of the thirteen performers who traveled with the Halifax Herald Concert Party to Europe are still alive, but only Mrs. Jeffries, born in 1921, enjoys good health.

1 Founded in 1938 and based at Drury Lane Theatre, London, the Entertainments National Entertainments Service Association provided entertainment for British and Allied forces and war-workers during World War II. Directed by Basil Dean, E.N.S.A. provided everything from full-length plays and symphony orchestras to concert parties and solo recitals not only for the camps and factories of Britain, but on all the war fronts as well.

2 Chartered by the United States Congress on 4 February 1941, the United Service Organization became the principal civilian agency for assisting the military authorities to provide welfare, social, and spiritual services, as well as recreation and entertainment for members of the American armed forces and their families in the United States and abroad. Disbanded in 1947, President Truman asked that it be restored in 1949 and it continues today. Although numerous performers have toured under the auspices of the U.S.O., Bob Hope's name has become synonymous with the U.S.O. because of his frequent U.S.O. Tours during World War II, the Korean Conflict, Vietnam, and the Gulf War. Hope even brought his U.S.O. Show with Frances Langford to the Botwood area of Newfoundland in 1942 to entertain the R.C.A.F. at a military hospital.

3 When Brigadier Foster was transferred to the Seventh Canadian Infantry Brigade, Colonel E.A. Deacon assumed control of the Directorate.

4 Its membership at the time of formation included Capt. Joseph Connolly, Navy; Brig. James Mess and Col. E.A. Deacon, Army; Group Captain D. McKell and Wing Commander H. Low, Air Force; Mr. George Pifher, Department of National War Services; Mr. Philip Phelan, Knights of Columbus War Services; Lt. Col. D.E. McIntyre, Canadian Legion War Services; Col. William Dray, Salvation Army War Services; Mr. John Beaton, Y.M.C.A. War Services; Miss Gates, Y.W.C.A. War Services; and Mr. Gillard, Navy League.

5 Although the relationship between the civilian and military population was more cordial during World War II, riots broke out on 8 May 1945 during celebrations of VE-Day. Instead of planning a series of entertainments throughout the day, the Halifax authorities scheduled only one evening performance at the Wanderers Grounds. By then it was largely too late. Perhaps the military officials in Halifax learned from this experience in their organization of the VJ-Day celebrations. For a history of the VE-Day Riots see Raddall, 300-301.

6 As an employee of Mills Brothers store, Charlotte Jeffries occasionally was called upon to contact performers. Her personal papers include a complete list of various performers (both military and civilian) in the Halifax area with information on the performers' specialty and availability.

7 Although the Canadian Civilian Concert Parties were ultimately the responsibility of the Canadian military, they were a special section of E.N.S.A., who had overall responsibility for supplying entertainment to the troops of the British Empire and Commonwealth nations.

8 "Uncle Mel" served as Master of Ceremonies, introducing each number and keeping the show moving with an amusing flow of patter and anecdotes. Julius Silverman served as musical director and played everything from classic numbers and modern to "barn-dance" numbers on his violin, while Lila Tredwell and Charlotte Guy accompanied everyone on piano and accordion. Ginger Fraser and Irene Spence provided the dance numbers which ranged from ballet to tap to hula. The trio of Genevieve Lockervie, Janet MacPherson, and Doris March specialized in blues numbers, while the West Sisters performed popular numbers. The star turn of the show,

however, was Dorothy Hamilton whose repertoire ranged from such operatic excerpts as "My Heart At Thy Sweet Voice" from Offenbach's *Samson and Delilah* and the cigarette aria from Bizet's *Beguine* to a roistering song in which all the boys joined called "We're Going to Build a Public House."

9 A complete itinerary of all their official performances appears in the Appendix. The Charlotte Jeffries Papers contain the original list.

10 Major Peters returned to Canada in October, and Lieutenant Thomas Homewood, of the Irish Regiment of Canada, served as their liaison officer for the remainder of their tour in Europe.

11 The Charlotte Jeffries Papers include the complete list of the Standing Orders for the occupational forces and the specific rules and regulations pertaining to the Halifax Concert Party.

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APPENDIX

HALIFAX HERALDS' TOUR

AUGUST 7 - NOVEMBER 20, 1945

DATES

Aug. 7 Whitley Camp 4 Repat Witley, England

Aug. 7 Huron Camp 1 Repat Bramshott

Aug. 8 Guillemont Camp 3 Repat Guillemont

Aug. 8 Garrison Theatre Aldershot

Aug. 9 Y.M.C.A. Theatre 2 C.G.R.U. Bordon

Aug. 9 Garrison Theatre Aldershot

Aug. 10 11 Can. Gen. Hosp. Astor Estate, Taplow

Aug. 10 Ward show in afternoon

Aug. 11

Aug. 12 Garrison Theatre (2 Shows) Bordon
Aug. 13 Jasper Camp 4 Repat Witley
Aug. 14 Rose Camp Comeru Bordon
Aug. 15 Cove Camp 3 Repat Cove
Aug. 15 Crescent Theatre VJ Night Leatherhead
Aug. 16 Burdon Hall 1 C.C.O.D. Godalming
Aug. 16 Maida Men's Mess Dance 1 C.G.R.U. Aldershot
Aug. 17 "2A" Wing 9 Repat (3 Shows) Petworth
Aug. 18
Aug. 19 Outside Inn 1 C.C.O.D. Eashing Park
Aug. 20 4 Can. Gen. Hosp. Farnborough
Aug. 21 Camp Theatre 11 Repat (2 Shows) Sheffield Park
Aug. 22 4 Can. Gen. Hospital Ward Show Farnborough
Aug. 22 Camp Theatre 8 Repat Aldershot
Aug. 23 Jasper 4 Repat Witley
Aug. 24 Camp Theatre 5 Repat Aldershot
Aug. 25 2nd. Spec. Inf. Btn. Camberly
Aug. 26
Aug. 27 Travel from Dene Lodge to Tillbury Docks, London
Aug. 28 On LST from London to Ostend
Aug. 29 Arrive Ostend 7:00 a.m.
Aug. 30 On the road from Brussels to Ghent.
Aug. 31 Spent in Ghent
Sept. 1 Spent in Ghent
Sept. 2 Travel from Ghent to Aurich
Sept. 3-5 Garrison Theatre Marine Barracks Aurich, Germany
Sept. 6-8 Forces Theatre Leer
Sept. 9 Travel from Leer to Wilhelmshaven
Sept. 10-12 Camp Theatre Canada Camp Wilhelmshaven
Sept. 13 Camp Theatre Near Varel
Sept. 14 16 Can. Gen. Hosp. Near Varel
Sept. 14 Ward show in afternoon
Sept. 14 Camp Theatre Near Varel
Sept. 15 7 Can. Gen. Hosp. Near Wilhelmshaven
Sept. 15 Ward show in afternoon

HALIFAX HERALDS' TOUR

AUGUST 7 - NOVEMBER 20, 1945

DATES

Sept. 16 Travel from Varel to Groningen
Sept. 17 17 Fld. Regt. & 5 L.A.A. Winschoten, Netherlands
Sept. 18 B.C. Dragoons Veendam
Sept. 19 G.G.F.G. Bellevue Club Assen
Sept. 20 Westm. Regt. Cruso Theatre Leek
Sept. 21 P.L.F. Factory Akkrum
Sept. 22 Beaver Playhouse Groningen
Sept. 23 Travel from Groningen to Leeuwarden
Sept. 24-25 Harmonie Hall Leeuwarden
Sept. 26 14 Can.Arm. Regt. Frenneker
Sept. 27 C.B. Hldrs. 620 Club Bolsward
Sept. 28 Perth Regt. Sneek
Sept. 29 Irish Regt. Heerenveen
Sept. 30 Travel from Leeuwarden to Apeldoorn via Zuider Zee and Amsterdam
Oct. 1-6 Tivoli Theatre Apeldoorn
Oct. 7
Oct. 8 Camp Theatre CFN Hdqs. Bldg. Apeldoorn
Oct. 9 School Theatre 1st. Can. Army Troops Honderlo
Oct. 10 Esquire Club Regina Rifles Ede
Oct.10 1103 Ord. Workshops Arnhem
Oct. 11 35 Coy. Comp Coy. RCASC Nitj Theatre Eerbeek
Oct. 12 Elgin Regt. Camp Theatre Oldebroke
Oct.13 2nd. C.C.S. Near Apeldoorn
Oct. 14 Travel from Apeldoorn to Amsterdam
Oct. 15-20 Tuschinski Theatre Amsterdam
Oct. 21 Travel from Amsterdam to Oldenburg, enroute Schleswig
Oct. 22 Travel from Oldenburg to Schleswig
Oct. 22 83 Group RAF Schleswig, Germany
Oct. 23 406 Group RCAF Eckenforte
Oct.24 Travel from Schleswig to Utersen
Oct. 24 126 Group RCAF Utersen
Oct. 25 126 Group RCAF Utersen
Oct. 26 Travel from Utersen to Celle
Oct. 26 84 Group RAF Celle

Oct. 27 84 Group RAF Celle
Oct. 28 Travel from Celle to Oldenburg
Oct. 29-31 Radio City Music Hall Oldenburg
Nov. 1 Travel from Oldenburg to Lemgo
Nov. 2-3 Can. Legion Theatre Lemgo
Nov. 4 Travel from Lemgo to Zeist
Nov. 5-10 Grand Theatre Hilversum, Netherlands
Nov. 11 Travel from Zeist to Nijmegen

HALIFAX HERALDS' TOUR

AUGUST 7 - NOVEMBER 20, 1945

DATES

Nov. 12 "Y" 1 Transit Camp Theatre Nijmegen
Nov. 13 Kay Cee Theatre 4 Can. Btn. Nijmegen
Nov. 14-15 Canada Club Roxy Theatre Nijmegen
Nov. 16
Nov. 17 Ord. Demob. Camp Grave
Nov. 17 1 Can. Gen. Hosp. Ward Show
Nov. 18 Travel from Nijmegen to Ostend
Nov. 19-20 Spent in Ostend - Poetgium
Nov. 21 Sailed from Ostend to Dover. Boarded train for Farnboro North, then by truck to Dene Lodge

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