

2014

## “The FEPOW Songbook”

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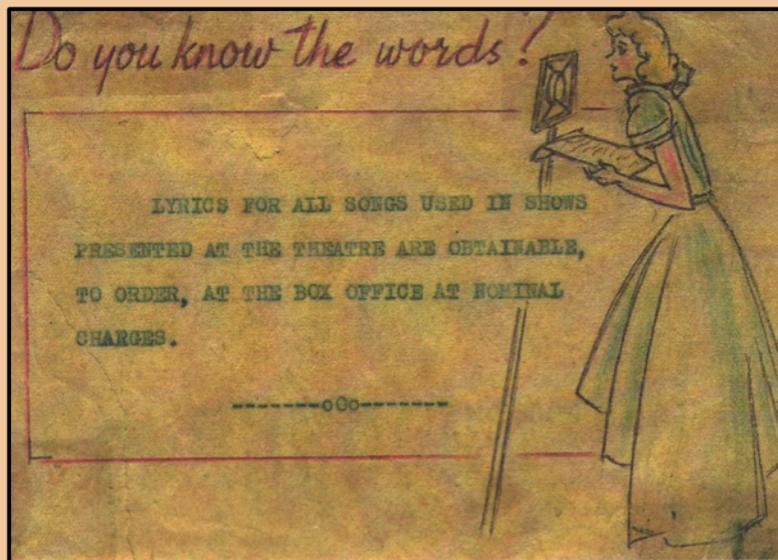
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# The FEPOW Songbook



CAMP ANNOUNCEMENT--CHUNGKAI. HUIB VAN LAAR. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Containing the full text of original songs and song-parodies  
written and performed by prisoners of war on the  
Thailand-Burma Railway, 1942–1945  
as excerpted or referred to in  
*Captive Audience/Captive Performers*.

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## SONGS BY LESLIE "BIGGLES" BYWATERS

*FIZZER'S FLUTE*

(Music: Norman Smith)

Behold in me a member of the Oswaldtwisle band,  
 When you hear my music you will think it simply grand.  
 I told my wife that playing second fiddle was the cause  
 Of much of our unhappiness, she answered without pause,  
 You're lucky to be in the band at all with an instrument like yours.  
 (Flute)

I saw a nice young lady standing in a crowded bus . . .  
 I winked and pointed to my lap, she sat down with a fuss . . .  
 I was going out to play all dressed up in my bandsman's suit,  
 Her girlfriend asked her who I was, she answered "Ain't he cute?  
 I think that he's a bandsman 'cause I'm sitting on his flute.

Once I bought a frock coat with a pocket in the tail . . .  
 I wore it at a dance one night, the thought turns me quite pale . . .  
 While searching for my handkerchief somehow my hand did pass  
 Right down a lady's evening frock, she was a buxom lass.  
 Never in the whole of my life have I felt such a perfect ass . . .

Once when playing contact bridge, it is my favourite sport . . .  
 I went into the bathroom, as I'd just been taken short . . .  
 While I was out my partner said "It really beats the band  
 The way he bids and play his lead cards, I seldom understand,  
 But at last I know exactly what he's holding in his hand . . ."

When I get home at last on England's happy shore . . .  
 I think that I shall never visit Thailand any more . . .  
 I'll go into some posh hotel and order something nice  
 And wash it down with good old ale, no matter what the price,  
 And I'll tell them what to do with it, if they serve it up with rice.

—Changi, Singapore, 1942

**FORE**

(Music: Norman Smith)

We're two Aphrodites the pride of our age,  
 The new generation now holding the stage.  
 We don't go for lipstick or facial décor,  
 We're bung full of muscle, we're frightfully outdoor.  
 So it's Fore, Fore, the game we adore,  
 We're first on the tee and you can't ask for more.  
 I'm Jesse of Scotland, I worship the pros,  
 St. Andrews, St. Pancras, King's Cross and God knows,  
 And I'm little Beryl the sweet English rose,  
 Two lady champs in the raw—Fore,  
 Two lady champs in the raw.

The fashions don't scare us, we never read *Vogue*,  
 And all that we ask is a good heavy brogue.  
 Our tweedy creations are just right for Tats,  
 And we finish them off with these damned awful hats.  
 So it's Fore, Fore, the game we adore,  
 We're decently dressed and you can't ask for more.  
 When playing young King, the assistant at Knowle,  
 My knickers fell off, it was really too droll,  
 He nearly collapsed when I gave him the hole.  
 Two lady champs in the raw—Fore,  
 Two lady champs in the raw.

Mere men never scare us—we're proud of our sex,  
 We're both rather Freudian, rather complex.  
 I dabble in spaniels when not on the green  
 And I share a flat with a girl from Rodean.  
 So it's Fore, Fore, the game we adore,  
 We're both got our girlfriends you can't ask for more.  
 When playing a man down at Troon just for fun

I told him my handicap, merely plus one,  
 He replied in falsetto "My handicap's none."  
 Two lady champs in the raw—Fore,  
 Two lady champs in the raw.

Our language is lurid but we're not afraid  
 We're two of the Page and Carstairs Brigade.  
 I only smoke Woodbines and similar fags,  
 Whilst I smoke a pipe and the roughest of shags.  
 So it's Fore, Fore, the game we adore,  
 We're both done an Eagle, you can't ask for more.  
 I'm browned by the weather and rough through the snows,  
 I spit like a yokel and breathe through my nose,  
 And wherever I spit sure the grass never grows,  
 Two lady champs in the raw—Fore,  
 Two lady champs in the raw.

So here's to the Driver, the Nibbilck, the Spoon,  
 We're two female tigers from Sandwich and Troon,  
 To hell with effeminate creatures who cling  
 And what's all this cock about babies and things?  
 So it's Fore, Fore, the game we adore,  
 We've both won the Open, you can't ask for more.  
 So here's to the mater we owe her a lot,  
 Thank God it was daughters she rocked in the cot.  
 And here's to the pater, he hit the right spot.  
 Two lady champs in the raw—Fore,  
 Two lady champs in the raw.

—Chungkai, Thailand, 1944

***PLEASE MISTER FLYNN***

(Music: Norman Smith)

Most girls will come from near or far  
 To gaze upon a movie star,

And listen to each thrilling word that's said.  
But I find it most distressing  
And I blush when I'm confessing  
That I've got one here beside me in my bed.  
A mind of a magician  
Must have fixed this queer position  
For I didn't contribute in any way;  
I was dreaming so serenely,  
Neither rudely nor obscenely,  
When I suddenly awoke and there he lay.

So please Mister Flynn, can't you see the plight I'm in  
Conduct yourself in gentlemanly style.  
Attractive masculinity  
Is not my sole divinity,  
I only like to have it, once a while.  
So please Mister Flynn, you can stop that silly grin,  
Perhaps I'm not enamoured by your touch.  
There're girls in this locality  
With greater personality,  
So please Mister Flynn, on my knees Mister Flynn,  
I don't want to, thank you very much.

A true artistic gentleman  
Is far more sentimental than  
A doctor, a surveyor, or a judge.  
An answer in the negative  
Is usually a sedative  
But not to little Flynny, he won't budge.  
I've tried him with my autograph,  
The crossword in the *Telegraph*,  
I've read him modern verse of every kind.  
I've showed him new positions  
In the classified editions,

But he only seems to have a one-track mind.

So please Mister Flynn, you must take on the chin,  
I'm of the Old Brigade, not of the Light.  
You may be an equestrian,  
But I'm a mere pedestrian,  
And Destiny isn't riding here tonight.  
So please Mister Flynn, can't you see the ice is thin,  
You've skated near a fissure once or twice.  
Don't think my churlish attitude  
Is based on sheer ingratitude,  
So please Mister Flynn, on my knees Mister Flynn,  
I don't want to, not at any price.

Attractive lady friends of mine  
Would think this set-up too divine  
And greet my awkward fate with loud applause.  
They'd think me "too satirical"  
Say "Darling it's a miracle,  
One simply can't believe in Santa Claus."  
It seems a playful Deity  
Produced a spot of gaiety,  
To tempt me in this tantalizing way;  
But my natural condition  
Had dictated my position  
And that's the reason why I cannot play.

So please Mister Flynn, be a sport and pack it in,  
As Mr. Baldwin said "My lips are sealed."  
I haven't got the calories  
For joining all the galleries  
Of every little girl you've sold and heeled.  
So please Mister Flynn, you must take it on the chin

*Per ardua ad astra*'s<sup>i</sup> not my aim  
 You'll ruin my embroidery  
 With overflowing Freudery,  
 So please Mister Flynn, on my knees Mister Flynn,  
 I don't want to, thank you all the same.

—Chungkai, Thailand, 1944

### ***THE HISTORY PROFESSORS***

(Music: Norman Smith)

We're here thanks to the courtesy of Oxford University  
 To tell you tales of days when knights were bold  
 And how a lot of history that's shrouded in mystery  
 Did rarely ever happen as is told;  
 Seeing is believing is a saying trite but true  
 And here's a bit of history that's absolutely new.

This is the truth about Elizabeth and Raleigh,  
 The rainy day, the puddle and the coat.  
 The so-called virgin queen and dear Sir Walter used to sally  
 Beyond the royal castle and its moat.  
 You'd see them stand both hand in hand, they weren't a trifle shy  
 And hear Sir Walter murmur low and Lizzie give a cry,  
 Then he'd fling his groundsheet on the ground the same as you or I,  
 But that of course is quite another story.

This is the truth about King Charles and pretty Nellie  
 The first recorded Drury Lane success.  
 And when he sauntered out with her, his legs just turned to jelly  
 And orange peel and pips got in his dress.  
 Now Charles a merry monarch, thought Miss Gwynn was rather cute,  
 And if she lived on oranges she'd soon be destitute,  
 So he cried "Let not poor Nellie starve" and slipped her passion fruit,  
 But that of course is quite another story.

<sup>i</sup> "Through hardship to the stars."

This is the truth about Victoria our greatest,  
 Of course she didn't say "We're not amused."  
 And we would like to add our information is the latest,  
 We found it in a diary that she used.  
 Victoria and her Cabinet had dined a bit too well,  
 Disraeli read an ode about an eskimo called Nell,  
 And dear old Queen Victoria slapped her thigh and laughed like hell,  
 But that of course is quite another story.

—Kanburi Officers' Camp,  
 Thailand, 1945

***I'M A DEB***

(Music: Norman Smith)

Exactly nineteen years ago, my mother Lady Littlego  
 Was married at St. George's in the Square.  
 Which really wasn't much too soon, 'cos later on that afternoon  
 My infant wails came wafting through the air.  
 And so though only just in time, I've had no social scales to climb  
 My name and title's opened every door.  
 I've never done a stupid act; I've still got everything intact,  
 And here's the day I've just been long[ing] for.

'Cos I'm a Deb,  
 Such a pretty, rather witty little Deb.  
 I'm quite a bright attraction now each night in Berkeley Square  
 There isn't any nightingale, so rub it in your hair.  
 What a chance  
 For a little spot of really hot romance.  
 My boyfriends say I'm delicate as any hothouse plant  
 They say that I not only won't, but that in fact I can't.  
 But if they'd only read the *Tatler*  
 They would see I'm quite a rattler,  
 And this year's most attractive Debutante.

When father found a child was due,  
 He checked up on a friend or two,  
 And entered me for Eaton on the spot.  
 But when I reached this earthly plane, he found I'd fooled him  
                   once again  
 And Wycombe Abbey then became my lot.  
 My nightly treks from door to door, I soon became a monitor,  
 When asked to leave I'd quite enhanced my name.  
 A finishing academy was hardly thought the thing for me,  
 But I finished off dears, all the same.

Now I'm a Deb.  
 Such a trustful rather lustful little Deb.  
 They say my coming-out affair will stupefy the town:  
 It won't be what is coming out, but what is coming down.  
 What a whirl.  
 For a highly shrewd and interviewed young girl.  
 The *Sketch* insists I'm shy, pure as any maiden aunt,  
 The *Daily Mirror* tackles me from quite another slant;  
 Whilst the *Sporting and Dramatic*  
 Say I'm hot stuff in the attic,  
 And this year's most attractive Debutante.

The *Sphere* reports I'm all the rage, the latest thing for screen or stage,  
 And so I'm asking Noel for a part.  
 There's always left, if all else fails, the Windmill and the Prince of Wales,  
 Where one can show the essence of one's art.<sup>ii</sup>  
 And as my figure's neat but thin,  
 I might become a mannequin,  
 I've heard one very quickly learns the knack,  
 And as I'm young and pretty, and I've something in the kitty  
 I'll soon be singing songs for Mr. Black.

<sup>ii</sup> At two London theatres famous for their nude revues.

For I'm a Deb.  
 A tired and mascara'd little Deb.  
 I'm dressed by Schiaparelli in creations rather rare  
 But who the hell undresses me is neither here nor there.  
 What a flair  
 For appealing and revealing underwear.  
 I've got a frightful chaperone, the dragon of an aunt,  
 Who's failed to stop the frolics of a charming dilettante;  
 For she's read in the *Spectator*  
 That I'm not a selling platter,  
 But this year's most attractive Debutante.

—Kanburi Officers' Camp,  
 Thailand, 1945

### ***SWINGING ON A STRAP***

(Music: Norman Smith)

Rush hour. Rush hour.  
 Taxi ramming, traffic jamming.  
 Window slamming, carriage cramming  
 Wary workers shuffle to the tempo of the street.  
 Everywhere the rhythm of a million milling feet.  
 City slickers, pocket pickers,  
 Letter stickers, chorus kickers,  
 Peace is very rarely found  
 Even when we're underground,  
 Still the voice of London rants and roars.  
 Escalators, indicators,  
 Errand boys and mere spectators:  
 Cockney voices crying "Mind the doors."

Swinging on a strap, every morning, every evening, every day,  
 Looking at a map whether coming, whether going either way.  
 Typist from suburbia adjacent to a Judge,  
 Looking so embarrassed at that accidental nudge,

Tightly packed together so that neither one can budge.  
 Grasping frantically, unromantically,  
 Swaying on a strap as we rumble and we tumble 'neath the town:  
 Looking for a lap if we're suddenly invited to sit down.  
 Smiling at a pretty girl and frowning at the plain,  
 Craning eager necks to glimpse the latest strip of Jane<sup>iii</sup>  
 We're swinging on a strap, any morning, any evening, any day.

Rush hour. Crush hour.  
 Boot repairers, window starers  
*News* and *Star* and *Standard* bearers  
 Break into a stumble at the rumble of a train,  
 Rummage in the scrimmage as they storm the doors in vain.  
 Bedding airers, heavy swearers,  
 Underwear and stocking tearers.  
 But whenever West End bound  
 Even on the underground,  
 Life takes on a lighter, brighter hue.  
 Disinfectors, crowd ejectors,  
 Even beetle-browed inspectors  
 Murmur quite politely "Thank you."

Swinging on a strap, every morning, every evening, every day,  
 Longing for a nap just to pass the weary minutes right away.  
 Smiling philosophically when kicked upon the shin,  
 Feeling our elastic go and praying for a pin:  
 Trying hard to battle with the rattle and the din.  
 Headache hammering, people yammering.  
 Swaying on a strap as we nestle and we wrestle in a whirl  
 Looking for a sap who will give his seat to any pretty girl.  
 But when evening pleasure bound we're feeling fair to fine,  
 When following the red light for the Piccadilly Line

<sup>iii</sup> *Jane* was a British comic strip created by Norman Pett in 1932. During her various adventures, either by choice or happenstance, the heroine usually shed most of her clothes. The strip was considered an important morale booster for troops during the Second World War, and pinups of *Jane* appeared on tanks and aircraft ["Christabel Leighton-Porter," *Obits, The Telegraph*, Sunday, 22 July 2012].

We're swinging on a strap, any morning, any evening, any day.

—Kanburi Officers' Camp,  
Thailand, 1945

**(Listen to Audio Link FS.1 for a vocal and instrumental rendition of this song.)**

Audio



FS.1

## SONGS BY EDDIE EDWINS

***PRUDIE—THE PRIDE OF THE PRAIRIE***

(Music: Eddie Edwins)

Verse:

There are many flash dames in the city,  
And many good gals on the screen.  
I've been far & wide, but I've never espied,  
A prettier gal than this wild western queen.

Chorus:

Prudie the pride of the prairie  
The girl of the Golden West  
She's rough and she's tough  
And she's really hot stuff  
But still she is one of the best.  
She mixes at every rodeo  
With cowboys all husky and hairy.  
When she swings her hips  
All the boys crack their whips, for  
Prudie, the pride of the prairie.

She barks and she bites  
She stands up for her rights  
And feathers her own little nest.  
She sorts out the cows & the doggies  
And corrals 'em down by the dairy.  
She looks such a dream  
That the cows all give cream, for  
Prudie, the pride of the prairie.

She can spit she can chew  
Like a big buckaroo  
And she wears a bullet-proof vest.  
She's got a log hut in the mountains  
It's cold, but it's lovely & rainy

When she pulls her “gat”  
 All the boys fall down flat, from  
 Prudie, the pride of the prairie.

One day she went roamin’  
 Down into Wyomin’  
 She took on the trip with great zest.  
 She met with an old lone star rancher  
 Who called her a sweet little fairy.  
 She thought he was cute  
 But the friendship bore fruit for  
 Prudie, the pride of the prairie.

You’ve heard in this song  
 How Prudie went wrong  
 The time she was put to the test.  
 Don’t give yourself up to a stranger  
 With he-men you’ve got to be wary.  
 If you must make a date  
 Remember the fate of,  
 Prudie, the pride of the prairie.

—Chungkai, Thailand, 1943

***IF THEY’D ONLY BRING LONDON TO CHUNGKAI***

(Music: Eddie Edwins)

**1.**

I’ve got a very fine idea, I’d like to put to you.  
 A very, very simple way to make our dreams come true.  
 Instead of ev’rybody going home to make a fuss,  
 Why not change it round & bring our home out here to us.

Chorus:

If they’d only bring old London out to Chungkai,  
 What a fine old bizness it would be.  
 If they’d put New Scotland Yard,

Where the soldiers change the guard,  
 Across the road the good old Strand we'd see.  
 If the River Thames went flowing past the Cookhouse,  
 And the Coliseum was in the Smilodrome,<sup>iv</sup>  
 Then we wouldn't be unhappy any longer,  
 For we'd just sit down & make ourselves at home.

## 2.

Altho' it may be difficult to do the thing at first  
 It could be done slowly if the worst came to the worst.  
 There is just one problem, or so it seems to me,  
 Everyone would want the place where they most want to be.

Chorus:

If they'd only bring the West End out to Chungkai,  
 What a fine old bizness it would be.  
 If they'd bring Cadogan Square  
 And just dump it over there,  
 Round here old Piccadilly we should see.  
 If Regent Street went curving past the guardroom,  
 And the Carlton Club was in the Smilodrome,  
 Then we wouldn't pine for Mayfair any longer,  
 For we'd have a drink & smoke ourselves at home.

If they'd bring the good old East End out to Chungkai,  
 What a fine old bizness it would be.  
 If they'd bring the Old Kent Road  
 Where the woodmen dump their load,  
 Then the Elephant & Castle we should see.  
 Now if Barking Creek was round the Johnny Horror,<sup>v</sup>  
 And the Old Dun Cow<sup>vi</sup> was next the Smilodrome,  
 Then we'd take our donahs<sup>vii</sup> walking round the Churchyard,  
 Knock back a pint and make ourselves at home.

—Chungkai, Thailand, 1944

<sup>iv</sup> This may have been camp slang for their theatre.

<sup>v</sup> Either a reference to the latrines or the ulcer ward, where the smell of rotting flesh was overwhelming.

<sup>vi</sup> A London pub.

<sup>vii</sup> Circus slang term for "woman" also used in the British music halls.

## SONGS BY BOB GALE

***SHE TOLD ME***

(Music: Bob Gale)

Dedicated to my wife, Fay

Verse:

I've got a girl in Blighty<sup>viii</sup> who is waiting for me,  
 She said that she would wait until the day I was free.  
 And every night I'm thinking as I'm lying in bed,  
 Of all those funny little things that my girl had said.

Chorus:

Oh she told me the day that I sailed away,  
 That she would never go astray, she told me.  
 She told me that she would always be true,  
 And never do a naughty thing if I promised [too?]  
 Then she told me there would be lovely days  
 If I'd been the goody goody I had promised to be.

Verse:

I've got a letter from my girl who's waiting at home,  
 She said it's time I settled down, it's silly to roam.  
 I've written back to say I'll hurry when I can,  
 Provided she can prove she's been with no other man.

—Nong Pladuk, Thailand,  
 December 1943

***TAKE MY SEAT***

(Music: Bob Gale)

Verse:

Monday morning feeling has got me.  
 I'm so tired of this monotonous ride.  
 But what a difference it would make  
 If I had a lovely lady by my side.  
 We could talk and make arrangements for the evening

<sup>viii</sup> Slang name for Great Britain from the First World War.

A show and maybe supper for two.  
And so I would go on dreaming,  
Till I'm [lines missing].

Chorus:

Lovely little lady won't you take my seat.  
Guess you're going shopping down in Oxford Street.  
Wish that I could come along with you and buy,  
Any latest fashion that you care to try.

Lovely little lady won't you please sit down.  
Are you from the country do you live in town?  
Bet you've got your mind on someone else to meet,  
'Cos why is it you hesitate to take my seat?

I've been travelling to work  
At the same old time every day.  
But I must confess that never before  
Has such loveliness come my way.

Lovely little lady now must I repeat  
It would give me pleasure if you'd take my seat.  
It's usually the gentlemanly thing to do.  
But secretly I hope to make a date with you

—Nong Pladuk, Thailand,  
December 1943

**(Listen to Audio Link FS.2 to hear a vocal and instrumental rendition of this song.)**

Audio



FS.2

*SIMPLE COUNTRY LIFE*

(Music: Bob Gale)

Verse:

I am just a simple country fellow  
And I must admit  
I've never envied those who dwell in towns  
And I've noticed how they always flock into the countryside  
Most every time a holiday comes round.  
But I'm not so sentimental as to say this isn't fair,  
The world was meant for everyone  
For all of us to share.

Chorus:

I don't envy city dwellers  
Smartly dressed with rolled umbrellas,  
Give me rural England  
With its simple country life.  
Crowding on to smoky buses,  
Packed like rabbits in tube rushes,  
Give me rural England  
With a cottage and a wife.  
There we'll live in peace and gladness  
Toiling with a willing heart,  
Serving dear old Mother Earth  
Until the day that we must part.  
Oh, I don't envy city dwellers  
Think they're high and mighty fellers,  
Give me rural England  
With its simple country life.

—Nong Pladuk, Thailand,  
1943

*I DON'T MIND*

I don't mind what happens to me  
As long as nothing ever happens to you.  
I don't mind if someone harms me  
As long as no one ever tries to harm you.  
The world is so upset it's hard to be a certainty  
I made a fortune when you played with love and lost to me.  
I don't mind what happens to me,  
As long as nothing ever happens to you.

—Nong Pladuk, Thailand,  
1944

## SONG-PARODIES BY FRANK L. HUSTON

Song-parodies sung by Australian Jack Wilfred Turner “dressed as a female” in the POW camps in Singapore, Burma, Thailand, and French Indo-China. Words by Frank L. Huston, Melbourne. Additional lyrics supplied by Ian Turner from his uncle’s diary.

***THE SINGAPORE RETREAT***

(Music: “The Man That Comes Around”)

**1.**

There’s the man that said that Singapore shall not, must not fall,  
He pushed us in the scrum and he left us with the ball,  
We’ll resist them on the land, repel them everywhere,  
But little did we realise, his words were all hot air.

**2.**

Now on the peninsula the pace was rough and fast,  
Lots of us were wondering how long the thing would last.  
But we’d be going yet, we’ll have you understand  
Though we knew we were finished when we ran out of land.

**3.**

The Air Force were magnificent, they long[ed] to have a crack,  
They all set out one sunny day and both of them came back.  
The Navy did their very best to help us in the fray,  
But the only thing they didn’t do was take us all away.

**4.**

And now we’re P.O.W.’s which isn’t very nice  
’Cos we’re fed on a diet of watery stew and rice.  
[2 lines missing here]

**5.**

Now there’s the man that comes to our house, he brings around his gun.  
He gives a little grunt, and expects us all to run.  
He creeps without a sound, in his little sneaker boots,  
But things will soon be different, for the dirty little coots.

***WE HAD TO GO AND LOSE IT IN MALAYA***

(Music: "She Had To Go and Lose It at the Astor")

**1.**

Now we had to go and lose it in Malaya,  
I wouldn't take my father's good advice,  
He said, my boy, you shouldn't join the army,  
You should think [it over once] or [maybe] even twice.

**2.**

So I thought of all the places I would go:  
To England, Middle East, or maybe France,  
But I never thought of going to Malaya,  
I never even gave the place a chance.

**3.**

We questioned all the sailors on the *Queen Mary*,  
They told us we were bound for Singapore,  
You could have knocked me over with a feather,  
When they dumped us in the rubber in Johore.

**4.**

Now we had to go and lose it in Malaya,  
We didn't know exactly whom to blame,  
Malaya Command, the AIF, or English,  
They dumped us in a tough spot just the same.

**5.**

Now we had to go and lose it in Malaya,  
I bet it nearly killed the dear old dad,  
When he learnt that we had all capitulated,  
After all it was the only plus we had.

**6.**

And ever since I've thought of what he told me,  
I only wish I'd done just what he said.  
If I'd taken his advice,  
I would not be eating rice,  
For we had to go and lose it in Malaya.

***YOU CAN'T WIN A WAR WITHOUT PLANES***

(Music: Tex Morrow's "Beautiful Queensland")

**1.**

I'm one of those ill-fated Aussies,  
 That backed to fair Singapore Isle,  
 To take up some fortified possies  
 To hold up the Nips for a while.

**2.**

With big guns, machine guns, and rifles,  
 And that fact so loudly proclaim,  
 Their value is nought for without air support,  
 You cannot win a war without planes.

**3.**

The Imperial Eagles came over,  
 With nothing to stop them at all,  
 We did not think we're in clover,  
 We heard the bombs sing in their fall.

Chorus:

The moral we put in these stories,  
 We stress when we sing these refrains,  
 When put to the test, you cannot do your best,  
 For you can't win a war without planes.

**4.**

We were hurried and flurried and scurried,  
 It was not quite safe above ground.  
 In view of the number we hurried,  
 We think our idea was quite sound.

**5.**

So take off your hats to the Air Force,  
 The Lords of the clean upper air.  
 We know of their worth, but then what on the earth,  
 [line missing]

Chorus:

The moral we put in these stories,

We stress when we sing these refrains,  
When put to the test, you cannot do your best,  
For you can't win a war without planes.

## SONGS BY WIM KAN

**SONG OF THE FOOD GRABBERS<sup>ix</sup>**

(Music: Kurt Weill's "Mack the Knife")

Yes, a man has ideals  
 But he'll dump them overboard  
 For at the moment food appears,  
 He is ready for mass murder.

Aristocrat or proletariat,  
 The difference is minimal.  
 First in line is food,  
 Good morals are in back.

Mankind has illusions  
 About a better world.  
 But things always end up in war  
 If it concerns his bread.<sup>x</sup>

—Tjimahi POW Camp, Java,  
 14 June 1942

**LETTER TO MY SON ON CHRISTMAS EVE '42**

(Music: Margie Morris' "Had jij niet die mooie blauwe ogen")

["Weren't you the one with those beautiful blue eyes?"]

**1.**

Dear son, I write to you in my thoughts  
 This Christmas letter which you will never receive.  
 Do you remember that we laughed about the snowman  
 That hangs on your Christmas tree tonight?  
 Do you recall that you grabbed my hand  
 At the sight of the shining tree?  
 How I explained to you this feast of peace on earth  
 While you listened filled with awe?

<sup>ix</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by Sheri Tromp.

<sup>x</sup> Trans. by Margie Samethini Bellamy.

Chorus:

I told you about peace on earth  
 About goodwill among men . . .  
 Without even a declaration of war  
 A mighty army crossed the border!  
 For you I tried to smooth over  
 The hopeless failure of this time.  
 The world was in flames, while I was still chattering  
 About peace and tolerance.

2.

Dear son, although I am in faraway lands,  
 Take care—before you forget—  
 Not to wipe your greasy Christmas pastry hands  
 On mother's tablecloth!  
 And if the turkey is disappointing  
 Or your portion seems somewhat small,  
 Bear in mind that your daddy  
 Would be dying for such a morsel  
 And the leftover bones.  
 Try not to burn down the Christmas tree.  
 Leave the nativity crèche alone.  
 Don't touch the angel, my little naughty boy,  
 She rubs off red, when you kiss her forehead.

Chorus:

If only I could peek around the corner  
 And see the so familiar place.  
 The crazy wall of war notwithstanding  
 Just to be "daddy" again.  
 I would love to tell a Christmas story  
 By candlelight—just like that time—  
 When I caught the cat who stole half the Christmas goose!  
 I wish she would do it again!

## 3.

Dear son, I wrote in my mind  
 This Christmas letter which I will tear up.  
 Don't wait up for your father tonight,  
 His stories only disappoint!  
 And perhaps it is better after all  
 That I am not with you, but only in your thoughts . . .  
 From me one gets nothing but a bankrupt earth  
 And that is not a suitable Christmas present!

Chorus:

Now your daddy with his "peace on earth" and  
 His goodie-goodie Christmas story from back then  
 Is hopelessly stuck in Mother Earth's muck.  
 What can a human being do about this world?  
 I hope—my son—that when you have grown up  
 And you sing for your son a Christmas song  
 About peace, tolerance and reason,  
 It does not sound like an "accusation."

—Rangoon prison, Burma,  
 20 December 1942

***VISIT TO BURMA IN 1950***

(Music: Louis Davids' "Zomeravond" ["Summer Night"])

When I am in Burma around 1950  
 And know every little store and prison,  
 I suggest to my wife: "Hey Ma  
 Let's go to Bangkok—by train—  
 I bet that will be a fun trip  
 And not hard because you just sit  
 At a window, and you can see perfectly  
 How your husband pulled at the pile driver  
 Like a son of a gun."  
 And in case she really shows interest,  
 Then I take second class—  
 No smoking in my train.

I will phone the chef at Thambuyzayat [*sic*]  
 Because, of course, I make my train  
 Stop there for an hour or so.  
 And I show my wife the well, the swimming hole,  
 And the fireplace your dear husband used for cooking.  
 And after that I have to arrange  
 To hook on a dining coach.  
 But I sack the cook; that saves us a lot of space.  
 I bake a cake—although this is against the rules—  
 That I sell to my wife.  
 I just hope that she has the grace  
 Not to get motion sickness on my train.

“The train is going too fast!”  
 My wife comments angrily, turning pale  
 “Your track does not seem up to par.”  
 I scream over the thunder of the train:  
 “It would be a miracle if I did something good in your eyes.”  
 She yells: “Shut your big mouth!”  
 And before I can see precisely what is happening,  
 The whole dining coach topples over.  
 But when I angrily inquire  
 Where the construction fault lies,  
 I recognize the little bridge as my own work.

My wife is in a foul mood: she calls me a jerk.  
 She says: “You always do a half-assed job.”  
 When I chat with the chef at Retpu<sup>xi</sup>  
 I find out that my railway line  
 Goes straight to China.  
 I then ask him how was it possible to miss Bangkok?  
 “It is a little matter of a mistake” he calmly replies.

<sup>xi</sup> A work camp up the railway at 30 Kilo in the jungle.

“They worked from two sides—that went very well—  
Only they did not meet; too bad.”

My wife said: “Let’s go back to Rembrandt Square<sup>xii</sup>

You are too unimportant for work on such a line.”

—Thanbyuzayat, Burma,  
22 January 1943

### ***THERE WILL BE A NEW SOCIETY***

(Music: Louis Davids’ “Wat zeg jemenou van Ome Ko” in G [“What can we say about old Uncle Ko?”])

#### **1.**

Friend Frits of Retpu 1, who thought a lot of himself,  
Founded the new Society from his *tampatje*<sup>xiii</sup>  
His neighbor on the right participated for a while, but then dropped out  
Because he cared more about playing bridge than about a new world.  
His neighbor on the left said: “I feel social, so I’ll participate,”  
And stole sugar from the pan of the Premier on the sly.  
There were some ministers and everything went well:  
For half the day the new front lay rotting in its nest.

Chorus:

That will be the new Society,  
Without poverty and without injustice  
Because everything you can learn here in a small way,  
They will try out in the big world.  
There in the new Society  
They are waiting in queue for bread and labour . . .  
He who is smart dies of laughter as he gets bread for the second time  
And passes the front of the line with a job in hand.

#### **2.**

Promptly at 10 o’clock one will build the Society,  
Except yesterday, because the Premier was searching for salt.  
(He knew a little source: it was costing him almost a *riks*.<sup>xiv</sup>  
He got half a barrel—his ministers did not get anything.)

<sup>xii</sup> A central square in Amsterdam.

<sup>xiii</sup> Indonesian word for sleeping place.

<sup>xiv</sup> Dutch slang for 2 ½ guilder.

He pushed two skinny guys aside near the pan with *kra*<sup>xv</sup>  
 And was caught in line getting two helpings of *sambal*,<sup>xvi</sup>  
 And going home with his pan like a traitor.  
 He called to “a fellow idealist” that there would be a meeting after  
 lunch.

Chorus:

That will be the new Society  
 Without a trace of egoism.  
 There class distinction will be buried—just like here—  
 Between the kings, the lords, and the slaves.  
 There is that ideal kingdom.  
 There we are so comfortably equal.  
 But the first one who determines where to obtain the mustard,  
 Gets—just like here—the sunniest spot in the kingdom.

### 3.

Friend Frits still had some *rupis*<sup>xvii</sup>, and sold these for such a prize  
 That could be contributed to his future paradise.  
 His artistic talents were very useful,  
 He smoked using pages of *Holland's Glory*<sup>xviii</sup>  
 As cigarette paper.  
 And furthermore lots of time was saved, because our Premier  
 Knew how to avoid doing vegetable chores.  
 And while he was lying on this *tampat*<sup>xix</sup>  
 He practiced expanding his politics to both sides.

Chorus:

There will be the new Society.  
 There the farmers wait in the queue for food.  
 But he who knows better doesn't waste his time there,  
 He goes around to the back door to get beefsteak.  
 There in the new Society  
 The sun shines with justice, warmth and happiness.

<sup>xv</sup> Unknown Indonesian word.

<sup>xvi</sup> Indonesian finger food made with hot chili paste.

<sup>xvii</sup> Indian money.

<sup>xviii</sup> Famous book by Jan de Hartog.

<sup>xix</sup> The man was faking being sick.

The biggest loudmouth sits on the best spot.  
 We are all equal, but he is more equal than you.<sup>xx</sup>

—Retpu [30 Kilo Camp], Burma,  
 20 July 1943

***NORMAL AND ABNORMAL***

(Music: Hans van Heusden and Hans de Leeuwentemmer)

**1.**

You read in books about home-sickness and longing.  
 And when you finished you ate a cheese sandwich.  
 The sentiments expressed struck you as unreal and shallow.  
 You hopped on your bike still laughing, but swore up and down,  
 When you waited for one minute at a traffic light.  
 We have now waited for one and a half year.  
 And it is the mundane things that sing a song of home-sickness.

Chorus:

I would love to wait again for a traffic light in The Hague  
 As an ordinary biker going about his business,  
 Or try my patience in the post office queue,  
 Waiting nicely for a stamp of five cents.  
 I generally did not appreciate enough the queue of the Volks Zeebad<sup>xxi</sup>  
 That took an hour (at its best)  
 That kind of waiting is a pleasure, a kind of cheap break  
 For him who learned to wait on roll call.

**2.**

Oh, it's often the simple things, things that you never paid attention to in  
 the past,  
 That now sing the song of longing: the desire to see the table setting in  
 your china cabinet.  
 I crave the use of the telephone again, it's okay to dial a wrong number,  
 To try out my lawn chair in the back yard and get water simply out of the  
 tap,  
 To walk into a store and buy bread.

<sup>xx</sup> Additional translation by Margie Samethini Bellamy.  
<sup>xxi</sup> Public bathing place.

Chorus:

I would love to buy a hat again in the The Hague  
 On sale, always a battlefield,  
 Or walk into the Bijenkorf<sup>xxii</sup>  
 For a pair of pants or a shirt  
 And lose the coupon before the cash register.  
 Wonderful as they send you from there to eternity  
 And the sales lady laughs about your stupid mistakes.  
 Buying clothes becomes fun, a kind of unknown break  
 For who receives clothes at one hundred and eight?<sup>xxiii</sup>

3.

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

Chorus:

But one of these days when you are eating at Heck's<sup>xxiv</sup>  
 Till a raw scream signals panic.  
 After you've inquired about it, you know the reason:  
 A huge rat walked straight through the public dining room.  
 After hearing this news, you stare at your veal liver . . .  
 Nauseated, you suddenly remember the rat from the past  
 And you cannot explain anymore how for two years  
 You did the abnormal and called it normal.<sup>xxv</sup>

—Payatouzu [Payathanau] (Camp 108), Burma,  
 26 October 1943

<sup>xxii</sup> Huge department store in Amsterdam.

<sup>xxiii</sup> At his present camp—108 Kilo.

<sup>xxiv</sup> A well-known Dutch restaurant.

<sup>xxv</sup> Additional trans. by Margie Samethini Bellamy.

***EVERYTHING POINTS TO IT***

(Music: Hans Maas' "Thuis" ["Home"])

**1.**

Why are there so many beatings lately  
On the workers?  
Why is the mood so full of stress?  
Why does one see the trains so packed  
With cannons and stuff?  
Why does the guard carry a rifle?  
Really, it's nearly finished.  
Believe me, things are going wrong for them.  
That's why they act so irritated. It is clear to see.  
Read it in the newspaper. The war will end  
In a few weeks. Everything points to it.

**2.**

Why are there no more beatings lately  
Of the workers?  
Why does one never hear an airplane anymore?  
Why does one never see armaments anymore  
On all the trains that arrive at 108?  
Really, everything points to it.  
Really, it's nearly over.  
Just look, the guard does not carry a gun,  
He is practicing for a peaceful mood.  
It is clear indeed that his country will suddenly announce:  
"The war is over." Everything points to it.

**3.**

Why do we walk in rags, without shoes  
On wooden shoes?  
Why is no food coming our way?  
Because it is not worth it  
As peace is nearly declared.  
Since long things were going wrong for them  
Really, everything points to it.

Really, it's nearly over.  
 You should read the newspaper  
 They admit it, in a long article:  
 The end is near. Not exactly,  
 But you need to read between the lines.  
 You can feel their noose tightening.  
 Everything points to it.

## 4.

Why all those new clothes? Why all the supplies of cows, sugar, and fish?  
 It can only mean that they feel less sure and that peace will be soon—  
 Really, it's nearly over. Read the newspaper, it confessed this by not  
 appearing—  
 They are standing in their shirts. Everything points to it.

## 5.

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

—Payatouzu [Payathanau] (Camp 108), Burma,  
 November 1943

SONG BY TED WELLER<sup>xxvii</sup>

***THE BALLAD OF THE THREE LITTLE FISHIES***

Song (1) ALL.

Down in the meadow in their little bittie pool  
 Swam three little fishies and their Mummy Fishy too,  
 “Swim” said the Mummy fishie “Swim if you can.”  
 And they swam and they swam all over the dam.

BOOP HOOP DIDUM DATAM WHATHAM CHOO<sup>xxviii</sup>

“        ”        “        ”        “        ”  
 “        ”        “        ”        “        ”

AND THEY SWAM AND THEY SWAM ALL OVER THE DAM.

Song (2) (“Humoresque”)

Just imagine Mammy Fishie  
 With her children’s tails a-swishie  
 Swimming so serenely o’er the dam—wham wham  
 Can’t you see our eager faces  
 As we view the open spaces  
 From behind the finzies of our Mam?

Song (3) (“The Bells of St. Mary’s”)

The three little fishes against Mama’s wishes  
 Decided to swim out and explore the blue  
 And filled with emotion they made for the ocean  
 Oh Boop Hoop Didum Datam Whatam Choo Choo Choo.

Song (4) (“Il Bacio”)

“Stop, stop!” said their Mam-Mam  
 As she watched them agitatedly  
 “Stop, stop!” said their Mam-Man  
 “Oh don’t swim out to sea.”

Song (5) (“Santa Lucia”)

For she’d heard dreadful tales

<sup>xxvii</sup> Who actually composed the lyrics for this ballad-opera is unknown. It is likely they were composed collectively by the singers, one of whom was Ted Weller.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Vocal jazz scat singing.

Of horrid hungry whales  
 Lurking so furtively  
 Out in the open sea,  
 Waiting for little fishies  
 To make them tasty dishies  
 Boop Hoop Didum Datam Whatam Choo  
 Boop Datum Whatam.

Song (6) (“Colonel Bogey”)

But we swam and we swam and we swam,  
 And we swam and we swam and we swam,  
 Disregarding the word of our Mam-Mam,  
 We swam and we swam-am.

Song (7) (“Floral Dance”)

Round the corner of a rock  
 Was a whale with a face  
 Like a town hall clock  
 Picking his teeth and cleaning his scales  
 With a 12-inch gun from the Prince of “Whales”<sup>xxix</sup>  
 Getting set for a fishie feast  
 Oh this whale was a hungry beast.  
 Quick as lightning they turned and flew  
 Boop Hoop Didum Datam Whatham Choo.

Song (8) (“John Peel”)

Now the whale gave a cheer  
 As he slammed into gear  
 He tore down the straight  
 At a hell of a rate  
 And the three little trout  
 They were going flat out  
 They were eager to get to their Mamma.

Song (9) (“Ha—Ha”)

“Goodbye for ever

<sup>xxix</sup> A pun on *Prince of Wales*—the battleship sunk by the Japanese on 10 December in the South China Sea. Survivors of this disaster may well have been sitting in the audience.

You'll never never  
 See us again.  
 Goodbye, Goodbye."

Song (10) ("Delia")

"Fishies, oh fishies, how naughty you are,  
 I gave you fair warning don't swim out so far.  
 I had some froggies and wormzies for tea  
 Now you'll go to bed hungry, so hungry, so hungry."

Song (11) ("Persian Market")

"Mama dear, we're penitent,  
 And our pride is sorely bent.  
 Please forgive us Mam we're sorry,  
 Didum Datam Whatham Choo."

Song (12) [no tune indicated]

"I will forgive you three  
 And let you have your tea,  
 And all those wormzies too  
 Will be for you.  
 Promise you'll never stray  
 Out in the open bay,  
 Stay—in your itty bittie pool.  
 Didum Datam Whatham Choo."

Song (13) ("Mother McCree")

"Sure we love the dear silver that shines in your scales,  
 And never no more will we show you our tails  
 And happy we'll stay in our ittie bitty pool.  
 Oh, didum datam, whatham,  
 God bless you Choo choo."

Song (14)

That was the story of the fishies in the dam  
 They swam out to sea and they got in a jam.  
 Now they are happy in their pretty little home,  
 And they never ever want to roam.

BOOP HOOP DIDUM DATAM WHATHAM CHOO

“ ” “ ” “ ”

“ ” “ ” “ ”

THE WHOLE FISHIE FAMILY IN THEIR ITTY BITTY POOL.

—Aunganaung, Burma,

1943

## SONG BY RON WELLS

**CHURCH BELLS IN THE MORNING**

(Music: Han Samethini)

“ . . . and as we were sitting there having our *yasume*, we heard the ringing of silver bells, coming from the tiny church . . . and everybody became silent.” —from Han Samethini’s diary

I hear bells with the morning light.  
Ringing through the air so quiet  
Do they say very soon—have faith—  
Loved ones pray for you always.

There are church bells in the morning,  
Reminding me of the old folks at home.  
And my heart is aching for that morning,  
When I’m returning across the foam.

Then the church bells of my home-town,  
And the choir as they sing,  
Will remind me of church bells in the morning,  
And the faith they brought to me.

—Tamuang, Thailand,  
5 June 1945