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## Chapter 2. "Jungle Shows" Thailand

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## Chapter 2: “Jungle Shows” Thailand

*Those jungle shows striving to create laughter amid exhaustion and cruelty.*

Jimmy Walker, *Of Rice and Men*

1942

### Up Country

The first POWs from Changi POW Camp, Singapore, were sent Up Country to Thailand during the monsoon season in mid-June 1942 as “Mainland No. 1 Work Party”—an advance group whose job was to assist the I. J. A. engineers in surveying the route of the projected railway and to build the supply depot at Nong Pladuk/000 Kilo, the transit camp at Ban Pong/003 Kilo, and the first leg of the railway to the Kanchanaburi area. It wasn’t until October, when the monsoon season was drawing to a close, that thousands of POWs followed, crammed into steel boxcars like so much chattel for the train trip north.



FIGURE 2.1. “SINGAPORE—BANGKOK.” JACK CHALKER. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

“The next stage of our journey, to be repeated every day,” Laurie Allison<sup>i</sup> remembered, “was sheer hell with shortage of water, shortage of food, jammed stinking bodies and short tempers. Many became sick and the car stank of vomit and excreta.”<sup>3</sup> This suffering was just the beginning of the long ordeal ahead. When the POWs arrived at Ban Pong after their torturous five-day ride from Singapore, the men in Jimmy Walker’s contingent asked him to provide a little entertainment to take their minds off the nasty trip and their uncertain future. In the months that followed, this became a recurring request.

In response, Walker and his buddy Hank Phillips found a platform that could function as a stage, made a backcloth, and proceeded to perform some of their old jokes and comic sketches.<sup>ii</sup> When orders came to move up country, the POWs were split up and transported by truck or marched up the line to their initial work sites beyond the provincial city of Kanchanaburi in western Thailand. Assigned different work

<sup>i</sup> Allison, an Australian who had enlisted in the British Army prior to the war, was a member of Singapore Fortress Signals.  
<sup>ii</sup> Walker had been a producer of “The Harbour Lights” shows back in Keppel Harbour, Singapore.

groups, Walker and Phillips lost touch with each other until a chance meeting at Nong Pladuk in the spring of 1943.

The city of Kanchanaburi was situated at the confluence of the Mae Khlong and Kwai Noi rivers. Just outside the city were three POW camps: Kanburi/050 Kilo, a hospital camp;<sup>iii</sup> Kanburi/051, an airfield and maintenance camp; and Kanburi/053, headquarters for the engineers of the 9th Railway Regiment. Almost four miles north of Kanchanaburi was Tamarkan/056 Kilo camp. In the jungle across the Mae Khlong from Kanchanaburi was Chungkai/060 Kilo, bounded on its south side by the Kwai Noi. Since the length of the railway construction in Thailand would be twice that in Burma, base camps for each of the major POW work force groups were established at Kanburi, Tamarkan, and Chungkai. As there was little, if any, organized entertainment in the base camps until late 1943/early 1944, these locations will be examined in later chapters.

### **Initial Construction: October '42-March '43**

The railway constructed beyond Chungkai would, for the most part, parallel the Kwai Noi so that it, along with a dirt access road, could be used as a conduit for the transportation of men and materiel up country. Looking back on his experience, Walker outlined the sequence and types of work the railway construction entailed:

A long line of labour stretched through the jungle. At the spearhead was the Jap survey team with their labourers, then came the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders cutting, burning and heaving trees off the destined track.

Most badly treated of all were the bridge-building gangs, who with huge trees and dog-spikes, erected roadways over the chasms. Then came the pick and shovel men building embankments and hacking out cuttings. Later came the Rail Gangs, humping and laying the heavy teak sleepers to bear the clanging rails and in their entourage, the fish-plate fixers and they who hammered home the spikes that held the rails to the sleepers.<sup>4</sup>

### **Impromptu Beginnings**

Early accounts of entertainment on the Thailand end of the railway appear in two work camps located in hilly jungle terrain: Wampo Central/113 Kilo and Kanyu River/150 Kilo.

<sup>iii</sup> *The existence of this camp before 1943 is in some doubt.*



FIGURE 2.2. THAILAND RAILWAY MAP #1: BAN PONG—MALAYAN HAMLET.

The POWs at Wampo were charged with constructing a huge wooden viaduct which, in conjunction with the subsequent chiseling of the cliff face above, would eventually allow the railway to pass through high above the Kwai Noi.<sup>iv</sup> When the last of the monsoon rains prevented the men from gathering outside after their evening meal, the POWs found ways to entertain themselves in the huts. Ian Peek, a member of the Singapore Straits Volunteer Forces, participated in these impromptu entertainments: “We lie on the bamboo slats in our dark huts and take turns in providing some sort of entertainment. No compulsion, but boredom is a great destroyer of morale, so we all try to think of something to contribute which might be of interest or make others laugh.”<sup>5</sup>

By late November, the monsoon season had passed and J. T. Rea recorded POWs engaged in impromptu sing-alongs around bonfires on the one *yasume*<sup>v</sup> day they got out of ten.<sup>6</sup> Len Gibson was one of the men responsible for these musical gatherings:

Some men managed to acquire some fat or oil and with a piece of string to serve as a wick made a crude lamp using an empty can. By this poor light men would play cards; often with home-made ones. Others would light fires and sit out in the open. I often took out my guitar and played at the camp fires and if Charley Carney and Michael Conlin joined in it would develop into a concert.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the challenges in constructing the huge wooden viaduct and cutting the cliff wall, the POWs remained in their Wampo camps for six months. This stability of location and personnel offered the opportunity of moving beyond impromptu entertainment to something more substantial.

Kanyu River Camp, situated on the banks of the Kwai Noi at the base of one of the hills, became the way station through which men and supplies moved to the construction camps above. In those camps, men were charged with constructing trestle bridges across ravines and carving out routes for the railway along the faces of steep hills—the latter job in preparation for digging the Kanyu Cutting.<sup>vi</sup> By November,

<sup>iv</sup> Wampo/113 Kilo, Wampo South, and Wampo North—the latter two a little less than two miles in either direction from the central camp.  
<sup>v</sup> The Japanese command for “At ease!” came to mean “rest day” as well.  
<sup>vi</sup> Kanyu River Camp/150 Kilo, Kanyu/151 Kilo, Kanyu/152 Kilo.

the POWs, weakened by inadequate diet and hard physical work, began to fall ill with dysentery, malaria, and beriberi. Scratches quickly became infected with flesh-eating ulcers. Men started to die. Jack Chalker remembered that one of his first duties on arrival in Kanyu River Camp was to set up a cemetery.<sup>8</sup>

It was late November before an impromptu concert party took place:

a large party of officers were brought up-country and established a camp a few Km down-river from us [wrote Chalker].<sup>vii</sup> Amongst these was a Captain “Fizzer” Pearson who came to our Kanyu Camp to pull together a small group of us to produce some sort of entertainment as a relief on Yasumi [*sic*] days, providing we were capable of anything beyond the daily exhausting misery of the working camps.<sup>9</sup>

Pearson had been instrumental in organizing “The Mummie Bees” concert party back in Changi, Singapore. Also in the officers party was orchestra conductor Norman Smith, who tried to engage the POWs in music to keep their morale high. “So much work was done whilst at Kanyu that little opportunity existed for setting up some sort of entertainment,” Smith wrote. “There was only a piano accordion but we decided that in the evenings after lighting the bonfires, community singing might prove popular. I asked for volunteers to form a choir and had a good response.”<sup>10</sup> The accordion player, Fred Coles, was among the handful of other ranks musicians and entertainers brought up country as batmen and cooks for the officers.



FIGURE 2.3. CAMPFIRE CONCERT KANU. JOHN MENNIE. IWM ART 167122.  
COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF JOHN G. MENNIE.

Because of their energy, enthusiasm, and dogged commitment to provide entertainment for the POWs wherever they went, Pearson and Smith would become legends on the Thailand-Burma railway.

<sup>vii</sup> At *Malayan Hamlet*/153 Kilo.

## **Entertaining Developments**

In early November, Fergus Anckorn, the sleight-of-hand artist “Wizardus,” arrived in one of the other Wampo camps where he performed tricks to entertain the troops and their guards. Anckorn’s skills in diverting attention from what he didn’t want his audience to see also proved useful in helping the POWs steal needed supplies for themselves.

Back in Wampo Central, impromptu sing-alongs had become popular, so Len Gibson, “together with some of the Gordon Highlanders led by Snuffy Craig . . . conceived the idea of giving a camp concert. One of our friends in the 125 Regiment was Billy Arnold and he had an uncle in show business. He’d evidently seen many of his uncle’s revues and under his direction we put on a show called, “A Mug in London.”<sup>11</sup> The success of this first show quickly developed into a demand for more.

Beneath this enthusiasm was an undercurrent of apprehension. With increasing incidents of POWs succumbing to illness, ominous thoughts about the future began to creep into the men’s consciousness. “It is depressing to study some people,” J. T. Rea noted. “You are accustomed to seeing them well, active and cheerful. Then they get dysentery and disappear for a while. Then they reappear thin, haggard, and dragging themselves about with a worried expression on their faces. It makes one rather fear what the future may hold.”<sup>12</sup>

The POWs’ worsening health and growing apprehension were on the minds of their officers as well. Officer in charge Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Lilly knew that one way to counter the effects of psychological stress on their deteriorating physical conditions was entertainment. What they needed were regularly scheduled shows by a concert party producing more than impromptu sing-alongs. Confronting Commandant Lieutenant Tanaka about the dire situation, Lilly proposed a solution: that an official concert party diverting the prisoners’ attention from their ills would help them find the willpower to keep working. Tanaka concurred. As the news that a concert party had been approved spread, there was an immediate improvement in camp morale. Lilly issued an appeal for volunteer performers and stagehands to come forward.<sup>13</sup>

But an “official” concert party created a dilemma for Tanaka. How could he justify it to his superiors when everyone in the camp was supposed to be working: the officers on “light duty” inside the camp; the other ranks in “heavy duty” on the railway? According to Peek, Tanaka’s solution was to make the concert party an “unofficial (but Tanaka-approved) working party comprised of officers with professional experience (surprisingly many) and enthusiastic helpers.”<sup>14</sup>

## **The Wampo Concert Party**

With the “carrot” of light camp duties, Gibson noted that other POWs quickly answered the call for more artists and helpers:

Frank Street, an excellent trumpeter, Reg Dixon an accordionist, and Charley Whiting who sang to his own accompaniment on the accordion were a great addition to the party.

I was approached by three Eurasian lads from the Singapore Volunteers who said they would sing if it was possible to borrow my guitar. So it was that I became friends with Jimmy Scheerder, Sidney de Cruz and Salo Suzarte. They

sang Hawaiian songs in harmony and became a very popular act.<sup>viii5</sup>

And so out of improvisational beginnings, the Wampo Concert Party was born. It quickly grew in size to more than fifteen members.

We used to practice in a little clearing away from the camp. There were artists and helpers. One helper was Tony Lock (Oxbridge and Foreign Office) content to just come along to keep the fire burning.

Apart from myself there were Michael Conlin, Charley Carney, Johnny Glancy, Jack Baldridge and Billy Arnold who were Sunderland lads and Snuffy Craig's group of Gordons plus four from the Sherwoods<sup>ix</sup> and the Singapore trio.<sup>16</sup>

Concert party performances would take place once a month. "These concerts always conclude with 'There'll Always Be An England' and 'God Save The King,'" J. K. Gale noted. "So far the Nips have raised no objections."<sup>17</sup> Their entertainment puzzled the Japanese: "The Nip Officers have frequently remarked that they cannot understand how we keep so cheerful as captives and why we laugh so much. They think that we must be very unpatriotic."<sup>18</sup>

With the formation of a concert party, the entertainers at Wampo began to dream bigger dreams. Performing "round the fires" had its drawbacks in terms of allowing everyone to see and hear clearly. To remedy this problem they requested—and received—permission to construct a stage, which they proceeded to build just off the parade ground. "A raised platform is shovelled up to form a stage and bamboo matting taken from the cookhouses to make a backdrop and side screens," observed a fascinated Peek. "The matting is daubed with white ash and soot to depict an Italian-style villa with a terrace, a low stone balustrade with urns and statues, and poplar trees dwindling in perspective into the background."<sup>19</sup>

Since the new theatre with its décor looked like one of the outdoor Mediterranean nightclubs seen in 1930s Hollywood musicals, it was named, appropriately, "Casino de Wampo." With the audience seated on the level ground facing in the same direction before a raised platform with a backing, the problems of visibility and audibility were solved—and the possibilities for scenery and lighting effects enhanced. Potential set designers and stage technicians were now encouraged to step forward.

## First Performance

The opening performance on the new Wampo stage took place at 9 p.m. on 30 November as part of a St. Andrew's Day celebration. The stage was lit by two huge bonfires, one at each corner, and by resin torches.<sup>20</sup> From a standing room-only area, Peek observed the opening night scene: "The colonel and the Jap commandant seat themselves centre-front on a bamboo bench, a few Nips flanking their officer, and our own officers alongside the colonel and filling the second row."<sup>21</sup>

Back in Changi, the Japanese had never attended a POW performance. When they did so for

<sup>viii</sup> From Gale's point of view, the musicians who carried "two piano accordions, two trumpets and a guitar" all the way Up Country from Singapore to Wampo were "either great fools or very public spirited."

<sup>ix</sup> British army units: Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, Gordon Highlanders, and Sherwood Foresters.

the first time Up Country, their attendance must have produced quite a shock—and resentment. But permission for the POWs to form concert parties and build theatres was given with an understanding that the Japanese administration would be permitted to attend the shows as well.<sup>x</sup> And when they came, they, of course, wanted the best seats: “centre-front.”

Before the show started, another unexpected audience arrived. Seven men who had lost their ability to cope were brought to the concert “in the hope that music and singing, laughter and chatter, will stir memories and provide a linkage by which they might pull themselves out of the mental vacuum.”<sup>22</sup> While they were being seated there was total silence.

The traditional St. Andrew’s Day meal—the haggis—was then piped in, “seemingly, from the depth of the jungle,” observed John Godber. “The ‘Haggis,’ of course, was rice but it was nevertheless accorded all the appropriate ceremonial. It was passed round and most people had a spoonful including the Jap commandant.”<sup>23</sup> Following this ceremony the variety show began. Peek was so impressed with the assortment of entertainers that had been found in the camp and the quality of the performance that he made extensive notes on it in his diary. The first item on the bill was an Australian corporal singing Neapolitan folk songs. He turned the stage over to the Singapore Volunteers with their odd assortment of camp-made instruments.

Tonight, stimulated by a shouting, whistling, laughing crowd of 1600 men letting off steam, they plonk and plunk, toot and bong their way through their program, then take off spontaneously with songs and funny stories until they are exhausted. For sheer morale and high spirits they have the admiration of all of us.<sup>24</sup>

Next came readings from Shakespeare and the Victorian poets, followed by “haunting melodies from Ivor Novello, sketches and farces from the London stage, all delivered with such skill and flair that even the most low-brow amongst us enjoys them. And, of course, jokes—clean, coarse, bawdy, subtle and crude, unprintable but not unsayable, and all stations in between.”<sup>25</sup>

It was after midnight when the Japanese commandant stood up, effectively ending the concert. “A bottle of spirits, a tin of fish and cigarettes” were presented by Lieutenant Tanaka to the “three best turns” chosen by audience applause.<sup>26</sup> Afterward, everyone, including “the Japs all stood for God Save the King & some even joined in!”<sup>27</sup>

Once the Japanese departed, Colonel Lilly went up on stage and thanked everyone for their efforts. He asked the audience to stay in their places until the seven sick men were escorted back to their quarters. Nothing had shaken them out of their “mental vacuum.” “It’s a chilling thought that any one of us can end up just like that,” Peek wrote. The rest of the audience then went back to their huts, humming the music and recounting the jokes. That night the POWs slept well.<sup>28</sup> The “unofficial (but Tanaka approved)” Wampo Concert Party was established.

### **Enter Charles Woodhams**

The next day, John Godber voiced concern about the concert party’s future: “of course we have so

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*x This very quickly became the standard practice Up Country, so when Peek came to write his memoir, it didn’t strike him as unusual.*

many times had the same items from the same people that it's getting pretty boring." He then confessed, "Actually I don't often go to these concerts now."<sup>29</sup> If Godber's reaction was typical, then new material and new blood needed to be found immediately or the concert party was in danger of losing its audience. The entertainers at Wampo were fortunate. Working side by side on "light duty" tasks in the camp during the day would give them time to develop material. New blood appeared unexpectedly.

Following the concert, Charles Woodhams, who had dance training and professional experience, volunteered his services and was immediately given the role of producer-director.<sup>xi</sup> At his first meeting with the company, Woodhams startled the others when he announced that there would be "women" in the next show. "He argued," recalled Gibson, "that we were limited by having plays with only men but with women the 'Sky would be the limit'":

First he wanted a leading lady. No one said a word and we thought that was the end of that until Bill James volunteered. We rolled around laughing. Bill was an Australian tin miner. Not only was he built like an ox but he had a huge moustache. And his voice—he could out roar a bull!

He actually was serious and shaved off his moustache and became a huge success in the part. Mind you, no one dare laugh at him.<sup>30</sup>

Bill James would perform under the stage name "Barbette."

But Woodhams had said "women"—plural—so just one female impersonator wouldn't do, as Gibson soon discovered:

One practice night Jack Baldrige and I were chatting to Pat Donovan when Charles asked the three of us to stand together. We were of similar height and weight. "Now I only want three more like you," he said. Next meeting he arrived with the three and said that he was ready to start work. Only then did we realize that we were to be a chorus line.<sup>31</sup>

Woodhams wasn't interested in re-creating the usual farcical "Beauty Ballet" with hairy and ungainly men in tutus performing mock arabesques and stumbling leaps—a staple of military concert parties. His "beauty chorus" would learn how to dance.

Only then did we realize what hard work it was. We thought we were using all our muscles working for the Japs on the railway, but Charley Woodhams found muscles the Japs did not know about. Only Pat Donovan did not complain, but he was a professional boxer in civvy street. We practiced to [Dixon's] accordion playing, "I want to be happy." I was definitely not happy about doing it.<sup>32</sup>

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*xi It was rumored that Woodhams had been a ballet master in civilian life (Gale, Diary, 25 February 1943).*

These dance rehearsals were only the beginning of Woodhams' attempts to transform these men into alluring female impersonators and not drag parodies. With Reginald Dixon as his musical director, Woodhams would produce a remarkable series of "jungle shows" up country.

### A "Beauty Chorus" Debut

When the concert party performed again, Peek was in the audience to witness Woodhams' first show as producer: "The concert is simply marvelous," he wrote, "the stage is lit by big bonfires in front at each side, throwing a rosy flickering illumination which lets us see what is going on but, fortuitously, is not bright enough to show the makeshift scenery and costumes." In his further comments, Peek identified the three sources from which all the entertainers in Thailand and Burma would create their shows: "Some turns are from memory, others have been pieced together from a pool of recollections, and some are original."<sup>33</sup>

In a POW camp rife with "borehole" rumors, the presence of a "beauty chorus" seems to have been kept a closely guarded secret. "When all was ready," Gibson remembered, "Reg Dixon struck up the introduction on his squeeze box, and the six of us emerged in line and keeping perfect time. This was a complete surprise for the whole camp and a roar went up which resounded throughout the jungle."<sup>34</sup> "The 'girls' are glamorous," wrote an astonished Peek, "in wigs of teased rope and a little Mercurochrome lipstick, with rice-flour cheeks and sooty eyebrows, their rice-bag dresses trimmed with leaves." They became the main attraction in a sketch re-creating dance night in an officers' mess:

The faithful accordion plays dance music, and couples drift around the stage in waltz and foxtrot time. Waiters hover, the crooner drools on about moonlight and perfumed nights and intimate whispers. It is all overwhelmingly nostalgic, the audience so lost in soft recollections of the past that the playlet ends in total silence while the men emerge from their private dreamlands. Then the applause is deafening.<sup>35</sup>

Charles Woodhams' first production was a smash hit.

The shout that went up when the chorus line first appeared was heard by sick POWs in a field hospital half a mile away and also by the Japanese there. When their commandant, Lieutenant Hatori, learned what the hullabaloo was all about, he wanted to see the performance, so it was repeated a few nights later. In the meantime, Hatori had phoned up his colleagues in nearby camps to come over and see the show, which they did, arriving by barge. As the cast took their final bows, they proceeded to sing the national anthem, but this time "Hatori stood up and shouted, 'No King!'" For a few moments the cast was struck dumb, until Gibson whispered that they should sing "There'll Always Be an England." The Japanese did not object to this choice, but the Gordon Highlanders did—afterward. Henceforth it was decided to close shows with "Land of Hope and Glory," which seemed to offend no one.<sup>36</sup>

Their concert parties were proving to be "a fine diversion," Gibson thought, "song contrasting to the daily grind on the railway track: for a few hours men could forget. . . . Of course it was back to work the next morning. It was back to reality. Back to the heat and the toil and the Jap guards and the yelling and bullying."<sup>37</sup>

## Japanese Entertainment

Not to be outdone by their captives, on 8 December the Japanese troops at Wampo gave a concert of their own. POWs were invited to attend if they wished. Godber did but kept his distance, as most of the Japanese were roaring drunk.

They sang a lot of very tuneless songs with great gusto, several of them gave little acts of their own such as dancing & general buffoonery. They also sang Auld Lang Syne for which they have their own words and “She’ll be coming round the mountain when she comes”—a Jap version of the English words. There seemed to be 6 M’s C. and several band masters. The band was 1 accordion & 1 cornet. The cornet player was a prisoner who plays it extremely well. He plays any of their tunes too if they have the music. It was quite amusing for a short time but after that just noisy.<sup>38</sup>

The traditional ditty “She’ll Be Coming Round the Mountain” had become a Japanese favorite after it was introduced in schools run by American missionaries and educators in the late nineteenth century.

## Christmas in Captivity

With December came the realization that Christmas holidays were fast approaching. The POWs’ first Christmas in captivity would be a difficult time emotionally. Carols and sketches, laden with images of home and better times, might cause the men to fall into depression and give up hope of release. To prevent this from happening, the content and tone of the Christmas festivities had to be just right.

### Kanyu River: “A Handful of Cockney Jokers”

At Kanyu River Camp, preparations for special entertainment had been under way since the early part of the month. On Christmas Eve, Norman Smith’s newly formed choir gave a carol recital around a campfire. The next day, “Fizzer” Pearson presented his show at the base of a steep hill that formed a natural amphitheatre. “I was one of a large group of sick men,” wrote Jack Chalker, now afflicted with malaria, “who had gathered or were carried out and laid on the ground about the huge fire, under a clear brilliant, tropical night sky. With Fizzer were a handful of cockney jokers who gave an ad-lib performance and ending with some carols.” There was also a “radio programme” with the performers reading “their script from behind an attap screen.”<sup>39</sup>

The “cockney jokers” were also among the cooks and batmen Pearson and Smith had brought up country.<sup>xii</sup> The re-creation of a radio show would take the audience’s imaginations back to family gatherings in the living room on Christmas Day, listening to special holiday broadcasts on the radio console.<sup>xiii</sup> As sparks from the huge bonfire flew upward, the evening’s performance ended with Smith’s choir, the cast, and audience singing “Silent Night.”<sup>40</sup>

For Chalker, this first Christmas concert in captivity had provided the tonic the men so desperately

<sup>xii</sup> The “cockney jokers” we know about were Eric Griffiths-Jones, John “Nellie” Wallace, and Sam Drayton.

<sup>xiii</sup> This was the beginning of Pearson’s dramatics group, “The Radio Players,” about whom we will hear more later.

needed:

A most moving and poignant occasion as well as one of laughter; a strange scene of a mass of exhausted, sick, ragged, and in many cases dying men, enchanted and taken out of misery and given hope for a few hours by the efforts of a small handful of men who made us listen and laugh.<sup>xiv41</sup>

Lieutenant Stanley Gimson found that “this has been a far cheerier Christmas than last. This year we expected little and received much—last year we hoped for much and got little. Last year too, the break with home was too recent and nostalgia prevailed—this year, I find memory is strong, but anticipation has supplanted nostalgia—and so to bed.”<sup>42</sup> Not every POW was able to make the same emotional adjustment.

### **Wampo Central: Woodhams’ Christmas Cracker**

Wampo Central also held special holiday celebrations. On Christmas Eve, “the Carol singers sang by torch-light as the moon had not risen,” Rea recorded in his diary. “They sang very well indeed and gave pleasure to all who cared to listen. Fire-side concerts went on until about 1:30 A.M.”<sup>43</sup>

Seats for Woodhams’ production on Christmas Day were at a premium. Besides the benches at the front reserved for officers, there were only a few spots left in the limited seating area on the ground behind the officers that had not been “reserved” by squatters’ rights (i.e., placing an article of clothing on a chosen spot). Rea and his friends attended the evensong service that took place on the stage so they could secure those seats for the show that followed.<sup>44</sup>

This time Woodhams’ surprise came at the top of the show for his unsuspecting audience. “We were staggered to see the first man to appear before the screen (made of blankets) was completely dressed in a double-breasted dinner jacket suit,” exclaimed Rea. “There was a stunned silence until everybody burst out laughing at the strangeness of it all. On his subsequent appearances this actor was minus the jacket as it had to be passed on to another of the players.”<sup>45</sup>

Costumes are always a delight for an audience, even more so when no such possibility is expected. “Charles Woodhams was excellent with a needle,” Gibson explained.<sup>46</sup> His ability to produce costumes out of scrounged materials such as the burlap sacks from vegetable rations, rice sacks, or “the torn borders from worn out mosquito nets” would prove to be quite extraordinary.<sup>47</sup>

As the POWs were told by the Japanese engineers how many meters of earth they had to produce for the railway embankment daily, Rea thought one of the funniest turns in the show was Eric Brancroft giving “an account of Sam Small at Wampoh trying to understand what the Japanese meant by a metre of earth.”<sup>xv</sup> But the two highlights were the appearance of the Union Jack being raised at the back of the stage to a cheering audience and Colonel Lilly’s slightly inebriated speech to conclude the evening (he had been given some Siamese whisky by the Japanese commandant as a Christmas present).<sup>48</sup>

With the national anthem forbidden, hoisting the Union Jack was a clever nonverbal substitute. It is surprising that the POWs got away with this provocative and subversive gesture. Lieutenant Hatori was

*xiv* “Those who were there and survived this will, I am sure,” Chalker added, “treasure that occasion and it will not be forgotten.”

*xv* “Old Sam” or “Sam Small and his musket on the evening before Waterloo” was one of British comedian Stanley Holloway’s famous character monologues about a stubborn soldier who willfully refuses to understand the order to pick up his musket because it had been inappropriately knocked out of his hands by the belligerent sergeant. One can easily imagine the topical version that Brancroft might have performed with this piece.

in the audience for the second performance and did not object.<sup>49</sup>

## Entertainment Elsewhere

Up to this point the account of entertainments on the Thai side of the railway has shuttled between two major construction camps. But there were other work camps where performers tried to provide something in the way of special entertainment for the holidays, even if only a sing-along 'round a campfire. Two of these were at opposite ends of the current railway construction: at Wang Lan/069 Kilo and at Kinsaiyok/171 Kilo.

At Wang Lan, Jimmy Walker and others had made a rudimentary stage on which to perform. "The 'stage' at Wun Lun [*sic*] was made by digging a trench, filling it with dead bamboo and the removed earth flattened to make a platform. The 'stage lighting' was tended not by an electrician but a stoker who set fire to the bamboo and kept it blazing. The performers acted or sang and were slowly cooked!"<sup>xvi50</sup>

At the other end of the line, in the mountainous terrain at Kinsaiyok, the Japanese commandant had unexpectedly granted permission to hold a concert on Christmas Eve and an all-day yasume on Christmas Day. John Barnard suspected this "gift" came because "they are as bored and fed up with this existence as we are."<sup>51</sup> But he and the other POWs were even more surprised when it was announced that the Japanese would take part in the Christmas Eve show. A "gigantic ant-hill" in an area "cleared for future hut building" was used as a stage.

A huge fire had been lit on either side of our improvised stage, and the large audience squatted all around the base, their faces lit up by the leaping flames. The concert itself was very poor, with the exception of a male voice choir which sang carols, and did so very well. The Nips themselves sang a few songs, which were rather quaint, but I'm afraid I was not in a mood to enjoy them.<sup>52</sup>

Although Barnard appreciated the entertainers' efforts to cheer up the men, he was one of those POWs who couldn't shake off the overwhelming fact that they were prisoners of war. He characterized his first Christmas in Thailand as "the most depressing one I have ever spent."<sup>53</sup>

## 1943

### New Year's Celebrations

New Year celebrations would mark the end of the Christmas holidays. At Wampo Central, the concert party made a valiant attempt to keep the tired audience awake until 1943 was rung in. They were not entirely successful. "It was a good show but rather long." Rea thought. "It is tiresome sitting on the ground or on a piece of a log for hours on end and some people left before the concert was finished. Also, in order to get a seat you had to be in place by about 7:30 P.M. As a result people were tired and a little bit unresponsive. As an audience they didn't seem to indulge in that spontaneous enjoyment."<sup>54</sup>

This was not entirely the audience's fault. Rea's further observation that the comedians "worked

<sup>xvi</sup> Walker went on to write, "Among them was Jackie Gray whose lovely voice wafted that night through the jungle. It was Christmas and his beautiful rendering of "Silent Night" and later, "Trade Winds" will ever be with me."

hard” to get an audience response signals that the performers were overcompensating for their own lack of “being free in the moment.” In spite of sore bums, tired jokes, and oft-repeated songs, the POWs who remained were determined to enjoy the show. Rea stuck it out to the end:

The cast were all on stage and 1942 [1943?] appeared bearing a plate of rice. Col. Lilly was given a well-deserved and spontaneous reception. He made a speech wishing us and the world, peace and a speedy return home. . . . A Union Jack on a long bamboo pole was carried from the back of the audience to the front, gradually coming into sight of us all when it was lit up by the fires on either side of the stage.

This was followed by the choir leading the audience in singing “Auld Lang Syne” and other Scottish airs.<sup>55</sup>

The concert party got away with their silent national anthem once again. This time the Union Jack’s appearance out of the darkness into the light was an even more dramatic and symbolic gesture.<sup>56</sup>

Up at Kanyu, there had been a “watch-night service” on New Year’s Eve at which Stanley Gimson turned out in his battle-dress uniform to make his own symbolic statement about what the New Year would bring forth. The next day he wrote in his diary, “all felt equally certain of a happy ending to our pilgrimage before the year is out—It’s ‘in the bag’!!”<sup>57</sup> But “it” wasn’t “in the bag”; they were. Little did they know they still had two years and eight months of captivity to endure—and the worst was yet to come.

## Consequences

Back at Wampo, the New Year’s festivities were unexpectedly extended into 2 January by a joint Japanese-Chinese-British concert that lasted from eight until midnight.<sup>58</sup> According to Godber, the Chinese performers were part of a group of about thirty men who had recently arrived in Wampo to be employed as “Tukan kayu” (carpenters).<sup>xvii59</sup> British performers had been encouraged to participate to foster good relations with their captors.

Several POWs noted this unusual event in their diaries. George Wiseman was interested in recording the show’s content: “One Nip played the mouth organ then asked everybody to join in the chorus. Much to our surprise, his version of the chorus was the [British] national anthem. Few joined in but most did heartily on the word ‘Victorious.’ They had a gramophone on the side of the stage but hardly anybody heard it as the guard in charge was very drunk.”<sup>60</sup>

Godber, on the other hand, had not been impressed with the concert: “I didn’t stay to see very much of it as the Jap numbers were very boring, nearly every item being announced as popular song. Well not understanding either their language or their music one couldn’t expect much.”<sup>61</sup> But Rea, who lasted till around 10 p.m. before packing it in, commented on what was perhaps the show’s most important aspect: “The Japanese had their flag up this time. They wouldn’t agree to both flags. They said we had our turn with flags and it was their turn now. They love to copy us in everything.”<sup>62</sup>

Celebrating the New Year was important to the Japanese as well. And the raising of the Union

*xvii This special group of skilled technicians must have been brought in to make sure the wooden viaduct would be built properly. The inclusion of Chinese, or romusha, as performers in the jungle concerts was extremely rare.*

Jack in the POWs' Christmas and New Year's concerts without a like honoring of the Japanese flag had been an affront, so the captors had to find a way to right the injustice, occasioning the need for a second concert.<sup>xviii</sup>

At Kanyu, the New Year's concert did not take place until 5 January. This time "Fizzer" Pearson was able to supplement his "cockney jokers" by showcasing performers he had discovered in the camp. With the show "[h]eld together by most excellent patter by Fizzer Pearson, and rounded off with selections by the choir, and a final 'Auld Lang Syne,'" Gimson called it "the best concert to date—it really was a treat."<sup>63</sup>

A note in one of J. T. Rea's year-end diary entries reads: "We are glad to see the end of 1942. The only thing that can be said for 1942 is that it might have been worse though at times it seemed impossible for that to be so."<sup>64</sup> With the large contingent of Highlanders at Wampo Central, the month of January couldn't pass without celebration of another important Scottish tradition. On 25 January was a *Burns' Night* concert that included "a good many incomprehensible poems recited."<sup>65</sup>

### Dunlop Force

When rumors about a new contingent of POWs arriving on the railway began circulating in the camp, Rea speculated on what this might signify: "Dutch and Australian troops captured in Java are passing through Tarsao. The Japanese seemed determined to construct this railway and to keep us here during the wet season to do so."<sup>66</sup> This time the "borehole" rumor was right. On the very day the Highlanders in Wampo celebrated poet Robert Burns, medical officer Lieutenant-Colonel "Weary" Dunlop and his contingent of Australian and Dutch/Indonesian POWs known as "Dunlop Force" arrived in Kanyu/151 Kilo from Java after a brief sojourn in Changi, Singapore.

### "They'll be Dropping Thousand-Pounders When They Come"

Exactly one month later, "Fizzer" Pearson and his fledgling concert party visited Dunlop's Kanyu camp to give his troops their first bit of entertainment.<sup>67</sup> "Our first concert had coincided with our first rain," Aussie Ray Parkin wrote.

The concert went on. *Things ain't the same my man Bill's 'ome from war*; the Far Eastern Brothers; lowdown on the Malayan Campaign—*frightfully* "General-Staff"; a duet of two strange fellows: one tough with a beard, was the tenor, while a boyish-faced, small-framed slender youth was the baritone; *They'll be coming round the mountain when they come*. Refrain: *They'll be dropping thousand-pounders when they come*; *Yeoman of England* and *Old Father Thames* (in excellent voice); a duet of a Scot and an Irishman with *The Little Yellow Idol*. Then, finally, a very good violin played while the rain streamed off the player. *God Save The King*, and it was over.<sup>68</sup>

The "Far Eastern Brothers" was a takeoff on "The Western Brothers," a popular prewar British comedy duo. And the "two strange fellows" who sang the duet with its comic inversion of voice with

<sup>xviii</sup> It is interesting to note that the Japanese show was more inclusive. Although they did not allow the British flag to be flown during the concert, they did include the British national anthem in their program.

appearance (the bearded tough-looking singer as tenor; the slender youth as baritone) were very likely Sam Drayton and Bobby Spong. (Spong had recently joined Pearson's troupe following his stint as the "Jungle Princess" in a makeshift Christmas pantomime at Chungkai.)

The parody of "She'll be Coming Round the Mountain"—first noted in a POW show in Bicycle Camp, Java, in 1942—would be sung lustily by the prisoners as a "resistance" song during concert parties on both sides of the railway. Given its overt seditious content, how did the POWs get away with it? And why did the Japanese sometimes join in singing it? It must have happened something like this: when some POW was learned that this folk song was well known to the Japanese, he risked altering the lyrics so when it was sung in a POW show, the Japanese, recognizing the tune but not understanding the new lyrics, would join in with their familiar ones instead. It was a clever ruse—and it worked!

The arrival of the "first rain" this early in the year was ominous. It foretold an early monsoon season that would only make living and working conditions more miserable, adding to the rapidly increasing numbers of POWs falling ill and dying.

### Enter Han Samethini and Joop Postma

Back down the line, approximately 500 Dutch/Indonesian POWs from a new contingent of workers sent up from Singapore had been retained at Wampo South to join British POWs in the difficult task of cutting away the face of the rock cliff above the viaduct. Among them were the accordionist Han Samethini and comedian Joop Postma—both had been significantly involved in producing entertainment in their POW camp at Malang on Java. They would be among the most important entertainers in Thailand.

In contrast to the viaduct builders, who only had to work during daylight hours, the rock cutters manned shifts around the clock. For Felix Bakker, "the night-and-day work schedule was a killer, and the sharp stone fragments tore up our feet as most of us had no shoes left to wear. . . . After a while, you lost count of hours, days, nights. No more thoughts, only work, eat, sleep, work, eat, sleep. The lack of sleep brought most of us to utter exhaustion."<sup>69</sup> But torn feet and exhaustion did not stop Samethini from finding the energy and time to play his accordion to buoy the men's spirits.

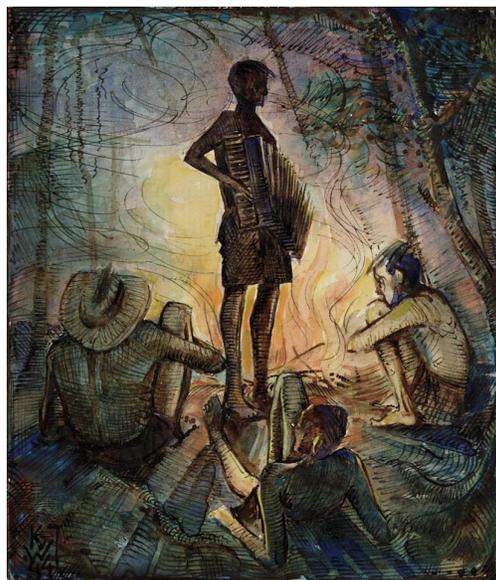


FIGURE 2.4. "KAMPVUUR IN DE JUNGLE." KEES VAN WILLIGEN. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

The young, slender accordionist in this ink and watercolor by Kees van Willigen, though unidentified, could easily be Han Samethini.

### Bigger And Better

Down in the viaduct-builders' camp, Woodhams was pushing to put on bigger and better productions. His show for February was an original revue entitled *Sincerely Yours*, which opened on the twenty-third. To create a further sense of normalcy, there were even handmade souvenir programs for sale.

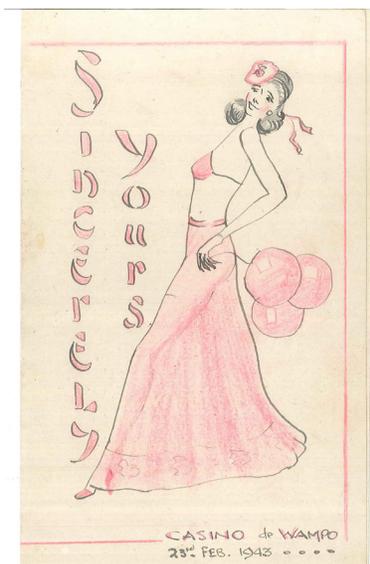


FIGURE 2.5. PROGRAM COVER FOR *SINCERELY YOURS*. IWM 93/17/1.

*Girls, girls, girls!* They were everywhere in this show. Following the successful reception of his “beauty chorus,” Woodhams had recruited two new “volunteers” willing to don wigs, dresses, and “falsies,” thereby increasing the size of his chorus from six to eight. From observers’ comments, it’s clear that Woodhams had become quite successful in training his female impersonators “to behave in a ladylike manner.” “They exceeded all our expectation,” Gale thought, “not only were the movements of their legs and arms graceful and ladylike, but they had even learned what to do with their hands when still. Several of them sang songs in passable contralto and their dancing was really excellent.”<sup>70</sup>

For a stunned John Godber, the transformation in the “girls” went well beyond demeanor; they had sexual allure: “They had been chosen for their figures and really the illusion was perfect & pretty nifty looking pieces some of them made.”<sup>71</sup> In fact, the impersonators so skillfully created the illusion of femininity that a couple of local Thais who wandered in and watched the show spread the news that the Japanese had imprisoned some European women along with the men.<sup>72</sup>

With beautiful new wigs made out of teased old rope by Bill Latham, a London barber,<sup>73</sup> and “beautiful swinging dresses from mosquito nets—homemade brassieres with homemade fillings,”<sup>74</sup> Godber thought *Sincerely Yours* “by far the most ambitious thing they attempted here yet, and it really was a splendid show.”<sup>75</sup>

## Cholera

On 26 February, Weary Dunlop recorded in his diary that cholera had broken out upriver and the men were now forbidden to swim in the Kwai Noi or use river water to clean their teeth.<sup>76</sup> News of this fearful disease spread quickly up and down the line.

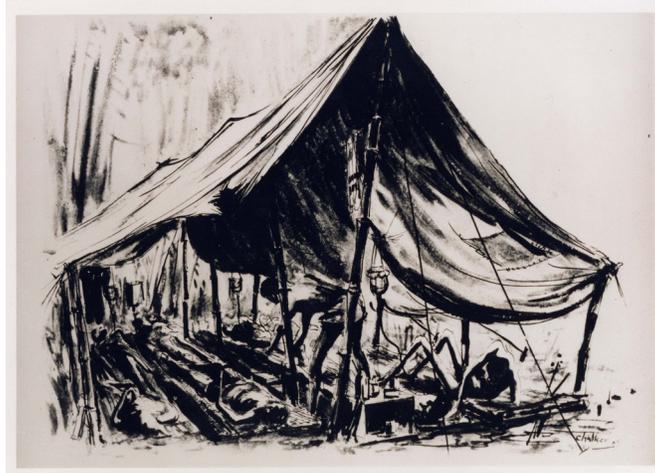


FIGURE 2.6. "CHOLERA TENTS – KANYU." JACK CHALKER. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

When Jimmy Walker, still at Wang Lun/069 Kilo, suddenly collapsed, he was “carried back into camp as the first suspected cholera case.” When he came to, he was lying on the floor in the hospital back down the line at Nong Pladuk/000 Kilo “looking up at Hank’s grinning face!”<sup>77</sup> Walker hadn’t seen Hank Phillips, his old comedy partner in Keppel Harbour days, since their arrival in Ban Pong in October 1942. Fortunately, Walker did not have cholera; he stayed on at Nong Pladuk until he was well again.

## Anckorn’s Disappearing Act

In his Wampo camp, the magician Fergus Anckorn found he couldn’t quite pull off an escape act. When the Wampo viaduct scaffolding was complete, he was told to climb to the top and start coating it with boiling-hot creosote in order to protect it from the elements and destructive wood-eating ants. But since receiving severe injuries in the battle for Singapore, Anckorn suffered from vertigo. He tried to tell the Japanese engineer that he couldn’t do it, “and he immediately went and got a bamboo pole to beat me up.” Given this additional inducement, Anckorn started climbing. It was a long way up. When he got to the top, he froze: he couldn’t look down, he couldn’t let go of the scaffolding, he couldn’t even open his eyes. The engineer bellowed at him to start work, but he couldn’t move.

*And he came up after me. Took him about thirty seconds, up like a monkey, right. And he flung all the creosote over me. And I remember, I put my head [down] so none of it hit my face—I had this hat thing on. But the rest—it was all over me—and a hundred degrees at the time. And I just started blistering everywhere: one huge blister. I looked awful. And pain too. I don’t know how I got myself down, but I did. And when I was near enough to the river, I flopped*

*into the river.*<sup>78</sup>

Now Anckorn could disappear: “I looked so awful they put me on a low loader truck and sent me down country [to] Chungkai, where I spent the next eight months.”<sup>79</sup>

### “Duet”

At Kanyu/151 Kilo, Dunlop Force had no further visits from the English entertainers, so, pulling together the few remaining performers from their own concert party formed earlier on Java, they produced a variety show on 6 March. Two men singing duets were the highlight of the evening—the harmony of their voices able to create a hope and camaraderie that dispelled fears of the dark jungle enveloping them.<sup>80</sup>



FIGURE 2.7. “THE DUET.” RAY PARKIN. COURTESY OF RAY PARKIN.

Australian POW artist Ray Parkin captured this evocative moment in a painting he reproduced for this investigation. The two figures dimly seen on the right standing on a pile of sleepers (railroad ties) for a stage, are etched by the light coming from the bonfire. It is just possible to make out the heads of the POW audience in the background.<sup>81</sup>

### “The Speedo”: March-October

The actual start of the intensive construction period known as “the Speedo” is hard to pin down. Not everyone agrees on a specific date, but it began sometime in the early spring of 1943. “The Speedo” meant an increase not only in the tempo of the work but in how much had to be accomplished daily. Fulfilling quotas dictated from Tokyo required longer and longer work days. The consequences of this forced drive to complete the railway to its new deadline would, for the POWs, be physically and psychologically catastrophic.

Massive migrations of railway workers began to take place concurrently with the start of “the Speedo.” As POWs and romusha completed their tasks at one site, they were not moved to the next camp up the line but instead leap-frogged to a new construction site. Once the Wampo viaduct was finished, the

POWs there moved to Tonchan South/131 Kilo. Before leaving Woodhams produced the second edition of *Sincerely Yours* on 25 March. Han Samethini and the other Dutch/Indonesians working on the cliff face were eventually sent to a camp north of Kinsaiyok/171 Kilo. In this way, the railway construction kept moving steadily forward. While these “internal” migrations were taking place, thousands of new POWs from Singapore, along with newly conscripted romusha, arrived to supplement a work force depleted by sickness and death.

On 17 March, Dunlop Force was moved to Hintok Road Camp/154 Kilo. The Hintok/154–157 Kilo camps were contiguous with those at Kanyu, and the POWs faced similar tasks: clearing the area in preparation for construction, building bridges over ravines, and cutting the railway trace along hillsides. Once that work was complete, they would begin the arduous task of cutting down through the limestone with little more than “hammer and tap” (sledgehammers and chisels).

While Dunlop and his men were setting up their new camp, the Japanese engineers began implementing “the Speedo.” The new “work rules” required all the POWs, even those classified as “light sick” (ambulatory) or without boots, at the work sites. Dunlop was furious with this change—he believed it close to premeditated murder—but he was helpless to stop it.<sup>82</sup>



FIGURE 2.8. “HINTOK CUTTING.” JACK CHALKER. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

In late March, Jack Chalker made the short trek from Kanyu to Hintok as part of a line maintenance party. While there he made sketches that resulted in the watercolor above, documenting the POWs working in the “Hintok Cutting.”

## Monsoon

As anticipated, 1943 was a year in which the annual rainy season arrived early, worsening the conditions in which the POWs had to eat, work, and sleep. When the dirt access road became impassible, the Kwai Noi served as the major lifeline for food and supplies. When the river, too, became unnavigable due to turbulence caused by heavy rains falling higher up in the mountains, rations did not arrive as scheduled and the POWs were put on an even more restricted starvation diet. Visiting Kanyu/151 Kilo at the end of March, Norman Smith was appalled by what he found: “Everything was dripping wet due to the rains. In the daytime the flies and mosquitoes bred in thousands. Malaria and dysentery were rife and the influx of the sick to Kanyu made it imperative to reduce the numbers to make room for them.”<sup>83</sup> There was no time or energy for sing-alongs.

In late March or early April, the Japanese made an attempt to ease the overcrowding in work camp hospitals by moving the chronically ill (“heavy sick”) to a large field hospital set up at the staging camp at Tarsao/125 Kilo. With this new facility and additional medical personnel, the captors hoped the POWs would recover from their illnesses more quickly so they could be put back to work. But when that hospital, too, became overcrowded, new heavy sick cases were sent back down the line to the hospitals being established in the base camps at Chungkai, Tamarkan, and Kanburi.

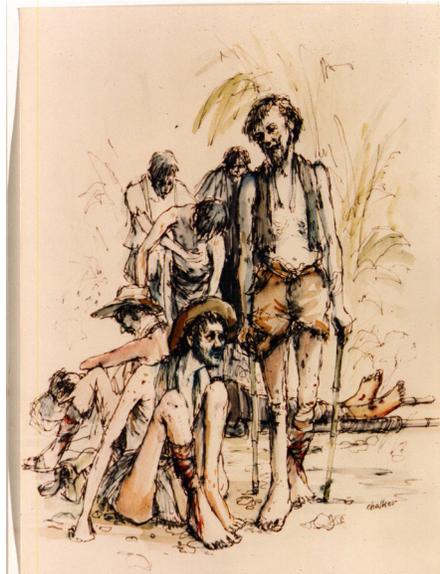


FIGURE 2.9. “LEAVING KANU.” JACK CHALKER. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

Like the wretches pictured in his sketch “Leaving Kanu,” Jack Chalker was one of those sent to Chungkai; he suffered from acute dysentery and dengue fever.

## Cancellation Notices

With the pressure on to meet the new construction deadline, yasume days for the POWs on the

railway became infrequent and formal concert parties disappeared as the prisoners struggled to hang on to some sort of entertainment. On 3 April when the prisoners' scheduled yasume day at Hintok Road Camp was shortened and all the men had to work for an hour and a half that morning, Weary Dunlop was pleased to see they still went ahead with their planned sing-along that evening.<sup>84</sup> Their next yasume wasn't until three weeks later, and again Dunlop was able to record that their morale continued to be high and a moonlight concert was well attended.<sup>85</sup>

### **“Brought Back To Life”**

From its beginning, Tarsao/125 Kilo had been a terrible place. Laurie Allison, who was there in late 1942 when it was a work camp, remembered it well: “If we thought Chungkai was bad, Tarsao was as Hell is to Purgatory. The camp was distressing and there was none of the divertissements that had given some semblance of living to Chungkai. There was no entertainment and it was a long hard working day on return from which, a wash, a feed and then to bed and to be woken at break of light the following morning.”<sup>86</sup>

During the former Wampo POWs' stopover at Tarsao on the way to their next work site, Len Gibson sat in one of the hospital huts strumming his guitar to vent his sorrow over a friend who had just passed away. Paradoxically, his playing revived David Ffolkes, one of the other patients, who had been given up for dead:

I approach the moment when we first met. . . . Do you remember? I bet you don't!! I do . . . in that terrible hut in Tarso [sic], when I half-dead, and drifting into a coma, was brought back to life by you playing a guitar; you so sad, because a friend of yours from Sunderland had just died because of a leg amputation.<sup>87</sup>

Before leaving Tarsao for Tonchan South, Gibson and his performer-buddies Charley Carney and Michael Conlin developed a new specialty act: “We called ourselves ‘The Andrew Twisters’<sup>xix</sup> and sang their hits as well as those of Carmen Miranda.”<sup>xx88</sup> It was also at Tarsao that Gibson composed a piece for his guitar that tried “to describe the wildness of the Jungle at the start of the rainy season.”<sup>xxi89</sup>

As the Wampo POWs were soon to discover, the railway construction in the mountainous region beyond Tarsao would prove the most challenging. “[Tarsao] was the end of the ‘easy’ stretch and the start of hell,” wrote Jimmy Walker.<sup>90</sup>

### **“Come On and Join Us”**

When they arrived at Tonchan South/131 Kilo, the Wampo POWs were disheartened to learn they were to be billeted in tents. As Gibson and Carney cleared the area to set up the tents, they realized Conlin was missing from the duty fatigues. When he returned toward mealtime, they kidded him about “dodging the column.” But Michael looked very serious. “You should see in those huts over there. That’s where I’ve been. They’re full of sick men and they’re like skeletons. The Japs have just left them. They’ve had no music

<sup>xix</sup> A parody of the American group “The Andrew Sisters,” known for singing in close harmony.

<sup>xx</sup> Carmen Miranda was the “Brazilian bombshell” singer who appeared in early 1940s Hollywood films dressed in outrageous costumes and tall headdresses topped with bananas and other fruit.

<sup>xxi</sup> Scored for a camp orchestra, Gibson’s composition would be played in Nakhon Pathom (see Chapter 8: “Breakout”).

or entertainment since they've been here. I think we should do something for them."<sup>91</sup>

Gibson and Carney agreed. After the evening meal, Len grabbed his guitar, the others took lighted torches, and all three dragged bundles of dead bamboo across a small bridge to the other side of the river to start a bonfire for their performance.

We chose a spot in the clearing about twenty yards from the sick men's huts, heaped up the dead kindling and set it alight. A Jap sentry appeared out of the jungle to see what was afoot and must have got quite a shock when we started to dance around the fire singing, "Come on and join us." . . .

With the Jap sentry looking on in bewilderment we pranced around until Charley was almost on the point of collapse.

And then at last it happened. Several skeletons emerged from the huts and walked unsteadily towards us shielding their eyes from the brightness of our fire.

For a while they stood staring at the ground in front of them, then slowly sat down. Once their eyes became accustomed to the glare of the fire they looked into the flames and not at us. Red and Charley went straight into their routine doing all the jokes which usually brought roars of laughter. The audience was unmoved. The rest of us took it in turn to try to stir some reaction but without success. Even Charley's impersonation of Shirley Temple singing "Good Ship Lollipop" failed to move—or so we thought—but when we performed our final piece and thanked them for listening they responded with an applause which, though not vigorous, was probably done with the maximum of strength left in their frail bodies.

We had to help some of them to their feet and after just a nod of the head they returned to their dreadful huts.

So ended our first night in South Tonchan. Next morning it was back to work on the railway.<sup>92</sup>

With "the Speedo" in effect, there would be no Wampo concert party productions at Tonchan South—nor would the company perform again until after the Burma and Thai halves of the railway were joined.

At the end of April, J. T. Rea recorded two important events in his diary. The first was the appearance of a Japanese cinema unit showing newsreels of their victorious Malayan campaign as well as other items to the whole camp. Since this event coincided with Emperor Hirohito's birthday, which was April 29, the I. J. A. may have intended the films to bolster their troops' resolve during their extended tour of duty in the jungle—especially now as they were implementing "the Speedo." There would be other attempts by the I. J. A. to keep their troops' morale high, including touring military bands and "comfort women."<sup>xxii</sup>

<sup>xxii</sup> These "comfort women" were frequently Korean women, but women from other conquered nations were also forced into this notorious military-sponsored prostitution as well.

The second important event was an update on the railway's progress: "The railway track was laid past Wampoh [*sic*] Central Camp on the 18th of April and it is now through to this camp. There were a couple of days hold up because some bridges had not been finished though men were working on them day and night."<sup>93</sup>

### **"Roll Out the Barrel"**

A fully recovered Jimmy Walker was back on the line as part of this rail-laying crew. A few days later, in the narrow confines of the twelve-foot-high clay walls of the Tampai Cutting at 148 Kilo, Walker discovered another reason for singing: "The pinnacle of our anguish in all the long years of our incarceration was reached that night in the Tampai Cutting. There must be a point in human misery when the soul shrieks out in rebellion; when all logical thought, all hope, is squeezed out by the unbearable weight of despair. The sheer ultimate in misery-produced madness."<sup>94</sup> Working at night in a downpour, Walker's crew was offloading steel rails from a succession of rail trucks onto the teak sleepers buried in the mud below. Cold, wet, and pushed to work at a fanatical pace—they had been laboring eighteen hours without food—"the slaves" suddenly began to sing:

"Roll out the Barrel" reverberated up that clammy canyon. It was roared out, shrieked out. It was vaguely musical and yet menacing. There was defiance in it, lunacy too. The rails were literally flung into the ooze. Wild eyes shone from mud splashed faces.

"We'll have a barrel of fun!"

The panicked Japanese officer in charge, hearing the hostile tone in their singing, jumped from the truck and called for the POW officer in charge.

Both officers knew, deep within them, that it was not a song they were hearing but the roaring waves of revolution.

The truck was emptied of its rails with fantastic speed. Then, with the cessation of activity, the song ceased. Men, panting, leaned against the clay silently awaited the next truckload.<sup>95</sup>

Walker and the rail-laying crew were not the first slaves to find strength and solidarity in singing.

### **"Hellfire Pass"**

By 25 April the area for the Kanyu Cutting was finally cleared and the POWs started to chisel down through the hill of solid rock with "hammer and tap."<sup>96</sup> As POWs from completed segments of the railway, as well as new reinforcements from Singapore, passed through neighboring Hintok on their way to camps further up the line, 600 were retained at Kanyu to ensure that the cutting would be completed on schedule. With numerous fires burning for illumination so the work could continue at night, the site resembled

something out of Gustave Doré's illustrations for Dante's *Inferno*. The POWs gave Kanyu Cutting the nickname "Hellfire Pass."

## F Force

### "A Pleasant Hilly Place"

One of the new POW contingents from Singapore was the ill-fated "F Force," composed of 7,000 British and Australian soldiers. As it had been increasingly difficult to find enough fit troops left in Changi to send Up Country, all the remaining members of the British 18th Division headquarters were placed on this draft, including Lieutenant-Colonel F. J. Dillon and Captain Charles Wilkinson. When the Japanese were informed that the numbers were lacking, the men were told "This was NOT a working party" and ordered to make up the quota by taking unfit POWs with them "so they would have a better chance of recovery with good food and in a pleasant hilly place with facilities for recreation."<sup>97</sup> Since Dillon and Wilkinson were ardent promoters of entertainment as important to any welfare program, there was every attempt to include musicians and other entertainers in the F Force drafts.

Four of the six members of the "Changi Celebrity Artists" received marching orders, including their producer, the padre and singer John Foster-Haigh, concert pianist Reginald Renison, baritone George Wall, and light tenor Aubrey King.<sup>xxiii</sup> They were ordered to bring along bands with all their musical instruments, which in this case included three pianos.<sup>98</sup> Renison, who had told Fergus Anckorn that he "couldn't go on without his music which was his life" if placed on an Up Country draft, would have something to sustain him. During his last concert in Changi, he played Chopin's "Etude Op. 10 No. 3" so beautifully that those in attendance would hold on to it as a sublime moment that would remain forever in memory.<sup>99</sup>

Morale was high as F Force departed Singapore in a series of drafts between 18 and 30 April. They were escaping Changi with its boring routine. Arriving at Ban Pong, the POWs were shocked to learn they had to march to their new camps; there were many unfit, barely ambulatory men in their midst. "Off we went," Signalman Alec Johnston bravely wrote, "whistling and singing our old favorite tunes. It would be the first and last time we did."<sup>100</sup> They soon discovered the Japanese promises were all lies. Their "rest camps" were actually work camps in the mountains near the Burmese border more than 186 miles away.

In a terrible twist of fate (as well as a turf war), F Force was not placed under the I. J. A. Southern Command but kept as a separate entity responsible to I. J. A. Malayan Command back in Singapore. The lack of cooperation between these two organizations greatly magnified the difficulty F Force had in getting food, medical services, and accommodations along the route of their march—and made conditions even worse at their border camps.

The three pianos brought from Singapore were left behind at Ban Pong with assurances that they would follow by truck. The men never saw them again. For many of the unfit who had expected to recuperate in the healthier hill-station climate, the long trudge up country through mud in the pouring rain turned into a death march. Reginald Renison, the brilliant concert pianist, was one of those brutally beaten to death and hastily buried in a roadside grave.<sup>101</sup>

When F Force reached the first of the work camps at Lower Nikki/276 Kilo in early May, they had endured two and a half weeks of forced marches. Cholera, which they picked up from being housed in a romusha camp on the way, soon ravaged their numbers. The work and living conditions at their

<sup>xxiii</sup> Those not included in the draft were violinist Denis East and piano accompanist Cyril Wycherley. It's possible that more of the 18th Division "Optimists" concert party and/or "The New Windmill Players," were included in F Force.

construction sites along the border would be among the worst on the Thai side of the railway. There would be no yasume days or recreation for the F Force men.

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The devastating effects of “the Speedo” on the POWs were by now fully apparent everywhere along the railway. Hundreds of Allied POWs and romusha were dying from hunger, disease, never-ending hard physical work, and the unimaginable brutal tactics employed by the Japanese engineers to finish their project. To satisfy the growing desperation for more laborers to supplement the work force being decimated by “the Speedo,” an additional 3,270 POWs—“H Force”—were sent up from Changi in May to join workers at Tonchan South and the Kanyu Cutting.

### “No Music. No Theatre.”

June, July, and August were the worst months of “the Speedo.” In order to meet the October deadline, the Japanese engineers increased the tempo of the work, driving the POWs and romusha ever more mercilessly. With the growing shortage of workers, the Japanese engineers insisted on a further change in the “work rules.” Over POW medical officers’ vociferous objections—and sometimes those of the Japanese POW administration as well—heavy sick were ordered carried to the railway line, where they could break rocks with hammers for ballasting.<sup>102</sup> “The men on the whole were in despair,” wrote Colonel Dillon, describing not only his F Force troops but the mental state of all the POWs working on the railway. “The choices in front of them seemed to be death from disease or never-ending toil and brutal treatment at the hands of the engineers. Their officers were unable to protect them in spite of all their efforts.”<sup>103</sup> At Rin Tin/183 Kilo, the young Dutch artist Jan van Holthe tried to document this criminal activity.

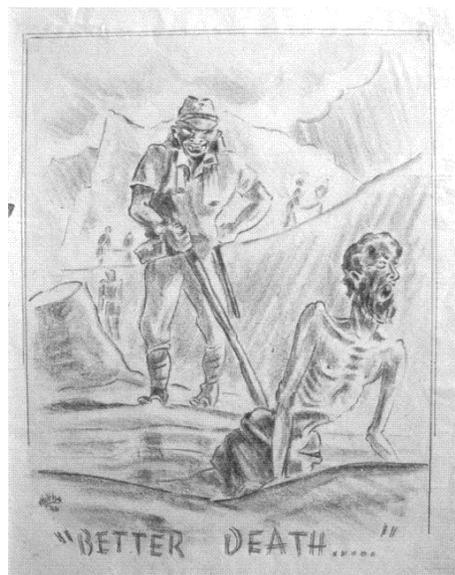


FIGURE 2.10. “BETTER DEATH.” JAN VAN HOLTHE. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

At Naka Songkurai/294 Kilo, Charles Frisby, the trumpet player who had urged the establishment of concert parties in Changi because of the good they could do for morale, sadly observed, “The two hospital

longhouses were full to overflowing whilst the three remaining huts also held patients—these were the ones whose illnesses could be attended to where they lay. . . . Our existence was bound within an acre of dense jungle. There were no concert parties in the pass! No music. No theatre. There was only the basest thread of life remaining, but still the true gravity of our position was yet to hit us!”<sup>104</sup>

The “true gravity” soon became evident. Cholera spread rapidly among the F Force border camps and then down to camps on either side. When the epidemic reached Takanun Base Camp at 223 Kilo, one of their medical officers, Hugh “Ginger” de Wardener, volunteered to care for the cholera patients in an isolation tent.<sup>xxiv</sup> At Tonchan South/131 Kilo, the Wampo POWs lost many of their comrades to the disease.<sup>105</sup> In some camps, burial parties were so overwhelmed with the number of dead that mass graves were dug to dispose of the bodies.

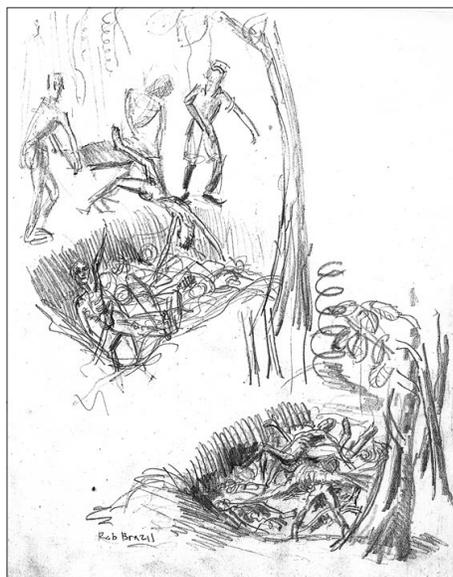


FIGURE 2.11. MASS GRAVE. THUMBNAIL SKETCH. ROBERT BRAZIL. COURTESY OF ROBERT BRAZIL.

In other camps, cremation was instituted in an attempt to stop the disease from spreading. Naka Songkurai became a death camp. Of the original 1,600 British POWs from F Force sent there, 600 died horribly. The baritone George Wall and the light tenor Aubrey King—two men who had brought such pleasure to the Changi POWs with their music—were among those who perished.<sup>106</sup>

### “Trumpeter What Are You Sounding Now?”

On Sunday 27 June at an F Force encampment on the Burma side of the border,<sup>xxv</sup> padre John Foster-Haigh surveyed the worsening health conditions and morale in his camp and agonized over whether he could do anything to make a difference:

<sup>xxiv</sup> He would later receive an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) decoration for this service.  
<sup>xxv</sup> Possibly Changara/301 Kilo.

Like the Israelites I find it difficult sometimes to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. Around us the wild Jungle exists—the home of tigers, elephants, snakes, & countless other creatures. Disease is rampant & the crowning difficulty are the roads, food shortage & the monsoon. . . . Nothing is really organized here at the moment. All fit men are taken out on working parties. Our lot is a hard one & the history of our settlement a most tragic one. Cholera is rampant & has taken over two hundred & forty of our men. Now small-pox & malaria have broken out & we are in a serious plight regarding medical stores. Our crude hospitals are full—out of 1350 men over 900 are sick. Dysentery & acute diarrhea play havoc & tropical ulcers seem to be inescapable. Exhaustion after the march & emaciation from the lack of food take their toll. We hear no cheerie conversation, no ribald songs, no sound of laughter. Long faces & embittered men live here. The going is hard. The life bitter. No church exists. Services are held in the different huts, & I have four today. Our task is Herculean for I am sure one of the great things we have to do is to infuse these men with new hope. . . . It is not easy. But when I think of all that these men have gone through & all the loved ones at home waiting their return I feel no effort is too great if by means of it these men recover their fighting spirit. I don't know which is worse—their battles or imprisonment. Sometimes one thinks the former is the easier lot.<sup>107</sup>

Foster-Haigh was keenly aware of the power of song and laughter to heal not only the psychic wounds but the physical as well. George McNeilly, the Australian YMCA representative who had sponsored Foster-Haigh's "Celebrity Artists" concerts in Changi, wrote that he was "a wonderful man and a great artist. He never tired of singing in the wards to the dying men and I can hear his voice now "Trumpeter what are you sounding now, is it the call I'm seeking?" This song had been Foster-Haigh's favorite encore number. It would soon be his turn to heed the call. Foster-Haigh died Up Country—of malnutrition.<sup>108</sup>

### An Animal-like Existence

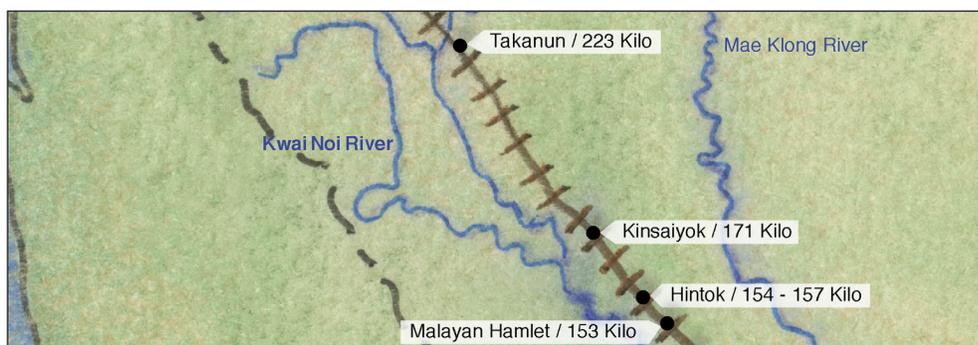


FIGURE 2.12. THAILAND RAILWAY MAP #2: HINTOK—TAKANUN.

Could conditions get any worse? To complete the bridges, embankments, and cuttings at Hintok, the POWs there had continued to work night and day without rest. By 15 July, after cholera had taken a

terrible toll in the camp and severely reduced the work force, Dunlop noted that his POWs had worked sixty-two days without a yasume day; by 15 August it would be eighty days.<sup>109</sup> Their evening singsongs and moonlight concerts had long since disappeared. This was true everywhere on the railway.

In the past, Tom Boardman had played his camp-made ukulele to entertain himself and others in his hut. That impulse had disappeared. In a succinct telegraphic style, he summed up his four months at 226 Kilo, the Takanun overflow camp:<sup>xxvi</sup>

May 1943—August 1943—Takanon [*sic*—A horrible camp—worst experience of captivity—monsoon season developed rain—rain—rain—accommodated in tent liners—rained in—cholera strikes—many dead—malaria—dysentery—bathing in R. Kwai forbidden—lice—crabs—bridge and railway work—Tamils . . .—very depressed and weary—mosquitoes galore.<sup>110</sup>

Stripped of their humanity, the POWs were reduced to living an animal-like existence. In order to survive, men suppressed their emotional life, sealing off their feelings for the sick and dying in their midst, and focused their whole attention on their own survival from one day to the next. The truly fortunate had a mate they could count on to care for them if they got sick. Without sing-alongs or any type of impromptu concerts, the camaraderie they promoted disappeared and with them reminders of the men's culture and values.

## Welfare Attempts

Despite the horror all around them, some POW officers and other ranks tried to combat the emotional and psychological toll the unbearable situation was taking on those who remained alive. The doctors did all they could to keep the physical body going despite being thwarted by the lack of medicines and proper surgical equipment. But their efforts weren't enough: there had to be something to sustain the spirit as well. As he had done back in Changi, Lieutenant John Coast encouraged other officers in Takanun/223 Kilo to join him in an "educational scheme":

As more than half the camp were so sick after six weeks that even the Nips couldn't see how to get work out of such derelict bodies, we tried to organise every conceivable type of lecture and talk to interest the sick men in the dreary hours which they must otherwise spend lying silently and painfully on their bamboo slats . . .—anything was of interest to those interest-starved men, and the most boring lecture was greedily listened to. Also, we took it in turns whenever we could to read books to them.<sup>111</sup>

The men at Takanun were also fortunate in having "the indefatigable Frankie Quinton who had carried his accordion all the way up county, and who on many evenings, having done a day's work, gave the lads a half-hour of 'old favourites' in one or other tent, or he would even play while they queued up for the

<sup>xxvi</sup> In POW literature this camp is identified as 226 K, but it has more recently been identified as Takanun North/225 Kilo.

evening meal. All these things helped.”<sup>112</sup>



FIGURE 2.13. FRANKIE QUINTON. PRE-WAR PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TOM BOARDMAN.

Down the line in the Kanyu camps, the POWs had not been so fortunate. Norman Smith, who suffered from debilitating bouts of amoebic dysentery, had contracted beriberi, and “Fizzer” Pearson persuaded their medical officer to send Smith downriver to a base hospital camp so he could receive better care. His departure would jeopardize the fate of his “cooks and batmen” musicians.

Fortunately, the doctor at Kanyu had been “a keen supporter of the entertainments we had organized both back in Changi and around the bonfires in Kanu [sic]. He contrived a way to keep together as many of the actors, singers and orchestra as he could, putting us on the list for the first barges to arrive for moving us south.”<sup>113</sup> Smith and his “light-er sick” musicians were sent to the base hospital at Chungkai. Pearson, Spong, and the other “cockney jokers” would soon follow. But by the time it was their turn to go downriver, Chungkai was so crammed with the sick and dying that they would be retained temporarily across the river at Tamarkan instead.

### “The Show Must Go On”

When the former Wampo POWs arrived at Kinsaiyok Main Camp at the end of July, they were immediately put to work with the others trying to complete a long earthen causeway for the railway trace using rocks quarried in one of the camps as ballast.<sup>xxvii</sup> During their next two and a half months at Kinsaiyok, there would be no opportunity for a concert party—or even impromptu sing-alongs. As Han Samethini passed through Kinsaiyok on his way to a work camp farther up the line, he learned that his brother, Frank, was in one of the hospital tents there. He was given ten minutes to visit before his unit moved on.<sup>114</sup>

One of the few records of entertainment taking place during the worst months of “the Speedo” are

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Kinsaiyok Jungle Camp 3/159 Kilo, Kinsaiyok Jungle Camp 1/161 Kilo, Kinsaiyok Jungle Camp 2/168 Kilo, and Kinsaiyok Main Camp/171 Kilo.*

those in which Jimmy Walker appeared. By August, Walker and his rail-laying crew were “somewhere in the Kinsaiyok area.” He recalled “a typical night” in camp:

After a 15 hour shift with the Rail Gang I stagger back into camp. Absolutely knackered. But even before I reach my bed space, I hear, “Walker, old man, I’ve arranged with the Dutch chappies to put on a show tonight. How about some of that stuff you did at Keppel? . . . You will? . . . Oh, good show.” The officer is vibrant, well rested and well fed. He has no conception of the work done on the railway by skeleton slaves like myself . . . the show must go on!<sup>115</sup>

Walker’s first impulse had been to refuse, but he couldn’t resist the call to help his fellow POWs.

I wrack my brains for something I can do alone which will be amusing to a multi-lingual audience. Unlike the previous concert party at Keppel Harbour in Singapore, audiences in the deep jungle could well be a mixture of races and languages. Men of the Dutch East Indies, black and white from Java and Sumatra: all Dutch.

I recall my father telling me about a comedian of our native Tyneside, named “J. C. Scatter.” His act, which I had never seen, about a miner, very tipsy having enjoyed his Saturday night in Newcastle. He awaits his home bound bus to Seaton Burn, a mining village 3 or 4 miles north of the city whilst eating from a paper of fish and chips.

He staggers on to the bus but he is too late to get a seat and must stand in the aisle and now having the tricky job of hanging on to the safety strap while holding and eating his supper. As the bus swerves and rocks he falls on seated passengers, raises his cap in apology and thus reaches his destination—all this done in mime.

Once on the roadway he staggers along whilst eating. Paper empty, he slaps and crumples it then throws it to the ground. He stumbles, walks a few yards, stops, turns around, gazes at the discarded paper-ball and then totters back to where it lies. After a few tumbling efforts, he stands erect and opens out the paper. With studied precision he forms the old newspaper into a gutter and directs the drains of vinegar down his throat. That done, he again ceremoniously makes a paper-ball and throws it down. Again he staggers off, stops, turns and retrieves the paper. This time he takes off his cap, throws it [to] earth, picks up the paper, carefully smoothes it out and rubs the greasy side on his hair. Finally the paper is thrown away, he gropes around, finds and dons his cap and exits left.<sup>116</sup>

The “Dutch chappies” Walker mentioned also rose to the occasion: “Some camp ‘business-men’

would boil up a mixture of burnt rice and Goola-Malacca sugar and sell it as ‘hot sweet coffee.’ At one show the Dutch lads were singing a song in their own language and I asked for a translation. It was, ‘It is hot. It is sweet. But it is NOT coffee.’”<sup>117</sup>

### Signs of Relief

By mid-August, the monsoon rains started to abate. With the improved weather conditions, the Kanyu and Hintok cuttings neared completion. As they did, the intensity of “the Speedo” for the POW and romusha work force there began to lessen. When the Hintok Cutting was finished on 26 August, the Japanese commandant declared they would celebrate the accomplishment with a yasume the next day—the first in over three months.<sup>118</sup>

For the romusha, celebrations included a coming-of-age ritual for two young Tamil boys and Muslims celebrating Ramadan. For the POWs, there was no celebration.<sup>119</sup> The human cost incurred in the maniacal drive to complete the cuttings at Hintok and Kanyu had been too great. In July, cholera had taken a terrible toll in the Hintok camps. At nearby Hellfire Pass, the POWs and romusha had been forced to work in twelve- to eighteen-hour shifts as they struggled to cut down through the limestone to a depth of nearly sixty-six feet (twenty meters). By the time this cutting was finished, 400 POWs and countless romusha had died.<sup>120</sup> Similar horror stories could be told about camps up and down the line.

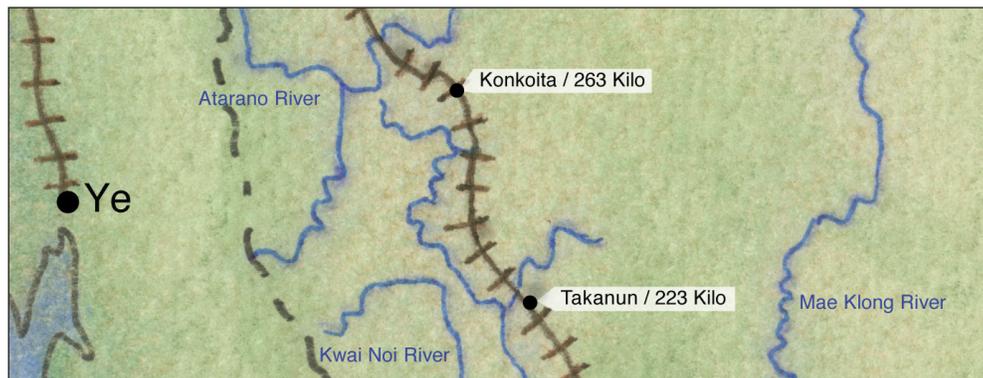


FIGURE 2.14. THAILAND RAILWAY MAP #3. TAKANUN—KONKOITA.

As the railway construction pushed on toward completion, those in the work camps at the lower end of the line, like the POWs at Hintok, found yasume days reinstated. At the railhead, where the railway was still under construction, the POWs continued to be driven mercilessly.

Everywhere on the railway was an enormous hunger for something to relieve the stress of the unending labor and brutality that had wreaked havoc on minds and bodies—some distraction to take them out of themselves for a few moments, like the lectures and sing-alongs at Takanun that had proven so helpful. One evening in the staging/transit camp at Tarsao, John Brennan noted that a Dutch POW passing through “sat on a log with a slush lamp alongside him, played a guitar and sang. In a short time he had an audience of several hundred men listening to hit parade songs of the pre-war era.”<sup>121</sup> In most camps, listening to music had not been possible for months.

Finally, on 17 October 1943, the two ends of the railway were joined near Konkoita/263 Kilo, Thailand. “The Speedo” was over.

*In contrast to the Thailand side of the railway, the POW workers on the Burma side were primarily Australian, Dutch/Indonesian, and American. Although their construction experience was similar to that on the Thailand side—except for the Allied bombing raids they endured—the “jungle shows” they produced to help them survive were not. Variety shows, farces, pantomimes, and cabarets—topped by the hilarious Aussie antics subverting a Japanese attempt to produce a propaganda film—make their story unique.*

## Endnotes

- 1 See David Boggett, “Notes on the Thai-Burma Railway,” Parts I–IX, XI, Journal of Kyoto Seika University (2000–2005).
- 2 See MacPherson Naming Standards, [http://www.mansell.com/pow\\_resources/camplists/death\\_rr/deathrailwaycamplist.html](http://www.mansell.com/pow_resources/camplists/death_rr/deathrailwaycamplist.html).
- 3 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 62.
- 4 Walker, *Of Rice and Men*, 23.
- 5 Peek, 26.
- 6 Rea, Diary, 27 November 1942.
- 7 Gibson, Memoir, 2.
- 8 Chalker, Letter, 3 March 2000.
- 9 Chalker, Letter, 3 March 2000.
- 10 Norman Smith, 35–36.
- 11 Gibson, Memoir, 2–3.
- 12 Rea, Diary, 27 November 1942.
- 13 Peek, 44.
- 14 Peek, 102.
- 15 Gibson, Memoir, 3.
- 16 Gibson, Memoir, 3.
- 17 Gale, Diary, 2? December 1942.
- 18 Gale, Diary, 2? December 1942.
- 19 Peek, 44.
- 20 Peek, 44–45; Godber, Diary, 1 December 1942.
- 21 Peek, 44–45.
- 22 Peek, 45.
- 23 Godber, Diary, 1 December 1942.
- 24 Peek, 45–46.
- 25 Peek, 45–46.
- 26 Wiseman, Diary, 1 December 1942.
- 27 Godber, Diary, 1 December 1942.
- 28 Peek, 46–47.
- 29 Godber, Diary, 1 December 1942.
- 30 Gibson, Memoir, 2–4.
- 31 Gibson, Memoir, 2–4.
- 32 Gibson, Memoir, 2–4.
- 33 Peek, 102.
- 34 Gibson, Memoir, 4.
- 35 Peek, 102.
- 36 Gibson, Memoir, 4.
- 37 Gibson, Memoir, 4.
- 38 Godber, Diary, 10 December 1942.
- 39 Chalker, Letter, 3 March 2000.
- 40 Gimson, Diary, 25 December 1942.

- 41 Chalker, Letter, 3 March 2000.
- 42 Gimson, Diary, 25 December 1942.
- 43 Rea, Diary, 25 December 1942.
- 44 Rea, Diary, 26 December 1942.
- 45 Rea, Diary, 26 December 1942.
- 46 Gibson, Memoir, 3
- 47 Gibson, Memoir, 3.
- 48 Rea, Diary, 26 December 1942.
- 49 Rea, Diary, 27 December 1942.
- 50 Walker, *Of Rice and Men*, 79.
- 51 Barnard, 60.
- 52 Barnard, 60–61.
- 53 Barnard, 60.
- 54 Rea, Diary, 2 January 1943.
- 55 Rea, Diary, 2 January 1943.
- 56 Rea, Diary, 2 January 1943.
- 57 Gimson, Diary, 1 January 1943.
- 58 Rea, Diary, 3 January 1943.
- 59 Godber, Diary, 3 January 1943.
- 60 Wiseman, Diary, 2 January 1943.
- 61 Godber, Diary, 3 January 1943.
- 62 Rea, Diary, 3 January 1943.
- 63 Gimson, Diary, 5 January 1943.
- 64 Rea, Diary, 2 January 1943.
- 65 Rea, Diary, 26 January 1943.
- 66 Rea, Diary, 26 January 1943.
- 67 Dunlop, Diary, 20 February 1943.
- 68 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 56.
- 69 Bakker, quoted in “Han Samethini Remembered,” 5:16.
- 70 Gale, Diary, 25 February 1943.
- 71 Godber, Diary, 25 February 1943.
- 72 Gale, Diary, 25 February 1943.
- 73 Gibson, Memoir, 3.
- 74 Godber, Diary, 25 February 1943.
- 75 Godber, Diary, 24 February 1943.
- 76 Dunlop, Diary, 26 February 1943.
- 77 Walker, E-mail, 25 January 2005.
- 78 Anckorn, Interview, 37–39.
- 79 Anckorn, Interview, 37–39.
- 80 Dunlop, Diary, 6 March 1943.
- 81 Parkin, Letter, 27 August 2003.
- 82 Dunlop, Diary, 19 March 1943.
- 83 N. Smith, 35.
- 84 Dunlop, 231 pb.
- 85 Dunlop, 242 pb.
- 86 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 75.
- 87 Ffolkes, Letter to Len Gibson, 5 May 1957.
- 88 Gibson, Letter, 23 April 2004.
- 89 Gibson, Letter, n.d.
- 90 Walker, *Of Rice and Men*, 36.
- 91 Gibson, Memoir, 5.

- 92 Gibson, Memoir, 5–6.
- 93 Rea, Diary, 29? April 1943.
- 94 Walker, *Of Rice and Men*, 29.
- 95 Walker, *Of Rice and Men*, 28–31.
- 96 Second Lieutenant Takumi Kamuro in Tamayama, 113.
- 97 Dillon, “Report,” 2.
- 98 Dunlop, Diary, 1 May 1943.
- 99 McNeilly, “Changi Celebrity Artists,” 2.
- 100 Alec Johnston, Diary, in Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 77.
- 101 Anckorn, Letter, 17 July 2000.
- 102 Dunlop, Diary, 12 June 1943.
- 103 Dillon, “Report,” 7.
- 104 Frisby, 264.
- 105 Gibson, Memoir, 7.
- 106 McNeilly, “Celebrity Artists,” 2.
- 107 Foster-Haigh, Diary, 27 June 1943 [21].
- 108 McNeilly, “Celebrity Artists,” 1.
- 109 Dunlop, 298, 313.
- 110 Tom Boardman, Notes, 5.
- 111 Coast, 124.
- 112 Coast, 124.
- 113 Norman Smith, 37.
- 114 Frank Samethini, 52–53.
- 115 Walker, Interview, 16; Letter, 10 April 2005.
- 116 Walker, Interview, 16; Letter, 10 April 2005.
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- 119 Dunlop, Diary, 27 August 1943.
- 120 Hellfire Pass Memorial pamphlet, 25.
- 121 Brennan, Letter, 5 July 2000.

