

a Military Tattoo, and it was fortunate that Leslie Dow and Tom Fleming were at hand to stop us from turning it into a musical. While staging, lighting, sound, smoke, sets and all the paraphernalia of the theatre can help, they must always be subservient to the Military aspect.

Even so, 500 fierce Scottish gentlemen – Black Watch, Seaforth and Cameron, the State Trumpeters of the Life Guards, and the Blues and Royals, the Fanfare Trumpeters, the Corps of Drums of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers and the Buglers of the Royal Green Jackets – all were reduced to the ranks under the fierce discipline of a theatre stage manager. Fortunately, Barbara Stuart had a faint Scottish accent but there was no doubt from the very start who was in charge.

Surprises on the military side were that we all took such interest in detail, attending rehearsals, marking up 'prompt' scripts and, of course, liaising with the American theatre crew. Happily, I am a member of the US Union so there was no need to have a sleeping designer being paid to do nothing and, having had experience of working practices both on Broadway and the Coast, I was able to oil the wheels – sometimes at the expense of a Bloody Mary or two!

On the technical side of the lighting, there were seven bars of spots over the stage area, six in the front of house area and a few odds and sods scattered about the trees. Ninety three changes of light and not a dry eye in the house.

We had Royalty and Presidents and it all seemed to work out well – apart from my flight back from Washington on an RAF plane. Although ranked as a Brigadier (for messing and driving purposes) I was severely ticked off by a lady sergeant in charge of feeding us for producing my silver hip flask half way across the Atlantic. All service planes are dry – very dry!

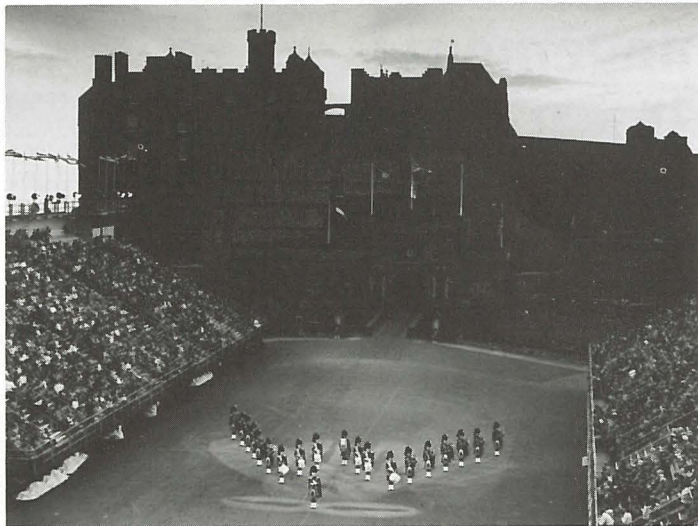
This year, I was involved in two other Military events – the Royal Tournament at Earls Court and the Edinburgh Tattoo and both provided different problems and different solutions.

The Royal Tournament, this year, celebrated its 100th Birthday and, after many discussions between my colleagues at Theatre projects, the BBC and the Tattoo Authorities, we came up with a fairly revolutionary scheme. For years, the Tattoo had been lit by floodlights and about sixteen follow spots. This meant that the televised performance had to be boosted by the addition of five or ten thousand watt lanterns dotted around the arena at considerable expense and inconvenience to the Tattoo and to Earls Court. By persuading the BBC to chip in and by assuring Michael Parker, the producer, that four followspots would be enough, we were able to install sufficient equipment to cope with the show and the tv at the same time. A main truss running the full length of the arena carried 240 units downlighting the main area; another 160 round the sides and 40 low voltage lanterns completed a scheme which gave us lots of 'firsts'. Biggest single run truss in Europe; nearly a crisis at the Electricity Board and the first time a televi-

sion director didn't have to say 'Can I have more light?' A computerised switchboard (Kliegl), a professional operator, a rigging and focussing crew who more than knew what they were about and once more I learned lots of lessons. Horses don't like sudden changes of light; top light is better for motorcycles; candles are magic, red, white and blue are good standard colours; must remember not to call costumes 'frocks' – they are uniforms. And please try to stop our lady switchboard operator saying to the producer 'Look, Major Darling, will you kindly belt up.' This caused shudders from some of the Military but a wry smile from Major Parker who confessed on the last night that it had been a pleasure working with professionals. What higher praise could we have asked for?

And what greater pleasure than to move on (after a hasty show in the Hague) to Edinburgh and an entirely different kettle of fish. Here again, with the help of Bert Donaldson and Mike Smyth, we tried to beat the television problem and only just failed. The addition of a few extra lanterns was necessary but the main lesson learned was that the angle of light on a wet esplanade can illuminate the audience nearly as well as the performers.

Sixteen follow spots (fewer next year!)



*Edinburgh Military Tattoo 1980*



*The Royal Tournament, Earls Court 1980*

labelled with military precision, Alpha, Bravo, etc., a 'Duet' computer type switchboard instead of a series of switches and a one preset board.

The Queen's Guard of Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA, with their hair-raising display of precision drill – razor sharp bayonets to the fore – provided the only colour problem, but we soon found out that steel blue was the answer, and once again deep reds and blues combined to highlight the uniforms. Technically, this time it was only seventy two lighting units covering ten areas but with 178 lighting changes.

The three displays that I've mentioned have had only a few things in common; a military hyphen theatrical aspect, imaginative producers willing to listen and, of course, the British flair for doing these things well. But uncommon was that Wolf Trap, Washington was half open air, Earls Court was completely enclosed and Edinburgh wholly in the rain.

There is a phrase used by my commercially minded colleagues – 'At the end of the day'. It's only when you've worked hard to get some decent lighting at the Edinburgh tattoo and suddenly you see the sunset behind that magnificent Castle that you realise that you've still got a long way to go before the end of the day.