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Chapter 4. The Interval: Thailand and Burma

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Chapter 4: The Interval

“Jungle Shows:” Thailand and Burma

When the Thailand and Burma sides of the railway were joined near Konkoita on 17 October, the worst was over for the sick, exhausted, and demoralized POW survivors—or so they hoped. They had built the railway, and now they could return to Changi, Singapore, to a world they had mythologized into an ideal “rest camp.” As the Japanese had anticipated, the end of construction had coincided with the end of the rainy season, so their troops and supplies could now be moved into Burma in readiness for the “liberation” of India.

Command Performances

As the end of major construction neared, concert parties were ordered to give “command performances” to celebrate the event. Though the prisoners’ participation in these festivities was morally questionable, most POW officers in charge knew they had no option but to comply. Looked at positively, the performances provided an opportunity to jump-start the rehabilitation process.

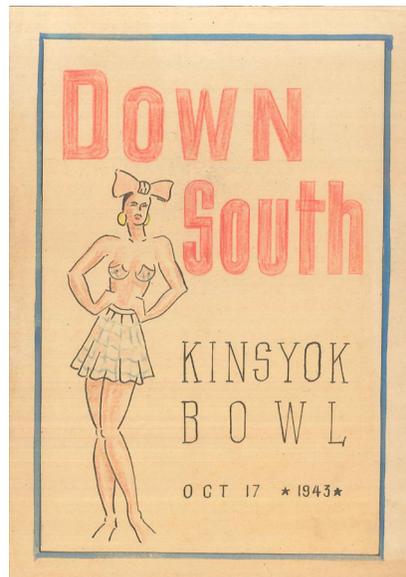


FIGURE 4.1. SOUVENIR PROGRAM. *DOWN SOUTH*. IWM CR (93.17.1).

At Kinsaiyok,ⁱ Thailand, the former Wampo concert party producer Charles Woodhams hadn’t mounted a production since late February, but he and musical director Reginald Dixon were able to cobble together a revue for command performance on 17 October. *Down South* was performed in a nearby natural amphitheatre called the “Kinsaiyok Bowl.” Since many of the performers were in hospital or scattered elsewhere, only six turns were on the playbill instead of the dozen or more usually presented. There was

ⁱ For this chapter, all “kilo” designations for the various camps have been dropped unless they refer to a new camp or are necessary for clarification.

no interval. The only indication that the chorus line “girls” —or a few of them, anyway—performed is the title of the opening number, “A Few Kicks.” The last item on the bill was the re-creation of a minstrel show from which the revue took its name. It featured “‘Babette,’ Douglas Sutor, Frank Wildman & The Coloured Folk.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The burly female impersonator “Babette” would have made a splendid “Mammy” figure, and given the image on the program cover, it is likely “the girls” appeared among “The Coloured Folk” as well. Given their recent experience, the white performers in blackface portraying black slaves in this minstrel show wouldn’t have been mocking them but identifying with them. The revue’s title may have been an allusion to the POWs’ expectations of being sent back “down south” to Singapore.

That same evening farther up the line at Takanun, Lieutenant John Coast witnessed his camp’s command performance:

a combined Jap-British show (by order) under an atap roof hastily erected on the square, a show in which British performers were exceedingly few and very reluctant to appear. As with all the Nip shows, it went on for hours; the Koreans were all roaring drunk on an issue of a pint of beer a man, and the British audience escaped as early as it could to the huts, where it examined and criticized the characteristics of the Japanese race till far into the night.²

A week later, on 24 October, a Japanese army touring band gave a concert at Takanun to which several medical officers, including Robert Hardie, had been “invited” along with a “motley collection of Japanese, Siamese, Tamilsⁱⁱⁱ and British POWs. . . . The hit of the evening was a war piece by a Japanese composer—*The Air War*—a terrific hullabaloo of drums, sirens, thunderous crashes and aero-engine noises from the strings. Banzai! Banzai!”^{iv3} The inclusiveness on the part of the Japanese regarding the composition of their invited audience is telling, supporting as it did their East Asia Co-Prosperity ideal.

There was a concert of music at Paya Thanzu Taung, Burma, during the first week of November, and at Aunganaung a joint Japanese-Australian variety show occurred on 2 November as part of a full-day celebration that included a “race meeting” for the Australians celebrating “Melbourne Cup Day.” During the late-morning concert, Australian POWs and Japanese soldiers performed alternately, the highlight of which was a “star” turn by Hochi, the Japanese commandant. “This distinguished officer gave a war dance,” noted Arthur Bancroft, “which consisted of the flashing of this two-handed sword with an accompaniment of silly symphony shrieks. Strict orders had been quickly passed by our officers to maintain a straight face. This was easier said than done.”⁴ Hochi’s traditional kabuki-like samurai dance with its highly stylized movements and vocalizations appeared utterly foreign to the POWs, ignorant as they were of this venerable Japanese tradition.

The concert lasted four hours and was, in Rohan Rivett’s estimation, so awful that many of the POWs left before it was over. He was among them. After lunch, the troops flocked to their homemade “lawn” and “paddock” and a performance more to their liking, one that also had “girls” parading on the arms of their beaus in “frocks.”⁵ The concert that evening was all POW—except that it, too, concluded with a repeat

ⁱⁱ With this production, Bill James (“Babette”) takes over responsibility for costuming the shows at Kinsaiyok.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term Tamils was used to refer to the indigenous contract workers generally but could also refer more specifically to another group of “romusha” originally from India who had been brought into Malaya as workers at the British-owned rubber plantations and tin mines.

^{iv} A patriotic battle cry. The band may have performed in the celebrations at Konkoita earlier.

of Hochi's dance that Rivett (who sat through the whole concert this time) interpreted metaphorically as a conflict between Good and Evil.⁶

The Interval: Mid-October '43-February '44

After the two ends of the railway were joined, there was a sudden decrease in the number of workers needed to finish the ballasting, set up the water stations, and fell the wood required for the steam engines. For the next three and a half months there would be a lull—an interval—that would give the I. J. A. time to decide what to do with the thousands of POWs and romusha in railway camps on both sides of the border. With their whole focus on completing the railway, the Japanese had apparently not given much thought to what would happen afterward.

While awaiting that decision, the POWs in small camps were moved to larger, more centrally located hospital/transit camps. Not until after the Christmas holidays would most of them learn what was next in store. Physically and psychologically exhausted, the other ranks laborers had little will left to live. This breather gave the POW administrative and medical officers time to focus their attention on restoring the men's physical and psychological health before their expected return to Singapore. To accomplish these goals, camps as well as men needed rehabilitating.

By the end of "the Speedo," many up country hospital/transit camps had become sprawling hellholes. Administrative and medical staff were overwhelmed, and as hundreds of additional POWs from the smaller camps arrived daily, housing and medical facilities already overstretched quickly became more so. Food and medical supplies were still in short supply, with no sign of impending change. Thousands of men in close quarters with nothing to do only exacerbated the situation and an atmosphere of despair pervaded the camps. Welfare schemes that could engage the POWs in physical and mental activities needed to be implemented immediately in order to give the men something to focus on rather than brooding on their troubles. Some of the most effective were instituted by Weary Dunlop at Tarsao.

In late October, Medical Officer Lieutenant-Colonel Weary Dunlop left Hintok Cutting to take charge of the large hospital and convalescent depot in the hellhole of Tarsao. On arrival, he began the struggle to reorganize the hospital and clean up the dreadfully unhygienic conditions, which had led to several recent instances of cholera. Near the end of November, he turned his attention to rehabilitation. Dunlop knew the men needed something to do to occupy their minds and bodies. If there were only so many camp duties and too many men to do them, then other activities had to be found that involved the POWs, even the light sick, in their own convalescence. Team sports were out of the question, but activities such as arts and crafts, cottage industries, and entertainment were possible. When Dunlop sought permission from the Japanese command to institute a comprehensive rehabilitation scheme, they recognized the benefit of turning the POWs back into potential workers once again.⁷ The first step was to locate a few would-be entertainers who might organize weekly concert parties.

"Memories, Imaginations and Natural Inventiveness"

Dunlop's rehabilitation plans were among the most elaborate on the railway, but other officers and other ranks recognized the same need and tried to follow suit. Starting concert parties "from scratch" (as at Tarsao) or re-starting them to provide entertainment on a regular basis would be a tall order for the small number of entertainers who, after months of back breaking labor, debilitating illnesses, and loss of their numbers, were in need of rehabilitation themselves. As in the past, potential performers were encouraged to volunteer. While laughter, of course, would be the best medicine for the POWs' ills, finding

someone who could sing or play a musical instrument was far easier than finding comedians who could provoke laughter beyond telling dirty jokes. Given what the POWs had endured, there was some question as to whether they would ever laugh again.

226 Kilo. Taking a cue from what John Coast and others had done in the Takanun main camp during “the Speedo,” a concerted effort was made in 226 Kilo, the Takanun overflow camp, to engage the POWs in activities that might alter their attitudes and the overall depressing atmosphere. “Lacking anything in the way of reference, relying purely on our memories, imaginations and natural inventiveness,” recalled Ronald Hastain, “we devised lively and informative talks, which stimulated interest even in those whose natural powers of perceptiveness were not of the most brilliant.”⁸ Their effort also involved weekly entertainment.

And on Saturday nights (or their equivalent, for any night before a *yasume* was Saturday to us), some dried bamboo would be piled in the centre of the camp square. Around the fire we would cluster in a wide circle and the accordion player would render the old tunes that had begun to have such an effect of pleasant nostalgia. There was also a performer on a ukulele made from an old cigar box and a strand of wire. (“Chinese Laundry Blues,” and “When I’m Cleaning Windows!”)⁹

The accordion player was Frankie Quinton; the performer with the ukulele he’d made back in Changi was Tom Boardman.

With little encouragement volunteers would come forward and sing. Sometimes the old sentimental ballads, sometimes the pathetic crooner warbling into a bit of tin on the end of a bamboo stick, to represent the “mike.” Then there was the raconteur of the *risqué* story and the determined reciter of “If” or “Gunga Din.”

When the fire died down and the last strains of “When Day Is Done,” had come from the overworked accordion, we would drift off to our huts, with memories flooding in as a result of hearing the familiar tunes. One could reconstruct one’s life from hearing the old, oft-plugged tunes of the years before the war. The tunes often made men talk.¹⁰

Hastain’s observations on entertainment’s effectiveness on the POWs’ sensibilities illustrate the crucial role it played as part of rehabilitation schemes. Music, with its ability to unlock memories, penetrated the POWs’ protective emotional armor with recollections of something other than the horrors of the railway. If hearing familiar songs helped them begin to “reconstruct” their lives, it also brought them more fully into the present, encouraging them to reconnect with each other. As with any therapeutic treatment, constant reinforcement was required for lasting effect. It wasn’t long before Hastain noticed, “The atmosphere of the camp changed. A fervent interest in all sorts of matters was engendered. There was

a questing for truth and knowledge.”¹¹

Takanun Main Camp. Meanwhile, a trio of talented men worked to establish a concert party in the main camp. Corporal Leo Britt had been a producer in “The Mummie Bees” concert party back in Changi;^v and Captain Gibby Inglefield, a choral conductor in the 18th Division; but Lieutenant Gus Harffey, the self-styled swing band conductor, had never, as far as is known, performed in any Changi entertainment. In seeking approval for a concert party, they were fortunate to have I. J. A. Group II Commandant Lieutenant-Colonel Yanagida in Takanun.^{vi} Among the POWs he had a reputation for taking a sincere interest in their welfare. He readily approved their request.¹²

The first shows (27 November and 4 December) offered by Harffey and Britt were “Amateur Night” contests that were really auditions for the concert party.¹³ Once the finalists were chosen, the official “Takanun Players” was born, with Harffey as officer in charge. Inglefield in the meantime had been recruiting singers for a choir. With a concert party formed, Yanagida gave permission for a theatre to be built and agreed to relieve the “artistes” of other camp duties so they could rehearse.¹⁴ What they built wasn’t an open-air theatre but a proscenium theatre with wings, an orchestra pit, and a “sort of dressing-room behind” on a sandy bar near the bathing point on the Kwai Noi.¹⁵ Audience seating was sculpted into the high riverbank facing the stage. It was called the “Beach Pavilion Theatre” in remembrance of famous seaside resort theatres back home.

Swim for Supper

Swim for Supper, the appropriately named first show that opened the theatre on 11 December—an hour of swing music by “Gus Harffey and his boys”—immediately livened up the camp atmosphere.¹⁶ Elsewhere, Inglefield’s choir began a series of carol services in hospital wards. And a week later, Leo Britt staged his first theatrical revue.

In this revue Medical Officer Hugh “Ginger” de Wardener, already renowned for his selfless treatment of cholera patients, made his theatrical debut—as a ballet danseur. His partner—the ballerina—in this farcical pas de deux was Lieutenant Douglas Morris. De Wardener retained vivid memories of their performers:^{vii}

I wouldn’t forget it; it was my first contribution. . . . And it lasted three and a half minutes. And we practiced for nine hours [for] this ballet. And there was this fellow who actually played the squeezebox [when] we practiced.^{viii} . . . Oh, yes, the whole thing was comic . . . a lot of falling about, but in time with the music, and so on. And it worked very well. . . . [Morris] was small and I was relatively big, so that worked well. . . . I had to catch him. And I did, two or three times. Then I missed him, you see, and he flew through the air. But it was [the] sand [stage floor he landed on].¹⁷

Audio



4.1

^v He had been sent up country from Chungkai after staging the Christmas show there in 1942.

^{vi} Yanagida had moved his headquarters to Takanun in August so he could better supervise the treatment of his POWs during the final months of “the Speedo.”

^{vii} This routine had been standard fare in military concert parties for a long time.

^{viii} This accordionist was most likely Frankie Quinton.

In rehearsal for Christmas was an even bigger show: a pantomime—*Babes in Thailand*—based on the traditional British panto *Babes in the Woods*, but rewritten by Harffey.

Aungganaung. Before the concert party at Aungganaung, Burma, could perform again, the theatre had to be refurbished. In the months since its last use, it had suffered from neglect and the monsoon rains. The hard-packed mud stage had to be resurfaced, a new atap roof attached, and the orchestra pit drained. When all was ready, amateur producer Wally McQueen and his troupe put on another of their variety shows. But this time instead of the anticipated roar of approval, the audience thought the three-piece band tiresome and McQueen’s repeat of his monkey act a bore.¹⁸ Unable to come up with any new musical arrangements or comic routines, McQueen, like Johnny Jevons before him, had fallen back on sure-fire content from his last show. But his audience, though, was ready for something new and different, not a rehash of old material—an important lesson for any would-be producers to learn.

As a professional producer, Norman Carter, still out of favor with Colonel Ramsay for his salacious *Radiosities* production back in April, knew he could rescue the situation. As he had proved in the past, what the troops needed to engage their minds and emotions was something with characters and a story, not another a variety show. He asked the padre to inquire whether he might be allowed to put on a pantomime of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* if he promised that “it would be as clean as Mum’s Monday wash.”¹⁹ Given the camp’s desperate need for entertainment, Ramsay gave Carter another opportunity to prove his worth.

Carter enlisted Wally McQueen’s performers and stagehands to help produce the pantomime. Discovering Frank Purtell, his old Bicycle Camp wardrobe master, in the camp, Carter engaged his services once again as well.^{ix} On Purtell’s recommendation, he recruited Frank Brydges as his set designer and painter. Pinched tarpaulins served as material for scenery backdrops, and a dead tree trunk was shaped into the magic boulder for the “open sesame” scene. Various colored stones were crushed into dry powder for paint. When Brydges showed Carter sketches for the different sets, he remarked, “Nice work Frank, but what are you going to paint with?” Brydges bent over half a kerosene tin filled with water and produced—a shaving brush!²⁰ And thus, the pantomime of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*—in a shortened forty-minute (“potted”) version with the forty thieves cut to four by casting and costuming limitations—was in the works. The Aungganaung POWs, starved for entertainment, would feed on rumors about the show until it opened on Christmas Day.

Shimo Songkurai. At the F Force encampment at Shimo (Lower) Songkurai, a small concert was held in the dysentery ward, the initial attempt at starting a concert party as part of their rehabilitation program. Stanley Wood-Higgs, one of the patients, remembered a parody sung to the nursery rhyme tune “Three Blind Mice”:

Three times a night.

Three times a night.

See how we run.

See how we run.

We all sit out on the bog in a row,

Cursing the War and the people we know.

^{ix} Purtell had been the wardrobe master for the Pow-Wow Concert Party shows in Bicycle Camp, Java.

*We'll all be happy when we don't go,
Three times a night.²¹*

Though still deadly, dysentery was now something that could be laughed at. Wood-Higgs admitted they hadn't had such "good fun" in a very long time. Two days later commandant Colonel F. J. Dillon and his assistant Major Wilde further revved up the troops' morale by performing in a concert for the entire camp. It was the first concert since they had left Changi six months earlier.²²

Paya Thanzu Taung. At Paya Thanzu Taung, Burma, the Dutch entertainer Wim Kan was dealing with his own problems in keeping his cabaret going. Even during the worst months of "the Speedo" he had been able to produce some sort of entertainment for the Dutch/Indonesian troops. But since his reprimand for singing the Dutch national anthem at Retpu on 4 September, Kan had come under suspicion for subversive activity. After his cabaret on 16 October, his songbook had been confiscated and inspected for inappropriate content. When he sought clearance to deliver his humorous theatre anecdotes in a cabaret on 31 October, he had been denied permission, informed by the Japanese censor that his stories weren't funny. But Kan inserted them in between turns in the show anyway and crowed, "There was lots of laughter," in his diary afterward.²³

For his 14 November cabaret, Kan used the same song, *Whitte muizen* ("White Mice"), to open and close the show and introduced two new songs he had written to confront activities by fellow POWs he felt were undermining their ability to recover their equilibrium.²⁴

"Everything Points To It"

In *Alles wijst erop* ("Everything Points to It"), Kan attacked hopes about the end of the war generated by false "prophets," who claimed to have divined "signs" about its progress. The song has a unique strophe-antistrophe structure. In one stanza, "pertinent signs" are read by one prophet as proof that the war will soon be over: "Really, everything points to it." In the next stanza, it is the absence of these same "signs" that leads another prophet to believe it will end shortly: "Really, it's nearly over." The song concludes with an epode presenting a third point of view that mocks both types of prophets for spreading false hopes.

*Masters, in [your] conclusions, you claim all sorts of pertinent nonsense
With an important air. I notice that the time affects your talk.
Your second childhood is not far off.
Really, everything points to it.
Really, you should put a stop to it as quickly as possible.
Slowly but for certain you are growing senile: all those conclusions are infantile.
See how slowly you decay from an intelligent man into a chicken without a head.²⁵*

“Normal and Abnormal”

In his other song, *Normaal en abnormal* (“Normal and Abnormal”), Kan tackled the POWs’ fears that after years of imprisonment they would never be able to readjust to normal life. Kan tries to convince them that what they did every day as prisoners in order to survive—actions that in the twisted logic conditioned by their situation had become “normal”—should be understood as temporary, not permanent.

The lyrics for the last verse state the present case:

*And when you see all these things clearly before your eyes,
You often get the feeling of: I'll never be there again.
This abnormal life seems the normal life.
The past becomes a kind of fairy-tale.
It seems more normal to sleep by the railway tracks than
Cuddled up in Mitropa's^x sleeping-car;
To make dinner of rat livers is more real than: “Butcher, an ounce of ground beef!”
Because of this necessity one often forgets the temporariness.*

In the final refrain, the perspective is changed to the future, when the war is over and the men are home once again:

*But one day you are eating at Heck's^{xi}
Till a raw scream signals panic.
After you've inquired about it, you know the reason:
A huge rat walked straight through the public dining room.
After hearing this news, you stare at your veal liver . . .
Nauseated, you suddenly remember the rat from the past,
And you cannot explain anymore how for two years
You did the abnormal and called it normal.²⁶*

[The complete lyrics to both songs are found in the “FEPOW Songbook.”]

Instead of receiving the usual congratulations and gifts from the Japanese when the cabaret was over, Kan learned his show had caused considerable consternation. Was it thought the framing song “White Mice” might be making covert comments about the POWs as caged laboratory animals? Did the Japanese suspect that “Everything Points to It” (which dismisses predictions about the end of the war) might, in fact, be giving credence to them? Did they see his use of the future tense in the conclusion of “Normal and

^x A European railway famous for its sleeping cars.

^{xi} A well-known Dutch restaurant.

Abnormal” as somehow predicting its end as well? Once again, it must have been difficult for the Japanese to understand Kan’s ironic tone and topsy-turvy logic: surely he must be putting something over on them—the audience’s laughter confirmed it. They may have been right. Kan later confided to his diary, “The Jap was being difficult; every time now something was ‘no good.’”²⁷

Hindato/198 Kilo. Meanwhile, back across the border in Thailand, Jimmy Walker and his rail-laying crew had been moved from the Kinsaiyok area further up the line to Hindato/198 Kilo rather than down the line as expected. Now that the railway work was done, their Japanese commandant, Major Chida, put his own rehabilitation scheme into effect. One of his projects was to have the POWs build a roadway through the jungle paved with millions of smooth pebbles laboriously dredged up from the nearby riverbed.²⁸ At least that’s how Walker understood what they were doing. But given Chida’s later projects at Nong Pladuk,^{xii} a better explanation might be that he was having the POWs create a Zen-inspired “dry river” landscape.

More important to the POWs’ morale, though, were the camp concerts Walker and others performed during their yasume days. “Two lads” produced a song for one of the shows, he recalled, that was “written to the rhythm of the train. It went something like this [singing]:

*Way up in old Kinsaiyok^{xiii}
Where all the girls are Thai-o
There’s lots of hot sweet coffee,
Lots of peanut toffee.
If you hear a sort of rumble,
Then [a] groan and then a grumble,
Don’t [you] shake at the knees,
Don’t you rush to grab a rifle,
Stick around, get an eye full,
It’s coming through the trees.
Hop along aboard, boys,
Now you know.
It’s the express to Kinsaiyok.*

*We built that railroad; made it run.
Then we thought, “That’s our work done.”
But the Nips said, “No, no, don’t you go.
You’ve only just begun.”
And so we came to Hindato,*

^{xii} See Chapter 7: “The Show Must Go On.”

^{xiii} Pronounced “Kin-sai-oh.”

All men, Speedo! Starto!
Doo-aa, Doo-aa, Doo-aa
But before this lot's over,
We're going to see those Cliffs of Dover.
Doo-aa, Doo-aa, Doo-aa . . .

Then it would fade away.”²⁹

Audio



4.2

“You’ve only just begun” may refer to Major Chida’s roadway project, but the lyrics may have other more ominous implications as well.

In Memoriam

On 20 November the I. J. A. required each camp along the railway to hold a memorial service honoring the Japanese, Allied POWs, and romusha who had lost their lives during its construction. Forced to participate in these services, the POWs were disgusted at what they saw as the height of hypocrisy on the part of the Japanese in conducting them.

New Restrictions

As the next day was still considered part of the commemoration, new regulations forbade whistling and singing in Kinsaiyok and, in addition, stipulated “no [audience] singing, laughing, or applause” could occur at the concert that night.³⁰ Though the restrictions would only be temporary, they had an understandably dampening effect on audience response to the evening’s show.

During the month since their last production, Woodhams and company had built a new free-standing proscenium theatre they christened the “Scala Theatre” after a well-known variety playhouse in London. With side wings and slush lamp footlights, this new structure allowed Woodhams to return to his former emphasis on high production values. The costumes and other theatre paraphernalia so carefully transported all the way from Wampo up to Kinsaiyok could now be safely brought out and refurbished.³¹

Revue du Monde

With *Revue du Monde*, his new show for the month, Woodhams was back in form. The show had two acts, fifteen numbers, and an interval. The full chorus line was also back: as part of the Act I closer, its members appeared as the “Rockettes.” For this nod to the famous Radio City Musical Hall troupe known for its precision and high-kicking routines, they had the services of a new choreographer, Arthur Woodroff Hill, who had supposedly “trained choruses professionally.”³²

The company had also gained several new performers: the “Harmonica Boys” and a solo female

impersonator, Frank Goodall, who called himself “Miss Fortune”: “an inhabitant of Grant Road, Bombay”—a notorious red-light district.³³ *Revue du Monde* also marked the first appearance by Pat Donovan (the former professional boxer now a member of the chorus) and Douglas Sutor in a series of ballroom “romance in dance” routines. With the services of “George Hart, Ltd., Décor and Furniture Providers,” Woodhams could begin to enhance his shows with props and settings.³⁴

Though the audience was not permitted to sing, laugh, or applaud during the show, they did, according to George Wiseman, make “rude comments on the song ‘Keep young and beautiful,’ as most of the chaps had some skin disease or other.”³⁵ Aussie Ray Parkin, in Kinsaiyok on temporary duty, thought the production, with its costumes, scenery, and lighting, “lavish” compared to those his unit had been able to mount back in Hintok Cutting.³⁶

“A Flying Concert Party”

Besides observing the required memorial services on the Burma side of the railway, Lieutenant-Colonel Nagatomo wanted to commemorate the first anniversary of his POW Accommodation Administration (Group III) and the arrival of the first POWs from Singapore in 1942 with a series of concerts by a group of performers drawn from various camps.³⁷ These men would form a touring company—a “flying concert party”—that would shuttle up and down the line performing in A Force camps, most of which had no entertainment of their own. Camps without stages were ordered to construct one in preparation for the troupe’s visit.³⁸

Not all of the members of this multinational concert party are known, but it did include Wim Kan and a number of his key cabaret performers (Hans Ryke, Nico Rayer, Cor Punt, Pat Levy), as well as a Brit named Mackintosh, the comedy team of Bob Skilton and Les Bullock, a Dutch magician named Cortini, and other singers and musicians.³⁹

After an initial concert on 19 November at Aunganaung for N.E.I. POWs, the flying concert party began their hectic five-day tour. From the reports of those who saw the show, it provided just the tonic needed to lift their spirits. At Little Nikki across the border, Major Jim Jacobs with rail-laying Mobile Force No. 1 wrote, “They gave us a splendid show that evening. Sgt. Bob Skilton and Les Bullock were very entertaining in comedy patter, while a Javanese vocal and instrumental trio proved excellent entertainers. Their harmonising in Hawaii [sic] and other popular numbers would have done credit to any first class vaudeville show at home.”^{xiv40} For one unidentified Aussie, the show was better than anything he had anticipated: “It was a professional, refreshing show that proved beyond doubt, no matter the suffering, there is always a group who can minimize miserable moments and build up morale.”⁴¹ The three hundred Dutch/Indonesians who had walked over from the main camp at Little Nikki to hear the concert shared his opinion.⁴²

At Paya Thanzu Taung, Arnold Jordon reported, “One of the finest displays of wizardry and sleight-of-hand one could wish to see anywhere was given by a clever young Dutch lad [Cortini] who, with no more than a tattered shirt to hide his wash-board ribs and to make do for voluminous sleeves etc. of the stock-in-trade, delighted us with his performance.”⁴³ On the flying concert party’s way “speedo, speedo” to Khonkhan, the farthest camp west on their tour, they stopped at Regue, home camp for the magician and several of the other Dutch/Indonesian performers on the tour. There they gave two performances before leaving for Khonkhan, the hospital camp where Senior Medical Officer Colonel Albert Coates had achieved fame performing successful leg amputations.

^{xiv} *The trio would be the Ockerse Brothers and “another Dutchie.”*

Two acts on the playbill of the “all-stars” performance at Khonkhan became forever imprinted in Jim Whittaker’s consciousness. One was the recitation of Arthur Clough’s poem “Say Not the Struggle Naught Avaieth.” From the charge in the opening stanza—

*Say not the struggle naught avaieth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain*

to the exhortations in the stanzas that followed,

*If hope were dupes, fears may be liars;
It may be, in yon smoke conceal’d,
Your comrades chase e’en now the fliers,
And, but for you, possess the field.^{xv44}*

—every line spoke so meaningfully to Whittaker that he memorized it on the spot.

The other act was an audacious farcical sketch performed by Skilton and Bullock. As Whittaker recalled, there were two panels of bamboo matting on stage painted white, one slightly upstage and taller than the other:

I vividly remember this low screen and the tip of the bald head colored red, coming above as the words, “Sunrise!” were spoken. Then the man on stage, a prisoner with a stick of some kind (probably a bamboo thing^{xvi}), said, “Sunset!” and tapped the bald head [laughs] . . . and the top of it disappeared behind [the screen]. . . . But the Japanese didn’t get the significance of it. Everybody else roared with laughter—thought this was great. Japanese probably thought it was an Anglo-slapstick, or something from Charlie Chaplin.⁴⁵

Audio



4.3

It’s hard to believe the Japanese in the audience didn’t immediately recognize this mockery of

^{xv} Time had not dimmed Jim Whittaker’s recollection: he quoted the complete poem from memory during his interview sixty years later. Unfortunately, it was before the recording equipment was running.

^{xvi} Most likely a swagger stick carried by officers.

their national flag and prediction of their defeat—or that the raucous laughter did not tip them off that something was amiss—but apparently not.^{xvii}

The “flying concert party” finished its tour at Mezali on 23 November, where three days later they gave a command performance for Lieutenant-Colonel Nagatomo.⁴⁶ But to Kan’s disgust, the gifts they expected for the success of the tour didn’t materialize. Instead, Nagatomo suggested the concert party become permanent and continue to tour the railway camps. Kan wanted no part of that scheme. Two days later the all-stars split up and returned to their home camps.⁴⁷

When Kan arrived back in Paya Thanzu Taung, he fell ill and was hospitalized with an infected foot and malaria. He had no appetite, which he quipped was “good, because there was no food anyway.” Even as he lay on his bed in the hospital ward, POWs begged him to perform, which he did in his feverish state, telling many jokes—but sitting down.⁴⁸

The Wider War

Late in 1943, the “outside” war in the Pacific began to make its presence directly known to the POWs along the railway, supposedly hidden from the world, giving them hope that they had not been forgotten. Attacks by Allied bombers on railway sites in Burma that started back in June, causing deaths and casualties among the POWs, were well known to everyone up and down the line. Allied reconnaissance planes were now seen over the Thai side of the railway, and the men speculated that these would soon be followed by bombing raids as well. Though the Japanese became increasingly apprehensive about the possibility of these attacks, they still refused to let any of the POW camps be identified as such, which caused the prisoners to fear what the future might bring.

Troop Movements

During the latter part of November, I. J. A. Malayan Command began evacuating the remnants of F Force and H Force back to Singapore, raising the other POWs’ hopes that they, too, would soon follow. The heavy sick were transported down to the hospital camps at Kanburi for recuperation before continuing on to Singapore. By late December, I. J. A. Southern Army Command began evacuating its A Force troops in Burma south as well, but, as they would discover, not back to Singapore.

^{xvii} When this sketch was performed as part of my play, “Return to Kanburi,” Nagase Takashi, a former interpreter for the Kempeitai who was in the audience, told me that if he had seen it while in Thailand, he would have reported it.



FIGURE 4.2. “FAREWELL PERFORMANCE”
PLAYBILL. RIMBOE CLUB. WATERCOLOR.
LODEWIKUS D. DE KROON. IMAGE
COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE,
NETHERLANDS.

On 22 December an elaborate *Afscheidsvoorstelling* (“farewell performance”) was put on at Regue by the “Rimboe Club”^{xviii} in honor of their departing commandant, Captain van Beck, who was leading the first draft of POWs leaving for their new base camp in Thailand. Although performances by this group of Dutch/Indonesians have not been reported earlier, the number of entertainers and the variety of their program suggests they had occurred.^{xix} The elaborate souvenir *programma* (“playbill”) is illustrated with vignettes of their life at Regue. Among other acts on the bill was an opening “repertoire” (comic patter?) by van Dorst (their adjutant); a *mappentrommel* (“grab bag of jokes”) by van Dalmen “and his guys”; van Dalm with his musicians, the “Dutch Blue Four”; magic tricks by Cortini; and a finale featuring a “Miss Waikiki” performing a Hawaiian hula.^{xx}

The Holidays

Christmas 1943: “Make ’em Laugh!”

The Christmas festivities produced by the POWs provided the real test of whether entertainment was making any progress on changing attitudes and camp atmospheres. The padres with their religious services would commemorate those who had died; the entertainment would focus the survivors’ attention on the present. Traditionally, Christmas shows in the military had to be special—something new and different to take the men’s minds off their loved ones back home—not just another regular variety show. Devising elaborate revues, pantomimes, and variety shows would test the entertainers’ capabilities as well, stretching the limits of their “memories, imaginations, and natural inventiveness.” Their success would be measured by how much they managed to “make ’em laugh.”

As many of the A Force POWs in Burma were in the process of being evacuated to Thailand,

^{xviii} “Rimboe” was another designation for Regue/100 Kilo.

^{xix} There is very likely material on this group in Dutch archives.

^{xx} Playbill translations by Margie Bellamy.

information on their holiday celebrations are scarce. There is no record of a Christmas show at Paya Thanzu Taung; Wim Kan was still in hospital and made very few diary entries during this time. Nor does Major Jacobs record a celebration—not even a sing-along (which is odd)—other than a special meal at Little Nikki. He recalled their previous Christmas, “when we laughed at the chap who called out to the visiting band, ‘Come again next year,’” and ruminated on why celebrations in Burma were limited: “Many members of the band had since died in the jungle, and the remainder were split up among the other camps.”⁴⁹

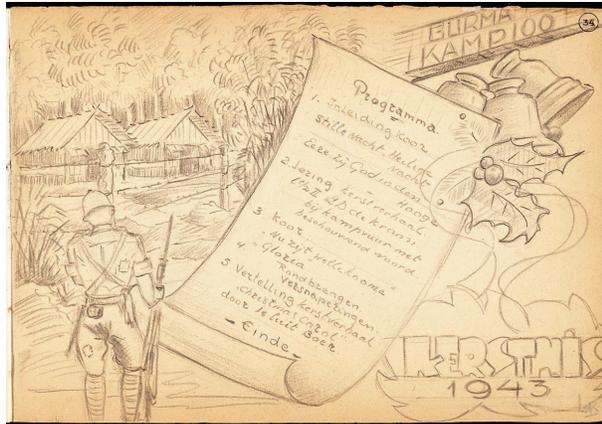


FIGURE 4.3. CHRISTMAS PROGRAM. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

For the Dutch/Indonesians who remained in Regue, the Christmas Eve celebration around a campfire included a choir singing traditional carols, a flannel board–type^{xxi} retelling of the Christmas story, distribution of special treats, and a recitation of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*.^{xxii50}

Caroling. Traditional carols were sung on Christmas Eve in other camps as well. At Takanun, Gibby Inglefield’s choir strolled about the camp “carrying flaming, musky, sputtering torches” and singing carols that ranged “from 14th century melodies only rarely heard in England, to the typical Christmas Day hymns.” Their only musical instrument besides Inglefield’s tuning fork had been a small portable harmonium.⁵¹ A few miles down the line at Hindato, the effect of caroling after lights out while carrying “coconut oil lamps and torches of pitch” created “an unearthly happiness” for Stephen Alexander.⁵² But for Jimmy Walker and his mates listening in their hut, the memories evoked were nearly unbearable: “The kids and their stockings and ‘What is *she* thinking?’”

Our second Christmas as prisoners. Pray God it’s the last.

Quiet we sat and then, from the hot starlit night outside came the strains of “Silent Night.” Sweet harmonious voices . . . “All is calm, all is bright . . .” Men fought with tears . . . “Yonder where sweet Mother and Child . . .” Outside a brave band of carollers, under our Battalion choirmaster, Lt. Purcell, were observing the wondrous tradition. . . . “Rest in heavenly peace . . .”

“Buggairo!^{xxiii} . . . Kuddah!”^{xxiv}

The Jap lashed amongst the singers with his rifle butt.

^{xxi} That is, illustrated.

^{xxii} Program translation by Margie Bellamy.

^{xxiii} Japanese swear word.

^{xxiv} “Stop!” or “Come here!”

“Kuddah!”

The lovely hymn ended abruptly as the conquerors vented their spleen.⁵³

The carolers did not have permission to sing after lights out.

At Hintok River Camp/155 Kilo,^{xxv} community singing around campfires until lights-out on Christmas Eve had put the men of Dunlop Force “in high spirits,” noted Captain C. W. Wells, “such a change from a few months back when never a laugh was heard nor a smile seen during those ghastly days of The Purge (‘the Speedo’).”⁵⁴

Variety Shows and Revues. Demanding the least amount of rehearsal time, variety shows or revues were the easiest productions for the POWs to put on. Held together by the jokes and running commentary of a compère, or a thin plotline, they could incorporate the widest range of performers one might find in camp.

Fun with F. A.^{xxvi}

In Hintok River the POWs had received permission to hold a Christmas concert party only four days prior to the holiday, but in that time a small group of dedicated officers had built a stage at the base of a hill and terraced the slope for audience seating while a ragtag group of entertainers quickly pulled together a show. On Christmas Day, their hastily improvised revue, *Fun with F. A.*, was “a howling success.”⁵⁵ Ray Parkin, back in camp after his stint in Kinsaiyok, described its premise: “It took the form of a broadcast from a radio station whose call-sign was ‘K-U-R-R-A,’^{xxvii} Thailand—*the call that gets attention!*” The station was competing in a £50,000 prize for the best broadcast programme.⁵⁶ As a series of contestants appeared, the contest got completely out of hand.

The comic sketch that had the audience rolling in the aisles was “the heart-breaking, though slightly improper, love tragedy between Ferdinand the Bull and Jessie the Cow. . . . Jessie coyly woos Ferdinand across a barbed wire fence.”⁵⁷ The show ended with the whole company onstage humming “Silent Night” while the announcer read a copy of a Christmas message that King George VI had broadcast years earlier.⁵⁸ There wasn’t a dry eye in the house.

Given the elaborate sets and costumes he had seen at Kinsaiyok, Parkin was singularly impressed by the costumes the entertainers had scrounged for the production.⁵⁹ Captain Wells, on the other hand, was more amazed by the props and setting: “The ingenuity of the Aussies in constructing the stage props was incredible. They made an excellent horse for a racehorse scene, an operating table, a portable camp fire, wigs made out of coconut husks, beards out of odd bits of rope, and heaven knows what else besides. The curtains were made of blankets and sheets, but in spite of all these make-shift matters, the tout ensemble was perfect, amazingly so.”⁶⁰ (Those who had engaged in cottage industries and arts and crafts were benefitting the concert parties as well.) As a first-time performer, being backstage had been an eye-opener for Wells: “I had no idea of what a hell of a lot of work is involved in back-stage work, what with continuity scripts, prompts, scene-shifting, etc.”⁶¹

Though enthusiastic about the show, Parkin was quite aware it did not meet very high performance standards: “Except for Herb Smith’s voice, nothing was very good but every single item was fully enjoyed.”⁶² Like O’Connor, Parkin felt the Hintok audience was determined to enjoy their Christmas

^{xxv} They had moved down from Hintok Cutting to Hintok River to be close to the river, which made it easier to receive supplies.
^{xxvi} “Fun with Fuck All.” Even in these circumstances it seems official decorum had to be observed.
^{xxvii} Japanese military command for “Attention!”

Day entertainment. High standards could wait.

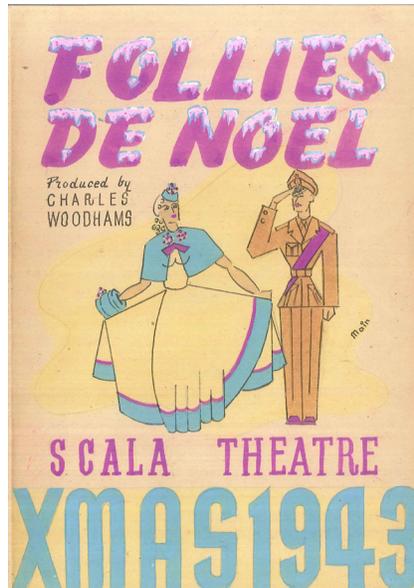


FIGURE 4.4. SOUVENIR PROGRAM. *FOLLIES DE NOEL*.
STAN MAIN. IWM CR (93.17.1).

Instead of producing something new and different for Christmas at Kinsaiyok, Woodhams stayed with the tried and true, although he did attempt to make the revue, *Follies de Noel*, more elaborate than usual by including a pantomime dame (“Dame Buxton”) and “Gentlemen of the Chorus” joining the “Scala Young Ladies” (see the playbill, **Figure 4.5**, in the Image Gallery). “The Four Pompoms” were the latest iteration of Len Gibson’s singing group, “The Andrew Twisters.”

J. T. Rea, for one, approved Woodhams’ decision. He thought the show “most excellent . . . better than last year.”⁶³ The officer in charge, Colonel Lilly, had successfully convinced the Japanese, fearful the stage lighting would attract Allied bombers, that the Allies would not attack on Christmas, though as Rea drolly noted, “the concert party did their best [to make it happen] by singing ‘The Yanks Are Coming,’ a last war song.”⁶⁴

Witnessing his first “jungle show,” new arrival Geoff O’Conner astutely noted what he thought might be behind the prisoners’ overly exuberant response—an observation that held true for POW audiences in all the other camps as well. “We had to be half queer to enjoy it,” he wrote, “but it was Christmas and everybody was singing his head off, some of them shaking with malaria. But they were all in it. They thought, well, it might be their bloody last.”⁶⁵

Jimmy Walker makes no mention of the Christmas show at Hindato in his memoir. The wave of homesickness that began with the carol singing may have been too overwhelming. But John Barnard thought what they had was “a first-class show. Most of us went to bed feeling much more cheerful than we had for many a long day.”⁶⁶ But he, too, sensed a dis-ease behind the cheerfulness: “If only we could be sure that this is our last Christmas, we should not mind so much, but we are all so tired and fed up with this dirt, heat and general discomfort. . . . The constant lack of food and drugs, in fact living without most of the common necessities of life, is beginning to tell on the spirits of everyone. Hurry up, England, we are getting very tired of it all.”⁶⁷

Pantomimes. Of all the shows produced for Christmas, the pantomimes were the most elaborate, elicited the most laughs, were the most outrageous, and received the most rave reviews.

Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves

The POWs at Aunganaung were more than ready for Norman Carter's pantomime, *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. It had been a long wait since their unsatisfactory bit of entertainment in mid-November and expectations were high. As dusk fell and the bonfires on either side of the stage were lit, Carter saw the POWs rush toward the theatre.

From the hospital huts came a stream of men, some with one arm, others with one leg. Those for whom there had been no time to make crutches were carried. If nobody was available to carry them, they crawled crabwise to their allotted space. Ulcer patients hobbled painfully and slowly; men who had been so ravaged with dysentery that their bodies were like skeletons, were carried by their mates.⁶⁸

When Johnny Brandon and his three-piece band hopped into the pit and began the overture, "there were gasps of delighted amazement. They were hearing pop tunes they'd never heard before." Brandon and one of the other musicians had risked their necks, hiding under Commandant Hochi's verandah and listening to the popular American music he played on his gramophone, to produce this surprise for their fellow POWs.⁶⁹

When the curtain parted, the opening scene in the Persian market stunned the audience into momentary silence, soon followed by "crashing applause." It wasn't just the "sinuous Eastern dance" of the "harem ladies" that had taken their breath away, but Frank Brydges' "backdrop showing flat-topped houses lining a narrow street and, towering above them, a golden-domed minaret."⁷⁰ Before the pantomime was over, Ali Baba's donkey, Doins, stole the show.

That donkey got his biggest laugh in the Mountain Pass scene. When the Robber Band was heard getting nearer and nearer, Doins came apart. His forequarters rushed off stage uttering terrified brays, followed by his hind legs with its tail sticking up and quivering with fear.

When at last [Princess] Uneeda's rescuers made their getaway from the Robbers' Cave after Hassan had shouted a triumphant "Open Sesame," the audience whistled and roared its approval. . . . After the show, all mens walked, or were carried, back to their huts, weak with laughter.⁷¹

With *Ali Baba*, Norman Carter proved his worth and was back in Colonel Ramsay's good graces.

Cinderella

The search for entertainers among the POWs in Tarsao had garnered more than “a few” volunteers. A proscenium theatre built by camp engineers stood ready for their first production: the old pantomime favorite, *Cinderella*. The structure’s name, “The New Victory Theatre,” had somehow escaped the Japanese censor’s notice but not the POWs’. With its visible presence and “borehole” rumors about rehearsals, anticipation had reached fever pitch. The performance proved to be worth the wait.

Medical officers Weary Dunlop and “Pop” Vardy, attending the opening performance along with a contingent of Japanese officers and fit POWs, were amazed at what the entertainers had been able to produce from “scratch”: “Proper stage, orchestra, chorus, leading lady, Ugly Sisters, Count, Prince Charming and one long scream of laughter,” observed a delighted Vardy.⁷² Dunlop was astonished at the costuming for the prince’s court. Being a doctor, he spotted the ulcer and scabies scars on the female characters’ legs that momentarily destroyed the illusion.⁷³ For Vardy, it wasn’t only the costumes that caused such pleasure; it was the total effect of all aspects of the production: “Down to the smallest detail—nothing had been forgotten and if it was rough and a wee bittie crude, it was, nevertheless, there. It was smashing.”⁷⁴



FIGURE 4.6. SECRET PHOTOGRAPH OF AUDIENCE AT TARSAO. PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN. IWM 65/143/1. COURTESY OF JUDITH GAWN.

“‘Cinderella’ was a roaring success,” wrote A. G. Allbury. “We hooted with delight at the antics of the ugliest of Ugly Sisters. We whistled appreciatively at the seductive curves of Cinderella—a young Indian Army officer—whose final scene, clasped to the breast of Prince Charming, caused a literal riot.”⁷⁵ The panto was so successful in raising everyone’s spirits—“tears ran down our cheeks and for two hours we forgot all worries and ills,” raved Vardy⁷⁶—that Dunlop requested special permission for a second performance for hospital patients two days later. When that day came, he ordered the sick helped, or carried, to the theatre by their orderlies where they, too, responded. . . . Laughter *was* proving to be the best medicine.

A renewed hopefulness had now become manifest in the camp. “It had not been a noisy or a sophisticated Christmas,” Allbury remarked. “We had eaten the simplest things and drunk nothing stronger

than tea or coffee. We had talked, laughed, sung and prayed together, letting our minds wander and our hearts soften. Each one of us knew that in being here at all he had so very much to be thankful for.”⁷⁸ The Tarsao entertainers had found their legs and hit their mark.

Babes in Thailand

At Takanun, Christmas Day had been declared a full yasume day by Colonel Yanagida. During the afternoon there was a soccer match between the officers and men and a “race meeting” on the riverbank.⁷⁹ After the evening meal came the eagerly awaited pantomime, *Babes in Thailand*.

Given the plot of the pantomime’s inspiration, *Babes in the Woods*—two children (“the babes”) rescued from the clutches of their wicked uncle by Robin Hood and his merry men—it’s not difficult to see why Harffey and Britt chose to adapt this traditional story to their purposes. And if the connections to their own situation weren’t clear, the many topical allusions (a standard practice in a panto) would make them so. As with *Cinderella* at Tarsao, POWs who saw this pantomime as children would now understand it quite differently—and in a way the Japanese censor never imagined while translating the text. According to J. K. Gwinnell, “there was much symbolism read into this production. The Babes were thought to represent the POWs and the ‘Wicked Uncle’ the IJA.”⁸⁰ He might have added that Robin Hood and his merry men symbolized Lord Louis Mountbatten and his Allied South-East Asia Command troops, who would eventually rescue them.

“The atap theatre was an amazing sight,” observed John Coast, as prompter, sitting alongside musical conductor Gus Harffey and the musicians, “the stage lit up by one kerosene lamp,^{xxviii} and the sandy scoop of an orchestra pit illuminated by three little oil lamps from empty pilchard tins, and in front of them an audience of a thousand people sitting around on the natural ledge of the arena, the rear seats looking down from 40 feet above the stage.”⁸¹ On the sandy flat in front of the stage were stretcher cases brought from the hospital by their friends.

“The production was a success from the moment the mosquito-net curtains were lumberingly dragged aside,” Coast boasted.

The first thing was the drunken act of the camp dentist who lay flat on his back in the orchestra pit mumbling and laughing so that all the first rows could hear him; and who, when Ginger [de Wardener] leapt on to the stage in a puff of much rehearsed smoke^{xxix} as the rather sensational and over-weight Fairy Queen, immediately started to shout out: “Look, there’s old Ginger! Ginger!! Ginger!!! Have a radish, Ginger?” and promptly began throwing Chinese radishes up on to the stage. Ginger, before speaking his proper lines, tripped to the front of the stage and whispered to his drunken friend in a voice audible to half the audience, what must have been a quite unique opening line for any show ever put on anywhere—a succinctly stated; “Shut up, you _____t!”⁸²

De Wardener recalled the details of his sensational entrance and its drunken disruption a bit

^{xxviii} Hardie records that the show was lit by two Petroma lamps which Bill Pycock had secured from the Japanese [Hardie, *Diary*, 26 December 1943].

^{xxix} See Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!” Part One for how this smoke was produced.

differently:

And I went to the front of the stage. . . . And lying in the front row was a dentist friend of mine, who kept saying, “Have a dildo, Ginger? Have a dildo!” At that time I had no idea what a dildo was—shows how nice I was! No idea at all. But anyhow, he was making a nuisance of himself.

So I went to the front of the stage and I said, “Shut up, you cock!”

And by this time the noise [laughter] was dying down and then I had to say my famous couplet^{xxx}. . . . And it went something like this,

In me you see your Fairy Queen, I used to play Miss Muffet.

But now I have a little wand, don’t tell me where to stuff it.

And you know there was absolute silence while I said it. And then there was silence . . . one . . . two . . . three, four. And I thought, “God Almighty, I’ve [failed]. And then the most enormous explosion of laughter, which relieved me a bit, you see.”⁸³

Audio



4.4

John Sharp and G. E. Chippington, who had been sent with others up to Takanun from the hospital at Chungkai to relieve the overcrowding and rejoin their unit, both attended the pantomime but on different evenings. Sharp saw the opening performance on Christmas Day:

very amusing and well-performed pantomime full of topical allusion and jokes and old songs—done by officers mostly, with [lighting] effects supplied by IJA (who were thanked with some hand clapping)—there was a good orchestra. . . . The programme concluded by very special permission from the camp commandant (our old friend Colonel YAMAGIDA [sic]) with the singing of the WILHELMUS and GOD SAVE THE KING sung very lustily indeed—then back to the hospital in the dark to hot coffee and biscuits at 11 pm.⁸⁴

For a select few, the Christmas Day celebration ended not with coffee and biscuits but with something much more potent. Following the opening night performance, a cast party, to which Coast, as prompter, had been invited, was held in the senior medical officer’s hut, “where extraordinary things took place, led by the normally dignified S.M.O. [senior medical officer] who set the ball rolling by dancing with the pantomime’s leading lady who was there still in her make-up. There was no Lights Out that night, but

^{xxx}A prisoner in Takanun, who had also been a POW in Germany during the First World War, gave this couplet heard in one of their concert parties to de Wardener to speak [De Wardener, Interview, 18].

the force of the home-brew sent everyone soon to bed or to sleep, and shortly after midnight peace reigned once again in Takanun Camp.”⁸⁵

The aftereffects of this cast party had an impact on the performance of the panto the next evening, which Chippington attended. His notes reveal that significant changes in the cast and orchestra had taken place from opening night:

Lively music from Frankie [Quinton] and his accordion heralded the opening of the evening’s entertainment and there, before my very eyes, dancing on tip-toe (or almost tip-toe) across the stage, clad in long white stockings (probably discarded mosquito netting), a short frilly white skirt (ditto), a pair of gauzy wings and a little wand with a glittering star on its tip—no other than Freddie Thompson . . . singing away lustily (in a rather deep voice for a Fairy Queen) as though that mortar bomb had never happened.⁸⁶

Half of Freddie Thompson’s jaw had been blown away by a mortar bomb in the battle for Singapore, yet here he was, taking Hugh de Wardener’s role as the Fairy Queen. And in the orchestra pit, Frankie Quinton had replaced Gus Harffey. What occasioned these changes we don’t know, but perhaps, as Coast suggested, some of the cast members may have partied too long and drank too much the previous evening.

As Chippington watched the show, he ruminated on its effect:

But, as I sat there under that canopy of stars and watched the pantomime, just for a short while I forgot all about the Japanese and the railway, the sweat, the suffering and the pain and those who died. Just a rough and ready, makeshift pantomime by a bunch of amateurs who have probably never performed on a stage before in their whole lives—yet, for a brief moment, in the middle of our dark jungle, they brought us a shaft of light, a breath of freedom.

Afterwards, when I rolled myself in my blanket and settled down to sleep, I found my heart strangely refreshed.^{xxxii87}

Chippington’s realization—that when an audience is “taken out” of itself during a performance, a space opens up in which each spectator is “free”—had profound psychological implications for the prisoners.

^{xxxii} Director Leo Britt, who had been a professional actor in West End shows, would have bristled at Chippington’s classification of him as “amateur.”

1944

New Year's Celebrations: "Keep 'em Laughing!"

The Christmas shows had been an enormous success. The problem with success in the theatre is that it raises audience expectations that future shows will be just as good, if not better. Since there was only a week for the entertainers to get their New Year's shows together, those expectations were difficult to fulfill. One factor to take into account was the normal letdown that took place after Christmas was over. With the New Year upon them, the POWs could no longer avoid facing their uncertain future. Laughter and song was a necessary defense against unspoken anxieties. The question for the entertainers now was whether they could "keep 'em laughing."

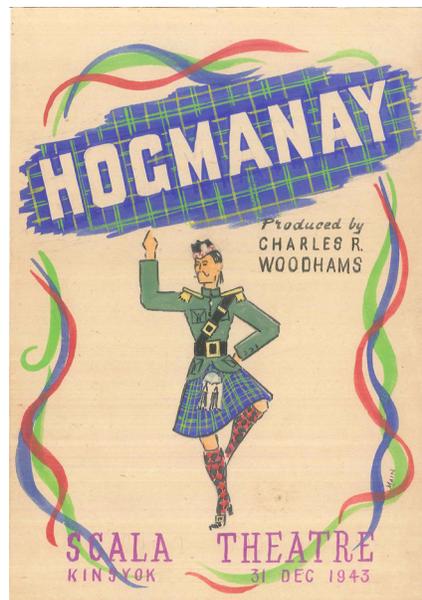


FIGURE 4.7. SOUVENIR PROGRAM. *HOGMANAY*. STAN MAIN. IWM CR (93.17.1).

At Kinsaiyok, Woodhams and company produced a traditional Scottish *Hogmanay* for their New Year's celebration, delighting the many Highlanders in the camp. But with eighteen variety acts on the bill (including repeats of past "hits") to keep the entertainment going past midnight, it taxed the entertainers' abilities and the audience's patience. Rea, for one, thought the show overly long and "not as good as their Christmas day one."⁸⁸ Even Woodhams' attempt to enliven the long evening with another surprise—"a burlesque fairy dance by the five battalion commanders"^{xxxii}—only momentarily relieved the undercurrent of discontent. Woodhams had convinced the commanders to make fools of themselves to shore up everyone's flagging spirits. And spirits were flagging. "The New Year was welcomed in, in the middle of the show, with surprising little rejoicing," George Wiseman noted.⁸⁹ Two days later, Rea wrote in his diary, "We are glad that 1943 is past. It has been an unhappy year and were well forgotten."⁹⁰

New Year's entertainment at Paya Thanzu Taung had not fared much better. Though still feverish,

^{xxxii} Two British, one Australian, and two Netherland East Indies commanders.

Wim Kan appeared in an afternoon cabaret on New Year's Day but went back to bed immediately afterward. He didn't know it at the time, but this would be his last performance in Burma.

Elsewhere, entertainment sputtered along. Although Jimmy Walker doesn't mention a New Year's Eve or New Year's Day show at Hindato in his memoir, Geoffrey Adams does: a production "made up in bawdiness and high spirits what it lacked in polish, and received a standing ovation—though this may have been due to the fact that there was nothing to sit down on."⁹¹

The Sorrowful Sultan, or What Price Laughter?

At Hintok River the concert party was on a roll and mounted an even more elaborate production on New Year's Day than it had at Christmas. This time it was an original musical comedy, *The Sorrowful Sultan, or What Price Laughter?* The plot about a sultan who had not laughed for thirty years, nor had any of his wives borne him a son, carried a not-so-subtle message for the POWs. Not only had the prisoners experienced difficulties trying to laugh again, but they feared the diseases contracted building the railway, combined with malnutrition, would cause impotence. The court sorcerer promised the sultan that when he laughed again he would also have a son, so a competition (with the princess as the prize) was organized to make the sultan laugh. Those who failed to do so would be put to death.⁹² If laughter was the cure for impotence, this was the show to see.

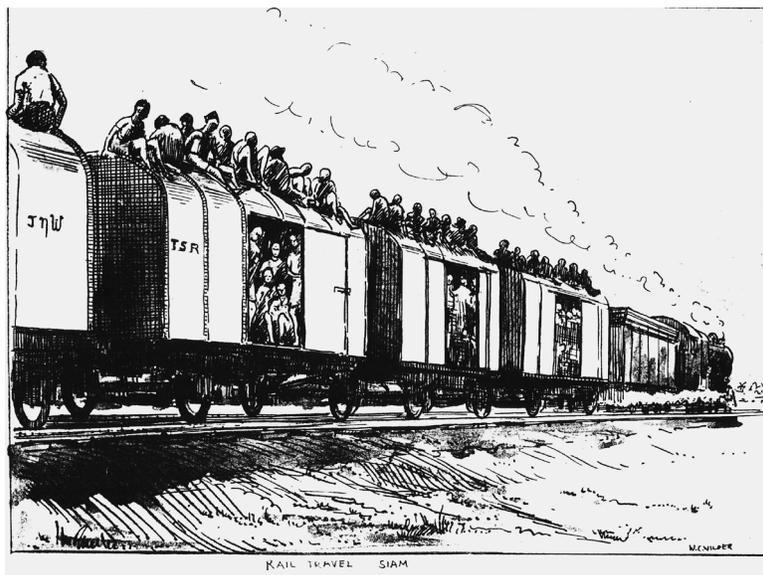


FIGURE 4.8. RAIL TRAVEL SIAM. WILLIAM WILDER. COURTESY OF ANTHONY WILDER.

No New Year's celebrations took place at Aunganaung: the men there had received word that their evacuation to Thailand was imminent. On 27 December, Norman Carter had seen a train rattle by, its cars swarming with I. J. A. troops being sent into Burma in preparation for their coming incursion into India. Four days later, empty cattle trucks were backed onto the siding by the camp, and starting on New Year's Day, all the POWs at Aunganaung were transported by rail over the line they had built to their new base camps in Thailand.⁹³

Redeployment

Once the New Year was past, I. J. A. Southern Command moved to implement the next phase of their plan for the thousands of POWs languishing in the railway camps. Most of them would be evacuated to base hospital and relocation camps in Thailand where they believed they would be rehabilitated before being sent back to Singapore. But others—select groups of “fit” POWs—would be sent overseas to Japan to alleviate the manpower shortage in their home islands.^{xxxiii} Several hundred would remain behind stationed as maintenance parties at key locations along the railway. Among their duties would be repairing damage caused by Allied bombing raids.⁹⁴

Weary Dunlop’s success in reorganizing the Tarsao hospital and implementing a successful rehabilitation scheme had not gone unnoticed. In mid-January, he was ordered by Senior Medical Officer Albert Coates to leave Tarsao to take charge of the large base hospital at Chungkai, whose leadership and organization was a shambles. Dunlop left behind a camp that had made tremendous strides in its welfare program but was still struggling with the enormity of the task.

New Developments

A Touring Cinema Unit

Back on Boxing Day (26 December), Mobile Force No. 1 had moved from Little Nikki down the road to the main camp to await their evacuation orders.⁹⁵ One night shortly after the New Year, Major Jacobs was part of a group of “Japs, Thais, Allied P.O.W.s, and Asiatic coolies of half a dozen nationalities” who were shown “propaganda newsreels and a historical drama” by a “traveling Japanese Cinema Unit.”⁹⁶ Jacobs readily grasped the point of the newsreels but had to rely on translator Bill Drower to understand what the drama was about:

It concerned a famous Japanese warrior of medieval times who was always getting himself involved in duels which inevitably resulted in the death of his opponent. This caused great concern to his future wife and to his aged parents, who finally induced him to give up his duelling and settle down. It was a very boring performance because of the stilted mannerisms of the actors, but it gave some idea of life in medieval Japan.⁹⁷

While Jacobs obviously didn’t think much of the drama, the subject matter of this unidentified example of the Japanese *jidai-geki* (period drama film) is quite remarkable. Japanese audiences would understand that the past was being used to comment on the present. So the fact that the “famous warrior” is “finally induced to give up his dueling and settle down” and not spurred on to greater glory fighting against his enemies could be read as a radical shift in attitude about the Pacific War. Was this *jidai-geki* film preparing its audience for the future?

^{xxxiii} At this point, the “select group” would be “white” POWs only. The Japanese had a racial purity policy and did not want dark-skinned POWs, such as might be found in the Volunteer Forces or the N.E.I., sent to Japan. Later, when they became more desperate for workers, this policy would shift.

Tarsao Redoubles Its Efforts

The large number of heavy sick and fit POWs that continued to crowd into Tarsao prompted the concert party to operate two separate producing organizations—"The Tarsao Musical Comedy Show" and "The Tarsao Dramatic Society." Since they had distinct audiences to cater to, they built separate theatres: the "Hospital Theatre" and the "Lines Theatre." Each group alternated its weekly appearance between these two venues.⁹⁸

The Tarsao Dramatic Society adapted fiction and plays into radio dramas that stimulated audiences' imaginations. One of these was *Mutiny on the Bounty*. "One thought of uniforms of the day, a sailing ship's deck, men being flogged, breadfruit plants being soaked with water," wrote F. W. G. Power. "How wrong can you be—there was none of that. The audience sat on the ground and watched, or rather, listened to a screen of matting. In the matting, holes had been cut out against which the players held a megaphone."⁹⁹

The Tarsao Musical Comedy Show, on the other hand, performed works such as *Café Metropoll* and Noel Gay's 1937 cockney musical *Me and My Girl*. "Pop" Vardy treasured these musical comedies because of their positive effect on the morale of his hospital patients—and on his own as well: "You would have to see these shows to appreciate their 'wonderfulness.' First the girls—they just stagger me—'Judy' performed by a Pte Cullen just carries us away with her smashing way until, bump—we come down to earth—she has lifted her dress just a wee bit too high. . . . Some of our 'asides' to the male-'come'-female charms are best left out of, even this Chronicle."¹⁰⁰

An Aside

The Tarsao female impersonators were obviously good. Arthur Johnston witnessed one instance of their attraction offstage:

Going back to camp from work (collecting wood) coming past parade ground I suddenly saw an English girl all done up, prancing across the ground in very high shoes. Nicely dressed, big breasts and well done up. Gave me quite a start, and had to stop and look and really think. Finally woke up that it was one of the "female impersonators" returning from a practice. However "she" had been sighted by two of the guards who rushed down, made rude signs, and turned very nasty when "she" refused to accompany them to their hut. To their dismay one of their officers came along, who happened to know the impersonator and the guards had the indignity of being stood to attention and their faces thoroughly slapped whilst "missey," as they protested, continued across the ground to his quarters.^{xxxiv101}

But Vardy reported that a few officers thought the female impersonators' appearance and behavior offstage offensive:

^{xxxiv} The Japanese officer's respect for the female impersonator may reflect his appreciation of the onnagata (female impersonator) tradition in the Kabuki theatre back home.

The Camp is divided over these female impersonators—some of them seem to have taken their “art” too serious, having shaved their eyebrows off and allowed their hair to pass even the worst soldier’s standard. We in the hospital are a bit removed from the main scenes but we hear that one or two “very fierce soldiers” don’t like seeing their brother officers with curlers in their hair each morning or their eyebrows shaved and shaded foreheads and mincing ways—most unsoldier-like—I agree but hardly worth the tempers that would appear to have been displayed and certain remarks passed.¹⁰²

“Suffering . . . Will Cloud the Brain in Excess”

Even with elaborate rehabilitative schemes and the best efforts of entertainers, conditions at Tarsao continued to be squalid. A recently arrived J. K. Gale protested, “Tasao [*sic*] is a frightful dump. There are 3,000 men here and 2,000 of them are in hospital. Half of the hospital huts are falling down and the squalor is only comparable to that of the worst depression squatters camps shown in American films. Everyone here looks dirty in body and clothing. . . . There is hardly a person in the camp who hasn’t got scabies. . . . The sooner I get out of Tasao the happier I shall be.”¹⁰³ What Gale didn’t take into account is that everyone in Tarsao, including the administrative and medical staff, was struggling to survive.

“Pop” Vardy’s medical report for the month of January lists thirty-six deaths in the camp and four medical officers bed-sick with amoebic dysentery. In a moment of despair about the situation he cried out, “Almost two years and oh My God, how I long for it to end but when, oh when, will it?”¹⁰⁴ Three days later while reading John Gunther’s book *Inside Asia*, Vardy came across a passage by the Indian politician Jawaharlal Nehru (composed while he, too, was in prison), in which he wrote, “suffering, even if it may be necessary for clear thought, will cloud the brain in excess.” And he thought, “This is what, I think, has happened to so many of my patients. In no other way can I account for the change in so many of them—not their physical but their mental change. If these men were once A1 British soldiers, it is the only answer ‘Suffering’ . . . Oh God. Stop it all.”¹⁰⁵

As a medical officer, Vardy could work on shoring up his patients’ physical health. But a more difficult task lay in restoring their dulled sensibilities and minds clouded by prolonged trauma. Forced inactivity, with its long stretches of boredom, could affect them adversely as well. Johnston’s comments that he “had to stop and look and really think” and that he “finally woke up” confirm Vardy’s observation on the POWs’ mental acuity. Though entertainment coupled with cottage industries and arts and craft projects were proving their worth in the POWs’ recovery process, the healing would take time.

Meanwhile, Gale would not have long to wait for his evacuation from Tarsao. By the beginning of March, all the POWs at Tarsao were sent down the line to hospital or transit camps on the plains.

“Hurry Up and Wait”

Knowing they were soon to be evacuated made the waiting all the more difficult. Although “Hurry up and wait” was standard military procedure, it increased anxiety about the uncertainties, and the challenge to find new ways to keep themselves entertained became acute. As the days wore on, entertainers in three camps aimed to distract the men from their anxieties.

The performers at Hintok River once again proved they were up to the task. In late January, they

followed the success of their New Year's Day show with another, more spectacular original production, *Kannibal Kapers*. During the interval, they had relocated their theatre to a new and better site, "at the foot of the rocky hill which . . . [made] a natural amphitheatre for seating above the stage."¹⁰⁶

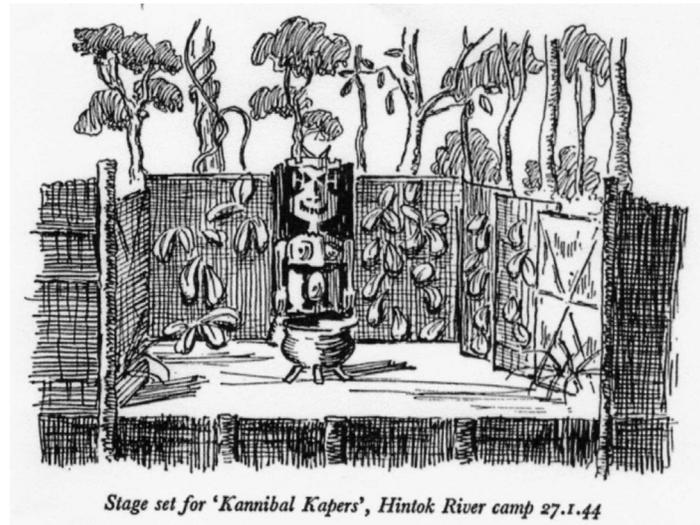


FIGURE 4.9. SETTING FOR *KANNIBAL KAPERS*. COURTESY OF RAY PARKIN.

Parkin's sketch and description of the setting for *Kannibal Kapers* shows that the abilities of the concert party's design and technical staff had continued to grow:

In the centre of the stage, stood the great god Ju-Ju, with the sacrificial pot in front of him.

Ju-Ju is cut from the trunk of a kapok tree, with the sap still in it. But already he has a life of his own. He is complete, with belly and breasts and prominent navel. His hollowed-out eye sockets are lit from behind with two slush lamps which also smoke and add to the supernatural effect. The arms are hinged to raise with each solemn and spine-chilling proclamation.¹⁰⁷

Though scenic effects had improved, Parkin thought the plot for *Kannibal Kapers* needed more work: "Javanese Dutch took the parts of natives and concubines. . . . The witch doctor and his rival were the comics, intriguing to get each other boiled and eaten. For the rest, it was a musical which gave the Javanese a chance to sing many of their fine songs."^{xxxv108}

While watching the show, Parkin became attuned to a different perception of what the concert party activity might be about. "There was something about this international flavour of the show that affected us all," he mused. "And we talked about it when we got back to our tents. The harmony of people together: the theatre and make-believe seems to be an important thing to humanity—particularly in primitive states."¹⁰⁹

^{xxxv} From our point of view, casting the dark-skinned Javanese POWs in the "cannibal" and "female" roles is a blatant example of racial stereotyping and sexualization of the Asian "other." But in 1944 no concept of color-blind casting or queer theory existed, and these practices were accepted as the norm.

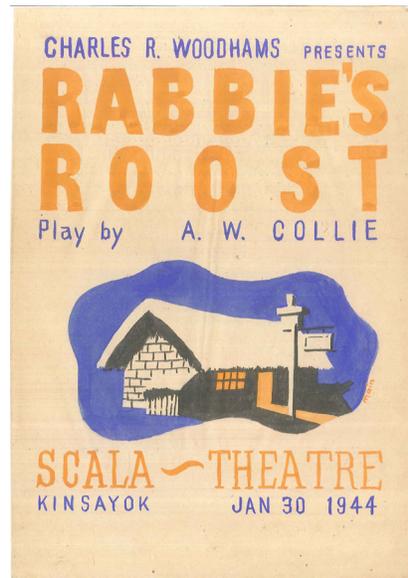


FIGURE 4.10. SOUVENIR PROGRAM. *RABBIE'S ROOST*.
STAN MAIN. IWM CR (93.17.1).

Given the poor reception of his last production at Kinsaiyok, Woodhams knew he had to produce something other than another revue if he wanted to keep audiences coming. At the end of January he presented an original play: *Rabbie's Roost* written by A. W. Collie (inspired by poems of Robert Burns). Though labeled a play, the cast list of nine principals, a chorus of farmers, farmer's wives, Highland dancers, and a fiddler, Jock Smith, is more appropriate for a musical comedy. *Rabbie's Roost* is the production in which Woodhams made his first known appearance as a female impersonator. And another new face, Ken Adams, would soon become a major female impersonator in shows at Nakhon Pathom hospital camp.

At the beginning of February, Gus Harffey and Leo Britt opened their revue, *Takanun Topics*, at Takanun. John Sharp found it "very amusing in spite of rehearsal difficulties."¹¹⁰ What the "difficulties" were is not made clear, but given later events at Chungkai, it wouldn't be surprising to know that Britt and Harffey were having trouble working together. Following the performance, there were more difficulties with the show's "topical" content: "Nips are said to have taken umbrage at references to the progress of the war in our shows," wrote Sharp, "and there is a rumour that they have been banned."¹¹¹ The rumor proved false, but the incident served as a warning for the entertainers to be on their guard.

A Promenade Concert of Popular Classical Music

As in other places, the influx of new POWs into Takanun greatly benefited the concert party. Among the recent arrivals was professional musical conductor Ernest Lenthall, ARCM,^{xxxvi} bandmaster of the Cambridgeshires Regimental Band, and some of his musicians. Capitalizing on this godsend, Leo Britt produced *A Promenade Concert of Popular Classical Music* on 5 February, with Lenthall conducting "The Beach Pavilion Light Orchestra." There was even a souvenir program for sale for ten cents.

^{xxxvi} Associate of the Royal College of Music.

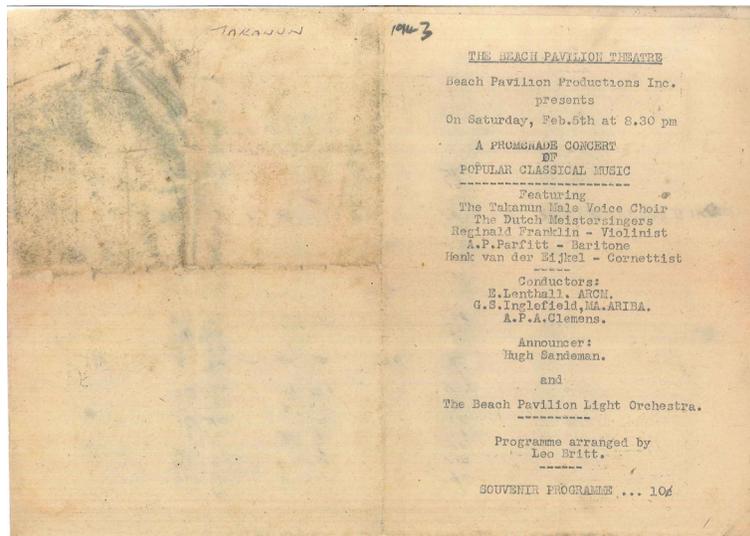


FIGURE 4.11. SOUVENIR PROGRAM. *A PROMENADE CONCERT*. IWM 9387/99/82/1.

For this remarkable jungle concert Britt brought together all the British and Dutch musicians in the camp to sing and play an astonishing collection of light classical pieces (see the program of music at **Figure 4.12** in the Image Gallery).¹¹² Such a concert was possible because musicians, in addition to protecting their instruments, had either preserved their precious scores throughout the construction period or managed to remember them.

Farewell Shows

Now that evacuations of POWs from Burma were well under way, those in Thailand soon followed. Many romusha were also moved down the line at this time, collected together in larger camps where they were left to survive on their own. There was little, if any, attempt by the Japanese to repatriate them. At Paya Thanzu Taung, Wim Kan had remained seriously ill with repeated attacks of malaria throughout January and February. At the beginning of March he was evacuated by rail, along with 140 other chronically ill men, to Kanburi Hospital camp in Thailand.¹¹³

Since Takanun was located at the upper end of the Thai side of the railway, it was among the first of the Thailand camps slated for evacuation. Those chosen for the overseas Japan Party had been given a farewell religious service and sing-along before they left.¹¹⁴ But before they were sent down the line, Harffey and Britt were determined to present the show that was in rehearsal. Doing so would give them something more than a sing-along to mark their departure: it would be a glorious farewell show.

Animal Crackers was produced by Carl Moser on 27 February. His rewrite was of a show originally written for the Marx Brothers that had, in England, starred “The Crazy Gang,” a group of six farceurs. Coast, who had been promoted to stage manager for this production, thought it “one of the best shows ever put on in our captivity.” But the “most lasting thing in the show” was “a parody of *These Foolish Things*” that had somehow snuck by their “lax and lazy Nip censor.” In expectation of their impending evacuation to Singapore, the parody was meant to be a farewell to Thailand and the whole wretched railway construction experience.

*The high embankment where the Railway Trace is,
The blasted cuttings through the rocky places,
Mosquitoes whirring wings, these crazy things
Mean Thailand to you.*

*The rain of May that made the camp a plaster,
The senseless shouting: 'Speedo! Speedo! Faster!!'
Those Buggairero-ings, these crazy things
Mean Thailand to you.*

*We worked and slaved on rice and tea,
When you did that to us we ached and prayed that we might be free.*

*The work in boiling sun for half a nickel —
But Rolex watches fetch a hundred Tikal,
And as for signet rings:^{xxxvii} these crazy things
Mean Thailand to you.*

*The prophylactic dose of tasty quinine,
The aromatic whiff of nearby latrine,
Bed bugs, the stinking things, these crazy things
Mean Thailand to you.*

*We worked in mud just like a sea,
When we came up in May we never knew that this had to be.*

*A cigarette that bears the Red Cross traces,
A bale of shorts hid in sandy places,^{xxxviii}
Those petty pilferings, these crazy things
Mean Thailand to you.*

*The blunted needles for inoculations,
The agonies of jungle ulcerations,*

^{xxxvii} Personal items sold to have money to buy special eats in canteens.

^{xxxviii} Refers to an incident where a bundle of army shorts had been stolen and hidden in a sandbank.

Oh how the Blue Stone stings!^{xxxix}

These crazy things mean Thailand to you.^{xl15}

At the close of the show—their last in Takanun—the audience of POWs “just stood up and cheered for minutes.”¹¹⁶ Two days later the final round of their evacuations down the line to Chungkai began.

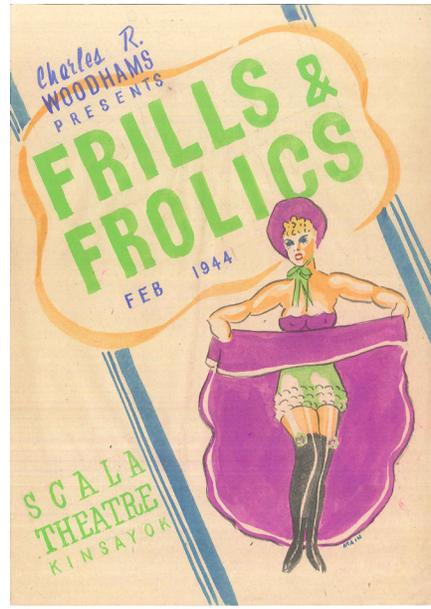


FIGURE 4.13. SOUVENIR PROGRAM. *FRILLS & FROLICS*. STAN MAIN. IWMCR (93.17.1).

For the final show at Kinsaiyok, *Frills & Frolics*, Woodhams reverted once again to a revue format. Though the program cover shows a buxom blonde cancan dancer lifting her skirts to show off her ruffled undergarments, there is no indication on the playbill that a cancan ever took place, unless it was part of the finale. If it had not, Woodhams’ audience would have let him know about it.

This will be the last we hear of Charles Woodhams, Reginald Dixon, Bill James, and the other performers (except for Ken Adams and Len Gibson) in this extraordinary jungle concert party. At Tamuang, their new base camp, Gale reported that severe restrictions were placed on concert party activity: “There is to be no whistling or singing at any time, even at concerts. The only concerts allowed are to be on the Yasume [sic] day and then must consist only of band music. Plays, songs and humorists are completely forbidden.”¹¹⁷ These constraints put an end to any further ambitions Woodhams might have had.

For those at Hindato, their departure could not come soon enough. Since the New Year’s holiday, there had been little for them to look forward to as their entertainers exhausted their repertoire of songs and sketches and fell back on repetition of old material. As the concert party struggled on, “hopeless miserable monotony” returned full force. In a series of terse and caustic observations, Jimmy Walker summed up the

^{xxxix} “Bluestone” was copper sulfate crystals rubbed on raw ulcers to cauterize the flesh [N. Smith, 32].

^{xl} The absence in the lyrics of any word about the disease, brutality, and death that happened on the railway speaks volumes. No one could bear to be reminded of those.

reality of their daily life:

Sheer monotony. Each day and night one conversed with one's mate until anecdotes once interesting became with repetition, boring and a new mate sought.

The mutual loathing of one's kind that is born of long and forced association in crowded conditions was a prominent portion of our torment.

Some entertained on makeshift stages partly for the amusement of their fellows and partly as a prop to their own sanity.¹¹⁸

These realities would not go away until the men were finally liberated.

* * *

And so end the “jungle shows” in the Up Country camps along the Thailand-Burma railway—that is, until further entertainment is performed in maintenance camps in late 1944 and early 1945. Stalwart entertainers had performed everywhere and anywhere they could: around campfires; in huts; on flattened anthills, stacks of sleepers, and open-air stages; and even—when time, abilities, and resources allowed—in proscenium theatres. The music and laughter had given many the courage to live another day. The productions put on following completion of the railway—sing-alongs, variety and radio shows, minstrel shows, revues, pantomimes, promenade concerts—are characterized by a phenomenal resurgence of creativity after months of suppression. Over and over, the POWs who witnessed these jungle shows were awed not only by their fellow prisoners’ performances but by the ability of the producers, designers, and technicians to devise musical and theatrical productions out of little more than “memories, imaginations, and natural inventiveness.”¹¹⁹ Everyone knew what a remarkable achievement it was for them all, stuck for months in the middle of nowhere.

Actually, it was only a foreshadowing of greater things to come. The hospital and relocation camps to which they were headed would present the entertainers with new opportunities and new challenges to test their abilities to keep hope alive.

Endnotes

- 1 Woodhams, IWM CR (93.17.1).
- 2 Coast, 146.
- 3 Hardie, Diary, 20? October 1943.
- 4 Bancroft, 108.
- 5 Bancroft, 108–110 passim.
- 6 Rivett, 300.
- 7 Dunlop, Diary, 22 November 1943.
- 8 Hastain, 156–157.
- 9 Hastain, 157.
- 10 Hastain, 157.
- 11 Hastain, 156–157.
- 12 Peacock, 213.

- 13 Coast, 156–157.
- 14 Peacock, 213.
- 15 Coast, 156.
- 16 Richardson, Diary, 11 December 1943.
- 17 De Wardener, Interview, 13–16.
- 18 Carter, 146.
- 19 Carter, 147.
- 20 Carter, 147–153 passim.
- 21 Wood-Higgs, Diary, 10 November 1943.
- 22 Wood-Higgs, Diary, 10 November 1943.
- 23 Kan, Diary, 31 October 1943.
- 24 Kan, Diary, 14 November 1943.
- 25 Kan, Diary, 14 November 1943.
- 26 Kan, Diary, 26 October 1943.
- 27 Kan, Diary, 14 November 1943.
- 28 Walker, *Of Rice*, 41.
- 29 Walker, Interview, 16–17.
- 30 Rea, Diary, 21 November 1943.
- 31 Rea, Diary, 22 November 1943.
- 32 Wiseman, Diary, 28 November 1943.
- 33 Rea, Diary, 22 November 1943.
- 34 Woodhams, IWM CR (93.17.1).
- 35 Wiseman, Diary, 28 November 1943.
- 36 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 231.
- 37 Kan, Diary, 19 November 1943.
- 38 Jacobs, 95.
- 39 Kan, Diary, 19 November 1943.
- 40 Jacobs, 95.
- 41 Quoted in Hall, *The Blue Haze*, 277–278.
- 42 Kan, Diary, 30 November 1943.
- 43 Jordon, 78–79.
- 44 Quiller-Couch, ed., *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.
- 45 Whittaker, Interview, 1.
- 46 Kan, Diary, 30 November 1943.
- 47 Kan, Diary, 30 November 1943.
- 48 Kan, Diary, 15 December 1943.
- 49 Jacobs, 97–98.
- 50 Trans. by Margie Bellamy.
- 51 Coast, 163.
- 52 Alexander, 157.
- 53 Walker, *Of Rice*, 44–45.
- 54 Wells, Memoir, 226.
- 55 Wells, Memoir, 228.
- 56 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 239–240.
- 57 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 239–240.
- 58 Wells, Memoir, 229.
- 59 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 239–240.
- 60 Wells, Memoir, 228–229.
- 61 Wells, Memoir, 228–229.
- 62 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 239–240.
- 63 Rea, Diary, 26 December 1943.

- 64 Rea, Diary, 26 December 1943.
- 65 O'Connor, quoted in Nelson, *Japanese Prisoners*, 43–44.
- 66 Barnard, 133.
- 67 Barnard, 134.
- 68 Carter, 161–162.
- 69 Carter, 162.
- 70 Carter, 162–163.
- 71 Carter, 162–163.
- 72 Vardy, Diary, 26 December 1943.
- 73 Dunlop, Diary, 25 December 1943.
- 74 Vardy, Diary, 26 December 1943.
- 75 Allbury, 109.
- 76 Vardy, Diary, 26 December 1943.
- 77 Dunlop, Diary, 27 December 1943.
- 78 Allbury, 108–109.
- 79 Hardie, Diary, 24 December 1943.
- 80 Gwinell, “Christmas in Captivity: Three Memorable Days on the Railroad of Death,” British Association of Malaya, *MALAYA Magazine* (Jan. 1958): n.p. [quoted in Moffatt e-mail, 28 July 2003].
- 81 Coast, 159.
- 82 Coast, 159–160.
- 83 De Wardener, Interview, 17–19.
- 84 John Sharp, Diary, 25 December 1943.
- 85 Coast, 160.
- 86 Chippington, 309.
- 87 Chippington, 310.
- 88 Rea, Diary, 2 January 1944.
- 89 Wiseman, Diary, 1 January 1944.
- 90 Rea, Diary, 2 January 1944.
- 91 Adams, 116.
- 92 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 244–245.
- 93 Carter, 163.
- 94 Richards, *The Survival Factor*, 106.
- 95 Jacobs, 100.
- 96 Jacobs, 101–102.
- 97 Jacobs, 101–102.
- 98 Vardy, Diary, 29 January 1944.
- 99 Vardy, Diary, 29 January 1944; Power, 89.
- 100 Vardy, Diary, 29 January 1944.
- 101 Johnston, Diary, 7 January 1944.
- 102 Vardy, Diary, 29 January 1944.
- 103 Gale, Diary, 15? February, 1944.
- 104 Vardy, Diary, 31 January 1944.
- 105 Vardy, Diary, 3 February 1944.
- 106 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 254.
- 107 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 254.
- 108 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 255.
- 109 Parkin, *Into the Smother*, 255.
- 110 John Sharp, Diary, 20 February 1944.
- 111 John Sharp, Diary, 21 February 1944.
- 112 Pearce, J. A., IWM 9387/99/82/1.
- 113 Kan, Diary, 5 March 1944.

- 114 John Sharp, Diary, 21 February 1944.
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116 Coast, 166.
117 Gale, Diary, 21 July 1944.
118 Walker, *Of Rice*, 50.
119 Hastain, 156–157.