

2014

# Chapter 12b. “Jolly Good Show!”: The POW Theatre Production Handbook | Part Two: Lighting, Costumes, Musical Instrument Construction

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## Recommended Citation

Eldredge, Sears, "Chapter 12b. “Jolly Good Show!”: The POW Theatre Production Handbook | Part Two: Lighting, Costumes, Musical Instrument Construction" (2014). *Books*. Book 8.  
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## The POW Theatre Production Handbook

### Part Two: Lighting, Costumes, Musical Instrument Construction

#### E. Lighting

##### Light Sources

There were two primary sources of light for these proscenium theatres: daylight and/or some form of artificial light.

**Daylight.** Performances on yasume days in the camps usually took place in the late afternoon or early evening, “while it was still light.” Most theatres were situated so that the sunlight would come from behind the audience and strike the stage, not the audience’s eyes.

Evening performances did not necessarily demand artificial lighting, Tom Boardman recalled, because “for some unknown reason, the moonlight out there seemed to be a lot stronger than we get in England. It was brilliant; it was daylight. So, if it [the performance] coincided with a three quarter moon or a full moon, it was brilliant. You could read . . . in the moonlight.”<sup>1</sup> Since many of the first theatres in the hospital and relocation camps had stages without a roof, daylight (or moonlight) would illuminate the interior and upstage spaces. The diminishing natural light that occurred during an evening show could be used to powerful effect, such as in the final moments of *A New Revue*, when couples danced onstage as “In the Still of the Night” was sung, or in the panto *Aladdin*, when Ted Weller sang “Bluebird of Happiness.”

With the approach of the rainy season, it became apparent that roofs were needed to protect performers and painted scenery from the rain and that artificial lighting would be required to illuminate the enclosed stages. Approval for the use of artificial lighting was dependent upon how concerned the Japanese were that the camp might be vulnerable to Allied bombing attacks. Lacking permission, lighting technicians had to devise an alternative solution to light their enclosed proscenium stages.

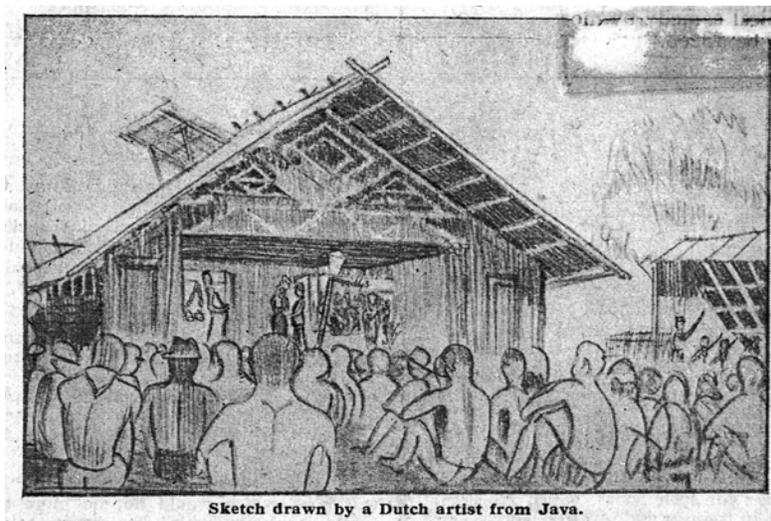


FIGURE 12.36. SKETCH OF NAKHON PATHOM THEATRE. UNKNOWN DUTCH ARTIST.

In Nakhon Pathom and Nong Pladuk, down the line and closer to Bangkok, no artificial lighting was ever permitted.<sup>i</sup> Natural lighting for the upstage interior spaces of these structures was accomplished by positioning the theatres in such a way that afternoon light could stream in through a large trapdoor on the left side of the pitched roofs. The theatre in the strategically located “bridge camp” at Tamarkan also had a trapdoor in its roof for use when artificial sources of lighting were prohibited.

**Artificial Light.** When approved, artificial lighting, its sources and control, presented the POWs with a series of technical problems to solve.

## Lighting Instruments and Their Placement

**Footlights.** One immediate source for artificial light and “instruments” were the camp-made “slush lamps” used in the huts at night. G. E. Chippington wrote of the pleasure of finally having lights in his hut at Chungkai in 1942: “We have now installed our own lighting system—small tins of oil plus ‘wick’—a short piece of thick thread held up by a wire. The light, though feeble, at least breaks the total darkness in the huts and acts as a ‘homing beacon.’”<sup>2</sup> Slush lamps could be made from such scrounged items as Kiwi tobacco containers or jam tins.

A row of these small oil lamps lined up across the front of the stage were used as *footlights*. Filled with coconut oil, pig oil, ghee (clarified butter), or any other oil the prisoners could lay their hands on and with wicks of braided thread, these lights gave off a warm, flickering light. A *ground row*—a long narrow panel—sitting just downstage protected the slush lamp wicks from being extinguished by the wind, shielded the audience’s eyes from their glare, and helped bounce the light upstage.

But slush lamps as footlights had two serious drawbacks: low intensity and diffuse focus, which meant that the *throw* from their unfocused flames could only illuminate the performers when they played directly in front of the lights.<sup>3</sup> D. R. Mullineux’s report that “50 coconut oil lamps [were used] for the footlights” at Chungkai illustrates how the POWs tried to compensate for this deficiency.<sup>4</sup>

At Tamarkan, the technicians came up with another type of instrument that could also be employed as footlights: “hurricane lamps, blanked off with the sides of four-gallon oil or sugar containers.”<sup>5</sup> Not only did the metal containers block the light from striking the audience’s eyes, but the shiny interiors acted as reflectors, throwing more concentrated light onto the stage.

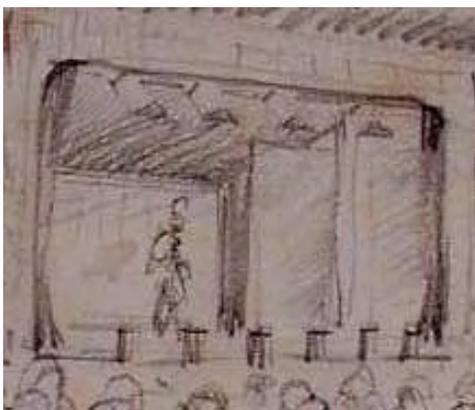


FIGURE 12.37. SKETCH OF TAMARKAN THEATRE. DETAIL. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

<sup>i</sup> One exception was made for a show at Nong Pladuk: see Chapter 7: “The Show Must Go On.”

Chalker's sketch of the theatre at Tamarkan shows this type of footlight in use.

Because the light produced by the hurricane lamps was more intense, it could illuminate more of the stage area. But whether the required intensity came from numerous slush lamps or hurricane lamps, distracting shadows were thrown on anything upstage of the actors who performed in front of them.

**Front Lights.** Experienced theatre people knew how to overcome this problem: they needed *front lights*—additional lighting that struck the stage from a different and higher angle. “Through the Japanese we bought three petrol lamps for stage lighting,” explained Jacobs, “which enabled us to put on our shows at night instead of in the later afternoon as previously. Using cut down petrol tins as reflectors, we obtained a much better effect from our scenery in the night light than we had in daylight.” As usual, the Japanese charged a huge fee for facilitating the transaction.<sup>6</sup>

Chalker's sketch of the Tamarkan theatre (above) shows a row of four strange-looking, triangular-shaped oblong boxes hanging over the front of the stage suspended from a bamboo “pipe” (*first electric*) at the top of the proscenium arch. These were the “petrol tins” that had been cut in half on the diagonal (thus the triangular shape) providing the “reflectors” for additional lighting. Tilted down so their more intense light could strike the actors from the optimum angle, they washed out the shadows caused by the footlights.

John Milford noted that the first front lights at Chungkai were “ingeniously contrived out of quinine bottles with reflectors made out of tinfoil from . . . one gallon bins.”<sup>7</sup> The larger capacity of these variations on the “slush lamps” allowed them to burn longer.

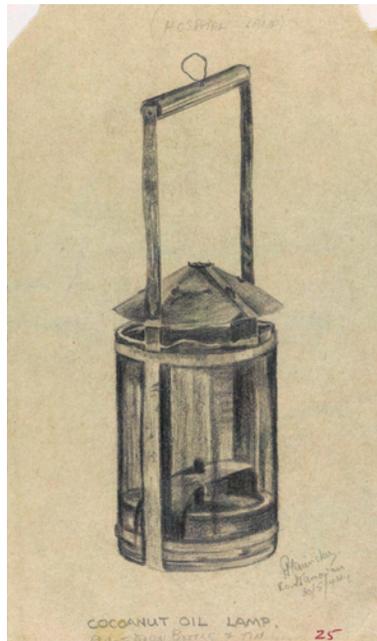


FIGURE 12.38. CAMP-MADE COCONUT OIL REFLECTOR LAMP. STANLEY GIMSON. IWM LD\_006637. COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF STANLEY GIMSON.

Stanley Gimson's sketch shows a prototype of this camp-made reflector light used in the hospital. Later, lighting technicians were able to borrow pressure lamps from the Japanese. When attending the

*Promenade Concert* in May 1944, Arthur Johnston noticed the qualitative difference the new front lights made: “Stage brilliantly lit by 2 mantle kerosene or petrol lamps suspended from bamboo rafter in front of the stage, and shaded by cut-away kerosene tins.”<sup>8</sup> There would eventually be three such instruments.<sup>9</sup>

Photographs of the theatres at Ubon (see **Figure 12.14**) and Kanburi Officers’ Camp (see **Figure 12.2**) also display these reflectors suspended in front of the stage; at Kanburi, they cantilevered out from the bottom of the proscenium arch header so that the multiple instruments clustered inside could light the whole width of the stage.

**Specials.** But the POW producer-directors were not content with general illumination. They wanted the atmospheric “magic” that special lighting could bring to their shows. This effect would require additional lighting—lighting normally found in a professional theatre, such as *side lighting*, *top lighting*, or *spotlights*—that could highlight, shape, and tone the stage.

In his comments on the *Promenade Concert*, Johnston observed that the technicians were exploring more complex lighting: “Suspended from the rafters, out of sight of audience were also a further pair of mantle kerosene lamps (hurricane variety of about 500 candle power each) to light up the interior of the stage, and the whole gave a very good impression of a well lit substantial theatre stage and every bit as good as some of the scenes seen in the theatres at home.” Lights had even been incorporated into the scenic design: on the two supports for the three arches at the back of the stage were “two lamps of modernistic design supposed to be set in, something after this style.”<sup>10</sup>



FIGURE 12.39. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

Though photographs of *Wonder Bar* were taken in daylight, some of the sophisticated lighting developed for use in that show is evident in the photograph above. Artificial light illuminates the three-dimensional Alpine mountains from lighting placed offstage in the wings and even from the top, as Johnston witnessed earlier in the musical concert.

**Spotlights.** During the spring and summer of 1944, the lighting designer-technicians at Chungkai continued to experiment. By the time the Javanese dancer Tari made his first appearance

onstage in July, *spotlights*—lights that could concentrate their beams in a more proscribed area—had been developed. Coast exulted that the audience would see “this impressive green and silver costumed dancer in a spotlight against a black [back cloth<sup>ii</sup>].”<sup>11</sup> Three months later, “all sorts of coloured spotlights” devised by Pat Stephenson were used in the “Balinese Scene” for *On Your Toes*—and then again to create “flashes of lightning” during the “Sleeping Beauty Ballet.”<sup>12</sup> A note in Colonel Owtram’s memoir claiming these were operated from offstage is confirmed by Leslie Fielding’s sketch of the new Chungkai theatre where two spotlights strike performers from offstage right and left.<sup>13</sup>

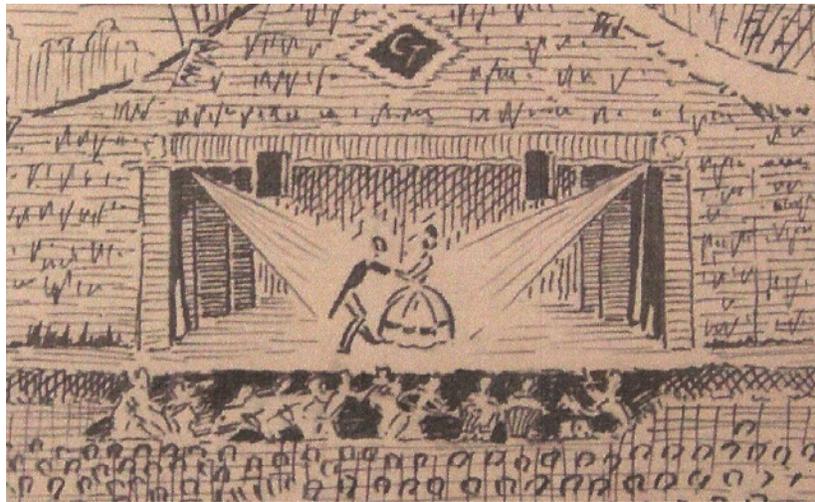


FIGURE 12.40. CHUNGKAI THEATRE DETAIL. SKETCH BY LESLIE FIELDING. IWM 1559 36.

**Color Media.** In the late 1930s and early '40s, there were three standard practices for achieving colored light. All required that some transparent colored medium be placed in front of the light. Changing this medium with one of a different color would, of course, change the color of the light. One practice was to use a thin sheet of colored gelatin held in place by a metal frame in front of the light. Another was to dip a lamp in a colored lacquer, or “lamp dip,” which would provide a transparent color medium on the glass’s surface. The third was to use a colored glass piece, or *roundel*, in front of a light.

Any of these techniques could have been used at Chungkai. Gelatin could possibly have been obtained by boiling down the hooves of the cattle used for food and dyeing the resultant goo. Dipping light bulbs was, of course, out of the question, but applying some sort of viscous lacquer-like, transparent substance to the glass chimney of a hurricane or petrol pressure lamp would produce the same effect (the dyes available to the POWs are cited in Section F: Costumes, below). Primitive roundels could have been treated the same way.

**Control.** Besides the angle and the color, the next most important capability is to control the light’s intensity. Dimming and/or brightening can create not only a shifting focus but a sense of movement. This possibility might seem beyond the POW lighting technicians’ capabilities, but this was not the case.

Describing the “Mystery of the Lotus” dance, Laurie Allison recalled that the stage had started in darkness and then the scene was revealed “in the glow of freshly lit lighting.”<sup>14</sup> A sequential lighting of the footlights by crew members dressed in black working simultaneously from the center toward both

<sup>ii</sup> Coast wrote “front-cloth” here, but he clearly means that the dancer is to be seen as if performing in a void that would make both him and his costume “pop.”

ends (or vice versa) would have would have created the illusion of the lights “coming up.” And Colonel Owtram’s reference that the “stage lighting slowly faded to darkness” as the dance ended suggests the same procedure had been followed in reverse.<sup>15</sup>

**Special Effects.** Wilbur Smith, lighting designer for the shows in the Kanburi hospital camp theatre in 1944, wrote with pride about a unique lighting effect his crew had produced for a revue called *Nite and Day*: “We made our neon lights<sup>iii</sup> by a piece of tin pulled across by a string on each side” in front of a kerosene pressure lamp borrowed from the Japanese.<sup>16</sup> He explained that the tin was perforated with pinholes which spelled “New York” in flashing lights on the scenery when it was pulled forward and backward in front of the lantern.<sup>17</sup>

A strobe-like lighting effect was produced at Ubon for a nighttime outdoor skating scene in the show *Hot Ice*. Pritchard explained how it was done: “While the band played the Skaters Waltz, and skaters moved their feet appropriately, a lighting enthusiast spun a circle of cardboard with suitable holes cut in it in front of the one pressure lamp provided by the Nips. This gave the necessary flickering effect, and the impression that the chaps were actually skating.”<sup>18</sup>



FIGURE 12.41. UBON THEATRE. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

This imaginative lighting needed three things to make it work: semi-darkness on stage so the special effect would be visible, the right angle—ground level—for the light, and the active involvement of a stagehand. The dark rectangular “Prompter’s Box” visible at the front of the stage in the Ubon theatre photograph was the ideal place to hide a “lighting enthusiast.”

Other special lighting effects were noted by Mullineux: “Standard lamps, table lamps [f]or scenes were easily made from clay, wire and decorated with paper which, with a coconut oil lamp instead of an electric bulb, gave ample variety for change of scenery.”<sup>19</sup> The lamppost center stage in the *Hot Ice* setting (see Figure 12.25) would most certainly have contained one of these oil lamps glowing in the background during the nighttime skating scene as well as the light that “came on” as the radiogram mentioned in Props earlier was opened.

<sup>iii</sup> Smith probably means “chaser lights” instead of “neon lights.”

The fire danger from the use of these “live flame” lights in bamboo and atap theatres would have been extremely high, so the standard procedure of having sand or water buckets readily available backstage and in the wings must have been rigidly enforced. There are no accounts in the POW literature that any of these lighting instruments causing a fire and burning down a theatre.

## Combining Sources

Clever producer-directors and lighting designers could combine the use of both natural and artificial light to their advantage—as Britt and his lighting person, E. L. Carr, did for their production of *Night Must Fall* at Chungkai. Cast member Hugh de Wardener explained how both sources of light had been employed to enhance the effectiveness of the mystery-thriller:

*But Night Must Fall couldn't have been a better name and a better play for the audience. . . . And so as night fell as the play went on . . . and the sun set behind the audience (so what sun there was shone on the stage, you see) . . . the stage got darker and darker. And then the lights were lit, I suppose, between Act I and II (I can't remember).<sup>iv20</sup>*

## Lighting Designers

Unfortunately, we know the names of only four of the POW lighting designer-technicians responsible for these shows, and all but one of them—Wilbur G. Smith at Kanburi—come from Chungkai. The first lighting person was Gerald Angier, who was succeeded by P. H. (“Stevie”) Stephenson when Angier took over responsibility for wardrobe. Stephenson was eventually followed by E. L. Carr.

## F. Costumes

If the scenery and lighting delighted POW audiences, they were thrilled by the costumes they saw onstage. The appearance of an evening gown, or a suit, or anything other than G-strings and ragged military shorts was viewed as a triumph over adversity and lifted their spirits. Glamorous costumes for the female impersonators were especially prized, and the results, according to Ted Ingram, who witnessed what the wardrobe staff at Nakhon Pathom was capable of producing, were truly amazing: “The dresses, designed and made for the leading ladies in the shows, simply baffled description. Just odd pieces of cloth, scraps of sarongs, mosquito netting and sacking, a little home-made dye, and cotton from unpicked webbing—and the result perfect, alluring, and requiring no coupons.”<sup>v21</sup>

*Costumes* can include a large category of items worn by performers. In this section, the term will cover accessories, wigs, and makeup as well as clothing. One terminology issue: *costume renderings* are a designer’s colored sketch of an individual costume; *costume plots* show all the costumes to be worn by an actor together on the same page.

<sup>iv</sup> It is actually Act III that takes place at night.  
<sup>v</sup> Ingram wrote this article in Britain after the war when rationing coupons were still in use.

## Costume Designers and Wardrobe Staff

When writing about the costumes that appeared in the shows, the POWs did not always make a distinction between those who designed the costumes and those who built them (sometimes they were the same people). To most writers, these separate activities were all identified as simply “wardrobe.”

“It was lucky for us that we had Frank Purtell with us,” Douglas Harris wrote in Tamarkan. “Frank had been a tailor with J. C. Williamson, the major theatrical producing organization in Australia. He seemed capable of making clothes out of anything. At one show a man appeared in a perfectly fitting full dress evening suit and another in a dinner suit equally well fitting. Both were made of rice bags blackened with charcoal.”<sup>22</sup> Purtell gathered around him an extremely capable wardrobe staff.<sup>vi</sup>

When Norman Carter started producing elaborate revues and pantos at Tamarkan, Purtell and his staff became so overwhelmed with the workload that Lieutenant Rae Nixon, a popular camp cartoonist, was enlisted to take over the design responsibilities. His immense contributions to the costuming of shows at Tamarkan will be considered later in this section.

Across the river at Chungkai, Puck Jonkmans was responsible for the remarkable costumes worn by the Het Hollandsch Cabaret. For British productions, the wardrobe department was in the very capable hands of Gerald Angier and his assistant, J. Olds. John Coast described Angier as “a jovial Humpty Dumpty of a man, very efficient.”<sup>23</sup>

Kanburi Officers’ Camp had the expert services of Peter Bernard, at least for the N.E.I. productions. At Nong Pladuk, the female impersonator Basil Ferron took on the task of costuming many of the shows. And at Nakhon Pathom, Jack Chalker, besides being one of the most popular female impersonators, was heavily involved in designing and constructing costuming as well. His notes about the activity of the wardrobe staff provide excellent insider information on how costumes were designed and made in these POW workshops.

“A skill, invaluable to any costume making,” he wrote, “was that of the tailor and we were fortunate in having many amongst us in the camps. With the aid of their expertise some superb garments and costumes were produced.” Reminiscing about his “personal memories of costume making,” he wrote, “these were often made in our ‘sick’ huts as well as in the theatre area, back stage. My memories are of these small group activities, particularly in the living quarters where a cast member was draped with bits of cloth and bits stitched together with crude needles and reclaimed thread from army webbing or other bits of scrounged cloth—to form a garment. Where a tailor was available he could be brought in to assist.” “Needles,” he added, “were made from bits of filed steel or beaten brass from army webbing equipment.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>vi</sup> *Signalmen E. Geary, N. Townsend, and E. Christensen of the 8th Division Signals; Signalman E. Kenney of the R.C.S.; Sergeant F. Atherton of the 2/4th C.C.S.; A. B. L. Luff and Hill from the Royal Australian Navy; and Gunner A. McNiven of the 2/10th Field Regiment.*



FIGURE 12.42. COSTUME SHOP AT NAKHON PATHOM. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

Chalker's pencil sketch of the costume shop and storage area backstage in the last theatre constructed at Nakhon Pathom shows racks of costumes hung in two rows at the right, with shelves for accessories. A low table—possibly for cutting fabric—sits at left. At the back is a stove with a pipe extending up through the roof. The stove would have heated makeshift “irons” and boiled water for steaming and shaping clothing and accessories. Stools, buckets, and a broom complete the scene.

### Costuming Sources

Costumes for the shows were either borrowed, purchased, or made from scrounged materials.

**Borrowed.** Clothing for men's costumes was always the easiest to come by from the kit carried Up Country by the POWs, primarily officers. Coast described Gerald Angier's method for obtaining and caring for borrowed clothing:

Each week Gerald collects all the available clothing we need to borrow in the camp, has it washed in the river over the week-end, and returned to the owners the following Monday. He has a ledger and knows just where he can lay his hands on the owner of a pair of flannels, a blue scarf, a white shirt or any of the other amazing bits of kit some of the cunning people still own who've not gone up country [on a maintenance party] or lost their kit.<sup>25</sup>

Borrowing clothing for female characters was another story. But the wardrobe “Mistresses,” as Colonel Owtram teasingly called them,<sup>26</sup> learned not to underestimate what might be stashed somewhere among the odds and ends of treasured items that POWs carried with them. Chalker recounts one story of how some costuming “treasures” were acquired at Nakhon Pathom:

I believe it must have been for the Wodehouse play<sup>vii</sup> that some women's underwear was required and to cope with this a quiet and discreet appeal had been made throughout the camp for help with these items. Much to everyone's surprise two pairs of silk cami-knickers were produced from two separate POWs and were lent to the cast on the strict understanding that the owners were to remain anonymous and that the items were to be returned in immaculate order without further comment. The whole operation had to take place through a middle-man and the conditions were strictly adhered to.<sup>27</sup>

**Purchased.** But not all the soldiers were willing to loan their treasured possessions to benefit the stage. Jacobs remembered one English officer at Tamarkan “who had a dress suit complete with all accessories down to white tie and patent leather shoes . . . and steadfastly resisted all attempts of the concert party to borrow them as stage costume.”<sup>28</sup> To deal with this kind of resistance, Jacobs, as entertainments officer, had to find some way to raise money to purchase such needed items either from camp personnel or local Thai traders.

To finance purchases we ran ten cent sweepstakes, with prizes of up to fifty ticals. We usually made a profit of 150 ticals on each sweep, and with this money we purchase[d] all sorts of materials in the camp. It was really amazing what some of the fellows had stowed away in their kit bags. One chap . . . had a lot of imitation jewelery [*sic*], which helped to make our female impersonators look more glamorous. From others we purchased a grey civilian overcoat, ladies handbags, lengths of dress materials, crayons and paints, shirts, slacks and tonettes.<sup>29</sup>

At Chungkai, instead of running a sweepstakes, the income from ticket sales was used to purchase items from other POWs or Thai vendors.

**Camp Made.** If appropriate clothing couldn't be borrowed or purchased, the costumes had to be made from what could be altered from in-stock or from scrounged material. Anything and everything, Chalker asserted, became grist for the wardrobe mill:

Many costumes were made from odd bits of unwanted/rotting mosquito netting, from bits of blanket, old army shirts or shorts, woven bamboo matting or any other scrounged materials. . . . Old tins, bits of silver paper from the Japanese compound, collected birds feathers, bits of animal hide from pig or bullock brought into the camp for food, bones, stolen bits of wire or nails—anything that could be used that could be adapted to our needs was hoarded and valuable, demanding considerable ingenuity and skill—and great fun as well as effort in achieving a successful result.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>vii</sup> Good Morning Bill.

If the burlap gunny (“Hessian”) sacks, rice or sugar sacks, old tent canvas, or mosquito netting were not used as front curtains or backdrops, they, too, became major sources of fabric for costumes.<sup>31</sup>

And cardboard, available from American Red Cross packages, became useful for all sorts of costuming needs: at Tamarkan, as the foundation for a series of bonnets, top hats, men’s dickies, ties and bustles;<sup>32</sup> in Chungkai, for a “massive traditional Wayang hat . . . a mask . . . [a]nklets, bracelets, and earrings from silver-paper-cardboard” for the Javanese court dancer, Tari’s, first appearance on stage.<sup>33</sup>

Even the fluffy, cotton-like fibers surrounding the seeds of the kapok trees growing in or around the camp found a use. “We continued to collect it near Chungkai using it for clinical purposes,” wrote Chalker, “but also found it ideal for padding primitive mosquito-netting brassieres for stage female parts, providing shapely molded breasts and ponderous stomachs when required.”<sup>34</sup>

Female impersonator Custance Baker found what he thought was a better way to solve the lack-of-breasts problem: “When we started as girls most of us tried grossly padded bras but found them unsatisfactory. Most men have some sort of pectoral muscles and we found that a very little padding was enough to provide a convincing outline.”

In his estimation, the more difficult problem was lower down:

Hips were more difficult. Most men particularly POWs, have much slimmer hips than women of the same height and we needed quite a lot of padding to achieve the proper shape. This tended to show under a close fitting frock, which completely destroyed the illusion. . . . I had kept an old batik silk sarong with my kit and I tore it into four or five eight-inch wide strips. When there were stitched together end to end they made a strip about ten or twelve yards long. With a friend to hold the far end I could roll myself in to this as a spiral bandage over my padding, which then produced a very smooth and supple silhouette.<sup>35</sup>

### Costuming *Wonder Bar*

The *Wonder Bar* photographs reveal what extraordinary results could be obtained by combining these three sources of costuming materials. For this large-cast production, Gerald Angier, J. Olds, and their wardrobe staff produced well over thirty costumes.



FIGURE 12.43. *WONDER BAR* DETAIL. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

The photograph above shows seventeen characters—twelve men and five women—all wearing

outfits appropriate to the guests and staff of a high-class holiday hotel in the Swiss Alps, where this musical comedy takes place.



FIGURE 12.44. *WONDER BAR* DETAIL: "SIMON." PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.



FIGURE 12.45. *WONDER BAR* DETAIL: "PETER." PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

**Men's Costumes.** The divorce lawyer Simeon Process, at left, wears a tweedy-looking sports jacket, white shirt with a tie, light-colored trousers, and socks with incongruous camp-made clogs. Peter de Freece, at right, wears a white shirt with a dark tie and light-colored pleated trousers. It's difficult to see what he's wearing on his feet.



FIGURE 12.46.  
*WONDER BAR*  
DETAIL: "BOBSLEIGH  
TEAM MEMBER."  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY  
OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

Members of the bobsleigh team are scattered throughout the ensemble. Like the one pictured

above, most appear to be wearing white scarves (ascots?) under dark V-neck sweaters. A team emblem is sewn on the left chest of each sweater. They wear light-colored knit or cloth caps and light-colored trousers tucked into the tops of camp-made ski boots..



FIGURE 12.47. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL: "PAUL." PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

Most of the other men clearly visible in the *Wonder Bar* photograph are members of the hotel staff wearing traditional Swiss outfits of lederhosen, long-sleeved white shirts, black bow ties, and dark vests. Only Paul, the hotel chamber boy, at right, wears the traditional lederhosen suspenders. All wear light-colored knee socks and camp-made clogs on their feet.



FIGURE 12.48. *WONDER BAR* DETAIL: "MIRABELLE." PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

**Women's Costumes.** Mirabelle Swam, the leading female character played by Bobby Spong, sits at right center. She wears a strapless gown that shows off her slender neck and shoulders. Unlike the other women's outfits, the fabric for Spong's gown has reflective qualities, like the sheen of silk or satin, and drapes well around his body, having both softness and weight. Since such fabric would have been impossible to find in the camp, Spong was most likely wearing one of the dresses he brought up to Thailand from Singapore. Mirabelle is also wearing earrings (and probably a necklace, but the image is too indistinct to tell). A small matching pillbox hat sits on her head.



FIGURE 12.49. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL: "MILANIA."  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.



FIGURE 12.50. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL: "LADY ELIZABETH."  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

The other female characters were costumed by the wardrobe staff. Milania de Freece, on the left above, wears a sleeveless scoop-necked gown which has a soft layer of mosquito netting over some more opaque material and shoulder straps and a ruching ruffle trim around the bodice. Her right foot pokes out from the bottom hem of the gown, offering just a glimpse of one of her camp-made high-heeled shoes. On the right, gossip columnist Lady Elizabeth Craig wears a sleeveless top over a mosquito net skirt.

The other female characters wear dresses of a similar design: dark straps hold up lighter-colored V-neck bodices gathered in front that are attached to either dark or light-colored skirts. All the female impersonators in the *Wonder Bar* photographs appear to be wearing camp-made falsies.

### Designing and Constructing Women's Outfits

Designing and building outfits for the female characters was the most challenging of all the wardrobe staff assignments. The "professional" female impersonators like Bobby Spong took responsibility for supplying their own gowns and accessories. At Nakhon Pathom, Fergus Anckorn witnessed them engaged in altering their dresses to ensure they had new and different outfits for each show: "They made their own dresses. They'd sit there sewing for hours, you know, making these lovely dresses."<sup>36</sup> For his role in *Hay Fever* at Chungkai, Custance Baker remembered he "actually wore a pretty white tennis frock with a pleated skirt and white shoes, which I made myself."<sup>37</sup>

Costuming the other female characters was up to the wardrobe staff, and after years of imprisonment and isolation, this task, Chalker conceded, really tested their memories: "We tried to remember what women had been wearing. We had no reference. But we put our heads together and made these damned things out of odds and ends."<sup>38</sup>



FIGURE 12.51 & FIGURE 12.52. RENDERINGS FOR WOMEN'S OUTFITS. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

Chalker's color renderings of women's outfits for productions at Nakhon Pathom show two filmy day frocks and an evening gown for which dyed mosquito netting was the ideal fabric. The tailored black and white ensemble at left would most likely have been made of sacking dyed or painted.

### Fabric Dyes

If designers and wardrobe staff were going to have any versatility and range in the color of the costumes they constructed, fabrics would have to be painted or dyed. Sources for pigments and paint for sets have already been examined in Part One, and some of these would be used to paint costumes as well. Bernard's notes on his costume renderings also provide specific information on what color could be obtained from what sources:

Green	extracted from [boiled] leaves
Yellow	curry powder from kitchen mixed with chalk
Black	soot from same source, with starch
Red and Purple	from mercurochrome and permanganate
Brown	from clay
Blue	from low-grade Japanese ink <sup>39</sup>

At one point the wardrobe crew in Tamarkan was able to purchase "coloured inks" through a Japanese solidier who made an exorbitant profit on the deal.<sup>40</sup>

### Additional Accoutrements

#### Accessories

*Accessories* are those add-ons to a basic costume, such as hats, shoes, jewelry, handbags, gloves, stockings, brassieres, and the like, that help define a character more thoroughly. Most of the accessories noted below are for female characters.

**Hats.** In the 1930s and early '40s, a hat was an essential accessory for all women no matter what their station. Therefore, in order to accurately represent women on stage, these, too, had to be re-created from memory.



FIGURE 12.53. HATS. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

Chalker's pencil sketch shows numerous ideas for hats reflective of the period. These were made "of woven bamboo and all sorts of stuff, modern, smart, and we dyed them."<sup>41</sup>

In some shows, men needed hats as well. At Tamarkan, the wardrobe staff used grass matting to make the straw boaters used by the quartet of "Mashers" in the *Gay 90s* revue.



FIGURE 12.54. "THE MASHERS." RAE NIXON. HAN SAMETHINI COLLECTION. COURTESY OF ROBIN KALHORN.

Men's caps were made from burlap bags. For the valet in the production of *Dingbats Abroad*, the unique shape of a bowler hat was first sculpted in clay and then covered in papier-mâché to get a positive mold.<sup>42</sup>

**Shoes.** Shoes for the male characters were borrowed if at all possible. If not, as was the case for many of the men in *Wonder Bar*, they used “go-aheads”—clogs carved from wood with rubber or cloth straps that were made in the camp and worn by everyone daily. Women's high heels, on the other hand, were impossible to come by and had to be made.

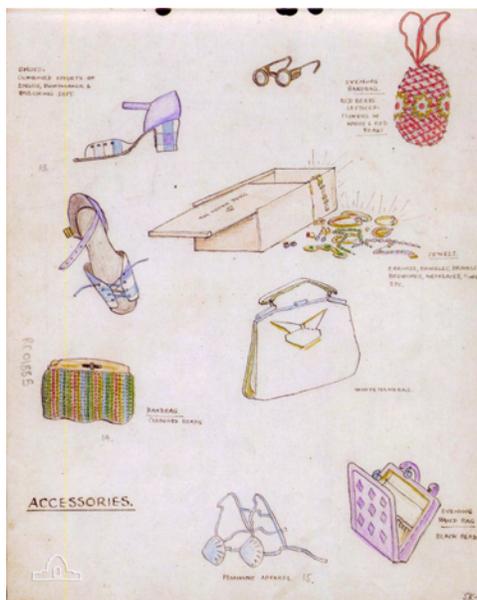


FIGURE 12.55. “ACCESSORIES.” RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

Rae Nixon devoted a whole page of his sketchbook to a rendering of accessories. At upper left is a pair of women's high-heeled shoes seen from both the top and side view. His accompanying note indicates that their construction was a group effort, employing the “combined efforts of Engrs [Engineers], Bootmakers & Tailoring Dept.”<sup>43</sup>

**Handbags, Jewelry, Etc.** Nixon's “accessories” rendering also shows daytime and evening handbags (two of which use seeds for beading), the “Krown Jools” box containing the collection of “earrings, bangles, bracelets, brooches, necklaces, rings, etc.” purchased from a POW, a pair of glasses, and the construction details for brassieres or, in Nixon's more polite term, “feminine apparel.”<sup>44</sup>

Besides the unexpected appearance of ladies' underwear mentioned earlier, the wardrobe staff at Nakhon Pathom came in for another surprise when their request for a seemingly impossible item was answered: “About the same time as this a woman's handbag appeared on loan to the theatre group and this was even more curious than the underwear revelation and caused a great deal of mirth and conjecture! We could carry very little [Up Country] because we had long marches and how the hell could anyone take a woman's handbag up there? We could believe the cami-knickers . . . OK, yes, but not the handbag. Anyone having a fetish about a handbag must be interesting.”<sup>45</sup>

**Stockings.** For his *Memories of the Gay 90s* production, Carter insisted that he wanted his cancan dancers to wear silk stockings. Nothing, he said, could be faked to look like them. This seemed an impossible request, but when the appeal went out to the camp for these items, “six pairs of silk stockings appeared out of someone’s kit-bag—still in their cellophane wraps.”<sup>46</sup> The owner had purchased them in Singapore for his wife before being captured.<sup>47</sup> Now, after two years and four months of captivity, they were sold to Jacobs for ten ticals.<sup>48</sup>

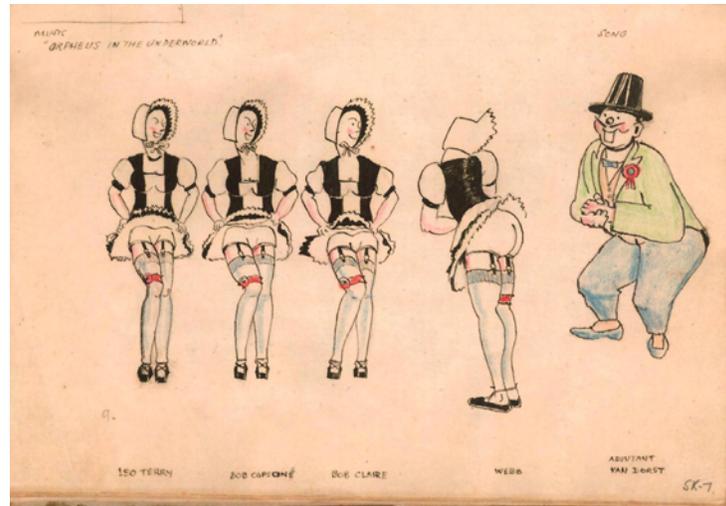


FIGURE 12.56. “CAN-CAN DANCERS.” COSTUME PLOT DETAIL. RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

Nixon’s costume plot for the cancan dancers and the Dutch comedian shows the famous silk stockings. “The genuine article—dyed blue” are Nixon’s instructions to his wardrobe crew. The rest of the cancan outfits were to be made as follows: “Suspenders: wire clips & bachelor buttons, pairs of braces, bag. Garters: Elastic & sherred silk. Slippers: Bag & c/board [cardboard].”<sup>49</sup>

## Wigs

Having good wigs was crucial to the leading female impersonators, and various wardrobe staffs attempted to make these articles as well. It proved to be one of their most challenging technical problems, and the men who perfected the art of wig making were so valued that they received special credit in souvenir programs.

**Artificial “hair-like” materials.** According to Jack Chalker, the wigs in Nakhon Pathom were made from “teased-out hemp”:

The Japanese . . . brought in a great deal of raw hemp and set lines of legless men to comb it out on blocks set with nails. The purpose of this was to prepare the hemp for rope making and some of the sick POW’s were involved in making the ropes with which to raise or lower the bamboo-matting stage curtains, but also for the manufacture of wigs.<sup>50</sup>



FIGURE 12.57. WIGS. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

Chalker went on to explain their construction process:

Wigs were made by first producing a light head cap of mosquito netting onto which carefully teased-out hemp was sewn. This could be curled or straight according to requirements and could be coloured with the use of soot and tapioca ‘goo,’ or a range of browns from ground clays or other colouring matter. Wig making, in my own limited experience, occurred mostly in Nakorn Pathom [*sic*] and were singularly sophisticated.<sup>51</sup>

The versatile tapioca “goo” used as a sizing for scenery paint could also give a “set” to the ladies’ stylish hairdos.

The most effective and lifelike wigs were made at Tamarkan by the Dutch POW R. Jansen out of other, more human “hair-like” materials: cow or yak tails and even Scotsman’s sporrans.<sup>viii52</sup>

<sup>viii</sup> *The fur- or hair-covered leather purses worn by the Gordon Highlanders as part of their dress uniforms.*

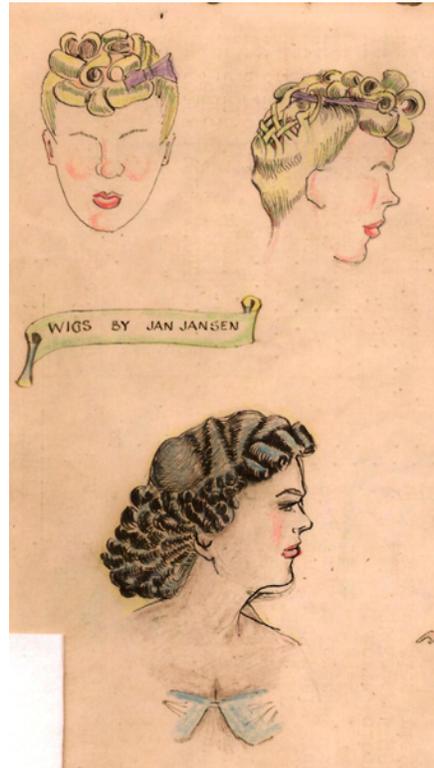


FIGURE 12.58. “Two Wigs” DETAIL. RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

Nixon’s notes accompanying his sketches of Jansen’s wigs tell us that there “were three ‘stock’ wigs in Tamarikan wardrobe—two brunette and one blonde—each given a fresh ‘perm’ for the next show.”<sup>53</sup>

But full-head wigs for the female characters weren’t the only challenges for Jansen. For the character of the valet, Egbert, in *Dingbats Abroad*, he made a “bald wig out of a cow’s bladder with a detachable toupee!”<sup>54</sup> And because there wasn’t time for the actors to grow their own handlebar mustaches to play the “Mashers” in *Gay 90s*, he “made them out of the clippings from cow’s tails” (see **Figure 12.54**).<sup>55</sup>

When the Tamarikan POWs were transferred to Chungkai in late 1944/early 1945, Jansen became part of Joop Postma’s Het Hollandsch Cabaret and went on to achieve even greater glory in wig construction. “And don’t forget our wig maker, Jansen,” exclaimed Philip Brugman, “who could create the most beautiful ladies wigs from cow tails: platinum, red, 17th century—he did it all and supplied for all the theatre groups, such as the English and Australian.”<sup>56</sup>

**Human hair.** Because of the difficulty in creating effective wigs for the female impersonators, some POW commanders allowed their top impersonators to grow their hair out. It was very possible, therefore, to see these men parading around the camp with their long hair up in curlers, much to the consternation of some other officers and men.



FIGURE 12.59. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL: BOBBY SPONG.  
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.



FIGURE 12.60. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL: DOUGLAS MORRIS. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

In these details from the *Wonder Bar* photographs, Bobby Spong, on the left, wears his long brunette hair in an upsweep. Douglas Morris, at right, wears his soft blond hair down and curled about his face.

The other female characters in the *Wonder Bar* photographs are wearing turbans, which were not only appropriate to the time period of the production but, more importantly, eliminated the need for wigs. A lock of the actor's own hair was pulled out at the front to suggest more hair underneath.

## Makeup

As with costumes and accessories, makeup not only helped the actors transform more completely into their characters but also helped project their facial features to the back rows in the thousand-plus-seat theatres: "The stage lighting was always weak," noted Custance Baker, "so make up had to clear and strong."<sup>57</sup>

In Chalker's experience, "Make-up was a more difficult matter":

Apart from the use of charcoal sticks and white tapioca flour and in the early days some ground pastel mixed with grease, red was difficult to produce or obtain. I believe that in Chungkai and in Nakhon Pathom some rouge was obtained either through Thai traders who brought up our rations on river barges or possibly from amenable and interested Jap guards.

As you can imagine this crudely made facial make-up would have only a limited life on stage where intense heat combined with perspiration could, and did, provide disastrous and hilarious effects on occasion, though it never ruined a show.<sup>58</sup>

Charcoal or soot from the cookhouse chimney was used for lining the eyes; rice or tapioca flour as face powder. As a further source for red lipstick or rouge, small amounts of mercurochrome were sometimes available, although this antiseptic was needed in the hospitals.

The performers at Chungkai had the services of a professional makeup artist, R. Taylor, who had worked for Max Factor in Hollywood before the war.<sup>59</sup> Before their accommodating Japanese commandant at Tamarkan gave permission for women's face powder and lipstick to be purchased locally in Kanchanaburi,<sup>60</sup> Sergeant Fred Atherton, a Tasmanian pathologist, developed a range of makeup bases by mixing mosquito cream with colored artist crayons.<sup>61</sup>

The high black and white contrast in the *Wonder Bar* photographs makes it difficult to see, except in the most obvious cases, who is, or who is not, wearing makeup. The female impersonators wear eye shadow, rouge, and lipstick to heighten their allure. But most of the men do not appear to be wearing makeup, or if they are, it is a basic *corrective makeup*. Hugh de Wardener (**Figure 12.44**) seems to be wearing some sort of old-age *character makeup* with whitened hair (rice or tapioca flour), and two others sport fake-looking Hitler-type moustaches.

### Costuming Challenges

The range of costumes produced by the dedicated designers and wardrobe staff in the various camps was simply astounding. But the prize for the most imaginative costumes seen in any POW show in Thailand has to be given to Puck Jonkmans and his Dutch/Indonesian wardrobe staff for *Circus Cavaljos* at Chungkai. In this show, costumes were required for the “[a]crobats, pumas, penguins and clowns [which] were mixed together with serious acts such as a legendary ‘Lotus Dance.’” Chalker called it “perhaps the most ingeniously designed and constructed of any of the Chungkai theatre performances,” with “superb” costumes.<sup>ix62</sup>

Chalker also recalled a “singular example of construction and achievement” at Nakhon Pathom: “a two-man operated elephant made of fine woven bamboo matting.” He explained, “The Elephant was part of a revue called ‘The Raja [*sic*] of Coconut.’ The elephant was made of woven bamboo matting coloured grey with a mixture of wood ash and tapioca goo which had dried hard and had begun to revert back to powder.”<sup>63</sup>

Chalker goes on to tell about the hilarious mishap that occurred with the elephant during a matinee performance in the hot sun,<sup>x</sup> and then concludes, “I mention this not just because of its crazy ending but because the construction of a reasonably sized elephant able to contain two men and survive considerable antics on stage without splitting apart, that worked successfully as well as looking good was a considerable achievement. It was a great day for us all.”<sup>64</sup>

The Tamarkan designers and wardrobe staff did not lag behind their counterparts in the other camps. For *The Wizard of Oz*, Frank Purtell was faced with the challenges of creating the costumes for the Cowardly Lion and the Tin Man. For the lion, he devised a “frightful skin made out of old bags, that sprouting mane of shredded rice-sacks!”<sup>65</sup> The Tin Man, though, presented a difficult problem that was only solved when a Petty Officer, who had survived the sinking of the *Prince of Wales*<sup>xi</sup> and was constructing artificial limbs for camp amputees, stepped in and made a suitable outfit out of old tea containers.<sup>66</sup> For the musical revue *When Knights Were Bold*, Lieutenant George Plunket constructed a suit of medieval armor and a helmet out of tin.

<sup>ix</sup> See **Figure 6.17** in Chapter 6: “Chungkai Showcase” for a rendering of the “Lotus Dancers” costumes.  
<sup>x</sup> A story told fully in Chapter 11: “Out of the Blue Came Freedom.”  
<sup>xi</sup> Or The Repulse. Drower was unsure.

## An Amazing Costuming Achievement

But it was Norman Carter's revue *Memories of the Gay 90s* in which Frank Purtell and his wardrobe staff outdid themselves by producing forty-odd late-nineteenth-century period outfits. With no historical source books available, the reconstruction of these period costumes was an amazing achievement of memory by Rae Nixon, (although it may be more accurate to ascribe it to a collective memory on the parts of Nixon, Purtell and his wardrobe crew, and Carter). Notes accompanying Nixon's costume plots for the thirty-eight characters provide details on how each outfit was to be built from borrowed, purchased, or scrounged sources. Three of his plots are given here.

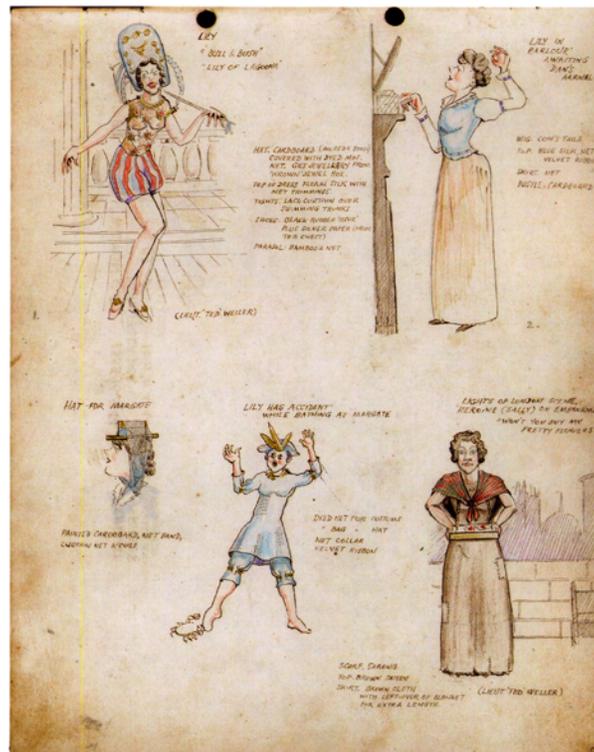


FIGURE 12.61. COSTUME PLOT: LIEUTENANT TED WELLER'S CHARACTERS. RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

In his costume plot for Ted Weller's character of Lily at top left, he calls for the following: "Hat. Cardboard (Am. RedX Boxes) covered with dyed mos. [mosquito] net. Gilt jewellery [sic] from 'Krown' jewel box. Top of dress floral silk with net trimmings. Tights. lace curtain over swimming trunks. Shoes. Black rubber 'issue' plus silver paper (from tea chest). Parasol. Bamboo & net."

And for Weller's character of Sally in the "Lights of London" melodrama at lower left: "Scarf. Sarong. Top. Brown sateen. Skirt. Brown cloth with left-over of blanket for extra length."



FIGURE 12.62. COSTUME PLOT: "MUSIC HALL" CHARACTERS. RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

For authenticity, the Cockney Costermonger outfit (at upper right) had 2,000 "mother-of-pearl" buttons made out of "C/board painted with a mixture of lime & tapioca paste" sewn onto it.<sup>67</sup>



FIGURE 12.63. COSTUME PLOT: "LIGHTS OF LONDON" CHARACTERS. RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

These magnificent costumes, as well as the costuming in other shows and other places, reveal the astounding resourcefulness and skills of the POW costume designers and their wardrobe staffs—and what remarkable lengths the theatrical producers went to in order to mount these productions for the enjoyment of their audiences.

## G. Musical Instrument Construction

In the musical instruments they constructed to supplement the limited number of instruments available, the POWs ingenuity and technical skills were further put to the test and succeed brilliantly.

Numerous musicians played on the Thailand-Burma railway, most of them members of the military bands sent Up Country to provide morale-boosting music for the others. But there were other musicians—professional and amateur—among the general population of officers and other ranks; men like Frankie Quinton, Han Samethini, Nico Rayer, Len Gibson, and Tom Boardman who carried their accordions, guitars, and ukuleles along with their kit. As one POW wrote, “every man who owned an instrument of any kind felt it his duty to carry it wherever he went. Saxophones, violins and guitars were carried carefully through the jungles of Thailand when every extra pound to carry was a burden out of all proportion to its actual weight.”<sup>68</sup> Members of official military bands may have had an easier time of it, according to Tom Morris: “Well, I think that since they were actually Army instruments, and the Japanese allowed them to convey them . . . they did provide, you know, trucks [for] essential gear and some thing—that sort of stuff we’d carry on a truck.”<sup>69</sup>

## Sources for Musical Instruments

Of the three sources of instruments for the musicians in the hospital and relocation camp orchestras and dance and jazz bands—those the POWs carried with them, those donated by the Red Cross, and those that were camp made—our interest is in the latter.

**Camp-made Instruments.** In order to have a full-fledged orchestra, dance band, or jazz ensemble with varied and balanced sound, musical instruments not available from any other source were desperately needed. Workshops were organized to construct them.

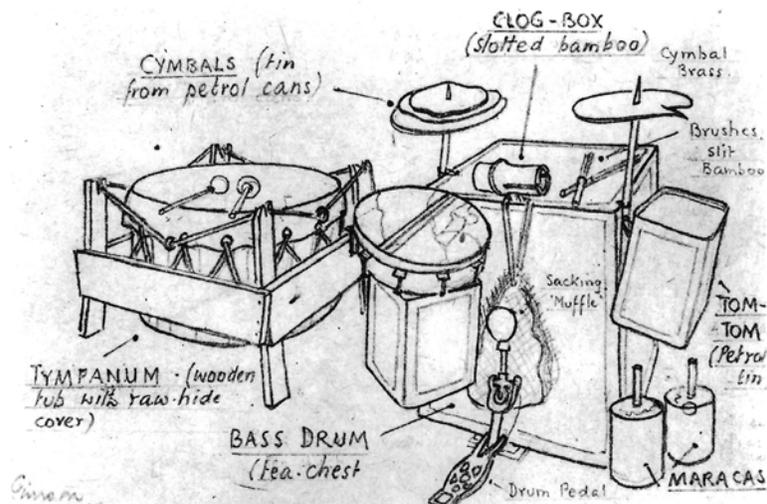


FIGURE 12.64. SKETCH OF CAMP-MADE INSTRUMENTS. STANLEY GIMSON. IWM HU\_3103. COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF STANLEY GIMSON.

Both Stanley Gimson and Wally Davis drew sketches of the instruments that were constructed at Chungkai. Gimson's sketch from early 1944 shows a large tympanum made from a wooden tub with a stretched rawhide cover suspended by cords in a scrap lumber cradle. By 1945, the original tympanum had been replaced with a hollow tree trunk and the wooden cradle by a bamboo stand. Gimson's bass drum is made from a tea chest. The drum pedal was the real thing, donated by a POW who had carried it with him since the beginning of his captivity thinking it might come in useful.<sup>70</sup> A muffle of rice sacking hangs in front of the pedal. Attached to the drum are a number of other instruments: a tom-tom (made from a petrol tin) hangs off the right side; two cymbals (also from petrol cans) are attached at top on either side; a clog box (slotted bamboo) sits center along with brushes made from slit bamboo. In Davis' 1945 sketch, the single clog box has become a set of temple blocks attached to the front of the drum.

Suspended on the left side of Gimson's bass drum is a side/snare drum sitting on top of another petrol tin for support (and, perhaps, added resonance). A buffalo bladder is the drum head, tightened with threaded nails for tension rods. Davis' notes on his sketch indicate that it had a "small trap door to put warm brick in to tighten head in the damp night air."<sup>71</sup> By 1945 this snare drum had its own stand. Gimson shows two round maracas that appear to be made out of food tins. Davis also displays two maracas, but these are "made from bale fruit. Ants eat inside leaving pips."<sup>72</sup> Bamboo stuck into the dried fruit created the handles.



FIGURE 12.65. SKETCH OF CAMP-MADE INSTRUMENTS. WALLY DAVIS.  
HAN SAMETHINI COLLECTION. COURTESY OF ROBIN KALHORN.

Davis' sketch was drawn in the late spring of 1945 after these same instruments had been transported to Tamuang. By that point, some new instruments had been added and originals worn from use had been reconditioned. It includes several more items not seen in Gimson's: side drum brushes made from bamboo; petrol tin cymbals worked with pedals of hinged wood; band seats made from bamboo; and a bamboo and wooden music stand complete with slush lamp in a small hutch at the top that could be lit for evening concerts.

**The Double Bass.** But it is the large musical instrument standing at left in Davis' sketch that is most of interest: the camp-made double bass. Gimson, too, sketched this instrument, but separately, showing its front, back, and side construction.

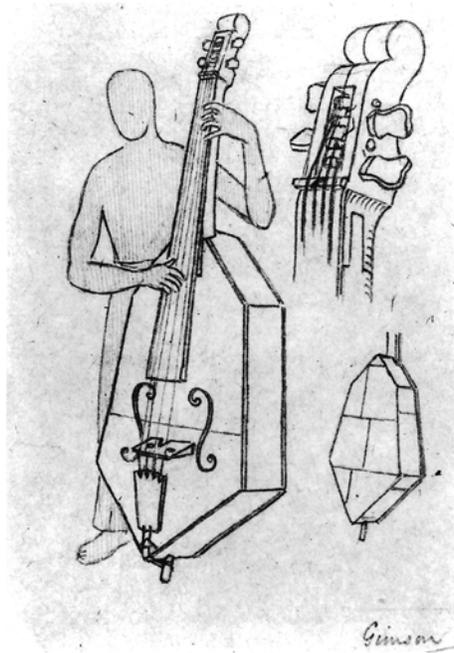


FIGURE 12.66. SKETCH OF CAMP-MADE BASS VIOL. STANLEY GIMSON. IWM HU\_3105. COURTESY OF THE FAMILY OF STANLEY GIMSON.

The construction of this double bass was a singular achievement. The details of its construction, its progress toward completion, and the date of its first appearance in the orchestra were eagerly discussed in the camp. Apparently started sometime in early 1944, the construction took several months to be completed—a slow process of trial and error. A diary entry by Lieutenant W. W. Marsh provides an update on its progress: “Our local ‘workshop’ is making a double-bass violin for the concert orchestra. It is nearly finished & I hope it works. It is made entirely from old Red Cross tea-chests. The strings are twisted bullock gut wound round with fine wire.”<sup>73</sup>

Two days later the double bass appeared in a musical concert at Chungkai. Captain Aylwin makes special mention of it in his diary entry recording the event: “The camp now boasts an orchestra. It consists of five violins, one double bass, two clarinets, one trumpet, two cornets, a piano accordion, a mandolin, a guitar, tympani and percussion! The double bass is home made from three-ply wood and odd screws etc., a great achievement.”<sup>74</sup> In Aylwin’s eyes, at least, the addition of the double bass transformed the band into an orchestra.

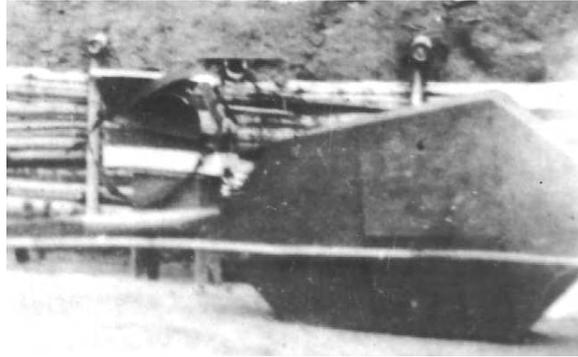


FIGURE 12.67. *Wonder Bar* DETAIL: CAMP-MADE BASS VIOL. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF MARTIN PERCIVAL.

One of the *Wonder Bar* photographs gives a view of this marvelous camp-made double bass lying on its side in the orchestra pit at Chungkai.

In “Orchestras in Captivity,” an article published shortly after repatriation, the musical conductor Eric Cliffe provided more detailed information on the double bass’s construction and tonal qualities:

The bass was manufactured in the camp from tea-chests and a log extracted from the river, and all its strings were telephone wire—which imposed a calculated strain of over two tons on the frame. Four men were required to tune the instrument: one to hold it down, another to tune the string by means of a long pronged lever fitted over the peg, a third to hold a brick against one side of the neck whilst a fourth drove home the peg with an eight-pound hammer! This bass possessed a powerful voice, its tone carrying to a distance of three hundred yards in the open air.<sup>75</sup>

Richard Sharp’s account supplies the name of the person he believed responsible for its construction: “the work of the Camp Carpenter, Sgt. Horrocks of the Suffolk Regt., was regarded with pride and admiration. It was made out of ply wood, with a red-wood neck, strut, scroll and bridge. To make the glue strong enough for it, a dark Dutchman had to keep the cow hooves brewing for seven whole days.” Like Cliffe, he remarked on how the bass “could be heard when all the other instruments had faded in the distance, yet near at hand, it nicely added the bass to the otherwise unbalanced ensemble.”<sup>76</sup>

Credit for this amazing achievement should not be given solely to Sergeant Horrocks. It had required the the efforts of three men, each contributing his special knowledge and skills. A caption attached to Gimson’s sketch of the double bass notes that it was made by “Sergeant G. [‘Bill’] Bainbridge of the 2nd Gordon Highlanders and Sergeant R. Jansen of the Dutch Army.” Bainbridge was the musician who would play the instrument; Jansen may be the “dark Dutchmen” mentioned in Sharp’s account above, although Joop Postma credits “an Eurasian boy named Liddel” with this accomplishment.<sup>77</sup>

From the numerous accounts of the instruments played in the various POW musical ensembles in Thailand, it is clear that more than one of these double basses were constructed in the camps.

**Double-bass “Jungle Style.”** A more simply constructed type of bass viol can be seen in Nixon’s

sketch of Tony Gerrish's dance band at Tamarikan, where it is identified as "Base [sic] (Jungle Style)."

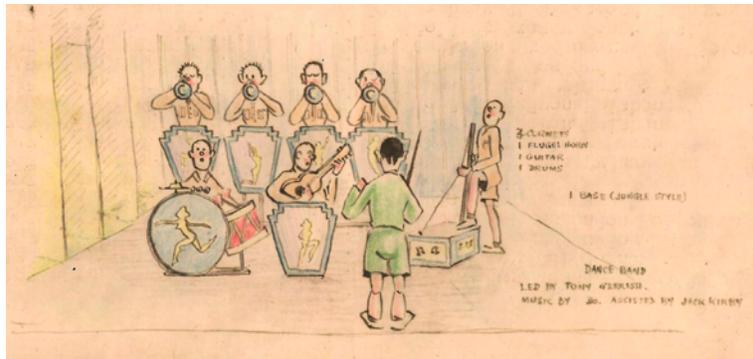


FIGURE 12.68. TONY GERRISH'S DANCE BAND." SKETCHBOOK DETAIL. RAE NIXON. AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL. COURTESY OF MRS. RAE NIXON.

None of the camp-made bass viols could be bowed; they could only be plucked.

## Other Musical Instruments

**The Violin.** In his "Orchestras" article, Cliffe records the construction of another musical instrument, this time at Kanburi Officers' Camp: "One of the fiddles was made from tea-chests, a piece of aeroplane glass (for the tail-piece), telephone wire (for the E string), and the bow was haired with shredded hemp rope which had been boiled previously for twenty-four hours; yet this instrument had a richer tone than the Red Cross fiddles which the camp had so gratefully received at an earlier date."<sup>78</sup>

**The Ukulele.** POWs not associated with the orchestra also got into the musical instrument construction business. When amateur musician Tom Boardman returned to Chungkai in early 1944 after the railway was completed, he set to work to make himself a new and larger ukulele out of scavenged scrap lumber and signal wire.<sup>79</sup>

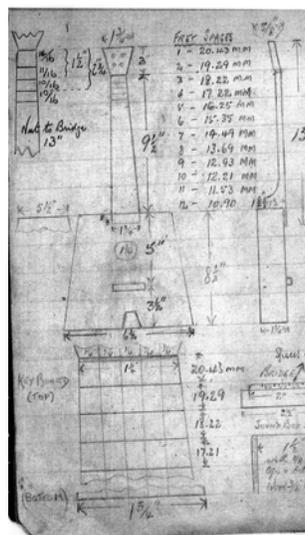


FIGURE 12.69. SKETCH OF UKULELE CONSTRUCTION. TOM BOARDMAN. COURTESY OF TOM BOARDMAN.

Boardman's construction diagram shows careful measurements for each section of the ukulele and placement of the frets. The "gears" used to tighten the strings—salvaged from a smashed mandolin found on a working party back in Changi, Singapore—were transferred from his old ukulele to his new one. Boardman played his new ukulele in hut concerts at Chungkai and later in camp shows at Kachu Mountain.

\* \* \*

Theatres, sets, lights, costumes, props, musical instruments—all the material artifacts needed to produce the POWs' music and theatre—were re-created from memory. Through their creative imagination, ingenuity, and skill, the designers and technicians kept alive a world that was otherwise quickly fading from consciousness.

## Endnotes

- 1 Tom Boardman, Interview, 34–35.
- 2 Chippington, 148.
- 3 Chalker, BRA, 96.
- 4 Mullineux, 22.
- 5 Durnford, 145.
- 6 Jacobs, 117–118.
- 7 Milford, Diary, 9 April 1944.
- 8 Johnston, 113.
- 9 Mullineux, 22.
- 10 Johnston, 113.
- 11 Coast, 186–187.
- 12 Coast, 183–184, 186.
- 13 Owtram, 105.
- 14 Allison, Letter, 24 August 2001.
- 15 Owtram, 109.
- 16 Wilbur Smith, Note C.
- 17 Wilbur Smith, Telephone Interview, 12 May 2004.
- 18 Pritchard, "the undefeated," 5.
- 19 Mullineux, 22.
- 20 De Wardener, Interview, 25–26.
- 21 Ingram, 2.
- 22 Harris, 133–134.
- 23 Coast, 175.
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