

SOLDIERS COMMAND : STARS PERFORM

ZB's "American Hour" Incorporates Special U.S. Session



WELL, men, this is Clark Gable speaking from the U.S.A. This is the land that not long ago had boundaries—an ocean on one side and an ocean on the other, Douglas firs and deep snow and good fishing to the north, blue water, lilacs and hot weather and cotton picking to the south. Yes, America had boundaries then. You lived and worked within those boundaries, and thought that it always would be that way. You worked at that shoe store at Peoria, but to-night you are over there in Australia, and you fly hell out of your bomber, and go through God-made storms of rain, and man-made storms of steel and fire, and you fight your way back. Then you write into this radio programme, and say, will you please ask Dinah Shore to sing "You Can't Take That Away From Me"? You used to be a clerk at the local Sawayay Petrol Store, a history teacher at

Grand Rapids, a mechanic at the corner garage. Yet to-night you are blacked out on a freighter, or lurking beneath the cold waters far below the fog that hangs over the Aleutians and you write to this radio station and say, "Recently we received packages from our mothers and to show our appreciation would Bing Crosby sing 'Dear Momma'?"

You were the guy who had never been more than 30 miles away from Carson City, Nevada. Yet to-night you are hoping it will cool off in India, or on the Gold Coast of Africa. You used to go into town for the Saturday night dance. Yet to-night you are in Labrador, Egypt, England, Trinidad, or China. That is the way it is these days. The boundaries of America have moved out across the earth, wherever you Americans have gone to fight for every man's right, to live within the boundaries of his own self-respect and freedom. But because of guys like you, when we think of the boundaries of America we still think of Douglas firs, because you guys are like those Douglas firs. And you like good fishing and the lakes, Coney Island, and the cornfields, and the smoke stacks; you like the towns with the little red water towers. Because all those things are American—they were part of you when you left—they will still be part of you when you come back."

THAT is how Clark Gable compered No. 9 of America's Command Performance. Command Performance is perhaps American broadcasting's most pretentious piece of entertainment. It is produced by the War Department exclusively for short-wave broadcasting to America's armed forces abroad and it would seem that nothing is too good for them. The programme draws upon the talent of America's top-flight entertainers. Not one star has declined. All work without pay. So does the producer, Vic Knight, who gave up lucrative commercial work to devote full time to the session, which gets its title from the fact that the performers appear in response to requests

Several famous film stars are shown in this group of members of the Hollywood Victory Committee which helps to organise "Command Performance." Left to right the stars are Charles Boyer, James Cagney, Ronald Colman, Claudette Colbert, Jack Benny, Spencer Tracy, Cary Grant

from servicemen abroad, making each broadcast actually a "command performance."

Not all the "commands" are for celebrities. One "grease monkey" in Trinidad was lonesome for the birds that used to wake him up on the farm back home in Indiana. Engineers recorded the songs of the birds. A sergeant in North Ireland wanted to hear his dog bark, so she was brought to the microphone and barked her greetings to her master. An important link in the production of these shows is the Hollywood Victory Committee, which presents letters from service men to the stars, and gets in touch with lesser known people, including some who have never before appeared before a microphone. The first series of shows originated in New York but they now come from Hollywood. They are released on eleven shortwave outlets with seventeen different beams. Each programme is compered by a star and listeners have already heard Cary Grant, "Red" Skelton, Walter Pidgeon, Pat O'Brien, Spencer Tracy, and Bob Hope.

When the National Commercial Broadcasting Service of New Zealand first planned its American Hour, which has since become a notable Sunday evening feature, it incorporated some parts of Command Performance. Except for one occasion when the reception conditions were too bad it has been possible to pick up and re-broadcast this programme from the States. The ZB session was primarily introduced for the benefit of visiting American servicemen and so was planned to include in the programme all the latest hit tunes from the U.S.

RELIGIOUS BROADCASTS

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qualities and interests into social radicals, persons suspect as ecclesiastically "unsafe" and theologically "unsound." (Think over the small list of effective "radio preachers" to see how true this is.) Therefore, it would seem, one of the things needed to make religion on the air effective is a great access of courage and imagination in constituted authority.

Then what about the form of religious broadcasts—other, that is, than relays of special celebrations and events carefully edited to be effective over the air? Obviously the "continuity" form is the natural radio one; i.e., selected music bound by linking "script" into expressing one simple emotion or idea. One of the best known voices heard over the National stations has, I am told, been given permission by the Religious Advisory Board to experiment in this way, using English poetry as well as Biblical "script." I hope I am not the only dissatisfied worshipper eager to know what the result will be.



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