Chapter 6a. "Chungkai Showcase": Chungkai Hospital Camp | Part One: Mid-October 1942 to Mid-May 1944

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Chapter 6: “Chungkai Showcase”

Chungkai Hospital Camp

Part One: Mid-October 1942 to to Mid-May 1944

Though POWs in other camps in Thailand produced amazing musical and theatrical offerings for their audiences, it was the performers in Chungkai who, arguably, produced the most diverse, elaborate, and astonishing entertainment on the Thailand-Burma railway. Between Christmas 1943 and May 1945 they presented over sixty-five musical or theatrical productions.

As there is more detailed information about the administration, production, and reception of the entertainment at Chungkai than at any other camp on the railway, the focus in this chapter will be on those productions and personalities that stand out in some significant way artistically, technically, or politically. To cover this material adequately, the chapter will be divided into two parts: Part One will cover the period from mid-October 1942 to mid-May 1944; Part Two, from mid-May 1944 to July 1945.

There was continual bustle in Chungkai at the beginning of February 1944 as the camp was enlarged to accommodate the POWs returning from up country construction sites and maintenance parties were being sent back up the line. What had everyone’s attention, though, was the theatre about to re-open at its new location at the bottom of the slope in the Group IV area. The old platform stage was on flat land next to the parade ground. Now that nearly 12,000 POWs were in camp, it had become increasingly difficult for the thousands seated on the ground to see a show properly. The new theatre site commissioned by POW commandant Lieutenant-Colonel Cary Owtram was going to be a spectacular improvement.
As an amateur performer himself—he had a fine singing voice—Owtram well understood the value of a steady supply of organized entertainment for restoring and maintaining the morale of the troops in his care. If Chungkai’s “valiantly struggling concert party” was going to succeed as a crucial part of his rehabilitation scheme, what they needed was a venue where shows could be more effectively staged and a seating area with good sightlines that could accommodate large audiences more comfortably.

When all was ready, the old stagehouse was “dismantled and re-erected” at its new location. “It is a kind of outdoor amphitheatre with a raised mud platform and a trench dug in front for the orchestra,” observed Medical Officer Ian Mackintosh. The new site “affords all the spectators a good view of the stage,” wrote a delighted Lieutenant John Milford, to which Mackintosh added, “The acoustics are amazing for an outdoor space as even those sitting right at the back can hear perfectly.”

The theatre opened on 4 February with a two-day festival showcasing the different entertainment groups in Chungkai. The lineup of performers included the Chungkai Orchestra, Colonel Cary Owtram, the Chungkai Chorus, and “Fizzer” Pearson’s “Radio Players.”

Lieutenant G. Stanley Gimson sketched one of these opening performances from the point of view of an audience member at the back of the crowded amphitheatre.

Gimson’s sketch shows the old open-air (roofless) proscenium-arched stagehouse on a raised platform at the bottom of a slope. (To learn more about this theatre, see Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”)

Captain C. D. L. Aylwin of the Royal Maries was pleased that another concern about the audience’s comfort had been taken into account when choosing the theatre’s new location: “The audience no longer has the sun beating into its eyes. In the background are dark green mango trees and one tall tree which was recently in scarlet blossom. If bored with the show in progress, the trees contain plenty of natural life which is far from boring.” This “natural life,” according to Gimson, consisted of “chattering birds and flying tree-rats [squirrels].”

Besides a ready-made topography, it was the position of the sun in relation to the stage and not the audience that had been a major factor in choosing the site. Since artificial lighting had been banned from
the old stage when Allied reconnaissance planes began to appear overhead, producers needed the slant of
the afternoon and early evening sun to light their stage. Sixty years later, the experience of attending this
theatre was still vivid in Jack Chalker’s memory: “Concert evenings, with the vast audience of emaciated
men sitting or lying in that great dusty bowl of the amphitheatre, were a moving sight.” Life in Chungkai
had not always been so agreeable.

**Backstory: October 1942—February 1944**

Chungkai POW camp was situated on the edge of the jungle across the Mae Khlong River from
the provincial capital of Kanchanaburi. It was established in early October 1942 as headquarters for I. J. A.
POW Administration Group II with Group Commandant Lieutenant-Colonel Shouichi Yanagida in charge
and Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Williamson as POW officer in charge. The Japanese had been warned by
the local Thai population that the chosen camp site, at the convergence of the Mae Khlong and Kwai Noi
rivers, was subject to severe flooding during the monsoon season, but this information was disregarded
and construction went ahead. Between late 1942 and early 1944, Chungkai evolved from a work camp into
a hospital camp and finally for those not in hospital, something resembling a holiday camp.

**Work Camp.** Chungkai was initially a work camp for the “Chungkai cutting”—a short but
difficult stretch of the railway made by hand-chiseling and blasting though a hill of solid rock so the railway
crossing the bridges over the Mae Khlong could pass through it.

In early November, members of the Mumming Bees concert party arrived in Chungkai from
Singapore. But the imperative to finish the cutting as soon as possible meant that only impromptu campfire
entertainments were allowed on the few yasume days, although Laurie Allison remembered Frankie
Quinton lifting the spirits of those in his hut with his cheery accordion music after a long day of hard work.

When more POWs arrived in Chungkai from Singapore, there was an excess of non-working
officers, so the I. J. A. sent a number of them, including the actor-comedian Captain “Fizzer” Pearson and
musical director Lieutenant Norman Smith, up the line to an all-officers camp in the Kanyu area. Pearson
and Smith took several of the Mumming Bees performers with them, listed as “cooks” or “batmen,” to
provide entertainment in the construction camps.

For their first Christmas in captivity, the remaining Mumming Bees entertainers produced an
original pantomime in the early afternoon on Christmas Day and a variety show that evening. One member
of the throng of enthusiastic audience members at the panto *Rhythm on the River* observed: “And as we sat
in the hot blazing sunshine with the sweat pouring down our backs we roared with delight at a pantomime
that would have delighted a crowd of school children.” Bobby Spong’s appearance as the “tantalizing
Jungle Princess” was “tumultuously received.”

When work on the cutting was complete, members of the concert party were among the workers
sent up the line.

**Hospital Camp.** After the first of the year, the heavy sick and dying began to arrive back in
Chungkai from up country, and Chungkai was transformed into a base hospital camp. By the time Donald
Smith arrived in March, the flood of sick had completely overwhelmed the medical authorities’ ability to
deal with them:

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1 This group included the general manager and producer Major Leofric Thorpe, the musical conductors Lieutenants Norman Smith and Eric
Cliffe, producers Captain “Fizzer” Pearson and Corporal Leo Britt, female impersonators Bobby Spong and John “Nellie” Wallace, singer
Sam Drayton, actors George Donnelly, Teddy Ingram and Nigel Wright, and the musicians Arthur Bradfield, Fred Coles, N. Kemp, Frankie
Quinton, and Bill Bainbridge, among others.

2 Oddly enough, Major Leofric Thorpe, who had been one of the founders of the Mumming Bees, took no part in these early Chungkai
productions. As an officer, he had worked on details inside the camp since his arrival, been laid low with a series of debilitating illnesses, and
was now running one of the six cookhouses (Thorpe, Letter, 24 May 2000).
From the very moment I first set eyes on the place, my spirits began to fall. . . . The whole place bore an air of overpowering gloom and misery. Involuntarily I shuddered. It was almost as if we had entered a cold dark mortuary. As we moved farther into the camp, we passed little groups of prisoners. . . . All looked emaciated and ill. One man stood up near us, grinning vacantly. Then he raised a bony hand and pointed derisively at us. “Chungkai, Chungkai,” he chanted, “That’s where the Englishmen come to die!” The poor creature was mad. . . . What tragic place, in Heaven’s name, was this that we had been brought to?

This was also the time when Jack Chalker arrived back in Chungkai from Kanyu suffering from recurring bouts of dysentery as well as malaria and dengue fever.

But Chungkai wasn’t only the place where Englishmen came to die; so did Australians and Dutch/Indonesians. Chungkai had become a death camp.

As “the Speedo” got under way, Group II Commandant Yanagida moved his headquarters from Chungkai up the line to the Tarsao area. Before leaving, he installed Lieutenant Yoshio Osata as I. J. A. commandant and replaced Lieutenant-Colonel Williamson (who would accompany him up the line) with Lieutenant-Colonel Sainter.

Over the next six months, various attempts were made to try to alleviate the boredom and despair. In late April, Colonel Sainter received Osata’s approval to form a small concert party that would perform twice weekly, once in the hospital wards and once for the whole camp.
Hence, “The Bam-Booz-Lers.” Among the company was cowboy singer Larry Croisette, who had been an original member of “The Optimists” when they were formed in England in 1940.iii

In May, Lieutenant John D. V. Allum, former officer in charge of “The Harbour Lights” concert party in Keppel Harbour, Singapore (who had been recuperating in Chungkai since February), put on a show with the Bam-Booz-Lers that delighted the troops with its swing music, comedy sketches, and a radio “playlet.”15

In June, Lieutenant-Colonel Cary Owtram took over as POW officer in charge from Colonel Sainter. As there was little energy to tackle anything other than attending to the ever-increasing numbers of heavy sick and dying sent down from the construction camps, there was little he could do to implement a more extensive welfare scheme. As there was yet no base camp for Group IV POWs, their sick were sent to Chungkai as well.

In July, Allum was transferred to Nong Pladuk, where he would become entertainment officer (see Chapter 7: “The Show Must Go On”). Despite efforts by those remaining in the Bam-Booz-Lers to carry on, conditions in Chungkai continued to deteriorate and the death toll continued to rise. On 8 August, Chalker reported that a newly arrived Dutch/Indonesian musician named Jimmy van Lingen livened up the camp with a “superb” solo guitar performance.16

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iii This concert party marks the beginning of Croisette’s remarkable career in Chungkai, where, except for one maintenance party detail, he would continue to perform until the camp closed in the late spring of 1945.
Ironically, this was the very day that Osata stopped all shows from taking place inside or outside the hospital in the belief that entertainment was not appropriate for a camp full of sick and dying men. But it was soon clear to everyone, including Osata, that his ban only made matters worse, so he reversed his decision and a week later sponsored an elaborate show combining POW, Japanese, and local Thai performers in an attempt to lift everyone’s spirits. The aftereffects were only momentary. Two days later Chalker noted that barges appeared from the upriver camps “filled with the sick and dead.”

Convalescent Camp. In late September as the monsoon season passed, Colonel Owtram was finally able to implement his welfare scheme for those not in hospital or ambulatory. To relieve their boredom during the day, he encouraged them to participate in activities that would call upon their ingenuity and imagination, such as setting up cottage industries in shoe repair, tailoring, or arts and crafts projects—activities that would benefit the camp as well. Once a week after the evening meal, they could look forward to entertainment by their fledgling orchestra or small group of theatrical performers.

In early summer, musical conductor Norman Smith had been sent back to Chungkai to recover from amoebic dysentery and beriberi contracted up country. Now ambulatory, he immediately “sought out musicians . . . and with a few basic musical instruments zealously preserved by their owners” established the beginnings of what he optimistically called an “orchestra.” One of the Dutch/Indonesians recruited for his group was guitarist Jimmy van Lingen.

Though only a small ensemble, they were determined to perform and gave their first major concert in conjunction with the celebrations surrounding the joining of the Burma and Thai halves of the railway
Smith’s score for an original composition entitled “The Exiles,” written for one of these early concerts, reveals the composition of his “orchestra” in the fall of 1943: two violins, one clarinet, two trumpets, and one guitar.\footnote{This score, written by hand on six large sheets of manuscript paper, was preserved by Han Samethini and passed down to his grandson, Robin Kalhorn, suggesting that the composition must have been played again when Samethini was in the orchestra.} [To listen to an electronic realization of this composition, access \textbf{Audio Link} \ref{audio-link}]

Over the next several months, as more POW musicians arrived in camp or were released from hospital—and with the donation of several instruments from the Red Cross and YMCA via the Swiss Consul in Bangkok\footnote{See Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!” for details on how these instruments were constructed.}—Smith’s orchestra grew to fifteen players: “5 fiddles, 2 guitars, 2 trumpets, 1 cornet, 2 drummers, 1 banjo, 1 clarinet, and 1 piano accordionist.”\footnote{See “The FEPOW Songbook” for examples.} The percussion instruments—a drum set and tympani—had been made in the camp out of scrounged materials. But the hoped-for camp-made bass viol—the subject of much speculation—would not make its appearance until March.\footnote{Chalker gives this date as 16 October but writes that his dating is sometimes fuzzy.}

It’s not clear when Eddie Edwins of the Royal Army Medical Corps started to produce shows on the platform stage that had been erected on the edge of the parade ground, but it had to be sometime in October. Edwins, a “cockney” other ranks from London’s East End, had a passion for Victorian music hall and variety theatre and entertained the troops with original monologues and songs.\footnote{It was during his show in the hospital area on 12 November that the infamous “snake-incident”}
occurred.\textsuperscript{25} When one member of the audience casually remarked to his neighbor that he had seen a snake drop from a nearby tree, “the entire audience rose to its feet and began to run without reason.”\textsuperscript{26} The magician Fergus Anckorn, still convalescing from his burn wounds, was one of the unfortunate patients in the audience caught in the wake of this stampede. “I was pushed through two huts, with the crowd,” he remembered, “with the bedding and everything . . . right through.”\textsuperscript{27} A number of recent amputees at the front of the audience were trampled upon.\textsuperscript{28}

After this incident, entertainment appears to have been halted temporarily, as Chalker doesn’t record another show until 1 December.\textsuperscript{29}

In late November/early December, two other theatrical producers and their troupes returned to Chungkai to enrich the entertainment offerings. One was “Fizzer” Pearson, who arrived on 27 November with his “Radio Players”\textsuperscript{viii} from Tamarkan, where they had been retained since March because Chungkai had been too overcrowded to take them in.\textsuperscript{30} It was in one of his new Chungkai shows that Jack Chalker first appeared as a female character. His turn was not a success: “I remember clearly my trepidation when I appeared for the first time with “Fizzer” Pearson as a vicar’s daughter in a short burlesque. . . . I remember clearly that there was no proscenium or theatre structure for that occasion—only that we were on a higher level than the audience.”\textsuperscript{31}

Being cast as a young woman caused Chalker some embarrassment. But that wasn’t the worst of it. “I had to sit down during this small vignette,” he remembered, “and not being properly versed in the ways of women I sat with my legs apart and not together.”\textsuperscript{32} But with a rough POW audience, this youthful ignorance did not go unnoticed: “all the people in the front row said, ’Close your legs!’ And . . . I remember being so embarrassed, first of all, doing a part like that, and then, secondly, so damn dead wrong.”\textsuperscript{33}

The other producer was Joop Postma, who arrived with members of his cabaret troupe and a large number of Dutch/Indonesian POWs at the beginning of December. They had been performing in the N.E.I. hospital wards up the line beyond Kinsaiyok.\textsuperscript{34} Finding that Chungkai had a stage, Postma immediately asked if his troupe could use it for a “grand concert” in celebration of St. Nicholas Eve (5 December).\textsuperscript{35} His request met with resistance. Since his performers could not perform in English, it was argued, the British POWs would not be able to enjoy the show. An argument ensued.

In the end the Christmas spirit prevailed with a compromise in which British performers would join forces with Dutch/Indonesian entertainers to make the show more “accessible” for the camp as a whole.\textsuperscript{36} The Dutch/Indonesians built a proscenium arch at the front of the stage\textsuperscript{ix} that became a permanent part of the structure.\textsuperscript{37} But the contentious issue of Dutch/Indonesians gaining access to the stage to perform for the whole camp would not disappear.

\section*{Lieutenant Kokubo Takes Charge}

On 15 December, Group Commander Yanagida made an inspection of the camp from his new up country headquarters at Takanun that resulted in Lieutenant Osata being replaced as camp commandant by Lieutenant Kokubo.\textsuperscript{x} Compared to Osata, who had “proved to be quite reasonable,”\textsuperscript{38} Kokubo had a mercurial personality. When he drank heavily, which was often, no Korean guard was safe from his merciless
beatings or no thing safe from his sword: “[Kokabu] in drunken but genial frenzy of swordsmanship attacks and decapitates three banana trees.” But Kokubo, it turned out, was a lover of music, which would prove a blessing to Norman Smith and his orchestra as well as to the future development of entertainment generally, and Owtram was able to establish a good working relationship with him as he had with Osata.

The Christmas Holidays 1943

For Christmas Day 1943, “Fizzer” Pearson produced an elaborate two-hour variety show accompanied by Norman Smith’s orchestra that showcased all the British musical and theatrical talent in the camp, including a fully recovered Fergus Anckorn, who gave his first and only Chungkai performance as the magician “Wizardus.” The next day, Eddie Edwins put on a pantomime version of the Snow White story, So Tite and the Seven Twirps, that Ernest Gordon called “inspired nonsense . . . with our guards as the villains and Snow White as the spirit of innocence. The Japanese, who were self-invited guests, had no notion that they were the butt of the jokes, and laughed and applauded with the rest of us.” It was these overcrowded Christmas performances, with thousands in attendance struggling to see and hear properly, that convinced Owtram something had to be done about their theatre’s inadequacies to help the POWs survive the long months of incarceration ahead.

New Year’s Day 1944 was primarily devoted to sporting events, although, as John Cosford observed, “There were very few men anywhere fit enough to take part.” Bobby Spong, as usual, was present at the horse race playing his onstage role off stage, much to the delight of most, if not all, of the troops: “Bobby Spong (female impersonator) was kissing the winners of races,” observed Lieutenant J. A. Richardson. “All rather distasteful!”

A New Theatre

Shortly after the holidays were over, Owtram followed through on his plan to rectify the camp’s inadequate theatre space:

Accordingly I selected a small, shallow valley near the river bank and outlined my idea of having a stage built on one slope and the auditorium formed on the other. This was acted upon and gangs of willing volunteers spent hours digging rising tiers of seats for the audience and building up a level platform for the stage.

Theatre Committee

As construction on the new theatre site began, Owtram organized a committee to facilitate its operation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel Owtram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Manager</td>
<td>Alec Knight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td>Gerald Angier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Construction</td>
<td>Peter G. Bambridge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three performers from the old Bam-Booz-Lers concert party were in the cast: Bob “Lovely” Dunning as So-Tite, Larry Croisette as Queen Nopeen, and Tom Parker as Prince Archie.
These six men comprised the permanent members of the theatre committee. They would supply the administrative and technical support necessary to run the theatre. Except for Edwins, all the committee personnel were officers. All were British. Owtram would function as chair until the committee and theatre were fully operational.

The designated areas of responsibility indicate what growth and developments were anticipated in the theatre’s operation. (With no committee assignment for scenic artists and wardrobe staffs, each concert party would continue to be responsible for these.)

One area needs further explanation. When the need for props quickly moved beyond hand props to include furniture and set dressing, this bundling of responsibilities would prove too burdensome for Thwaites and a new committee member would be added so he would only be responsible for Front of House (box office, ushers) and publicity.

Once the theatre at its new location became fully operational, a box office for booking reserved seating would solve the current unruly situation in which POWs reserved their seat by placing a personal item in their preferred spot on a first-come, first-served basis. For those who could not afford to reserve a seat, there would be standing-room-only areas available at the back and sides.

In a camp the size of Chungkai, publicity beyond word of mouth was a necessity. Other than a staff artist for signage, talented graphic artists were commissioned on a freelance basis to produce hand-drawn and -painted posters. Since these posters were individually produced, variations in wording and images were common. Art supplies came from privately held stocks or scrounged materials or were purchased in Kanburi through guards (for a price). By 11 February, these artists were also producing souvenir programs for sale, another way to generate money for production budgets.

For rehearsals, the theatre committee secured two spaces: the “Bamboo Rehearsal Theatre,” situated in a clearing in a grove of slender arching bamboo, and “the ‘Slaughter House Rehearsal Theatre,’” in a “clearing [where] the butchers had formerly performed the gruesome task of killing the camps’ meat with a sledgehammer.”

What days of the week and times of day shows could be performed were determined by the I. J. A. camp administration. The present arrangement was Friday and Saturday between the evening meal and lights out, with each evening devoted to a performance by a different group.

Two New Arrivals

While Owtram’s theatre was under construction, two men who would make a significant difference in the POWs’ lives arrived in Chungkai.

One of these men was the musician Han Samethini, emaciated and suffering from malaria and tropical ulcers on his legs, who limped into camp on crutches still clutching his accordion. Han had been part of Joop Postma’s hospital entertainers up beyond Kinsaiyok. Spotted by his brother, Frank, who was in Chungkai on detached duty from Tamarkan helping construct huts for new arrivals, Han was immediately taken to hospital.

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xii John Coast’s memoir for early March 1944 provides this information, which, except for the chair, would be substantially the same committee that Owtram constituted two months earlier [Coast, 175].

xiii The poster and program covers used as illustrations in this chapter will identify these remarkable artists.
Under his brother’s nurturing care, Han began to recover. Though still too weak to walk, one day he told Frank he could now “play for the boys if they want him to.” Of course they wanted him to. One evening he was carried on a stretcher to the theatre, placed on a chair, and given his accordion. A large crowd had gathered to hear him play.

“For a moment or two his fingers run tentatively over the keyboard of his old accordion,” recalled Frank. “A hush has fallen over the audience. Then—up spring and sparkle the notes, rising and tumbling down.” After a few moments the audience “burst forth into singing.” They sang all the old songs—the music “touching the hardened souls of these ragged, skinny people drawn together in close unity. A unity which goes beyond the boundaries of rank and standing.” After singing “Auld Lang Syne” at the close of the concert, “the men walk back to their quarters, contented, for had they not, for a little while at least, beaten the enemy?” As soon as he was walking again, Samethini was recruited by Norman Smith for his orchestra.

The other new person was Lieutenant-Colonel Weary Dunlop, who had turned around the death camp at Tarsao with his reorganization of the hospital and his welfare schemes. As the camp’s new senior medical officer, Dunlop would try to effect the same change on the chaotic hospital situation in Chungkai. Dunlop’s efforts in getting the patients involved in their own recovery and his promotion of entertainment as a vital part of the rehab process coincided with Owtram’s ongoing welfare program, and the two men complemented each other well in running the camp. Though seriously ill men would continue to die, Chungkai would no longer be known as the place where Englishmen, or anyone else, came to die.

Chungkai “Holiday Camp”

When the POWs returned to Chungkai from their up country work camps at the beginning of 1944, they were stunned to find the camp they had left months earlier completely transformed into
something resembling a “holiday camp.” There was a flourishing Thai canteen and an N.E.I. stall selling hot and spicy sambals, a remedial physical therapy center, a barber shop, soccer field, and tennis courts (for officers only), various cottage industries (cobbler, tailor, metal smithy), vegetable gardens, officer and administrative huts with small flower gardens in front, and a POW Military Police Force with its own separate quarters. Among the approved “rackets” were coffee stalls (burnt rice) and cigarette factories. “Scores of men, unfit for manual work, are being employed by the 'factories,’” wrote Frank Samethini, “the entire profit of which is donated to the hospital fund. On ‘concert’ days the theatre ground resounds with the calls of cigarette dealers, all for obvious reasons picked from non-smokers.” To top it off, a new theatre was under construction.

Even so, there was one reality about life in Chungkai that the POWs there could never ignore: “For the hospital and the sick were always with us, though often they lay curiously apart, and we kept them deliberately in our mental backgrounds,” wrote John Coast.

**Standards of Performance**

With musical and variety shows occurring on a weekly basis, audience expectations about performance standards began to rise and complaints about lack of quality began to be heard. Richardson voiced his concern about the overall quality of entertainment available in camp: “usually not very good. Strange that out of 7000 troops (excluding those in hospital) that there is not more talent. Norman Smith, Musical Director; band not too bad.”

Colonel Owtram was well aware of the problem. With no rehearsal time allowed other than during the leisure period after the evening meal, the Chungkai entertainers were having a hard time developing new material and improving their performances. If entertainment was going to continue as an important part of the “rehabilitative” process, then both the performers’ skills and the shows’ content needed to improve—and that meant more time for rehearsal free from other duties.

The musicians, at least, were in luck. Owtram was able to persuade Lieutenant Kokubo that the quality of musical concerts would improve if the musicians could count rehearsals as their daily camp duties. For orchestra co-conductor Eric Cliffe, Kokubo’s approval was a godsend: “The Japanese Camp Commandant was generous with regard to rehearsals, permitting the orchestra to practice all morning and allowing afternoon rehearsals to be held in hospital wards for the benefit of those too ill to walk to the camp theatre on the concert night.”

But Owtram was unable to effect the same arrangement for the theatrical producers and performers. They would continue to rehearse in the evenings after their daily chores were finished.

**Maintenance Parties**

But one perk for all those involved in entertainment was being kept off drafts for maintenance parties. As the new year wore on, more “requests” for POWs to be sent back up the line on maintenance parties occurred. Who went on these parties and who did not involved tricky political decisions. “The British administration,” Lieutenant Richard Sharp wrote, “try as far as possible to send those who have, for one reason or another, escaped going up country before. But it becomes increasingly impossible.” Assignment to one of these maintenance parties was a fate to be avoided, if possible, at all cost, and the

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*Acknowledgments:*
xiv According to POW Laurie Allison, a “holiday camp” is a unique British institution where people go to participate in highly structured daily events including physical education. Some camps even had beauty salons, bars, and professional theatres. xv The POW commandant would give the directive, but the actual list would be drawn up by a group of officers representing the various military units/constituencies in the camp for him to approve.
politicking behind the scenes must have been fierce.

Involvement in entertainment activities became one of the legitimate means to avoid this duty and proved useful in recruiting performers and technical crews for the productions. Lieutenant Terry Morris, who had been in Leofric Thorpe’s and Leo Britt’s productions back in Changi, readily admitted his relief when asked to join Pearson’s Players: “For myself, despite a badly ulcered leg, frequent gastro-enteric troubles and persistent malaria, was delighted to get off any maintenance work on the railway!”

An illegitimate means was to contact one of the POW “entrepreneurs” in the dysentery ward who had a racket selling stool samples to fit men so they could “toss the doctor” by proving they weren’t healthy enough to be sent up country on a working party.

For those in hospital, the greatest fear was being released back into the general populace, which made them subject to drafts. Ambulatory patients, who were allowed out into the camp during the day, were the most vulnerable. One of those patients, Sapper Geoffrey Gee, knew firsthand that some medical officers were complicit in keeping men off these drafts: “Capt [Dudley] Gotla’s leaving me so long in hospital—thus keeping me from manual labour and what’s more important, from going ‘up country’—perhaps saving my life, who knows? A big thing!”

End of Backstory: Reprise

By the time the gala performances celebrating the opening of the new theatre took place on 4–5 February 1944, there was gathered in Chungkai a nucleus of talented individuals—officers and other ranks—who, along with others arriving daily from up country, would transform the camp into a musical and theatrical showcase. Producers would stretch the boundaries of what could be presented and what audiences would accept; designers and technicians would test the limits of their resources and ingenuity.

Shortly after the theatre’s reopening, Owtram turned over the chair of the theatre committee to Lieutenant-Colonel E. L. V. Mapey. As the months passed, the committee’s membership expanded in personnel and responsibilities in response to producers’ needs and the entertainment offerings.

The development of entertainment in Chungkai is a story fraught with all the elements of good drama: comedy, tragedy—and farce. To tell this story adequately, the arc of Chungkai’s entertainment activity from this point forward is divided into four sections: 1. “The First and the Best” (February to mid-May 1944), 2. “Rain Must Fall” (mid-May to early October 1944), 3. “Outward Bound” (mid-October 1944 to March 1945), and 4. “We Are Invincible!” (March to July 1945). Periodic updates will track the playhouse’s evolution, the social and political context in which productions occur, and the appearance of new personnel who make a significant contribution to the Chungkai entertainment scene.

1. “The First and Best”

A “High-Brow” Concert

One week after the gala opening, a performance took place that could not have happened without the rehearsal time recently approved by Lieutenant Kokubo: a concert of semi-classical and classical music.

Eric Cliffe joined Norman Smith on the podium for this concert as he had for similar shows back in Changi in 1942. Their interests in music were quite different. “On the musical side, there were two
outstanding people,” wrote Richard Sharp. “Norman Smith, whose brusque good nature and common sense smoothed many a situation, and who had an unusual facility for light and dance music; and Eric Cliffe, who saved the captivity for classical musicians.”

As a professor at the London Conservatory of Music before enlistment, it was Cliffe’s contention that the POWs needed more than a steady diet of popular music; they needed “good music” that was, he believed, ultimately more satisfying.

With this concert, Richardson thought the content and quality of the orchestra’s performance had vastly improved: “Norman Smith and Eric Cliffe conducting; a very good show. Played: Finlandia and Henry VIII Dances; well rendered. Jerry Clarke sang; the best item and the most heavily applauded.”

Arthur Johnston, who also thought the concert “wonderful,” questioned why so many musical events had taken place in Chungkai “and was informed that the Japanese Commandant was very musical himself, and had made a point with his superiors, that as a ‘recuperation’ camp it was good for his own men who also enjoyed it (and obviously didn’t really understand the heavily laid on irony at times; or preferred to ignore it) as well as getting much better work from the P.O.W’s. A good psychologist, and for which we were very grateful.”

The acknowledgment that Kokubo (and, by implication, other Japanese camp commandants as well) believed the shows were good for their own troops’ morale disturbed some POWs that their entertainment could be perceived as “Jap Happy,” which might be misconstrued as aiding and abetting the enemy.

**Postma’s Unfinished Business**

In his final remarks on the classical concert, Johnston included an intriguing observation: “Different groups competing for right to appear.” Among unknown others, this comment certainly referred to Joop Postma and his Dutch/Indonesian cabaret.

When Postma discovered that his group was excluded from the gala performances on the theatre’s reopening, he petitioned the theatre committee once again for the right to perform for the whole camp—and was again rebuffed with the same argument heard back in December:

[Performing for the whole camp] was not allowed because they said, “The Dutch understand the English language, but the British don’t understand the Dutch at all.” That was logical and, of course, a little stupid because, after all, if you bring a show for everyone, that everyone can enjoy, with dances and funny songs and even communal singing, it has to be enjoyable. I said, “You also bring short skits, and we are supposed to understand them; not every Dutchman speaks English.”

Behind Postma’s remarks is a subtext of the prejudice the Dutch/Indonesians endured in the British-controlled camp—a fact Richardson readily acknowledged: “I should add that the Dutch, many of whom were *Indische Jongen* (i.e. Mixed Bloods) were not generally held in high esteem by the British and were anathema particularly to the Aussies. Animosities were sometime acute. Latent feelings tend to become blatantly overt under stressful circumstances; and our general conditions were indeed stressful.”

Though only a private in the N.E.I., Postma was a feisty individual and not willing for the Dutch/
Indonesian entertainers to accept second-class status:

In the beginning we were not allowed to perform. I was mad and told them, “If we are not allowed to perform, you won’t have the chance either, because I am going to sabotage the thing.” The consequence of this was that I had to appear before the Japanese camp commander. Major Metser accompanied me, and we came to an agreement: once a month we were allowed to bring our own show.\(^1\)

Postma’s threat worked, and the N.E.I. troupe won their right to perform for the whole camp. The theatre committee was forced to add Major Metser to its board and to create a revised schedule for rehearsal spaces, performance dates, and resources to accommodate this additional group.

“Het Hollandsche Cabaret”

Postma cofounded “Het Hollandsche Cabaret” with Philip “Flip” Brugman and Ferry van Delden. Brugman described their different areas of responsibility: “Joop Postma was the leader who, besides taking the direction, also looked after the comical pieces. I had the job of choreography, because I had been involved with folk and ballet dancing before the war. The musical part was totally in the hands of Han Samethini. The songs were made by Ferry van Delden and Puck Jonkmans looked after the costumes.”\(^2\)
Holland Zingt Weer! (Holland Sings Again)

On 12 February, the evening following Smith and Cliffe’s concert, Postma’s troupe performed their first cabaret for the whole camp. Han Samethini had secured Norman Smith’s permission to have the orchestra’s drummer and violinists join him in the pit.73

British expectations about the worth and success of this Dutch concert were not very high, but they were in for a surprise. Gimson admitted that he had “attended the Dutch concert largely as a lesson—but enjoyed it immensely.”74 Richardson was completely bowled over by it:

Then the Dutch gave a “Hollandsck Konzert” very well arranged with superb dance ensembles; the “women” were magnificent, tremendously superior to our British female impersonators. Indeed, my good friend Glencross expressed his reaction thus; “my first feeling of lust in two years!” So considering the debilitating [sic] and virtually desexing effects of a prolonged rice diet, this was an eloquent acknowledgement of excellence of the “girls” performance.75

Geoffrey Gee also thought the “women” were terrific: “Grand musical finale of ‘Mama me quiero’ with gorgeous Jackie Stoenhoesen [Joqui Steenhuizen] as Carmen Miranda. Oo, la, la!”76

The audience’s enthusiastic response to the Dutch/Indonesian production, and especially to the sexiness of their female impersonators, must have set British entertainers’ teeth on edge. In their first all-camp production, the N.E.I. performers had more than proven their point and their worth. The British now found themselves in competition with the Dutch/Indonesians over which of them could produce the best entertainment.

Pearson’s Unwitting Challenge

The following week, on 18 February, Pearson’s Players presented P. G. Wodehouse’s comedy Good Morning Bill—a play of wit and style but without much substance. Pearson played the male lead opposite Bobby Spong as the female lead. Jack Chalker played the maid, Marie.

The audience loved it. Both Weary Dunlop and C. D. L. Aylwin thought the play had been extremely funny and the cast particularly well chosen.77 In addition, Aylwin was pleased with the attention paid to production values: “The details of the properties had been well thought out.”78

It was an evening of firsts: the first production of a straight playxviii in Chungkai, the first fully staged with setting and props, and the first time both Friday and Saturday night performances were allocated to the same producing organization. With Chungkai’s huge POW population, the theatre committee had changed its programming policy so that more troops would have the opportunity to see a particular show. But at the most that meant only 5,000 out of an estimated 8-12,000 men could attend a show.

With the production of this play, the British entertainers realized they had an advantage over their Dutch/Indonesian counterparts, as the majority of audience members were English speakers. Because of the language barrier, Postma’s troupe couldn’t possibly attempt to produce a straight play. Straight plays, therefore, would become Pearson’s strong suit—and since no accommodation would be made for those who didn’t understand English, the plays might discourage their attendance.

xviii Non-musical theatre.
Camp Update

In addition to POWs continuing to arrive from up country camps and the coming and going on
maintenance parties, on 19 February the POW Administration received orders to put together a party of
900 fit officers and men for deployment to Japan.79 Additional calls for Japan Party drafts would continue
into June.

To relieve congestion—as well as the competition between two I. J. A. administrations in the
same camp—the Group IV POWs would be moved downriver to a new base camp being established at
Tamuang/039 Kilo. And Weary Dunlop was told that his medical staff should start drawing up lists for all
the heavy sick in Group II to be sent to the large hospital for the chronically ill at Nakhon Pathom. Lacking
specific instructions, Dunlop decided to include all those suffering from chronic amoebic dysentery as well.80
The evacuation of these POWs would have adverse effects on the future of entertainment in Chungkai.

With the huge number of POWs in Chungkai, Kokubo finally allowed the theatre committee
and the production staff to be officially listed as “theatre workers,” which meant that rehearsals, building
sets and costumes, and so on would be considered their only day jobs in camp, protecting them from the
dreaded maintenance and Japan Parties.81 With this change, the quality of entertainment in Chungkai
improved beyond anyone’s imagining.

New Competitors: Leo Britt and the “Takanun Gang”

In the final draft of POWs arriving back in Chungkai from up country were Leo Britt, Gus Harffey,
and the officers and men of the “Takanun Concert Party.” Chungkai, they discovered, had changed greatly
in their absence. Along with the other camp amenities, it had a marvelous proscenium theatre and a
flourishing theatre scene dominated by producer “Fizzer” Pearson, with Eddie Edwins and Joop Postma
close behind. “Into the middle of this set-up,” observed John Coast, “strode our producer and professional,
Leo Britt.”82 And he immediately wanted in on the action.

Coast’s characterization of the “maestro’s” movement as a “stride,” not a “walk,” as well as his
designation as a “professional” is enough to suggest trouble ahead. The entertainment world at Chungkai
was about to change once again, becoming more complex, more competitive—and more exciting.

With the arrival of these entertainers—derisively labeled the “Tak-a-nun gang” by those already
in Chungkai—the theatre committee expressed some hope that Pearson’s and Britt’s groups might “blend”
into a single concert party.83 After all, Pearson and Britt had been together in the Mumming Bees back in
Changi. But for almost a year and a half they had been separated and during that time had formed their
own companies—“blending” was not in their vocabulary. But rivalry was. The “Takanun Gang” was added
to the concert party roster, the performance schedule was revised once again, and representatives from
each group were included on the committee in an advisory capacity so they could argue for and protect
their interests.xix

To prevent fights taking place over the casting pool, Pearson and Britt worked out an agreement
that their performers could be available to either one of them. “In spite of it all,” Richard Sharp noted,
“entertainment went on and no throats were cut.”84 Since Pearson, Edwins, and Postma had already staked
out their artistic territory, Britt’s “Takanun Players” would present revues and musical comedies.85

From Frank Samethini’s perspective, it was not the competition between the British groups that
caused concern, but that between the British and Dutch concert parties: “A state of rivalry exists between

xix I have not found any reference in the FEPOW literature to “voting” or “non-voting” members of the committee, so this is a “best practices”
guess from my experience of how these types of committees operate. It’s not clear from the sources whether the Dutch/Indonesians were
included in this arrangement.
the British and the Dutch stage groups performing in the camp’s amphitheatre, both of them having set as their goal not only to entertain the men but also to outdo the opponent by presenting a better show.”

“Ollanda Number One Show”

With their next production, Postma and his cabaret troupe mobilized their theatrical arsenal against the British entertainers. Besides “Jackie” Steenhuizen’s sexual allure, Te Tovey’s sets and Puck Jonkmans’ costumes would “wow” the audience.

Billed as “Het Grootste Lach Success in Thailand,” 1001 Nacht (1001 Nights) opened on 18 March. Gee found the show “very enjoyable and amusing.” John Sharp thought it was “particularly noteworthy for the care expended on the costumes and décor.” And Jack Chalker was so impressed with the settings that he drew thumbnail sketches in his diary of the “Persian” and “Arab” scenes that also included a stick figure of one of the “sand” dancers.

“Sand” dancing was the specialty of Wilson, Kappel, and Betty, a famous 1930s British variety act in which sand spread in the performance area heightened the sound of the soft-shoe routine of strange Egyptian hieroglyphic-like movements and gestures.
To guarantee their success, Postma staged "a master coup, with the support of the camp’s M. P. force"—an incident Frank Samethini gleefully recorded:

Dutchie-girl Johnny [“Jackie” Steenhuizen] had been making his debut on the stage playing the part of a “lush” doing a tango dance in a cabaret scene. The artificial bust, made to the last detail, the wig of shoulder-long wavy hair, the distinctive feminine sway of his hips in the dance—it all looked disturbingly real. Then at a certain pre-arranged moment members of the M.P. force had jumped on the stage, loudly demanding the surrender of that Thai-girl in the play who had slipped past the guard. The Japs among the audience, never missing a show, had obligingly fallen for it. Stopping the performance they had rushed backstage, angrily ordering on-the-spot-evidence which would leave no room for doubt as to Johnny’s sex.

Shaking their heads the Japs returned convinced, and impressed, to their seats ordering the continuance of the “Ollanda Number One Show.”

xxi Military Police Force—organized by the POW administration to self-police against bootlegging. It wasn’t very effective.
With “undisputed acclaim from friend and foe,” Samethini wrote, the Dutch had scored a “decisive advantage over the British.”\textsuperscript{91} Besides this masterful ruse which escalated the rivalry, Postma extended the competition into the areas of costumes and sets. But from the “borehole” rumors Frank Samethini heard, it had really become a contest between female impersonators:

Bobby and Johnny [Jackie Steenhuizen], respectively the British and Dutch impersonators of the “woman” in the show[s], are under no circumstances interchangeable.

There is too much bad blood between the “girls.” Some say because of an instant mutual dislike, others say jealousy of their personal wardrobe had been the cause for the feud.\textsuperscript{92}

Their feud was about more than that. It was about who would be recognized as the most glamorous female impersonator in Chungkai.

**Leo Britt Gets into the Act**

In the meantime, Leo Britt lost no time trying to establish himself as the “professional” producer-director and not an “amateur” like everyone else. If he and his Takanun “gang” were going to enter the contest for top billing, then he intended to win. And it wouldn’t be just over the Dutch/Indonesians but over the other British producers as well. His troupe’s first offering in Chungkai would be a revival of their recent Takanun triumph, Carl Moser’s *Animal Crackers*. 
Animal Crackers opened on 24 March for an unprecedented run of three consecutive nights. Britt’s takeover as producer-director from Moser, who had written and directed the original production, wasn’t the only change made to guarantee the revival’s success. Instead of Gus Harffey, Norman Smith led the orchestra and received credit for the musical arrangements, with Harffey acknowledged only for “Additional Collaboration,” xxii and John Coast, who had been the prompter for this show in Takanun, was asked by Britt to assume the duties of assistant stage manager (ASM), even though, as he acknowledged, “we instinctively disliked one another.” xxiii The cast, on the other hand, contained all the regulars from the Takanun production, including the Dutch musician Hank van den Eykel.

Even with the change in artistic staff, the revival of Animal Crackers had difficulty living up to all its pre-show hype. Selby Milner saw it as “a knockabout, farcical affair of the very broadest slapstick humour, more acceptable to the men than to officers.”95 Richardson, on the other hand, thought it had “good slap-stick but needed better production.”96 For Gee, the whole production fell “a little short of expectation.”97

Though Britt did not score a total victory with the show, John Coast did. With his expert skills as assistant stage manager on view, the theatre committee asked him to take over Alec Knight’s role as stage manager so Knight could become the theatre’s general manager.98 Thus Coast acquired a full-time camp job that guaranteed he would not be sent off on maintenance parties or to Japan.

**A New Face: Geoffrey Gee**

Up to this point Sapper Geoffrey Gee had no connection with the camp entertainment, although his talents as a graphic artist had already been recognized, and he was producing announcements for various camp events.99

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*xxii One wonders how all this went down with Harffey
xxiii The ASM is the stage manager who works with the show in the rehearsal stage.*
On 25 March, Gee got an offer of a different sort:

I’d a visit from Sam [Drayton] and Frankie [Quinton] with an amazing proposition which left me in rather a quandary. Eddie [Edwins] is getting up a permanent little concert party of 5 or 6 to visit the hospital—5 shows, 3 days a week. This will be a sort of pierrot troupe and at present they are short of a female (my angle!). Would I care to fill the breach? Be the one? In many ways I should enjoy it, but feel I haven’t the necessary confidence to carry it off, nor have I any talent such as singing, impersonations, etc. etc. which to me seems so all-essential. The two main things to make me hesitate are 1 Will it bring about my discharge from hospital? Undesirable. and 2 Will it cause my friends etc. to take the piss out of me and thus lose caste? Anyway, I agreed to a try out if and when I’m required so left it at that. Time will tell.

Time did tell. Gee never got to perform as a female impersonator, but over the next sixteen months he became involved in the world of Chungkai entertainment as a poster and scenic artist, and his observations on the musical and theatrical productions, on the performers, and on backstage life become one of our most important sources of information on these activities.

xxiv Entertainers who performed at British seaside resorts
“Fizz” Pearson Returns with *The Circle*

On 31 March, Chungkai audiences saw “Fizz” Pearson’s production of Somerset Maugham’s sophisticated drawing-room comedy *The Circle*. Besides Pearson, the seven-person cast included Bobby Spong, Eric Griffiths-Jones, Gus Harffey, Nigel Wright, Roy Randolph, and Douglas Mitchell. To set the tone with appropriate pre-show and entr’acte music, Eric Cliffe led the Chungkai theatre orchestra. In response to the Dutch challenge on production values, special effort was put into the setting and costumes.  

*The Circle* is a comedy of manners about love and marriage among the British upper classes. Its humor is not only witty but subtle, dependent upon an audience understanding a subtext critical of British class and culture—and therefore all the more difficult for the Dutch/Indonesians to appreciate.

Lines spoken at the end of the play by Clive Champion-Cheney, the father who believes he has solved his son Arnold’s marriage problems by having him offer his wife her freedom (which he’s certain she won’t take once it’s available), must have startled the POWs with their ironic relevance:

C-C: What makes a prison? Why, bars and bolts. Remove them and a prisoner won’t want to escape.  

The other characters (as well as the audience) know that Arnold’s wife has just escaped with her lover, so they respond to Clive’s remark in “fits of laughter.” But the audience of POWs in a prison camp in Thailand that lacked “bars or bolts”—who would escape if they could—knew there were other “invisible” constraints that keep one imprisoned.

The reviews were very positive. Richardson and Gee thought it was “excellent indeed, and extremely well-acted.” An enthusiastic response of another kind, according to Stephen Alexander, was “Fizz” Pearson’s. Getting a little caught up in his intimate onstage relationship with Spong on opening night, he announced afterward, “I could have had Bobby last night, balls or no balls!”

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*Wilton, Mason, and Fisher constructed the single interior setting, Jack Chalker and Rob Brazil produced the décor, and H. Neville the “Wardrobe,” although “Special dresses” were credited to Bobby Spong.*
Theatre Update

The theatrical producers’ growing ambitions in the areas of settings and props demanded changes in the theatre committee and further renovation of the playhouse.

Three new people were added to the committee: A. Harold “Bill” Pycock, the camp quartermaster (who had a reputation for getting any supplies he needed from the Japanese⁹⁵), joined the committee as props manager (allowing Thwaites to devote all his time to publicity and box office), N.E.I. POW Te Tovey took on the responsibility for all décor (set design), and J. Olds joined Angier’s wardrobe staff as his assistant.

All the set and costume designs (at least for British productions) would now be handled by staff designers and their crews rather than by the concert parties individually, as had been the case, which helped the committee gain some control over ever-expanding production concepts and expenditures.

The box office and the new seating policy went into effect in April. Lieutenant John Milford made note of it: “the theatre now has a Booking Office and gets a certain revenue from reserved ‘seats’ (Officers 10¢, O.R.s 5¢). We have no need for such features as a car park, a bar, or a cloak room (if any one had any clothes beyond the very exiguous minimum for decency, they certainly would not risk entrusting them to anyone else), but we have one novel feature, a Crutch Park, where the limbless men jettison their supports to avoid discommoding their neighbors while they enjoy the entertainment.”¹⁰⁶

A sketch of the Chungkai theatre drawn in early April by Philip Meninsky shows the renovations that had been made in the stagehouse to accommodate the growing need for offstage space and onstage...
scenic capabilities. A large canvas tarpaulin borrowed from the Japanese covers the roof not only in anticipation of rain but more importantly to make the stage dark enough for the latest staging innovation to be effective. (To learn more about this renovation, see Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”)

**Britt’s Coups**

Given the lackluster success of *Animal Crackers*, Leo Britt was intent that his next show, *Shooting Stars*—an original musical revue—would be a smash hit. Full-color posters plastered all over camp unashamedly proclaimed, “Written and produced by the Maestro himself” and that it “would be the hit of the season.” On Britt’s insistence, a notice was posted outside the auditorium stating, “Show commences 8:30. Late-comers will be required to wait outside the Area until the end of the First Act.”

Britt wasn’t just imposing his professional standards on the audience. As the contest over which nationality could produce the best entertainment now involved production values, Britt wanted his new show to thrill audiences not only with sets and costumes but with his coup de théâtre: special lighting. This was the first time lighting had been employed since fall 1943. Someone—probably Bill Pycock—had done a good job convincing the Japanese that Chungkai was not, like Tamarkan, a strategic target. The late starting time was to ensure the lights’ maximum effectiveness.

Another coup was Britt’s engagement of Bobby Spong to play the female lead as “the seductive crooneuse.” To get his large cast of thirty performers in top form, Britt had put them through an intense three-week rehearsal schedule on the repertory model: those actors in *Animal Crackers* or *The Circle* had rehearsed *Shooting Stars* during the day and performed their other show in the evening.

The plots of this book-revue had to do with the star performers and band being kidnapped by American gangsters and held aboard a yacht for ransom. At the climax, Britt, playing the arch-gangster, reveals himself as a super G-man, arrests the crooks, and marries the band’s “seductive crooneuse.”

Britt’s attention to production values as well as his performers paid off for most, if not quite all the audience members. John Sharp was duly impressed: “Theatre sets, props and dress get more elaborate.” Gee thought the stage lighting was “used with great success,” though the “show itself was slow in getting underway but warmed up into a sparkling musical production.” Richardson disagreed: the show had “a good stage management and good entertainment. But a punk script.” But for Aylwin, *Shooting Stars* had been “without exception the best produced show I’ve seen since a prisoner of war. I found myself completely lost in the show and when it was over felt I’d been swept away from myself and my p.o.w. surroundings.”

With Pearson’s production of *The Circle* and Britt’s production of *Shooting Stars*, the Dutch had to concede that the British were indeed very good. “They had amateurs as well as professional actors,” Philip Brugman noted, “and their pieces were of high caliber.”

**Eddie Edwins Takes Up the Cause**

Word spread that Eddie Edwins had declared he was planning to produce a show that contained material so audacious it would top anything done by the other British troupes or the Dutch/Indonesians and win him the honor of being the top entertainer in camp. “After all,” Frank Samethini observed, “[the British] had started to entertain their fellow prisoners before anyone else had done, so a greater feat had to be presented.” With cockney cheekiness, Edwins believed he was up to the task.

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xxvi For more on Leo Britt as a producer-director, see Chapter 13: “Precious Personalities.”
But the Dutch/Indonesians were not threatened by Edwins or his shows: “skits, song and dance numbers in which he played the part of a stand-up comic—were of lower caliber,” said Brugman.  

Frank Samethini was once again in the audience when Edwins opened his latest variety show on 14 April:

The theatre ground is filled to capacity. The regular Nip spectators are on their reserved seats. The music begins, the curtain rises—and soon the new stunt is revealed to everybody except, hopefully, to the Japanese. Breaking the previously held rule never to include the enemy in the script, the compère delivers one smart ambiguous jest after another about the whole menageries of Hitler, Mussolini and, daringly indeed, even the Japanese general Tojo! . . . His quipping is cleverly performed. In order to appreciate the innuendo one should understand English better than the average Korean or Jap guard does. It is really good—but also not good enough. One among the Japs finally catches on or perhaps the roar after each sentence has made him suspicious. Who would know? Anyhow, this Jap jumps up and rapidly speaking to his mates runs forward shouting “Stoppo! Bugeiro [sic]! Stoppo!”

Together with his mates he lines all actors up on the stage and then, before our astonished eyes, they are subjected to a solid one minute belting! Immediately afterwards the producer is ordered to continue the show but no laughing will be permitted. A certain strain is detectable among the performers. The play has lost its soul. The Dutch are still one in front.

Sharp and Richardson were in attendance as usual, and this time neither declared the show a success—but for different reasons. Sharp was concerned about the inappropriateness of the “unrehearsed gags in presence of Thai female spectators”—wives and daughters of Thai vendors who ran a canteen in the camp. Richardson pronounced the show only “fair” and thought it had some “bad singers.” Neither reviewer felt it necessary to mention the embarrassing fiasco that had taken place during the opening moments. Edwins would never again attempt to best his rivals.

**Joop’s Cabaret Roars Back**

Since the Dutch/Indonesian entertainers knew they could not win the contest for preeminence in camp entertainment through verbal means, they would use non-verbal. Postma was certain the originality and theatrical brilliance of his troupe’s new production, with its imaginative costumes and sets and virtuosic routines, would deal a decisive blow to the British competition. *Circus Cavalijos*, which opened on 20 April, featured clowns, acrobats, mimes, performing penguins and pumas, and a spectacular dance number.
Besides his poster, Peter van Velthuysen’s playbill, illustrated with characters from the show, lists a typical mixture of variety acts, songs, and sketches, among them “The Doll Store,” “The Mystery of the Lotus,” “Poverty (a one act play),” and “Acrobats.”

Unlike Shooting Stars, Postma’s show started at 6:45 p.m., while it was still daylight. John Milford opined, “lighting is proving too expensive to be used much.” If that were true, Postma had decided to allocate more of his production budget for costumes and sets and reserve his lighting effects for “The Mystery of the Lotus” dance number that would come after it had grown dark.

The ecstatic reviews reveal how well Postma and his troupe succeeded in knocking out the competition: Richardson gave the show high marks (“very good clowns and dancing precise and polished”); Aylwin thought the show “outshone the English shows in its decor, costumes and scenery which considering all were improvised, had to be seen to be believed,” and Jack Chalker remembered the whole production as superb:

[Circus Cavaljos was] perhaps the most ingeniously designed and constructed of any of the Chungkai theatre performances. It was funny, moving and extremely decorative, showing some superb costumes and using a great deal of mime both with and without music, spoken, as far as I can remember, in Dutch but mimed so well that language was irrelevant. A stunning, hilarious and memorable production.

If Milford is right, one has to wonder if the theatre committee, which established production budgets, wasn’t trying to advantage the British producers by squeezing Postma here.

Further notes on the costumes, the construction of the lotus, and the lighting for this show can be found in Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”
Many POWs who saw the show remarked on the profound effect the "Lotus Dance" had on their subconscious. Since each POW remembered it slightly differently, what follows is a composite reconstruction of the dance from several eyewitnesses.

After the curtain fell on the previous act, the compère appeared at the side of the stage to announce the last item on the bill: "The Mystery of the Lotus." The setting, "A Cave: The Temple of Ammon-Ra." As the orchestra started to play—"[t]he music was obviously indigenous to the Dutch East Indies and Polynesian generally"—"the curtain went up." The stage was in darkness, "and then in the glow of freshly lit lighting, a huge lotus blossom was seen" center stage. As the petals gradually unfolded, a "devastatingly beautiful Damsel" emerged and started to dance before the [statue of the] God in a "succession of graceful arabesques." She was dressed in a green diaphanous outfit with a floating fabric panel (selandang) attached to the back of her halter top. Her hair was covered by a headdress which had a high peaked front painted with a pink lotus design. "The audience were silent," "following with rapt attention, interpreting every movement each in his own way." "The figure and classic grace of the dancer was most convincing."

As she continued to dance, a grotesque figure dressed in black enters the temple and watches her. His head is covered by a tight-fitting cap through
which devil’s horns protrude—a Mephistophelean figure.

The “ravishing girl . . . then danced a most intricate routine with the devil for her partner” until at last, she re-entered the lotus. The “man fell prostrate in adoration while the Lotus flower slowly closed, enfolding the beautiful maiden within its petals.” As the “stage lighting slowly faded to darkness,” the “orchestra faded out,” and the curtain descended. After a moment of silence, the audience “highly applauded.”

An audience caught up in rapt attention before responding is the highest form of appreciation any performance can receive. For many spectators, “The Mystery of the Lotus” was numinous—an archetypal event on which they projected their deepest longings.

Weary Dunlop believed the dance resurrected what he thought had been lost from being constantly in the presence of so much sickness and death: his sense of beauty with all its elusive qualities. Ernest Gordon felt similarly: “‘Yes, life is good,’ he seemed to be saying with his body. ‘Look at the beauty all around us. See it in the flower of which I am a part, in the sunlight which opens petals and the breeze which moves me. I dance because I am a part of the beauty and because I am thankful for the mystery that is life.’”

The music for the “Lotus Dance” had not been Indonesian in origin as thought but was one of Norman Smith’s original bolero compositions used with permission by Han Samethini, who led the pit orchestra. Scored for different instruments and with a less insistent rhythm, it sounded “indigenous.”

To listen to an electronic realization of Norman Smith’s “Lotus Dance,” access Audio Link 6.2.

With Circus Cavaljos, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that Joop Postma and his Dutch/Indonesian performers had regained their position as “Ollanda Number One.”

Two Farcical Interludes

The scheduled dates for the next camp entertainment, 28 and 29 April, coincided with the annual celebration of the emperor’s birthday. But the Chungkai show was cancelled because the Japanese in Groups II and IV had been ordered to headquarters at Kanburi, where they would give performances in competition with other units in honor of the occasion. (Competition, it seems, had become contagious.) To gain the advantage, they had sets, props, and costumes made by the Chungkai theatre staff for their offerings.

Before the two groups departed for Kanburi, a dispute broke out between the officers in charge over which could use the services of the Chungkai orchestra for their unit’s performance—thus gaining a further advantage. The dispute was resolved when headquarters at Kanburi stepped in and announced that the orchestra would not perform for either group but would provide music for the festivities generally.

xxix Joqui Steenhuizen was “the Lotus Dancer,” Philip Brugman, the Devil. As a professional dancer before the war, Brugman considered this dance to be his specialty (Gee, Diary, 22 April 1944). This is the last performance record we have noted from Steenhuizen.
Early the next morning, Smith and twenty musicians, one ballad singer, and “Fizzer” Pearson (in case a clown who could do slapstick humor was needed), guarded by a Japanese sergeant and corporal, boarded a Thai barge to take them across the river to Kanburi.\(^{135}\)

As a replacement for their lost entertainment, the POWs back in Chungkai improvised a burlesque soccer match between “Angela [Bobby] Spong and Her Boy Friends” and “Doc Dunlop and His Quacks.”\(^{136}\)

![Figure 6.18. Soccer Match Announcement. Huib van Laar Collection. Image copyright Museon, The Hague, Netherlands.](image)

The giant red “V” in which “Angela” stands triumphant with her foot on the ball signifies “victory” of course—and not just in the soccer match.

Angela’s team played in costumes borrowed from the theatre—the Dutch dressed as clowns from their recent production of *Circus Cavajos*—and musicians not in Smith’s orchestra played sprightly music on the sidelines.\(^ {137}\) It was during this wild farce of a soccer match that one of Spong’s players, dressed as a pregnant woman, went into labor and delivered a baby.\(^ {xxx138}\)

But the farcical events were not over yet. As Norman Smith and company started back to Chungkai at the conclusion of the Kanburi festival, the I. J. A. corporal was too drunk to safely manage the steep bank down to the barge, and Smith was ordered by the sergeant to carry him. When he tried to pick up the corporal, the man started fighting. A big strapping fellow, Smith got the corporal in a fireman’s lift—and with that, the corporal’s mood suddenly changed. Thinking he was now in the arms of one of the geisha prostitutes attending the festival, he threw his arms around Smith’s neck and crooned in his ear.

Smith got the corporal down the bank and started to lower him to the barge, but the man fell backward into the water, which revived his fighting spirit. In desperation, Smith knocked him out, got

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\(^{xxx}\) There may be a camp in-joke here, as earlier John Sharp reported a wry statement made to him by one of the doctors: “Captain [H. Crozier Faulder]’s comment—we have done almost every type of operation except childbirth—and after what is going on in the camp now we’re expecting to do that soon” [John Sharp, 27 March 1944]. What occasioned this comment we don’t know, but better rations and light duty were, perhaps, beginning to produce unexpected results. An earlier diary entry may shed some light on this question: “Dutch navy-cake costs $5.00—I’m told” [John Sharp, Diary, 27 March 1944]. Navy-cake is homosexual slang for anal intercourse. Sharp makes no further comment about it, but the two references suggest that some sort of underground homosexual activity may have been occurring in Chungkai, strictly against military regulations.
him in the boat, and along with another POW sat on him while they made the trip back to Chungkai. When they arrived at the camp, Smith carried the corporal (still passed out) to his hut, dumped him on his bed, and quickly left, hoping the corporal would not remember what had happened. Instead of the feared reprisal, the next day Smith received a letter from the corporal written in English apologizing for his bad behavior and enclosing ten Thai dollars “for the benefit of the members of the orchestra.”

Theatre Update

In early May, important changes took place in theatre committee personnel and in the structure of the stagehouse.

On 1 May a crisis that had been brewing in the management of the Chungkai theatre finally came to a head. Committee chairman Lieutenant-Colonel Mapey resigned and was eventually replaced by Major Harold “Bill” Pycock—but not without a kerfuffle that bruised egos. In the leadership vacuum, Leo Britt had tried to engineer a restructuring “because the present committee was too youthful and inexperienced, and a small core of ‘business men’ would obviously be better.”

After the smoke cleared, John Coast mused, “I think Leo was disappointed not to have got a smaller committee, but he contented himself by trying to control the ten of us.” Leofric Thorpe, who knew both Britt and the inner workings of the theatre committee well, wrote,

All you read about [the] Theatre Committee I am sure can be disregarded. It is [was] always a cross one had to bear. There were only two people at that time who had any influence at all, Leo [Britt] and Harold Pycock, who was Camp Quartermaster. Leo said what he was going to do, and Pycock did all he could to see it was possible. Anything else was no more than camp politics and had to be put up with.

Bill Pycock would chair the committee until early 1945.
Jack Chalker’s watercolor shows the latest renovations and improvements made to the Chungkai theatre since April to increase its flexibility and technical capabilities—the most important of which were the replacement of the flat canvas roof with a thatched atap pitched roof that would shed the rain, and side wings which pivoted on a central axis for quick scene changes.\textsuperscript{xxxi} (For more details on these changes, see Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”)

The British Response: Our Stately Homes

The British answer to the extraordinary theatricality of Postma’s Circus Cavaljós was a production of Three One-Act Plays\textsuperscript{xxii} that took advantage of the latest playhouse renovations to present three different realistic interiors. Jack Chalker and Rob Brazil were credited with the décor.\textsuperscript{144} In another first for Chungkai, each one-act had a different producer-director (“Fizzer” Pearson, Nigel Wright, and Gus Harffey)—but all the one-acts were performed by ‘Fizzer’s’ little company of 10 men.\textsuperscript{xxxiii}

Of the three plays, A. A. Milne’s The Boy Comes Home must have garnered the most interest since it concerned a soldier who has just returned home from the First World War. Philip, a young officer, has come back a changed man accustomed to making his own decisions and giving orders, which puts him in conflict with Uncle James, a wealthy businessman who still considers himself Philip’s guardian and has plans for Philip’s future in his company. Though Milne questions the mores of British society in his play, he ultimately reaffirms them when Philip, free to determine his own destiny, chooses to join Uncle James’ company.

“It was these three plays,” Coast claimed, “that showed that a remarkably high standard of acting

\textsuperscript{xxxi} Even though Chalker’s watercolor is dated 1943, there was no such theatre in Chungkai at that time. In an e-mail to the author, Chalker admitted that he had misdated this and other sketches when he was in Bangkok after the war and had time to review and complete his enormous collection of drawings and watercolors [Chalker, E-mail, 11 November 2004].

\textsuperscript{xxii} Stanley Houghton’s The Dear Departed (1910), A. A. Milne’s The Boy Comes Home (1918), Sir Arthur Wing Pinero’s The Playgoers: A Domestic Episode (1913).

\textsuperscript{xxxiii} Besides Pearson, the Players’ company consisted of Eric Griffiths-Jones, Gus Harffey, Douglas Morris, Terry Morris, Roy Randolph, Bobby Spong, Freddie Thompson, “Nellie” Wallace, and Nigel Wright, with Eddie Edwins, Bertie Perkins, and Te Tovey cast in walk-on roles.
had already been attained.”

The emphasis on production values had also paid off: Richardson thought the décor, acting, and production good but the plays “thin.” John Sharp partly disagreed. He thought the plays “very good” and the stage effects “extraordinary” but was shocked to learn that five [Thai] dollars had been spent on the “dye for the dresses.” With the large amount of money lavished on sets, costumes, and props in evidence, Aylwin observed what had become obvious to everyone: “The theatre has developed into a big business in this camp.”

**Camp Update: Three Events**

In May, three events took place that would affect the present and the future of entertainment in Chungkai.

The first involved the pace of evacuations of Group IV POWs to their base camp at Tamuang and the heavy sick to Nakhon Pathom that was now stepped up to 500 a day. With little or no concert party operating in either of these camps, “Fizzer” Pearson and other members of his troupe, including Eric Griffiths-Jones and Nigel Wright, were ordered to Nakhon Pathom via Tamuang. But Bobby Spong, who had been Pearson’s “leading lady” for many shows, did not go with them. And ten days before the end of the month, Weary Dunlop along with some key members of his staff, one of whom would be head masseuse Jack Chalker, left Chungkai for Nakhon Pathom as well.

The second event was an announcement made in Chungkai on 12 May: “a Jap Officer in Kamburi [Kanburi] camp, impressed by a visit the Chungkai Band had paid [on 29 April] . . . decided that he would set up the Hollywood of Thailand and got permission to draw in entertainers from each group, in order to form a centralized concert party, that would travel the rounds of each camp.” The “borehole rumour” Richard Sharp heard said that the commandant at Kanburi was reputedly going to “provide $2000 for instruments (including $1000 from Thai canteen)” in support of this idea. If true, the offer would be very tempting, but “Chungkai viewed this with suspicion.” The final event had to do with the monsoon rains that were beginning to fall quite steadily. In mid-May, Richardson logged some disquieting entries in his diary: “considerable rain at Chungkai (first rains). River rising so rain up-country also.” Four days later, “River now almost too deep to cross.”

**Promenade Concert**

On the same night as the Kanburi announcement, the latest in the remarkable series of performances to occur on stage at Chungkai took place: a Promenade Concert consisting entirely of classical music performed by the Chungkai orchestra under the sole direction of Eric Cliffe, with soloist James F. Clarke and Gibby Inglefield’s choir. Though orchestral concerts did not count in the high-stakes contest between the British and Dutch/Indonesian theatrical producers, designers and technicians had taken the opportunity to provide the show with a stunning black and white Art Deco setting and to introduce innovative lighting.

To prepare for this concert, Cliffe had rehearsed his musicians intensely for a fortnight. Paper for the scores had been supplied by their music-loving commandant Kokubo, and a number of copyists (one of whom was Stanley Gimson) had worked laboriously transcribing music from scratchy gramophone records and musicians who remembered the scores. When three of Cliffe’s musicians—a drummer,
guitarist [Jimmy van Lingen], and violinist—were sent downriver to Tamuang in the days immediately preceding the performance, their loss almost sabotaged the concert. But Cliffe made the necessary adjustments and soldiered on.

The range and technical skill demanded of the British and Dutch/Indonesian musicians by the program of music was extraordinary (see Figure 6.21 in the Image Gallery for a listing of the musicians). One of the most meaningful selections was the “Largo” from Dvorak’s New World Symphony, based on the American Negro spiritual “Goin’ Home.”

Eric Cliffe was pleased with the concert’s outcome: “The interest shown in good music by all ranks increased with each concert given (one audience numbering over three thousand), and many who, before the war, had been unsympathetic towards any music other than ‘Swing’ were heard . . . whistling Bach and Purcell as they carried out their camp duties.” The symphony concert immediately generated “a demand for further Proms,” but Chungkai would have only this one to remember. Shortly afterward, Cliffe and several members of his orchestra were sent to Tamuang.

Knowing that a full concert of classical music would not appeal to everyone’s taste, the following night the orchestra played a Swing Concert of popular music led by Gus Harffey, who had stepped in as conductor because Norman Smith as a “charter member of the Amoebic Dysentery Club” and lyricist “Biggles” Bywaters had been placed on the same draft for Tamuang as Cliffe.

**Figures 6.20. Promenade Concert. First page of the program. Courtesy of Mrs. Arthur Johnston.**

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**xxxi** The program, prepared before the three musicians were sent away, lists nineteen musicians along with their instruments and additional singers.

**xxxvi** See more about the further musical activities of these three men in later chapters: Smith at Nakhon Pathom in Chapter 8 to “Breakout!” ; Smith, Cliffe, and Bywaters in Kanburi in Chapter 9: “The Battle for Concerts.”
Leo Britt’s Triumph

In the weeks prior to the Promenade Concert, Smith had been busily engaged in rehearsing the pit orchestra and singers for Britt’s big new musical, Wonder Bar, set to open the following weekend. He was able to conduct the first run-through with music before turning the orchestra over to Ernest Lenthall, bandmaster of the Cambridgeshires Regimental Band (who had conducted an orchestral concert at Takanun earlier).

Advertised as “Thailand’s Greatest Musical Comedy,” the final rehearsals of Wonder Bar attracted more than the usual number of POWs to sit in the amphitheatre to watch—a practice that had become a prized custom. But on 17 May, as a dress rehearsal was in progress on stage, Leo Britt complained to the I. J. A. authorities about the “do-nothings” who had gathered in the auditorium to watch. He had gained so much clout with the Japanese by this point that they threatened to punish anyone found there.

With Pearson’s departure, all hopes for the British winning the contest against the Dutch/Indonesians now lay with Leo Britt. Wonder Bar, his most elaborate production to date, opened at 8:45 p.m. on 19 May and ran for two triumphant performances. Britt had been in the musical in 1929 when it was produced in London by André Charlot.

For the Chungkai production, the original plot was rewritten by John Beckett to fit a more condensed time frame mandated by curfew restrictions and limitations on the number of settings that could be employed. The unusually late starting time signaled that special lighting effects would be used from the opening moment.

The three-act musical comedy was performed by a cast of thirty actors, singers, and dancers that
included three Dutch/Indonesians. Of this group, nine were female impersonators (see **Figure 6.23** in the Image Gallery for the cast list). In the orchestra pit were eleven musicians, led by Ernest Lenthall. Of the nine or more musical numbers, several were new pieces, such as the “Alpine (Pizzicato) Polka,” were written by Smith and Bywaters. As a dancer-singer in the original production, Britt had choreographed the show as well.

Te Tovey designed two completely different settings for the show: Act One took place in “Sir Charles’ Bedroom Suite at the Grand Hotel, St. Moritz.”

“Can you possibly imagine,” wrote Ian Mackintosh of the first act, “three men impersonating girls holding the stage for near three quarters of an hour with small talk, and one of them reclining in bed! And to the end of the act they got up sang a very catchy song and finished with a high-stepping dance. I can’t remember when I have laughed so heartily.”

John Coast believed the trio’s song and dance was the high point of Act One:

This latter number was sung in French, German and English by three young things who ended in a dance routine of high-kicking that delighted the audience; and seeing those three “girls” capering about on the stage, it was odd to think that in normal times one was an R.A.S.C. Private, from London [Bobby Spong]; one a Regular Officer [Douglas Morris]; and the other a bald-headed Corporal in a Highland Regiment, Johnny [John “Nellie” Wallace], who had come through cholera, malaria, dysentery, beriberi and jaundice altogether up country.

Acts Two and Three took place in the hotel’s “Wonder Bar Cabaret.” The highlights of Act Two were “a low comedy scene between a waiter, [Everard] Woods, and a charwoman, Freddie Thompson,” and a Spanish tango with accordion accompaniment danced by “Cecile” [Pat Donovan] and her partner André [René Den Daas].

But it was the Act Three cabaret scene that dazzled everyone with its brilliance. “Dresses, sets, costumes, dancing and singing made us gasp with astonishment when the curtains opened on the tiny stage, like a puppet-theatre in the darkness,” wrote John Durnford from his vantage point at the top of the amphitheatre. Milner was also stunned by the act’s opening moment: “the stage was full of colour, with many couples dancing a fox-trot.”

John Sharp, who had secured a reserved seat for the opening, called *Wonder Bar* “a triumph for the producer: very good sets, sustained interest, good costume and remarkable production.” Aylwin agreed: “a most ambitious production, magnificently carried out. When the curtain went up on the final scene with full chorus, I felt I was in a London Theatre. The dresses and décor were amazingly well improvised.” Geoffrey Gee went further, declaring *Wonder Bar* “A real theatrical thrill!” But it was G. E. Chippington who summed up the show’s total effect: “unbelievable. A magic carpet to transport us across time and space to another life where people actually live in a civilized society.”

During the curtain calls, Leo Britt was “called to the front of the stage to make a speech.”

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See more details about these settings in Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”
Two Production Stills

Two black and white photographs of *Wonder Bar* survive. They were taken by a Japanese photographer to prevent an onsite inspection by the Red Cross, which had been pressing the I. J. A. to get a look at one of their hospital camps and so far had been prevented from doing so. What could be more convincing of the prisoners’ welfare than photographs documenting the “happy” POWs enjoying themselves? The prints exhibit the difficulty of taking good black and white photographs in bright tropical sunlight, which heightens the contrast, flaring highlights and deepening shadows.

![Wonder Bar Curtain Call](image)

*Figure 6.24. Wonder Bar Curtain Call. Photograph courtesy of Martin Percival.*

The first Wonder Bar photograph shows twenty-seven members of the cast and crew on stage in a curtain call arrangement. Eight members of the orchestra are seated on stools in the pit. Three other musicians (the bass player, the drummer, and the conductor) are not included in the frame. Seated along the front edge of the stage are beaming Japanese camp authorities and Korean guards.
The second *Wonder Bar* photograph shows a scene from Act III with only a select number of cast members on stage. It is just possible to make out Huib van Laar’s Chungkai theatre logo on the proscenium walls far right and left.

[For a detailed examination of these photographs and an explanation of how Britt staged what is seen in the photographs to undercut their propaganda value, watch Video Link 6.1.]

**The First and Best**

“The highest peak reached in what one might call the first and best period of Chungkai entertainment was Leo’s ‘Wonder Bar’ adaptation,” wrote John Coast, “to my mind the best all-round show ever put on.”174 Since everyone in Chungkai agreed, the contest between the British and Dutch/Indonesians over who could produce the best entertainment was finally resolved. For Britt it was a personal triumph as well. As if to certify his status as “number one” producer-director, he was “officially recognized by the Japs . . . and excused other more menial work in order to train and produce our shows.”175

After *Wonder Bar*, the intense rivalry between the British and the Dutch/Indonesian entertainers faded into the background and everyone got on with the hard work of producing a new show every four weeks. There would still be competition, of course—that would be true among any group of theatre artists sharing the same performance space and trying to appeal to the same audiences. But now it would be what Philip Brugman called a “healthy competition.”176 The “unhealthy” competition had produced amazing results in raising standards of performance and production values and in technical innovations. A “healthy” competition would challenge them all to build upon those accomplishments.
Endnotes

1 Owtram, 109.
2 Milford, Diary, 6 February 1944.
3 Mackintosh, Diary, 9 March 1944.
4 Milford, Diary, 6 February 1944.
5 Mackintosh, Diary, 9 March 1944.
6 Aylwin, Memoir, 12–13.
7 Gimson, Diary, 18 February 1944.
9 Coast, 109.
10 Anonymous, 102.
11 Cosford, 72, 104.
12 Donald Smith, 101–102.
13 Chalker, BRA, 75.
14 IWM Misc. 90 Item 1323.
15 Richardson, Diary, 29 May 1943.
16 Chalker, Diary, 8 August 1943.
17 Chalker, Diary, 8 August 1943.
18 Gimson, Diary, 15 August 1943.
20 Riley, 100.
21 Chalker, Diary, 16 October 1943. Chalker mentions that dates in his diary are sometimes slightly off.
22 Frank Samethini, 91.
23 Richard Sharp, 51.
24 Johnston, Diary, 5 February 1944.
25 Chalker, Diary, 12 November 1943.
26 Durnford, 150.
27 Anckorn, Interview, 41–42.
28 Durnford, 150; Chalker, Diary, 12 November 1943.
29 Chalker, Diary, 1 December 1943.
30 Chalker, Diary, 27 November 1943.
33 Chalker, Interview, 24.
34 Interview with Postma, in Leffelaar and van Witsen, 240; trans. by Sheri Tromp.
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46 Johnston, Diary, 11 February 1944.
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48 Frank Samethini, 89.
49 Frank Samethini, 90.
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53 Coast, 169–171; J. Sharp, Diary, 3, 6 March 1944.
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66 Richardson, Diary, 11 February 1944.
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70 Richardson, Memoir, 159.
71 Interview with Postma, in Leffelaar and van Witsen, 249; trans. by Sheri Tromp.
72 Interview with Brugman, in Leffelaar and van Witsen, 252–253; trans. by Sheri Tromp.
73 Interview with Postma, in Leffelaar and van Witsen, 249; trans. by Sheri Tromp.
74 Gimson, Diary, 18 February 1944.
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80 Dunlop, 12 April 1944.
81 Carter, 177.
82 Coast, 175.
83 Richard Sharp, 49–50.
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99 Gee, Diary, 15 March 1944.
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106 Milford, Diary, 23 April 1944.
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115 Aylwin, Folder 7, 27.
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