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* All members of the club are called Rahobs (coined from the first syllables of "Radio" and "Hobbies").

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THE U.S. NAVY ENTERTAINS

On The Road is In The Air

AS we go to press the Claude Thornhill Show—the United States Navy entertainment unit—is giving its first concert in New Zealand to an audience of service personnel and their friends in the Auckland Town Hall. Station 12M is broadcasting the concert, so many of our readers will hear this popular group at work before we have a chance to report on it in "The Listener." In the meantime, the following are some of the impressions gained by our Auckland representative, who met the entertainers on their arrival.

SIXTEEN young men who have been flying all over the Pacific for seven months, giving sometimes three shows a night, playing in tents, in the open, between air raids, during air raids, on battleships, and rehearsing any time, any place available, shouldn't be expected to be very frisky when they fly into Auckland on a sunny Auckland day. But they were. Two of us called on them and found them as tidy in their blues as sailors on a stage, just as tidy and just as well-groomed and just as cheerful.

Claude Thornhill, the American band leader and organiser of the unit, has not come to New Zealand and we were greeted by Leonard Vannerson, manager for the group. He gave a rapid outline of its history.

"Last October Vice-Admiral William Calhoun, Commander South Pacific Area and Force, had the idea of commissioning Chief Thornhill to gather together an all-service show from the shore stations and ships in the Pacific. All the members were in radio or show business back in the States and they have all had at least two years' service in the Pacific. We trained at Pearl Harbour for two months or so and have been on the road ever since — seven months. Then the offer was made to bring the show here

and your Government accepted and here we are."

"And where have you been?" my colleague asked.

"It would be easier to say where we hadn't been. We've been to practically every island in the Pacific, playing to all our stations."

"And you've played on board ships, too?"

"Yes, battleships, carriers, shore stations, everything."

"Have you played in an air transport?"

"No. That's one place we haven't played—yes, you're right, Jack. We did, too. We played once in a transport plane—a jam session for the entertainment of the pilot and crew."

"But mostly it's been open-air playing?"

"Yes, nearly all. This concert in the Auckland Town Hall to-morrow will be our first in a real theatre."

"That seats about 2,300. How does this compare with the audiences up in the islands?" I asked him.

"You mean the numbers? Or the people? We were playing all the time to service personnel, not civilians. Natives were often there of course."

"The numbers."

"Well, we had one audience of 10,000."

That, he agreed, would count as Big Time anywhere. This was on Guam.

Witch-Doctors, Magicians?

We both wanted to know about the natives' reactions to the music and the show in general. We wanted to know and everyone wanted to tell us.

"Well, now, they were amazing, they really were amazing," said one of the boys. "Now take Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou—well, they couldn't get the hang of it at all, couldn't imagine where the other voice came from. They got very excited about that. And tricks with cards sent them into a great state. Mort Abrams with his accordeon was a magician, too."

"But the show was popular with them?"

Jackie Cooper (drummer) took up the tale. "Popular? Yes. But they'd rock with laughter when none of the fellows laughed and we couldn't make out what amused them. Other times they'd be solemn in comedy parts. They always liked the drum numbers — nearer their own music, I suppose—in fact, nearer their own language."

Bob Harris (guitarist) agreed: "Yes, at times we even thought they thought we were sending them messages—though what we were supposed to have said we've no idea."

"Of course the show stuff wasn't new to them," Art Bergman (guitarist) pointed out. "They see and hear most of it in the films. That's another thing—it's funny to watch them watching a movie showing horses, for instance."

(continued on next page)



All the members of the group (except Jimmy Roberts, pianist, who joined since the photograph was taken) dressed in their best for the trip to civilisation. Back row from left: Mort Abrams (witch-doctor), Charlie Graziano, Fred Greenwell, Rollie Morehouse, Eddie Sears, Art Bergman, Ted Vesley (musical director), Bob Harris, Johnny Fritz, and at the drums, Harold (Smokey) Stover. Front row: Bob Graziano, Jackie Cooper, Tommy Riggs (with whom is incorporated Betty Lou), Dennis Day and Leonard Vannerson, manager of the group.