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Chapter 6b. "Chungkai Showcase": Chungkai Hospital Camp | Part Two: Mid-May 1944 to July 1945"

Sears Eldredge
Macalester College

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Chapter 6: “Chungkai Showcase”

Part Two: Mid-May 1944 to July 1945

2. “Rain Must Fall”

Behind the Scenes

If there was any expectation that the entertainment world at Chungkai would be relatively normal now that the competition between the British and Dutch/Indonesians had been settled, that thought was about to change. All the smiling faces looking out from the stage in the *Wonder Bar* photographs belie the fact that behind the scenes all was not well: there had been a falling out between Gus Harffey and Leo Britt. “After Norman [Smith] had gone, Gus took over the band,” wrote Richard Sharp, “but fancying to himself the diabolic machinations of Britt, (who might quite possibly have been pleased to see him go) in a plot of dark and Italian intrigue, [he] resigned.”¹ Britt’s specific “machinations” are unknown, but Harffey had wanted to be named musical director, with responsibilities for leading the Chungkai orchestra as well as the swing band. Ernest Lenthall was named to the orchestra post instead, and, after Harffey resigned, violinist Ken “Tug” Wilson became leader of the band. Harffey would get his wish later in Kanburi.

But this disruption was minor compared to what happened next when the most hilarious as well as the most controversial show in Chungkai was produced.

The *Thai Diddle Diddle* Debacle

Thai Diddle Diddle was a revue by a new producer, battalion medical officer Dudley Gotla. When Gotla first proposed the subject matter of his revue, members of the theater committee voiced concerns about its contents. They warned Gotla that a show based on topical humor was “stale and wouldn’t go down” well with the troops, but he stubbornly insisted that it would, and the committee reluctantly gave in.²

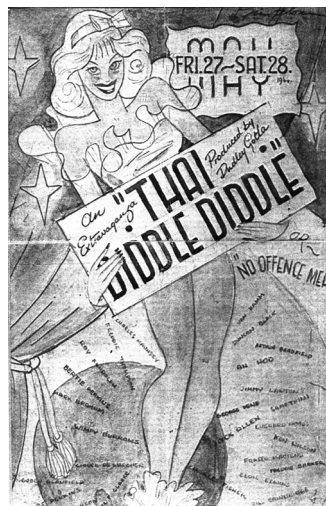


FIGURE 6.26. POSTER FOR *THAI DIDDLE DIDDLE*. GEOFFREY GEE, COURTESY OF HUGH DE WARDENER.

Gotla commissioned Geoffrey Gee (“a ‘grateful patient’”³) to create posters for his revue, apparently Gee’s first theatre assignment. The poster aboveⁱ lists an international all-star cast of twenty-six actors and musicians, many of them Chungkai regulars. Other names are new, a mixture of British and Dutch performers. Three stand out: Van Hamm, a Dutch/Indonesian performer; Fraser “Hank” Martens, an American naval officer—the only American in the camp⁴—in his first Chungkai appearance; and Ah Hoo, who, it turns out, was not a Chinese performer but Dudley Gotla “dressed up as a Chinaman for his Front Cloth Act.”ⁱⁱ Another version of the poster must have had an image of a cow jumping over the moon, referring, of course, to the well-known nursery rhyme from which the show took its name, as that image will be used as evidence of subterfuge by the Japanese in an internal investigation. To forestall any questions about its dubious humor, a subtitle, *No Offence Meant*, had been appended to the main title on the posters. But that gesture didn’t prevent offense from being taken.

Thai Diddle Diddle consisted of a series of satirical songs and sketches. Its opening on 27 May proved to be a showstopper—literally—causing such furor that further performances—as well as all future productions—were temporarily suspended until there could be a full investigation of why this show had been allowed to go on.

There were, in fact, two investigations: one by the Japanese administration, the other by the POW administration. Exactly what caused the hue and cry is a matter of some disagreement among the POWs who traded borehole rumors about the show. As far as they could tell, the investigations focused on three areas: language, representation, and actions.

The Japanese Investigation

Language. “The Nips asked for a copy of the script,” John Sharp reported, “and have threatened to punish any insults.”⁶ Coast was puzzled: “Quite why they should have disliked us using such words as ‘Kurrah! Buggairo!’ or ‘Benjo speedo!’ which were part of our vocabulary and theirs was never explained.”ⁱⁱⁱ But the use of these commands and phrases had infuriated the Japanese, who thought they were being mocked.

During a long comic sketch about three POWs (wearing “Jap-Happies”) on a train trip across the United States delivering parcels, the POWs had sung their version of the Scottish song “You Take the High Road” and ended the chorus with “On the muddy, bloody banks of Kamburi!”⁸ The topical references alerted the Japanese to further possible insults.

Representation. Others thought the main offense must have been that the monkeys accompanying the POWs on the train trip (also wearing “Jap-Happies”) had been recognized as a not-so-subtle reference to their captors. As noted previously, this racist caricature was well known to the Japanese, and they would have been incensed about its presentation on stage.

Actions. Even more damning, Richardson and Durnford believed, were the characters’ actions in the scene. “Jap depredations of the few Red Cross supplies received were persistent,” wrote Richardson, “everyone knew about it.”⁹ So when the sketch depicted monkeys opening parcels and removing items for their own use before passing them on to the next camp, where the same action was repeated, ending with “the arrival of the ‘parcels’ at their destination where the staff tore them open to discover them perfectly empty,” a truth was revealed that everyone in the camp knew but that had never been publicly

ⁱ Only a black and white photocopy of the original is available. The original in Gotla’s possession “now hangs on the wall in [his] house (outside the toilet)” [Gotla, Letter, 8 July 2001].

ⁱⁱ A “front cloth act” is a stand-up comedy monologue that takes place on the apron before the front curtain.

ⁱⁱⁱ Japanese for “Attention!”; Japanese-English pidgin for “Bugger” and “Must go to the toilet now!” or, less politely in Fergus Anckorn’s translation, “Shit fast!”

acknowledged.¹⁰ And this, reported Durnford, is when, “the stage was rushed by an armed ‘posse’ of the camp-guards, and the show brought to a hurried conclusion.”¹¹

The British Investigation

But this wasn’t the whole story. Another account was reported by John Sharp: “Concert on Friday night—mediocre and much criticized—objected to by Nips for references to them and also by various camp authorities for filth.”¹² Sharp’s “various camp authorities” were senior officers among the POWs. But what “filth” was he referring to? Were objections raised to language used in the dialogue or lyrics?

Language. Norman Smith and “Biggles” Bywaters had composed several songs for this show before they were sent down to Tamuang. “Fore” portrayed a pair of lesbian golfers, one of whom nearly emasculates a male golfer with her golf swing, and in “Please Mister Flynn,” a star-struck young woman finds herself in bed with the movie star Errol Flynn, attempting to discourage his advances:

*So please Mister Flynn, you must take it 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 Mr. 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.*^{iv13}

Lyrics replete with sexual innuendo and double entendre have a long tradition in the British theatre; perhaps the song’s humorous treatment of an innocent woman being seduced pushed the bounds of propriety too far for “various camp authorities.”

Representation. Coast believed the most troublesome turn for the POW authorities had to do with another of the comic sketches: a reprise of “The Warrior’s Return,” an old military concert party sketch that had been around since the First World War. In Gotla’s version, the soldier is a former POW home from Thailand after the war. Having been in an isolated camp for years, he “was quite unacclimatized to anything civilized, and spoke in the well-known pidgin-Japanese”:

When he wanted to “wash his hands” he plucked some leaves from the aspidistra, stuffed them in his pocket and left the room; when he asked for a banana he used the Malay word “pisang,” and when his wife reluctantly passed

^{iv} Find the lyrics to both these Bywaters songs in “The FEPOW Songbook.”

him the fruit bowl, minus the fruit, the misunderstanding had to be explained.¹⁴

Because of the scarcity of paper, the POWs had been forced to resort to primitive measures to take care of their basic needs. Hugh de Wardener, a performer in this sketch, considered this the funniest moment in the whole revue: “And the laughter went on and on. It was fascinating. They just went on and on and on. Because it related to them, you see.”¹⁵ But no one took offense at this part. The trouble came a few moments later.

Actions. In conversation with his wife, the former POW learns that an American soldier had been billeted in the house during the war.

And then there’s a noise of a baby—that was me [de Wardener]. And [the returning POW] wonders what the noise is . . . and of course, it’s a baby; not his! And so on . . . but it WAS funny.¹⁶ And they never stopped laughing . . . that did interest me. THAT THEY SHOULD LAUGH AT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO THEM!¹⁷

So here we have it: the real offense was the presentation of a humorous sketch in which a soldier’s wife had been unfaithful while he was imprisoned in Thailand. The steadfastness of wives and sweethearts was a concern that weighed heavily on the minds of all the married or engaged POWs. American soldiers—stereotyped as oversexed—billeted in private homes back in Britain in preparation for the invasion of Europe gave rise to all sorts of anxieties.

One or more of the senior officers must have been greatly offended that Gotla had the audacity to suggest that their women back home might be unfaithful to them while they were prisoners of war. In the early days of captivity in Singapore, “The Warrior’s Return” had been presented by the Optimists concert party in the 18th Division’s area without complaint; now the subject was considered by some as too demoralizing. Whoever these “various camp authorities” were, Owtram was pressured to conduct an investigation.

Procedures

The Japanese wanted to reexamine the script to see why their censor had approved it. Coast thought the censor “must have slept though [it] when he read the script.”¹⁸ Gotla was interrogated by the Japanese and got “bashed up for one sketch . . . [and] because he could not give the Japanese a satisfactory answer to what the cow jumping over the moon on the poster meant, or [the title] Thai-Diddle-Diddle.”¹⁹ Medical officer Robert Hardie thought the Japanese had probably “looked up the word ‘diddle’ in a dictionary and finding that it meant ‘deceive’ or ‘cheat’ suspected some subtle criticism of the [Japanese East Asia] Co-Prosperity Sphere.”²⁰

At the same time, the POW administration grilled the theatre committee members about how they

^v The Japanese could have seen this phrase as an allusion to Allied soldiers, who they believed (rightly) had parachuted into Thailand to aid the Free Thai Guerillas.

^{vi} The Japanese pretext for the war was the liberation of East and Southeast Asia from colonial rule and the establishment of a “co-prosperity sphere” uniting the region against further exploitation by the Europeans and Americans. Once the Japanese were in control, the East and Southeast Asians discovered that their subjugation and exploitation by the Japanese turned out to be even worse.

had come to approve the show.

Outcomes

Geoffrey Gee was one POW who didn't appreciate the danger in which Gotla had placed their entertainment program:

Mr. Gotla should have known better. There have been American Red Cross parcels in camp now, for at least a week, but they show no signs of issuing them—Hence some of the vicious humour last night. High time the war was over. We are all longing for freedom.²¹

The Japanese and POW authorities demanded so many revisions to the script that it was impossible for Gotla to make the changes before the second performance. That being the case, both investigative groups agreed the second performance should be cancelled.

In addition, the POW administration reprimanded the theatre committee for allowing such “filth” to be produced. As punishment for his sins, Gotla would be sent up country on a maintenance party in the next rotation.²² This would act as a warning to other producers and entertainers not to trespass the boundaries of good taste, lest they follow him.

For the Japanese, these reprisals didn't go far enough. Furious about having been publicly mocked and unmasked, they threatened to ban all future performances. Only theatre committee chair Harold Pycock's close association with Kokubo saved the day. Knowing how much the Japanese depended on camp entertainment for maintaining their troops' morale, Pycock negotiated a compromise: “the performances were halted only for one month, and after that every piece had to be screened by the commandant with the help of a Japanese interpreter. No more insulting text or gestures of the Japs, or the theatre would be closed altogether.”²³

Gotla had gotten in trouble with both the Japanese and POW administrations for cutting too close to the bone—for revealing truths (and fears) better left unspoken and making light of them. Many playwright satirists, from Aristophanes to Molière to Mayakovsky, have found themselves in this very situation.

A New Type of Entertainment: Hut Concerts

While this kerfuffle was going on, the removal of Group IV troops to Tamuang, drafts to Japan, and the transfer of most of the medical staff and the chronically ill to Nakhon Pathom had reduced Chungkai to “a fit working camp” of about 5,000 men. The remaining POWs were put to work building an earthen bund to protect the camp from flooding during the monsoon season.²⁴

In the midst of this activity appeared a new type of entertainment: hut concerts. They had started in late May when the Australians in Group IV had given “farewell performances in the huts.”²⁵ By the end of the month, John Sharp noticed the hut concerts were “becoming popular—band musicians perform solo.”²⁶

Ukulele player Tom Boardman found these smaller venues more to his liking.²⁷ Upon returning to Chungkai from up country in early 1944, he had constructed a larger instrument and used it in these

shows.^{vii} Hut concerts, he recalled, were “‘off the cuff’ productions of a variety nature (comedians, singers, recitation, storytellers, jugglers, magicians, musical instrument players—guitars, violins, trumpet, accordion, etc.).”²⁸ The accordion player was, of course, his friend Frankie Quinton.^{viii}

By early June, so many men had left camp for other locations that John Sharp reported, “Camp looks deserted now.” He also noted some disturbing signs: “River is up considerably in the last two days. Changeable weather.”²⁹ The bund could not be completed soon enough.

Swan Songs

At the beginning of June, Group Commandant Yanagida moved his headquarters back to Chungkai from Takanun. Captain Noguchi was designated camp commandant making Kokubo his adjutant, and Colonel Williamson was once again installed as POW officer in charge.³⁰ When the ban on entertainment was lifted, Leo Britt was ready with a revival of *Café Colette*, one of his old touring shows from Changi days, starring Bobby Spong, Sam Drayton, John “Nellie” Wallace—and now with more time on his hands, Colonel Owtram.³¹ “I took the part of a red-tabbed and elderly Colonel with a penchant for the ladies,” Owtram wrote, “and was to be seen dining at the Café with a ‘vision of loveliness’ in the shape of Bobby Spong, and ending my part of the act with an excerpt from one of the better known musical comedies.”³²

Sharp found the show “very amusing,”³³ Gee thought it “[a] fine musical show,”³⁴ but Richardson disliked it heartily and gave it the worst review he had ever written: “Leo Britt show ‘Cafe Collette’; culturally in the gutter; quite the worst creatures, almost I’ve ever seen prancing on the stage.”³⁵

What elicited Richardson’s vehement response to Spong’s and Wallace’s portrayal of the two tarts in the show is not known. His negative reactions to Spong’s amorous antics have been noted before, but they stand in high contrast to his view of Spong back in Changi as a “luscious, seductive bitch who always looks like a forthright whore!”³⁶

As it turns out, *Café Colette* was Bobby Spong’s farewell performance. Shortly after his triumph in *Wonder Bar*, Spong shocked everyone when he volunteered for a Japan Party scheduled for departure in early June. Spong’s motivations for giving up his Chungkai stage career at its height were personal. According to the borehole rumor Gee heard, Spong was going “so that he could stick with his pal Vic Marshall.”³⁷ Volunteering for the same draft was singer Sam Drayton. For his final performance in Chungkai, Britt had given Drayton ten songs in the show.³⁸

Months later news reached Chungkai that the unmarked Japanese transport ship carrying Bobby Spong, Vic Marshall, Sam Drayton, and the other POWs on their way to Japan was sunk by an American submarine off Manila on 21 September.³⁹ Bobby Spong—one of the greatest and most beloved entertainers in the POW theatre in the Far East—did not survive.^{ix}

Neither did Sam Drayton:

It appears Sammy was thrown into the sea after his ship was torpedoed and tried to swim to a raft. Whether he was wounded or not is not known, but as he nearly reached the raft, urged on by its occupants, one of the survivors reached out to grasp Sammy’s hand. Their fingers touched, Sammy gave a weary smile and said, “Gee, ducks, I’m fucked,” and sank under the waves.⁴⁰

^{vii} See further information on the construction of this new ukulele in Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”

^{viii} A puzzling question as to why Quinton was not a member of the orchestra or swing band would be answered if he did not read music.

^{ix} Read a more extensive treatment of Spong in Chapter 14: “Somebody Had To Put a Skirt On.”

June was also Gus Harffey's time to leave Chungkai. Having had enough of Britt and his "machinations," Harffey took up the offer the Japanese officer from Kanburi had made to form a concert party that would tour the up country camps, and he encouraged other Chungkai performers to join him. Among them were Frankie Quinton and the swing band drummer. On 13 June, Harffey and his "quota—of volunteers" left Chungkai for Kanburi.⁴¹ Their departure was not without hard feelings: "waved the party of 6 off by barge about 4.45. (Gus Harffey, Major Woods and 3 other stooge officers)," Gee wrote.^{x42}

Other ranks musician Wally Davis stepped forward to replace the departing drummer. Davis had been in hospital since December with malaria. On 16 June, the swing band—now identified as "Ken Wilson's Band"—opened *Sweet and Swing* with vocalists Larry Croisette and Cadder Parfitt.



FIGURE 6.27. PROGRAM COVER FOR *SWEET AND SWING*.
P. A. O. VAN VELTHUYSEN. HAN SAMETHINI COLLECTION.
COURTESY OF ROBIN KALHORN.

This time Richardson thoroughly enjoyed the show; it made him want to dance again.⁴³ He wasn't the only one. "A Nip jitterbug got on the stage and gave a performance," noted John Sharp.⁴⁴ Everyone in Chungkai was starved for this kind of energetic popular music, the end of the war, and the resumption of their normal lives.

Regardless of the huge interest in music and theatre, a crisis had developed that might spell entertainment's swan song as well. As the camp numbers shrank, box office receipts dropped precipitously and there was an urgent "appeal for support—the estimated expenditure for any one show is fifty baht."⁴⁵

Night Must Fall

One of the most talked about shows that ever appeared on the Chungkai stage was Leo Britt's production of Emlyn Williams' *Night Must Fall* that opened in late June.

Since the departure of "Fizzer" Pearson and some of his players in early May, Chungkai had not

^x Read more about Harffey's concert party activities at Kanburi in Chapter 9: "The Battle for Concerts."

witnessed a straight play. And Britt, recognizing the need for this type of theatre to round out the usual offerings, had been hard at work since *Wonder Bar* training “a select little company of his own” to fill the gap.⁴⁶ But *Night Must Fall* was not a comedy. It was a mystery-thriller: one of the most suspense-inducing plays ever written. Britt believed the POWs were ready for more complex characters and a plot more emotionally engaging than those in revues and musical comedies. This genre would be a first for Chungkai audiences, which made the theatre committee apprehensive about how the recovering POWs might be affected by it.



FIGURE 6.28. POSTER FOR *NIGHT MUST FALL*. GEOFFREY GEE. COURTESY OF HUGH DE WARDENER.

Gee designed an appropriately brooding scene on his poster, but advertising really wasn't necessary. Britt's reputation as a producer was so high that reserved seating for *Night Must Fall* was at a premium. On Monday 19 June, Gee “got into the booking queue at 10 o'clock . . . and procured 3 good 5c seats for Friday—the booking, as anticipated, was heavy and at closing time it was almost a case of ‘House Full!’ for the 2 nights.”⁴⁷

Night Must Fall opened on 23 June to rave reviews. Medical Officer Hardie thought the play “extremely well done, the tension being excellently maintained.”⁴⁸ Gee was thrilled with every aspect of the production:

The whole thing was first class from every angle: it's wonderful what we prisoners-of-war can do! The cast were superb. . . . The décor and lighting were splendid and for the entire production Leo could take a big bow. The atmosphere was tense with the drama, the orchestra effective with incidental music and the audience (a packed one) keen and on edge . . . tonight's production had a real professional touch. A great success.⁴⁹

“Splendid” lighting refers to designer E. L. Carr’s incorporation of the fading sunlight into the show’s lighting effects, thus making *Night Must Fall* even more “real” to the audience.^{xi}

Britt had cast the “three long difficult female roles” with Freddie Thompson as “the nasty old pathetic woman in her wheel-chair,” John “Nellie” Wallace as “the comic relief, the cook,” and, as Spong was bound for Japan, a daring choice for the young female lead—medical officer “Ginger” de Wardener as the “rather hysterical, morbid, queer young girl.”⁵⁰

More than fifty years later, de Wardener’s memories of his role in the production were still strong:

*And at the end, the last act, the entrance of this character—she comes in out of breath. So before coming in I ran like mad (it was easy to do at the site, you know, on the spot). So I came in . . . I was breathless. And I remember leaning against the wing, puffing away and looking at the audience. . . . And I paused a long time before [speaking].*⁵¹

Coast also recalled this moment: “I remember standing in the wings a yard from Ginger while he was leaning against the door of the room after discovering the murder of Mrs. Bramson by Dan in the Last Act, and to realise that that palpitating, nerve-wrecked girl in a green dress and glasses would be calmly taking our medical parade next morning, was very odd indeed!”^{xii52}

Tom Boardman thought “[de Wardener] was brilliant. . . . I can’t speak too highly of his performance.”⁵³ Of his friend Freddie Thompson’s success as the old woman, G. E. Chippington wrote jokingly, “Freddie will shortly be demanding his name in larger lettering on the posters.”⁵⁴ Reflecting on their celebrity status, de Wardener modestly said, “Mind you, as actors we had to realize they [the audience] were a ‘captive audience.’ There was no other entertainment. So they were glad to come to it.”⁵⁵

Night Must Fall was “voted the best play that was done in the camp,” wrote Owtram, who had a bit part.⁵⁶ And Dudley Gotla called it (along with Britt’s *Wonder Bar*) “remarkable, as near to professional standard as I have ever seen on an amateur stage.”⁵⁷ Britt’s hunch about the POWs’ emotional needs paid off: “with this one straight play that had surprised them completely,” wrote Coast, “the whole camp was greedy for more.”⁵⁸

“Rain Must Fall”

Even as *Night Must Fall* gained an excellent reputation as a well-acted production, it also gained a terrible reputation for never completing a performance. “‘Night Must Fall’ became known as ‘Rain Must Fall’ because every time they tried to put it on, it was washed out, [while] other shows remained dry,” noted Richard Sharp.⁵⁹ But Britt’s production “was so good that when the rain stopped the performance a second time, half a large audience stayed sitting it out in pouring rain in the dark till the show had to be stopped because the stage itself was flooded!”⁶⁰

The continued cancellation of the show due to rain created a problem for the theatre committee. In order not to refund the money from advance ticket sales badly needed to continue operations, *Night Must Fall* was allowed an extended run until all scheduled performances had been played out. But it took time: performances were cancelled because of heavy rain through the end of June . . . into July . . . and into

^{xi} For more about this innovative lighting, see Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”

^{xii} Read more about the process de Wardener went through in creating this female role in Chapter 14: “Somebody Had to Put a Skirt On.”

August.

Breaking Down Barriers

In the meantime, two entertainment events went a long way toward breaking down the racial and ethnic prejudices still lingering in the camp.

Dutch/Indonesian producer-comedian Joop Postma was included in Charles Fisher's variety show *Garrison Theatre*, scheduled to open the week after *Night Must Fall* but postponed so Britt's show could try to complete its run. Medical Officer Fisher had first appeared on stage as Doctor Marco in Edwins' Christmas panto, *So Tite and the Seven Twirps*. He had also been associate producer for *Thai Diddle Diddle* but had obviously been absolved of any complicity in the sins of that production.



FIGURE 6.29. POSTER FOR *GARRISON THEATRE*.
IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE,
NETHERLANDS.

Adding Joop Postma to the cast of *Garrison Theatre* marked a significant effort on the part of British entertainers to start producing shows addressed to the whole camp by integrating Dutch/Indonesians into their performances where possible. Britt had included three Dutch/Indonesians in *Wonder Bar*, and Gotla had put two Dutch/Indonesian musicians on stage in *Diddle*, but persuading Postma, their erstwhile rival and competitor, to appear in a British production was a major coup. After this production, cross-casting became increasingly frequent and, in the long run, crucial to entertainment's survival in Chungkai.

Gee's account indicates Postma's appearance was not just a token gesture:

The other parts [for the show] were a sea scene adapted from a W. W. Jacobs short story "False Colors" in which Wimpy Burrows and Postma were outstanding. Eddie [Edwins] was the mainstay of "Garrison Theatre" but the "littul gel" was terrible. Highlight:—Col. Owtram and Capt Clarke duetting "I'll

See you again.” Next came the 3 Marx Bros. Out-west in which Postma excelled with Wimpy, Capt Fisher, Larry Croisette, Scats (?) Thompson, Fraser Martens were outstanding (the latter is a true-blue Yank). I thoroughly enjoyed the show—and was very much surprised later to find it hadn’t been popular.⁶¹

The other event involved an audition for a performer Eddie Edwins “discovered, a dancer who might agree to appear in his next show. Edwins was so excited about this possibility that he had to share the news with John Coast, and the two of them waited anxiously in the bamboo rehearsal space for the dancer to arrive from the hospital, where he was a patient in the malaria ward.

His name was Tari,^{xiii} and he was a brown, very well and strongly-built Eurasian, with tattoo marks and the head of a tiger on his chest. He spoke no word of English, but through a friend indicated that he would do two dances, a Monkey Dance and a King Dance; as they had no Javanese orchestra, they’d have to use dance music, and the tune finally decided upon was “The Cucaracha.” Tari then wanted to know how long he would be required to dance. “Well,” said Eddie, “how long do you usually dance?” “Oh,” said Tari laughing, “perhaps four hours!” “Well, I think four minutes of each will probably be enough,” said Eddie.⁶²

So Tari danced and Edwins and Coast were entranced—and eager to have him perform for the whole camp. His dance would introduce the non-Indonesians to a classical tradition other than their own. Before he could appear, Coast helped Tari acquire the proper attire.^{xiv63}

As stage manager, Coast described the magical moment when Tari stepped onto the stage for the first time:

As the music began Tari danced on from the wings, one hand pressed flat to his stomach, jerking his legs out straight before him in a half running attitude, and when he reached the centre of the stage he faced the audience, and from then on he was the Monkey King, the magnificent monkey, so clever and so handsome, who had fought for the Gods of Java against the Personification of Disaster!^{xv}

As he danced, the rhythm played insistently and fiercely on, the gigantic black shadows of the dancer caricaturing his movements on the dark backcloth. Suddenly—perhaps incorrectly—the music ceased! Tari dropped to the ground and bowed his head to terrific applause.⁶⁴

^{xiii} Actually, “Tari” is a nickname that means “dance.”

^{xiv} For more information about how Tari’s elaborate costume was made from scrounged material, see Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”

^{xv} Coast was fascinated by the strange, delicate, and graceful movements of this Javanese dancer: “He rolled and shambled from side to side like a true ape; as he danced he flicked his selendang proudly behind him to show off his fine clothes; constantly he regarded himself smugly in the looking-glass of the waterfall, and each time he did so he raised a hand to his brow, palm downwards, his long, beautifully formed and curved fingers fluttering like birds’ wings before his eyes; when he wished to show his importance, by stretching up from his leg in a curious and hidden way, he seemed to grow inches taller” [Coast, 187].

As Edwins and Coast hoped, Tari's performance was an eye-opener. Richardson, normally reserved in his comments about Edwins' shows, praised this one and Tari's dancing in particular: "Variety Show. Eddie Edwins, his best. Edouard Bertling, Javanese (dancer to the Sultan Soenon of Solo, Central Java) danced the Monkey Dance (Hanuman) and Prince's Dance. Magnificent. Good Hawaiian dancing also."⁶⁵

Camp Update: A Show Camp

There was a noticeable change in the camp "atmosphere" the following day when Captain Noguchi announced a "no-slapping order" and that the *Bangkok Chronicle* would be allowed in camp again.⁶⁶ During the next few days, other amenities made their appearance: the barber shop was given its own hut, a (POW-built) reclining chair was installed, and copies of the colorful theatre posters were hung on the walls. However, no more rice sacks would be issued for use as blankets because they were ending up converted into deck chairs.⁶⁷ On 28 June the POWs were shocked when Noguchi "joined in a basketball game."⁶⁸ The POWs were also informed that due to the reduction in the number of inhabitants, the camp would be consolidated into a smaller perimeter. What were all these changes about?

As suspected, this unusual activity meant the Japanese were readying Chungkai as a "show camp" for a Red Cross inspection. At POW headquarters, Lieutenant W. W. Marsh was put to work designing new-style huts for the POWs and other camp beautification projects. On 22 July he wrote, "finished the contour map of the gardens & am now working out new paths & roadways there." In notes about the camp's consolidation, he mentioned that the present theatre would be located outside the revised boundaries, so it would have to be relocated inside the new perimeter.⁶⁹

Washout

Van Lach tot Lach (From Laugh to Laugh), produced by Joop Postma and Ferry van Delden, opened at the Chungkai theatre on 22 July. To make it more accessible to the non-Dutch speakers, it was compèred—in English—by someone named "Smeek." Postma, Ferry, Brugman, and Samethini highlighted the all-Dutch/Indonesian cast, though the performance was stage managed by Coast, and "Tug" Wilson and his swing band provided the music.



FIGURE 6.30. PROGRAM COVER FOR *FROM LAUGH TO LAUGH*. HUIB VAN LAAR. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Item #5 on the playbill was a “Lotus Dance”—but not the lotus dance that had had such a memorable effect on its audience back in April. This time a clown, probably Postma, “appeared out of the flower and did a drunken comedy dance.”⁷⁰ For those who had seen the original, this takeoff must have been doubly hilarious. Richardson thought it “an excellent show.”⁷¹ After it closed, “Tug” Wilson unexpectedly requested a transfer to Kanburi so he could join Gus Harffey’s new orchestra. Bass player Bill Bainbridge took over the ensemble.

From Laugh to Laugh had taken place just in time. On 26 July, both the Kwai Noi and the Mae Khlong rivers bordering the camp suddenly started to rise, causing serious flooding; patients in the hospital had to be evacuated to higher ground. Two days later the newly built earthen bund burst, leading to further evacuations and squeezing everybody into the few remaining huts.⁷²

One area hit hard by the flooding was the theatre. Although an excellent site for its purposes, it had been unwittingly built in a natural watercourse.⁷³ “Little Thai boats dart about the camp and tie up near the top of the Proscenium Arch of the theatre,” Coast observed, “where many people are bathing in the deep pool that was the auditorium only 24 hours ago.”⁷⁴

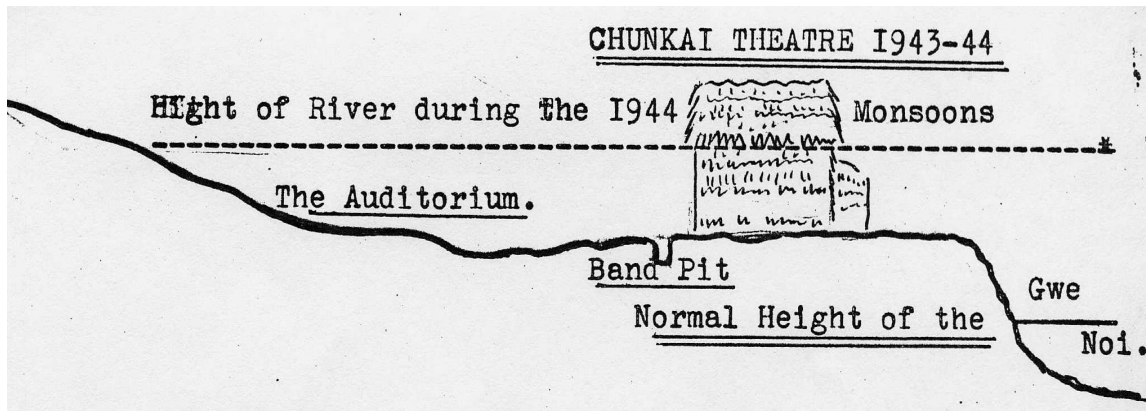


FIGURE 6.31. SKETCH OF FLOODED THEATRE. WALLY DAVIS. HAN SAMETHINI COLLECTION. COURTESY OF ROBIN KALHORN.

Wally Davis' sketch of the Chungkai theatre shows the extent of the flooding. Coast noted there was "three feet of water on the stage and ten feet in the auditorium."⁷⁵ Eddie Edwins' new show, scheduled for 29 July, was thought to be a washout.

But Edwins was not deterred by the flooding. At its height, he presented his show—billed this time as *Eddie's Road-Show*—on the basketball pitch, site of the old theatre, instead, advertised as "Free To All" (no reserved seating possible here).

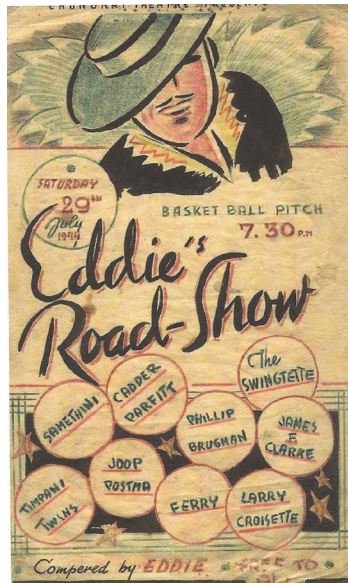


FIGURE 6.32. POSTER FOR EDDIE'S ROAD SHOW. HUIB VAN LAAR. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

For this new show Edwins continued his "mission" to integrate Dutch/Indonesian performers into his cast. This time he persuaded Brugman, Ferry, and Samethini as well as Postma to appear alongside the top British singers and a new novelty act called the "Timpani Twins." Under Bainbridge, the band

rebranded itself “The Swingtette.” Coast voiced the general sentiment when he wrote that Han Samethini “was the best [accordionist] any of us had ever heard, and he and the bass player [Bainbridge] made the Swingtet [*sic*] into a combination that would have been a genuinely high peace-time standard.”⁷⁶

Reality Check

By the last day of July, the floodwaters had started to recede although the weather was still rainy.⁷⁷ Hoping to keep the “congenial” atmosphere of the “model show camp” alive in the midst of this calamity—at least until the Red Cross inspection could take place—Colonel Yanagida allowed the POWs to receive more Red Cross packages, which, interestingly enough, contained many items bought locally.

Once the waters had fully receded, it was evident the flooding had been very destructive: Marsh’s new huts, carefully planned paths, and other beautification projects were a muddy mess. Given this reality check, the plans to show off Chungkai as a model camp were abandoned, and Colonel Yanagida decided to move his Group II headquarters across the river to Tamarkan, which sat on a high bank and had escaped flooding.^{xvi78}

In Chungkai, restoration of the theatre—which involved re-terracing the lower part of the amphitheatre, bailing out and then dredging out the orchestra pit, rebuilding the raised dirt base from where it had been washed away, and resurfacing the stage floor—took top priority. Ernest Lenthall’s *Musical Scrap Book* opened the restored theatre on 12 August—although its first performance, too, was stopped on account of rain.⁷⁹ This was not a good sign.



FIGURE 6.33. POSTER FOR *MUSICAL SCRAP BOOK*. KEMP. HAN SAMETHINI COLLECTION. COURTESY OF ROBIN KALHORN.

Kemp’s poster for the show includes a collection of caricatures of the Swingtette ensemble.

^{xvi} Did Captain Noguchi go with him? It is unclear in the record when Captain Noguchi was replaced by Lieutenant Kokubo as camp commandant.

Although *Night Must Fall* was still trying to complete its run, Britt opened his next show, *Bonnie Scotland*—an original musical—on 18 August. And Major Leofric Thorpe—the former general manager of the Mummie Bees back in Singapore—who had just returned from leading a maintenance party up country, suddenly found himself on stage: “That was the only proper play I ever had a part in, only as an understudy, when the actor, who had a good Scottish accent was unable to take part.”⁸⁰ *Bonnie Scotland* was an attempt to equal or better *Wonder Bar*, but it didn’t receive the same kind of rave notices.⁸¹

As soon as it was feasible, POWs were put to work rebuilding the earthen bund around the camp as the continual rainy weather, particularly the heavier rainfall occurring upriver, meant more flooding was possible. In fact, 1944 turned out to be an unusual double-flood year in Chungkai. As if on cue, the camp was flooded again and the cookhouses had to be moved to higher ground.⁸² The theatre was also flooded once more, but the overall damages were not as great as the first time. The roof was repaired with a large canvas tarpaulin borrowed from the Japanese.

An Anglo-Dutch Co-Production

John Coast’s close association with the Dutch/Indonesians on stage and off had inspired an Anglo-Dutch co-production. Tari (Bertling) was asked to train other Dutch/Indonesians as dancers and to choreograph a major piece for the new show. Tari “decided, in the end, to try to copy a famous palace dance that Europeans can see if they are lucky, performed several times a year at the Javanese Keratons in the central states.”⁸³

But to perform this traditional dance properly, he would need six female dancers, four male dancers, two sword dancers, two spear carriers, two clowns—and a *gamelan* orchestra. None of these performers or musical instruments existed. Neither did the elaborate setting of “painted elephants, a Royal Dais, and Magnificent looking draperies,” nor the costumes with “huge Wayang hats, slinky dresses, flowing *selendangs*, bracelets and ornaments.”⁸⁴

Coast admitted that acquiring the necessary mosquito nets, rice sacks, and cardboard for costumes and setting “made me cadge and steal as Stage Manager as I’d never done before.” And given the fierce competition among theatrical producers for scarce resources, it all had to be done secretly with the help of Bill Pycok.⁸⁵ Devising the gamelan orchestra was the most difficult part, but the Dutch/Indonesian POWs proved resourceful and scrounged the materials to make all the instruments.^{xviii86}

Once the volunteer dancers and musicians and the gamelan instruments were in place, a two-month period of intensive training began. If all went well, a unique entertainment would be performed for Chungkai audiences in October.

Camp Update: A Major Policy Change

In early September as the monsoon rains began to abate, there were urgent calls for more POWs to be sent up the railway line to repair washouts. With a decreased number of fit POWs in the camp, the selection committee was under intense pressure to find the necessary workers. To fill the quotas, Colonel Williamson announced a major policy change: the large number of fit POWs engaged in producing entertainment—men who had previously been exempt because their work was so valuable to the health of the camp—would now be subject to these drafts. In strong disagreement with Williamson’s decision,

^{xviii} A *gendang* (drum) was made out of a hollow palm tree trunk, two gongs were made from square pieces of metal suspended over water pitchers filled to different levels, a *tote* (a type of xylophone with nine metal keys), and a *k trck* (a type of rattle made of metal and wire bound together) were all made from scrounged materials [Coast, 192–193].

This last-minute appearance was too late to be noted on the poster, which highlighted Harold Pycock's first appearance in a Chungkai show and a "Krontjong Band"^{xix} under the leadership of an Englishman named Worthington, who was captivated by this unique Javanese musical form.

Richardson thoroughly enjoyed *Zijn Groote Reis*: "a very good show. Décor excellent. Could have enjoyed much more of it. Gamelan orchestra. Koronchong dancing [*sic*] by Bertling [Tari]."^{xx93} (One setting in the "excellent décor" was, of course, the elaborate palace with elephants and royal dais designed especially for the Keraton dance in Coast's show.)

Chippington was enthralled by Tari's dance as the Monkey King, which opened his eyes to a world he knew nothing about:

One performance which has made an impact on all of us was an extraordinary dance by a Eurasian with the Dutch contingent from Java—backed by a group of Javanese musicians playing their traditional instruments (all home made). Fantastically dressed as a very realistic monkey, elaborately decorated, he performed the Javanese 'monkey' dance—a part of their culture, I understand. . . . Everyone was spell bound under that dark blue sky sparkling with a myriad stars bathed by the soft glow of the full moon. A wonderful experience.⁹⁴

When Coast said good-bye to Tari and his dancers and musicians as they headed up country, he must have wondered if he would ever see them again. Despite this major setback to his own production, Coast was determined to carry on.

"Are We Men or Mice?"

On 18 September, orders issued from Japanese headquarters sought to reduce the profits being made by POW entrepreneurs in the camp: "shave and haircuts to be free, also theatre seats." With only 2,800 men left in camp, John Sharp thought this a "questionable benevolence."⁹⁵ Four days later, Edwins' new show, *Mixed Grill*, was cancelled when the Japanese abruptly took back their pressure lamps, on loan to the theatre, to finish building their new office. It opened the following night instead—but with disastrous results. In the interval Edwins had gone into hospital with another bout of malaria and "Hank the Yank" Martens stepped into the role of compère. This time his "true-blue" Yankee-ness was a little too blue. His jokes were considered so "filthy" that Martens was "rebuked by the camp C. O. [Williamson]" and banned from further performances. (It was rumored that Martens had already been banned in other camps for similar behavior.)⁹⁶

Gee agreed that Martens' jokes were "very dirty," but he took a different attitude about the furor: "It strikes me that there's a lot of hypocrisy in this camp 'cos it seemed last night that people were enjoying this fun. Anyway, this is a male community, the one place where you can safely talk a bit of dirt. Are we men or mice?"⁹⁷

^{xix} The Javanese *kronchongs* music is melodic music and singing using Western instruments but played with a unique beat.
^{xx} Obviously a confusion here.

The Chungkai Rep Company

Following the success of *Night Must Fall*, Leo Britt began to present—almost exclusively—a series of straight plays with a small troupe of actors who became the “Chungkai Repertory Company.”^{xxi98} “The era of straight plays had started and was to go on, in ambition and popularity,” wrote Richard Sharp. “And the odd thing is that troops who have never before seen a straight play, lap them up and ask for more.”⁹⁹

With only a limited number of scripts available in the camp library, how could they possibly satisfy this hunger? Leofric Thorpe came to the rescue. His years of experience directing shows for the Island Committee community theatre back in Singapore before the war proved invaluable. “I also remembered complete scripts of plays,” Thorpe recalled, “which was not difficult when I had been active before the captivity in putting the plays on at the Victoria Theatre in S’pore. ‘The Amazing Doctor Clitterhouse’ was one I remembered line for line.”¹⁰⁰ (Leo Britt had been an actor in that production.)

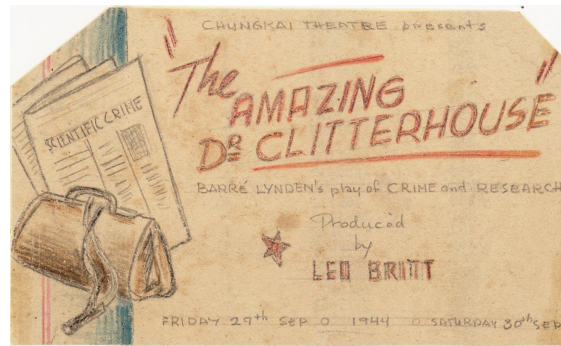


FIGURE 6.35. POSTER FOR *THE AMAZING DR. CLITTERHOUSE*. HUIB VAN LAAR.
IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

In fact, Britt’s next show was Barré Lyndon’s *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*, which ran 29–30 September with Captain “Schoolie” Faulder in the title role. Since Coast was fully engaged in final rehearsals for his own production, he could not function as Britt’s stage manager, which did not please Britt, who thought his shows should receive Coast’s attention and priority. So along with recalling the script “line by line,” Thorpe took on the duties of stage manager—a role he performed for all of Britt’s subsequent Chungkai productions.¹⁰¹

But *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* did not connect with its audience, which was expecting the same dramatic tension and excitement as in *Night Must Fall*. Gee’s response was typical: “I didn’t care for the show at all. It didn’t pack a wallop!”¹⁰²

On Your Toes

To avoid being sent up the line in the latest clamor for maintenance party workers, Gee took a full-time position with the theatre’s front of house staff. Besides painting posters, additional duties in this official role involved creating the paper tickets needed for each performance and ushering on performance nights.¹⁰³ He was also enlisted to help backstage with the scene painting on Coast’s show, set to open that night: “I was called to the Theatre by Mr. Knight to help them out with some scene painting as they were

^{xxi} The members of Britt’s rep company were Allan Alexander, “Schoolie” Faulder, Sam Flick, Bob Garrod, Gibby Inglefield, Douglas Morris, Howard Potts, Freddie Thompson, and Michael Walter.

choc-a-block with work. I got busy on a backcloth for the band presentation. Was very busy but happy amongst the whitewash and soot.”¹⁰⁴

But the opening was suddenly cancelled when I. J. A. Group II headquarters in Tamarkan “requisitioned canvas roof of theatre” for a theatre they were constructing there in celebration of their founding as a military unit. With heavy rain falling intermittently, the scene painters’ push to finish the backdrops came to a halt. The tech crew came to Coast’s rescue and constructed a new pitched roof out of atap so his production could open two days later.¹⁰⁵ But that opening was cancelled as well on account of rain.

On Your Toes: A Contrasted Programme of Dancing & Music finally opened on 8 October at 8:45 p.m. Coast’s unique collaboration with Philip Brugman and John “Nellie” Wallace would have been a daring production to find on the London or New York stage, but in a remote POW camp on the edge of the jungle in Thailand, it was truly astonishing. The late start time signaled that lighting effects would be used throughout.^{xxii}



FIGURE 6.36. POSTER FOR *ON YOUR TOES*. GEOFFREY GEE. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Gee’s colorful poster lists seven acts, each highlighted in separate boxes. In place of the Javanese Keraton dance with Tari and his company, Brugman had hastily created a spectacular “Balinese Ballet” based on the traditional Ketjak Monkey Dance.

^{xxii} See Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show! more information about the innovative lighting devised for this production.

The *pièce de résistance* of the evening was the twenty-three-minute version of *The Sleeping Beauty Ballet* choreographed by Wallace to music by Tchaikovsky, Grieg, and others (Wallace had professional training as a ballet dancer before enlisting in the army).¹⁰⁶ Coast described the setting as “a Walt Disney style of a forest with red toadstools and a little bent house.”¹⁰⁷

The cast for the ballet included “Prince Charming, a Witch, the Sleeping Beauty, eight fauns and four dwarfs!”¹⁰⁸ One of the fauns was Custance Baker in his “first stage part . . . wearing a minimal loincloth and a strip of fur round my ankles. We danced a simple graceful number to the tune of Grieg’s Morning Music.”¹⁰⁹

This serious attempt to dance Tchaikovsky’s well-known classical ballet had not happened without complications, as Prince Charming after Prince Charming was sent either up country or into hospital. During the final week of rehearsals, the following announcement had to be posted regarding the fate of the latest premier dancer, Tom Slessor.

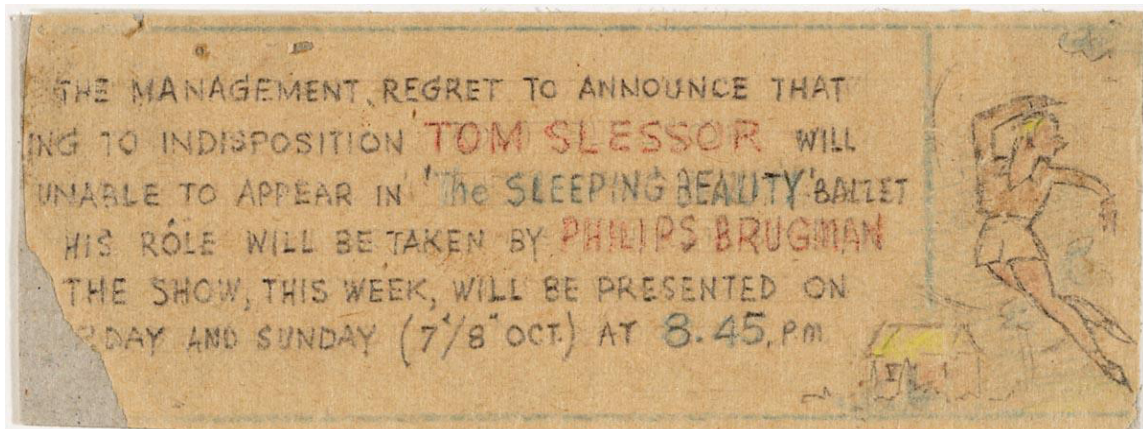


FIGURE 6.37. CAST CHANGE ANNOUNCEMENT. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

“Owing to indisposition” was a polite way of saying that Slessor was in hospital with dysentery.

For Coast, the “standard of dancing attained by the chief three [dancers] was simply astounding. The Witch pirouetted to flashes of lightning and rolls of thunder, and the Prince and the Beauty performed the intricate “Sleeping Beauty Waltz” perfectly together in the Finale.”¹¹⁰ Wallace himself danced the role of the Sleeping Beauty.

Richardson thought the dance show “very good.”¹¹¹ It was Gee, this time, who proved more discriminating in his criticism:

The band was not as good as usual. Scottish dancing didn’t appeal. Balinese Ballet good but badly lit. Jimmy O’Connor’s “Seat Dance” colossal! Postma amazing with “Sailor’s Hornpipe.” Lambeth Walk a hit. Tango & Rhumba v. good and finally “The Sleeping Beauty” ballet by John Wallace. Superb! Beautiful! And the décor looked wonderful. It was Brugman’s evening—tho’ Taeke took the spotlight with his Tyrolean “dive”!¹¹²

The opening performance concluded with a speech by Colonel Yanagida, who announced that the camp was being moved to a new and less vulnerable site. He promised the POWs a prime location for their beloved theatre (Coast would later call it “a new but inferior site on the other side of the camp”¹¹³).

Now considered part of the official theatre staff, Gee was invited backstage for the opening night celebration: “All the fun of the theatre. Everyone congratulating each other.”¹¹⁴ The following night, after his ushering duties were done, Gee “dashed backstage to speedily paint more trees etc. on the wings for the ballet finale”—possible to do while the show was in progress because the Chungkai theatre’s wings were double faced—and “stayed there for the rest of the show. What an atmosphere! Theatreland!—with elves and fauns, Tyrolean dancers, Witches etc. And Nellie Wallace throwing a blue fit when Mr. Lenthal played the wrong cues!! It was all grand. I loved it and hope to be there more in the future.”¹¹⁵ With this induction into the special bond enjoyed by theatre practitioners, Gee became part of the “theatre crowd.”

When Leo Britt attended *On Your Toes* and saw what precious “resources” Coast had been able to finagle without his knowledge (including fantastic costumes and settings and “multiple coloured spotlights”), he threw a “blue fit” as well. He confronted Coast after the show; they had a huge row and “parted company for good.”¹¹⁶

3. “Outward Bound”

Removal Difficulties

Major difficulties were encountered in trying to move the theatre to its new location, so the POWs decided to rebuild it, enlarging it to serve the needs of producers and technical staff who were always trying to present something new and different. This endeavor took more time than originally expected. When the Swingtette performed on 10 October, Gee reported the theatre was “only ½ built.”¹¹⁷ And it was still not finished when Edwins produced *Mixed Grill* on 20 October—or a week later when *Stockpot*, a variety show written and produced by a new producer, Leslie J. Stock, was presented.¹¹⁸

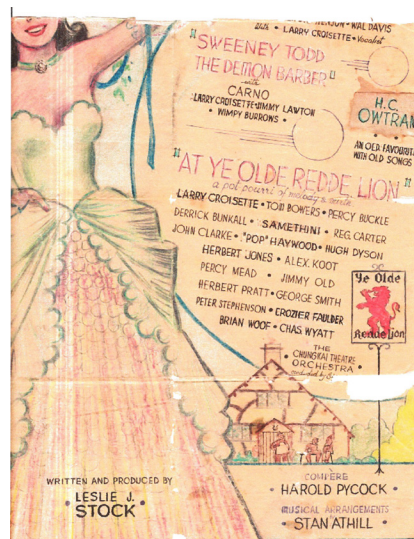


FIGURE 6.38. POSTER FOR *Stockpot*. GEOFFREY GEE.
COURTESY OF JASON STAGGS.

The cast list given on the poster is a mix of old regulars and new faces. At the top right, Colonel Owtram's name has been pasted over that of the original performer. Gee explained that Owtram had "filled in the breach left by up country party."¹¹⁹

The "up country party" Gee refers to was a touring concert party led by Ernest Lenthall with most of the Chungkai orchestra musicians. After their success at the I. J. A. celebration in Tamarkan on 15 and 16 October (a concert for which Gee had painted backdrop screens: "one big one of a map of Thailand with Railway Engine thrusting out of corner"¹²⁰), Lenthall had received orders to take his musicians on a week-long tour up country to entertain the POWs and I. J. A. guards in their isolated maintenance camps. They would leave on 31 October and travel by river barge as far up the line as Kinsaiyok.¹²¹ "It was band vocalist Cadder Parfitt who had dropped out of *Stockpot* to go with them.

Theatre Update: The New Chungkai Theatre

By 1 November construction work on the new theatre was finally complete. As on its previous site, the stagehouse was situated on a raised platform at the bottom of a slope that had been terraced into seating for an amphitheatre. Instead of the "great dusty bowl" of the old theatre, this amphitheatre was covered with grass and enlarged to accommodate an audience of 3,000. As the new amphitheatre was more flat and open, some POWs mourned the loss of their "old intimate theatre."^{xxiii}¹²²

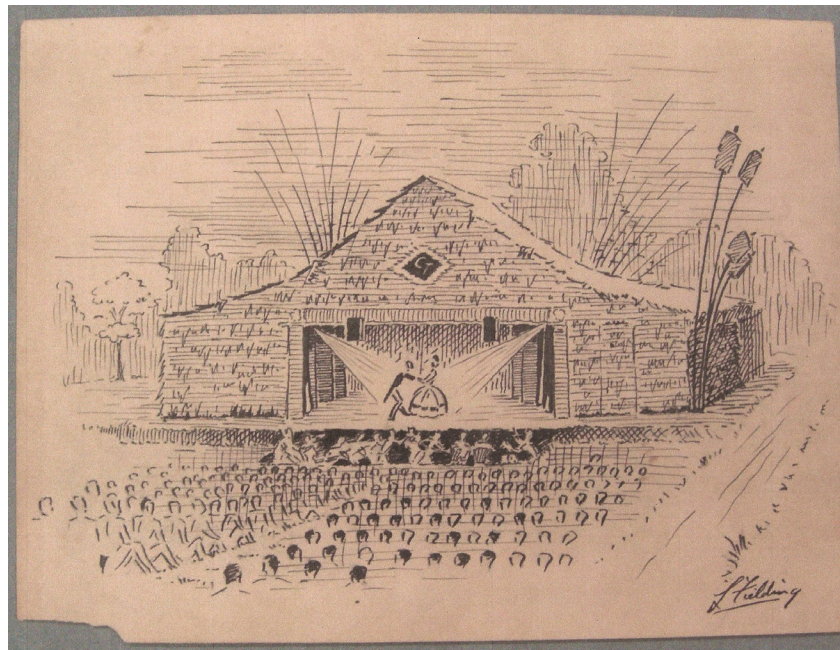


FIGURE 6.39. THE NEW CHUNGKAI THEATRE. LESLIE FIELDING. FEPOW IWM 155936.

Leslie Fielding's sketch shows the new Chungkai theatre looking quite different from its predecessor. The pitched roof is much higher, allowing settings and set pieces to be flown in and out from a grid. In the center of the proscenium header is the new Chungkai theatre logo. Behind the theatre can be

^{xxiii} It's strange to think of a theater with an auditorium that seated 2,000 or more as "intimate," but the new location lacked the "embrace" of the old amphitheatre that was similar to the Hollywood Bowl.

seen the grove that contained the “bamboo rehearsal space.” With the theatre’s opening, one of Gee’s jobs was to “paint up the [new] seating index.”^{xxiv123}

On Short Notice

A show by Michael Walter, a member of Britt’s rep company, was scheduled to open the theatre but cancelled at the last minute when Walter became ill and sent to hospital. In the day-to-day sameness of their prison existence, the POWs had become ever more dependent on their weekly entertainment for emotional and mental sustenance, so it was of vital importance not to let the theatre “go dark” for a week. Though he was in rehearsal with his new show, Leo Britt stepped into the gap with a hastily devised recreation of a nineteenth-century minstrel show, and *Oh Susannah!* opened the new theatre on 4 November. The two figures in period dress standing in spotlights at the front of the stage in Fielding’s sketch present a scene from this production.

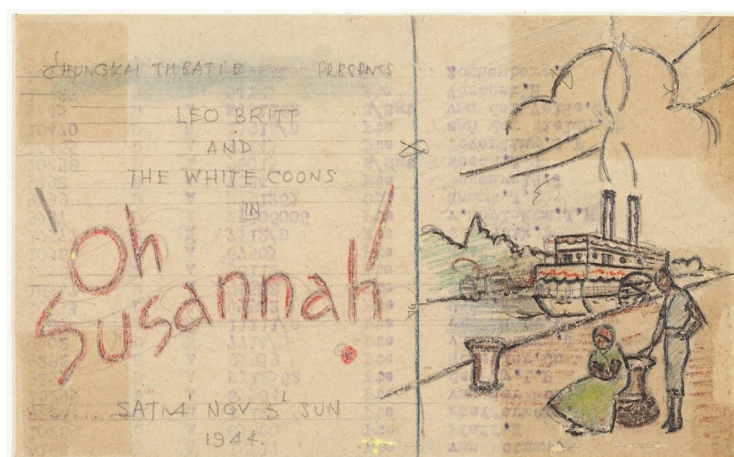


FIGURE 6.40. POSTER FOR *OH SUSANNAH*. GEOFFREY GEE. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Though rushed into production, Britt’s “white coons” show^{xxv}—white actors impersonating African Americans in blackface—was a huge success. “Everybody happy,” wrote Gee. “Thanks, in the main, are no doubt due to Leo for his efforts.”¹²⁴ Britt himself played the master of ceremonies (the “Interlocutor”), and Jimmy O’Connor “scored a hit with his eccentric dancing.” Among the other performers were Freddie Thompson, Joop Postma, Philip Brugman, Mike Sands (as Susannah), and a “chorus of Niggers.”¹²⁵ The show was so popular that the next night it went on, despite a soaking rain, “with a fairly good (and enthusiastic) audience, considering the state of the ground.”¹²⁶

Camp Update: Further Raids on Theatre Personnel

On 14 October, Lieutenant-Colonel Williamson and his headquarters staff were removed to Tamarkan as the result of a flap over new orders requiring all officers to engage in manual labor, and

^{xxiv} See Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!” for details.

^{xxv} A derogatory racist term used to identify minstrel shows performed by white performers over against minstrel shows performed by black performers (also in blackface).

Owtram was back in charge once again.^{xxxvi} A week later orders were received from Group II headquarters for all the POWs in hospital to be evacuated to Tamarkan and all the fit POWs to be sent up country.¹²⁷ But finding fit men available for maintenance parties became more difficult, so in order to fill the quotas, two further policy changes were made: light sick POWs and members of the theatre staff would now be included in the maintenance drafts. On 9 November, two box office workers were sent up country. And the next day, Joop Postma, Philip Brugman, and their cabaret troupe—in final rehearsals with their new show, *Lichten Op!* (Lights Up!)—received word they were leaving as well.



FIGURE 6.41. POSTER FOR *LICHTEN Op!* IMAGE
COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Lichten Op!—a new co-production by John Coast’s “Engelsch-Hollandsche” company—was to be an international musical extravaganza. The large cast of singer-actors and musicians—a phenomenal collection of “stars” from both the British and Dutch/Indonesian concert parties (see poster)—would have been a major contribution to the new drive to cooperate instead of compete in supplying entertainment to the troops, but with the loss of Postma and his troupe, the show had to be cancelled. Gee, for one, thought it particularly upsetting they should be sent up country: “What a pity they must go. For a long time they have been wangled off previous parties ’cos of their invaluable services to our entertainment here in Chungkai.”¹²⁸ No further Dutch/Indonesian performances or cross-casting experiments would take place until their return.

The Chungkai Repertory Company Presents

As the only established producer-director left in Chungkai, Britt was under considerable pressure

^{xxxvi} With very few other ranks left in Chungkai, the officers had been ordered to engage in manual labor once again. This time they refused, so the light sick left in camp were forced to work a half day. This decision resulted in the officers holding a mass meeting during which they “refused to work as long as Colonel Williamson was the camp commandant—as he was too weak with the Nips” [John Sharp, *Diary*, 14 October 1944]. The officers petitioned Group Commandant Yanagida for his removal, Colonel Williamson was ordered to Tamarkan, and Colonel Owtram was placed in charge at Chungkai once again. Now everyone worked. It’s possible that this was when Captain Noguchi was replaced by Lieutenant Kokubo as camp commandant as well.

to have his rep company perform more frequently. On 10 November, they had opened Hubert Griffith and Paul Vulpius' play *Youth at the Helm*.

Compared to *Doctor Clitterhouse*, the audience response this time was positive. Richardson praised it as "an excellent show. Good acting and very amusing."¹²⁹ Gee thought there were "superb performances from Michael Walter, Gilbert Inglefield, Howard Potts, Freddie Thompson et al. A huge success!"¹³⁰

Two days later, on 12 November, Gee was in the box office working on the poster for *50/50*—the show John "Nellie" Wallace was hastily assembling as a replacement for Postma's *Lichten Op!*—when he was told he was on the roster for one of the next up country maintenance parties. Singer Larry Croisette and producer Eddie Edwins also got the bad news—and Bill Bainbridge and Wally Davis from the Swingtette as well. But someone with authority convinced the POW administration that all the members of the Swingtette must be kept together, so at the last minute Bainbridge and Davis were taken off the list.

The next day Gee left Chungkai and traveled by train up the line to Rin Tin/183 Kilo, where he and others were put to work quarrying rocks for ballast and chopping down trees for kindling for the steam engines.¹³¹ R.S.M. Bill Nelson attempted to mount concert parties there, but Gee thought them "amateurish" and longed "for Chungkai and its excellent theatre."¹³² In late December, suffering from a bad case of malaria, Gee would be sent down to Tamarkan.

The Chungkai Reps' next production was *Accent on Youth* by American playwright Samson Raphaelson. Though no longer on speaking terms with Britt, Coast openly admired his abilities to inspire his actors and production staff to ever-greater achievement.¹³³ These last two shows had required the props crew to construct a radiogram [console radio] and a baby grand piano.^{xxvii}

Reviews of the show were mixed. W. Marsh thought it "extremely well done, particularly as it involved playing two sophisticated female roles."¹³⁴ (These "females" were new rep company members Dick Lucas and Custance Baker.) Richardson, on the contrary, thought it had been "a dreadful play and much poor acting. Generally antique."¹³⁵

Camp Update: About-Face

With the Allied offensive in Burma under way, the two bridges spanning the Mae Khlong River at Tamarkan being used to funnel fresh men and supplies to the Japanese troops at the front became strategic targets for Allied long-range bombers. For quite some time, Allied reconnaissance ("recce") planes had been seen over the camp in preparation for bombing attacks on the bridges. The first of these raids took place in the early evening of 29 November. The next day, the POWs in Chungkai learned that bombs had fallen in Tamarkan, killing twenty of their men, most of whom had only transferred there the day before.¹³⁶ In spite of the raid, the Japanese inexplicably continued to evacuate more POWs from Chungkai to Tamarkan, including all of the senior officers except Colonel Owtram.¹³⁷

During the first week of December, Lieutenant-Colonel Yanagida was reassigned to Nakhon Pathom hospital camp and Lieutenant-Colonel Ishii arrived from Nakhon Pathom to become the new commandant of Group II. In the second full week in December, new bombing raids on the bridges, including the railway support facilities and airfield at Kanburi, produced the desired results: almost all traffic on the railway came to a halt. In the face of these continuing attacks, the I. J. A. finally acknowledged the obvious and made an abrupt about-face, ordering all the POWs in Tamarkan transferred to Chungkai. This reversal caused much confusion, and Chungkai became severely overcrowded once again, its resources strained to

^{xxvii} See more about the construction of these props in Chapter 12: "Jolly Good Show!".

their limits.¹³⁸

The first group to arrive on 16 December included Major Jim Jacobs, the officer in charge of the Tamarkan Players. Their leading theatrical producer-director Norman Carter would soon follow. The phased evacuation of the large contingent of Australian and Dutch/Indonesian POWs from Tamarkan to Chungkai continued well into the new year.

The Chungkai Rep Carries On

Jacobs arrived in Chungkai just in time to see Leo Britt's production of Noel Coward's comedy-farce *Hay Fever* on 18 December.

Custance Baker, cast this time in "a longer part of an older woman," summarized the plot: "Mostly mixed up couples having violent kiss and cuddle scenes and dashing outdoors to avoid each other: 'Anyone for Tennis?'"^{xxviii139} Baker's "kiss and cuddle scene" with Leo Britt, who played the male lead, was a sensation.^{xxix140}

Richardson thought the production "not too bad, but acting generally poor."¹⁴¹ Jacobs thought differently: "a talented cast of British officers treated an appreciative audience to an excellent performance."¹⁴²

Christmas 1944

Christmas 1944 would be the POWs' third Christmas in captivity, and with news of the recent Japanese losses in the Pacific heard on their secret radio and the continued Allied bombing of the Tamarkan bridges and points southeast, they firmly believed it would be their last.



FIGURE 6.42. POSTER FOR *THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT*. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

On Christmas Eve, *The Christmas Spirit*, a carol service led by Gibby Inglefield and his choir, was presented on stage in imitation of the traditional carol service broadcast each year on the BBC from King's College Chapel at Cambridge University. The elaborate staging with a setting designed to represent the interior of the chapel was described by Baker who sang in the choir:

^{xxviii} "I actually wore a pretty white tennis frock with a pleated skirt and white shoes, which I made myself," Baker continued. "On the second night I almost dried but one of the cast fed me my words so that I did not have to take a prompt" [Baker, "Extracts from 'A Memoir,'" 14].

^{xxix} See more about these "kiss and cuddle" scenes in Chapter 14: "Somebody Had to Put a Skirt On."

On the night, one night only, the choir was placed in these stalls hidden behind a mosquito netting gauze curtain. A radio announcer with a microphone in his hand stood alone in front of the curtain and told the audience that a radio broadcast of carols from King's College would now be presented. The gauze curtain was raised just like a pantomime transformation scene and disclosed a group of choristers in white surplices lit up by our two tilly lamps and little oil lamps disguised as candles, in a row of stalls which really did appear to stretch away into a dark interior. We sang the usual proper carols and Inglefield introduced some less common ones. . . . Members of the audience told me that the illusion of the interior of a College chapel had been very convincing and nostalgic.¹⁴³

One of those audience members was Richard Sharp: "With the choir, dressed as choristers (out of mosquito netting) in a setting of Cathedral stalls: Kings Chapel, we felt, could not do better."¹⁴⁴

The following evening, audiences saw Carl Moser's pantomime *Cinderella* directed by Britt. Custance Baker, who played the Fairy Godmother, wrote that the pantomime "was presented in an atmosphere of hope and confidence."¹⁴⁵

Jacobs was delighted with the production: "In the panto, a handsome young English subaltern, Dicky Lucas, made a charming Cinderella. Captain Freddie Thompson was the principal comedian [Pantomime Dame], and was ably assisted by a capable cast."¹⁴⁶ Basil Peacock, who "laughed uproariously" throughout the show, was also taken with Lucas: "I shall never forget the sight of Cinderella (one of our younger and prettier subalterns) going to the ball in a golden coach and waving to us like royalty."¹⁴⁷ Richard Sharp thought the panto had been "a wow!"—so good, in fact, that he returned to see it again the second night.¹⁴⁸ Even Richardson thought it a "great success."¹⁴⁹

John Coast, in hospital with a new attack of malaria, missed the show but confessed that the Christmas performance had not just been a "great success," it had been "a drunken, raging success," with most of the cast and crew performing under the influence.¹⁵⁰

1945

If there was any official New Year's Eve celebration in Chungkai, there is no record of it. Everyone was too busy trying to find accommodations for the Australians and Dutch/Indonesians continuing to arrive daily from Tamarkan. New Year's Day, though, was a different story. Sports competitions between Japanese soldiers and POWs were held during the day at Kokubo's order. In the evening, Britt produced a revival of *Café Colette*.

Colonel Owtram, who reprised his role of the "red-tabbed and elderly colonel" in the show, recalled a personal anecdote connected to this production that made his performance that night a "must see":

It was a blazing hot day, and about 11 a.m. Kokobo [sic] summoned me and my Dutch interpreter to watch the sports with him. We sat in front of the crowd out on the sports ground and he produced a bottle of Chinese Brandy which we proceeded to drink neat. We got through that without any difficulty, but at the end he asked me to go back to his quarters as he said he wished to offer

me his hospitality to show his appreciation of the way in which I had run the Camp while he had been in charge! I had no desire to accept, but to refuse would have been a grave insult and the camp would have suffered in consequence.¹⁵¹

Owtram and the Dutch interpreter followed Kokubo to his quarters, where a bottle of whisky was produced. When they had almost consumed that bottle, Kokubo got the idea of including more of Owtram's staff in the celebration. They were summoned, and once they arrived another bottle appeared. "I was getting to the point where I had to think very hard what I was going to say and things appeared a bit hazy," Owtram recalled. Some food appeared, and after it was consumed they were able to leave. Owtram made it back to headquarters, laid down, and "sank into a deep sleep immediately which lasted from about 3 p.m. until 7 p.m. when considerable concern was felt because I was due to take part in a 'Café Colette' show at 8 o'clock."¹⁵²

A medical officer was called, Owtram was awakened and given two Benzedrine tablets, which made him very wide awake, and he "was able to appear on the stage even though still a bit 'under the influence'":

By this time, of course, the whole camp knew about my session with Kokobo and they flocked to the show to see what effect it had had on me. I remember receiving terrific applause on my entrance onto the stage. All went well until I missed the cue for me to say goodbye to the "lovely"^{xxx} with whom I was dining and make my exit singing "I'll see you again"! Leo Britt who was playing the part of the "Maestro," seeing I had missed my cue, gave me a more direct one, but still having my head full of fumes, I ignored that too, much to the delight of the audience. Eventually I did realize the situation and made my exit singing in terrific form. The show was voted a great success!¹⁵³

Custance Baker also had a favorite anecdote occasioned by the show. He called it "My best theatre crit!"^{xxxii154} Cast as prostitutes, he and Dick Lucas "did a dance routine to the tune of 'Yam' a popular song of the thirties. We danced separately and then as a pair, finally in a chorus line. When walking back to my hut after the show I overheard two soldiers, one of whom I knew, discussing the show: 'Those two fucking tarts, they were more like real fucking tarts than any fucking tarts I've ever met.'"^{xxxiii155}

Camp Update: The New Order

With his drinking party, Kokubo had wanted to thank Owtram before Lieutenant-Colonel Ishii arrived from Tamarkan to assume command. He knew that with Ishii in charge, relationships between the Japanese and the POWs were about to change for the worse.

Following his arrival, Ishii made his first move on 5 January to show who was in charge by ordering "concert performances reduced to one night."¹⁵⁶ This directive was a blow to the approximately 9,000 or so

^{xxx} Who the "lovely" was this time is not identified. It wasn't Baker, so it must have been Dick Lucas.

^{xxxii} British theatre slang for "critical review."

^{xxxiii} The excerpts from Custance Baker's diary were made available to me in the spring of 2012. I was told this anecdote previously by Leofric Thorpe, who thought the comment had been made about the female impersonators in Wonder Bar.

POWs in Chungkai, as Hardie estimated the “theatre only holds at most a third of the camp.”¹⁵⁷ According to Coast, had it not been for Bill Pycok operating behind the scenes to prevent more drastic measures, “Ishi [sic] would probably have stopped entertainments altogether.”¹⁵⁸ “Under Ishii, the conditions of life have at once become more irksome,” Hardie wrote, “because all the tinpot Jap authorities feel they must be extra officious under the colonel’s eye.”¹⁵⁹ This, of course, included Kokubo.

Everyone, officers and other ranks alike, was put to work building huts again. In addition, the POWs were ordered “to build a moat ten feet deep with a far bank eighteen feet high all around the camp.”¹⁶⁰ Now that the possibility of flooding was past for the year, the need for this fortress-like construction was puzzling.

When John Coast came out of hospital following his latest malaria attack, he discovered that he had lost his “exempt status” position on the theatre committee. Under Ishii, the committee was forced to limit the number of personnel exempt from manual labor because of their involvement in entertainment. Coast “joined the Officers Working Party once again.”¹⁶¹

The POWs’ high hopes about a quick end to the war was not to last. “After the festive season, during which we had been too optimistic, we relapsed into pessimism as we received news of the German winter offensive, and then no news at all,” wrote Peacock. “As far as we could judge, the situation in Burma was still a stalemate, and there was unbeaten Japanese armies between us and liberty.”¹⁶²

Since 1942, this reversal from optimism to pessimism after the holidays had become a familiar pattern, but with each year’s passing, the disappointment grew deeper. By the end of the month, POWs in Chungkai were depressed and apathetic. “Finding life as P.O.W. increasingly tedious and dull; periodically good interest,” admitted Richardson. “Powers of concentration declining and periodically good.”¹⁶³ His words described the deadly “war within” that the few entertainers left in camp struggled mightily to combat and whose efforts Ishii worked steadily to undermine.

Maintenance Party Entertainers Return

By mid-January, work on the moat and the bund surrounding the camp was well under way as the maintenance parties with important entertainment personnel began to return.

Arriving from Tamarkan, where they had been retained since just before Christmas, were Eddie Edwins, Larry Croisette, Fred Coles, and Geoffrey Gee. During their absence, Chungkai had, in Gee’s words, “considerably changed (for the worse). Liberties curtailed. Theatre only 1 night (Mon). Lights out 10 o’clock. Piss Pickets. Registering books, etc. Bathing area restricted and new Col (Ishi) [Ishii] bit of a _____. No church services on Sundays. On Mondays if Yasume!” In addition, Gee discovered that Bill Bainbridge was now in charge of the Chungkai musicians—Lenthall had resigned sometime earlier—and only a fixed number of men could work in the theatre at any one time.¹⁶⁴

Returning directly from up the line were Hugh de Wardener, Keith Neighbour, Tom Boardman, and the rest of the 201 Kilo party. At Christmas, de Wardener had produced an original pantomime, *The Isle of Pochohuntas Treasure*, in which Boardman, swollen with the endemic effects of beriberi, played the Fairy Queen. To the POW audience, this affliction only made his appearance more hysterical.¹⁶⁵

Shortly thereafter, Dudley Gotla, Joop Postma, Philip Brugman, and the Dutch/Indonesian cabaret troupe returned from Kinsaiyok. For their Christmas festivities, Gotla and Postma had put on a bilingual production of the pantomime *Jack and the Beanstalk (Ian und der Bonenstolk)*.¹⁶⁶ It took little imagination for the POWs to recognize Jack’s imprisonment as mirroring their own or the real identity of the Giant as their captors, who too often in their experience had sung, “*Fee, Fi, Fo, Fum—I smell the blood*

of an Englishman!” The pantomime was a message of hope that they could survive against enormous odds.

Major Barbara

On 15 January, Britt’s repertory company presented their most challenging production to date: George Bernard Shaw’s comedy *Major Barbara*—challenging because it required intelligent actors with the ability to handle the Shavian wit while still leading audiences through the various points of Shaw’s dialectical argument.

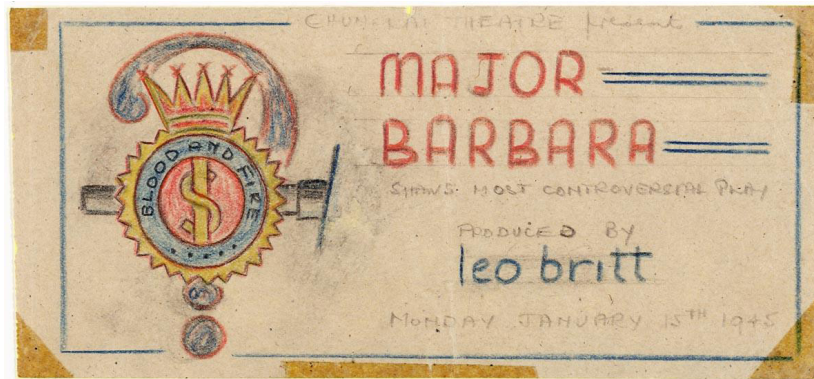


FIGURE 6.43. POSTER FOR *MAJOR BARBARA*. GEOFFREY GEE. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

“[M]y brother [Douglas],” wrote Terry Morris, “gave a sterling performance in the title role. Undershaft was played by a peacetime schoolmaster ‘Schoolie’ Faulder. Again, a long wordy part quite excellently portrayed.”¹⁶⁷ Custance Baker “[played] Barbara’s younger sister, a girl of no importance.”¹⁶⁸

John Sharp thought the production “very good,” Aylwin was “enthralled,” but Richardson, supercritical as always, thought “Undershaft and the Greek Professor not right. An enjoyable entertainment but not correctly produced.”¹⁶⁹ Newcomers Jim Jacobs and Norman Carter were also in attendance. For Jacobs, “‘Major Barbara’ would have done credit to any of the smaller dramatic companies at Home.”¹⁷⁰ Attending his first Britt production, Carter was able to judge Britt’s talents as a producer-director for himself: “I got a back-row seat, which not only provided me with a quick getaway, but also the chance to test the theatre acoustics. Like Britt’s production of *Major Barbara*, both were perfect.”¹⁷¹

Norman Carter Meets Leo Britt

It was in this context that the Australian theatre producer-director Norman Carter found himself one day sitting in “the gods”—the seats at the top of the amphitheatre. Impressed with the care that had been taken to sculpt a steep bank into a rising tier of seats, he decided to investigate the stagehouse and its support spaces more closely.

Backstage, the professional touch was apparent. Everywhere there was evidence of expert theatrical knowledge, and in the centre of the scrupulously

swept stage was a baby grand piano. It looked real but inspection showed that it was a “prop” made of bamboo and reed matting, camouflaged with soot from the cookhouse.¹⁷²

He was inspecting the piano when Leo Britt appeared: “In spite of his patched shorts and hand-knitted blue woolen beret, there was no mistaking his profession.” When Carter introduced himself, Britt was not very welcoming: “‘Oh yes. . . . You’ve been putting on a few concerts at Tamarkan.’ Concerts! Resisting the urge to slap him down, I asked mildly if I could look over the theatre and again I got the suspicious glare.” Britt responded that he was too busy at the moment to show Carter around.¹⁷³ With a new producer in camp—one with professional credentials as well—Britt’s guard was up.

At this point “Schoolie” Faulder appeared and offered to show Carter the bamboo rehearsal space behind the theatre. With its overarching bamboo, Carter thought it resembled a cathedral:

I looked at the small table with its chair and the mound of whitewashed stones to mark the size and shape of the sets and show the placings of windows, doors and important furniture.^{xxxiii} Mr. Britt was doing a first-class job.

“Your producer is a perfectionist.”

“Yes, but he’s inclined to over-play his role of martinet. Sometimes I think he does it deliberately. You see, all theatre workers are officers, except Leo, but that makes no difference, nobody ‘pulls the pips’ and if he gets a little temperamental now and then, what the hell! This theatre has proved a godsend. I suppose you people have found the same.”

“Yes, we have.”

And with that exchange, Faulder and Carter parted company.¹⁷⁴

***Outward Bound* Goes into Rehearsal**

The following evening Britt came to Carter’s hut to inquire if he knew anything about Sutton Vane’s disturbing fantasy play *Outward Bound*, which would be his next production. Carter had stage-managed one production in Melbourne and played the leading role in a touring production. Since Britt had already cast the lead, he asked Carter if he would like to play “the poor old charlady,” Mrs. Midge. Carter accepted immediately.¹⁷⁵ When he walked into the rehearsal space the next morning, he was delighted when Britt asked him to use the white-washed stones to “show him the ‘set’ for the ship’s bar.”^{xxxiv}

Custance Baker thought *Outward Bound* a very odd choice for production in a POW camp:

The scene is aboard ship, in the saloon or bar of an ocean liner. There

^{xxxiii} It’s common practice in theatre to tape the floor of the rehearsal space with an outline of the settings so that the director and actors have some sense of the space relationships and actors know where they are to stand. Without the availability of tape or a wooden floor, Britt was repeating that process with white-washed stones on the ground.

^{xxxiv} Jacobs claimed Carter not only created an accurate ground plan of the single setting but recalled the entire text of the play from memory and really directed this show [Jacobs, 131].

is a mixed group of middle aged and elderly passengers none of whom appear to know one another. Endless conversations establishing characters, identities, and backgrounds until at last they begin to realize that they are all dead and that the ship is taking them to some unknown destination: hence the title.

Mixed in with this odd bunch are a young couple very much in love, referred to as “the half-ways.” They have little part in the play except to sit in corners kissing and embracing and murmuring love to one another.¹⁷⁶

The “half-ways”—played by Baker and Dick Lucas—were a failed suicide pact trapped on the tipping point between life and death.¹⁷⁷ Roused out of their stupor at the last minute by their dog’s barking, the young couple will themselves back into life, deciding that life, even with all its problems, is better than death.

Britt believed *Outward Bound* could speak to the POWs as a metaphor for their own condition. With a defeatist atmosphere about the end of the war pervading the camp, the play’s “message” about “willing oneself back into life” was one the POWs needed to hear.¹⁷⁸ But Baker wasn’t so sure the POWs were ready for a play about a group of deceased passengers sailing to “some unknown destination.”¹⁷⁹

Having to rehearse their “kiss and cuddle” scenes countless times, Baker and Lucas made a bold decision: “After a few dull rehearsals we decided to learn both parts and to play boy and girl on alternating nights”—which yielded hilarious unintended consequences.^{xxxv180}

Two One-Offs

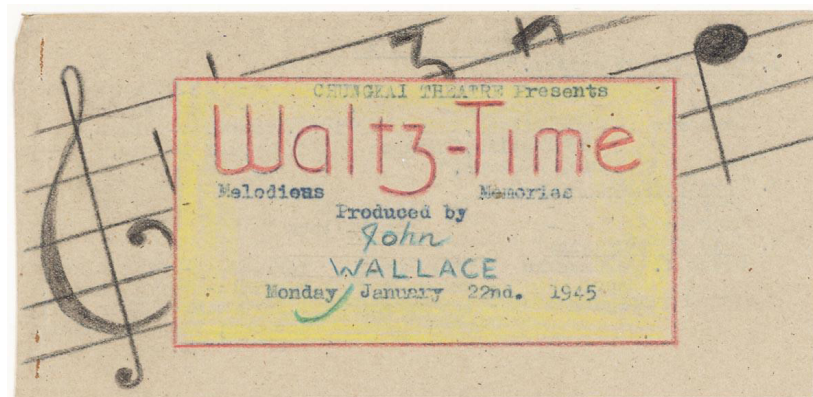


FIGURE 6.44. POSTER FOR *WALTZ TIME*. GEOFFREY GEE. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Inspired by the success of *On Your Toes*, a week after Britt’s *Major Barbara* closed John “Nellie” Wallace produced a dance show entitled *Waltz Time*.¹⁸¹ We know nothing of the playbill other than the climatic piece, a performance of Fokine’s 1911 ballet, “The Specter of the Rose” (*Le Spectre de la Rose*), created especially for the Russian dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. Who danced the two roles in this tour de force is not known, but with Philip Brugman’s return from up country, it’s possible he took Nijinsky’s role of “the

^{xxxv} See Chapter 15: “Somebody had to put a skirt on: Female Impersonators” for the unforeseen consequence of this decision.

specter” and Wallace that of the Young Girl who falls asleep and dreams she is dancing with a rose held in her hand.^{xxxvi}

When *Outward Bound*’s opening was postponed two days before it was supposed to open because two of its leads went into hospital with new bouts of malaria, Britt hastily pulled together a show so the stage would not be dark for a week.¹⁸² In *The Rhythm Club*, Britt was able to present “new discoveries, male and female,” which in this case meant some of the newly arrived Australian and Dutch/Indonesian performers from Tamarkan.¹⁸³ With the slim pool of Chungkai performers left in camp, these new entertainers would prove to be a great blessing. Baker was amazed at Britt’s ability to create a production out of whole cloth practically overnight.¹⁸⁴ To make sure there would be no mistaking it as a fully rehearsed Britt production, the show was billed as “A Short Notice Program.”

Camp Update: The Theatre Held Hostage

On 29 January Colonel Ishii ordered a new “Speedo” to make sure construction of the bund and moat around the camp were finished on schedule. With all POWs (including officers) required to work around the clock on night and day shifts, this order became the occasion for a new and concerted effort by the officers to reassert their rights under the Hague Conventions. But in his new role as Ishii’s adjutant, Kokubo resisted any change in the compromise that had been worked out in a similar situation back in June: “all fit Officers would be expected to work but . . . the I. J. A. would consider it to be voluntary.”¹⁸⁵ Kokubo threatened retaliation if the officers didn’t comply with that arrangement. The officers responded by going on strike. Kokubo countered that maneuver with one of his own: “He said it was unfortunate, but if the officers didn’t work exactly as before, but quite voluntarily, he’d have to close the theatre; and that would be bad luck on the O.R.’s, wouldn’t it?” The officers refused to be blackmailed, and the theatre was closed.¹⁸⁶

By closing the theatre and the canteen, Kokubo hoped to create dissension between the officers and the other ranks. When that didn’t work, he upped the ante by threatening to tear down the theatre. But that threat also proved ineffective. The other ranks stood fast with their officers against this blatant attempt at intimidation. In the meantime, the officers had written a letter of protest to General Sugazawa at I. J. A. POW Accommodation headquarters in Bangkok, and when his reply was received, Kokubo had lost the battle.

Pressing their advantage a bit further, the officers sought to reverse the order to tear down the theatre. A deputation led by theatre committee chair Bill Pycock went to Ishii to request that the theatre not be pulled down and, instead, be allowed to resume its operations. Ishii argued that “war time was not the time for merrymaking.” In the ensuing “discussion,” Ishii finally gave permission for theatre activities to resume, but face-saving concessions had to be made in order to gain his approval: “all props etc (including band instruments) are to be removed. Panel paintings of nude beauties (theatre décor) removed to barber’s shop.”¹⁸⁷

This is the first notice in any POW account that paintings of “nude beauties” adorned the proscenium’s side walls. They don’t appear in Fielding’s sketch (see **Figure 6.39**).

^{xxxvi} Later, in a new campaign of deprivation by the Japanese administration, the POW cemetery with its beautiful garden setting surrounded by a high bamboo fence would be declared out of bounds. But something of inestimable value was left untouched by this harassment policy: “A rose is blooming on the solitary rose bush, and is much frequented, smelling it having become a ceremony” [John Sharp, *Diary*, 7 February 1945]. POWs and Japanese alike were hungry for beauty. Wallace’s *Specter of the Rose* ballet could not have been more prescient.



FIGURE 6.45. "BED DOWN." FIGURE 6.46. "STRONG MEN NEEDED." TWO SKETCHES BY P. A. O. VAN VELTHUISEN. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

Since Dutch artist P. A. O. Van Velthuisen was well-known in the camp for drawing "pinups," he may have been commissioned to produce the "nude beauties" flanking the stage.^{xxxvii}

Another and more important casualty of the theatre's closure was a Dutch/Indonesian production with a science fiction theme entitled *Mars Fantasia* (*Mars Fantasy*) that had been scheduled for early February.

^{xxxvii} These images of the female form may have not only been decorative but also functioned as visual aids to help audiences imaginatively superimpose their idealized representations onto the less than ideal bodies of the female impersonators.

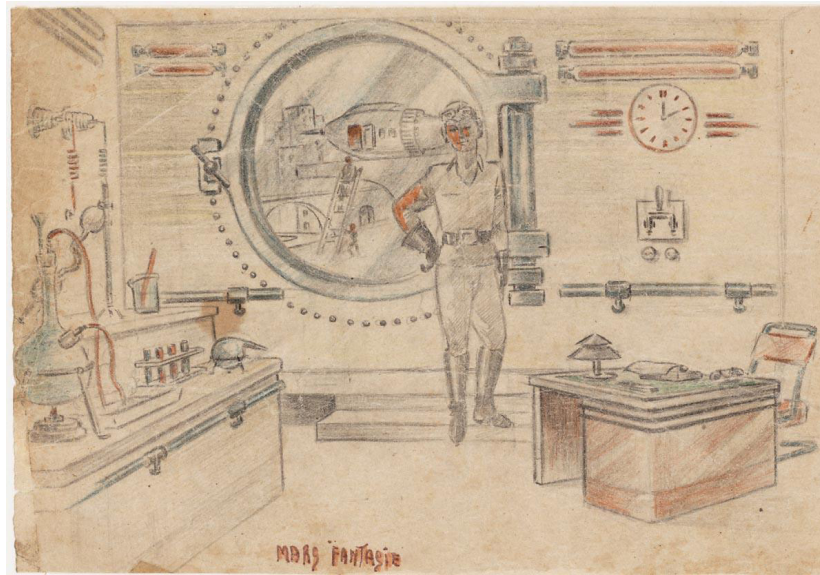


FIGURE 6.47. *MARS FANTASIE*. SET DESIGN BY HUIB VAN LAAR. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

All that remains of this aborted production are an unfinished poster and Huib van Laar's and Franz Hans' renderings for the elaborate futuristic set designs executed in the style of the popular 1936 British science fiction film *Things To Come* (see **Figures 6.48–6.50** in the Image Gallery). Why this brilliantly designed show was never rescheduled is a mystery, but perhaps other events intervened.

Outward Bound

While hurriedly putting up *Rhythm Club*, Britt also rehearsed his cast of *Outward Bound* until Faulder and Potts were released from hospital. They were in dress rehearsals once again when Faulder arrived late one morning and announced that Ishii had decided to close the theatre—effective immediately—and that the officers would be sent to an all-officers camp at Kanburi. Dejected by the news, Britt and his actors left the bamboo rehearsal space.¹⁸⁸

A few of the Chungkai officers were not transferred to Kanburi: their skills were urgently needed at new airfield construction sites elsewhere in Thailand. Hugh de Wardener and Dudley Gotla were sent down to Kachu Mountain on the Kra Peninsula as medical officers along with Keith Neighbour and some other ranks. And Leofric Thorpe was sent to the remote jungle camp at Nakhon Nai. By 17 February, all the officers in Chungkai except for Robert Hardie and a few other medical officers had been transferred to Kanburi.¹⁸⁹ With their departure, Regimental Sergeant Major Edkin was designated officer in charge of the POWs and Bandmaster Warrant Officer Neale installed as entertainment officer.

A Controversy about Entertainment

Once the officers had left, the theatre was allowed to reopen but only on the condition that Ishii's new guidelines both on the content of the shows and on audience behavior would be obeyed. "Each week a new order was given," wrote drummer Wally Davis, "until we finished up with no announcing, no singing, no applause and a Japanese tune to be played in both halves."¹⁹⁰ For the Japanese these restrictions were a

“No words” order meant to prevent the entertainers from passing covert messages about the war’s status to their audiences. In response, Bainbridge and Samethini tried to subvert the censorship by inserting “odd bars of British and Dutch patriotic tunes” in the music the Swingtette played.¹⁹¹

In a further attempt to scuttle the entertainment, Ishii ordered that no rehearsals could take place. This time he nearly succeeded. According to Davis, the restrictions “caused controversy amongst POWs as to whether to continue with the concerts or not. Some thought to continue looked as though we were Jap-happy, others thought to stop altogether was just what the Japs wanted.”¹⁹²

This report is the first of any internal disagreement among the POWs about the role and value of their entertainment, although there must always have been an undercurrent of opposition to these shows for the very reason given above. These objections were answered by the obvious salutary effect entertainment had on the morale and health of the troops and by the belief that its continuance was more important to their survival than what could possibly be seen as collaboration with the enemy. And once again, these arguments won the day.

Exeunt

The overcrowding, poor rations, constant state of flux, and ever-tightening restrictions on camp life encouraged POWs like John Sharp, Laurie Allison, and Tom Boardman to volunteer for redeployment to a new airfield construction site at Kachu Mountain south of Ban Pong on the Kra Peninsula.¹⁹³ Some reasoned that Kachu Mountain would place them closer to the location of the expected Allied invasion of Thailand when it took place and, therefore, closer to their liberation.

Ishii’s restrictions on theatre—as well as the argument among the POWs over the value of their entertainment—led Leo Britt to announce he was leaving Chungkai for Kachu Mountain as well. Gee was puzzled by Britt’s decision: “No doubt hoping for fresh fields to conquer but I can’t see there being any theatre down there—Heaven knows there’s nothing much doing here with a well-established theatre.”¹⁹⁴

But when Pat Fox, Jim Anderson, Val Middleton, G. L. Galyean, A. B. Luff, band conductor Tony Gerrish, and other former members of the Tamarkan Players decided to go as well, it was clear that plans were afoot to start a new concert party at Kachu Mountain, one not hampered by Ishii’s constraints. This group’s sudden departure in early March was a huge loss to the entertainment world at Chungkai.

4. “We Are Invincible!”

With Britt’s departure, Eddie Edwins, Bill Bainbridge, and Joop Postma appeared to be the only entertainment producers left in camp. But members of the Tamarkan Players who had not left with Britt were not to be discounted. On 22 March, Gee attended a “little informal show in the Surgical Ward” compered by Ron Wells and starring Wally McQueen and the Ockerse Brothers trio. He thought it a “grand concert!”¹⁹⁵

This ward concert was the beginning of a newly formed Australian-British concert party led by Wells and McQueen. On 26 March, they remounted a production of *The Wedding of the Painted Doll* (originally produced at Tamarkan back in August) for the whole camp. Gee thought it “a very scrappy effort” and was particularly taken with a Hawaiian scene: “(excellent décor by Digger Frank Bridges [sic]) featuring Eurasian Dutch, the Johnny Ockerse trio etc.”¹⁹⁶

On 2 April, Postma presented *Joop Lacht Weer (Joop Laughs Again)*—his first show since returning from his up country maintenance party. It had been originally scheduled for 21 March but was

postponed because the ashes of dead Japanese soldiers killed in the Allied offensive in Burma had been brought down the line and kept temporarily in the camp.¹⁹⁷



FIGURE 6.51. PROGRAM COVER FOR *JOOP LACHT WEER*. GEOFFREY GEE. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

To prove to Chungkai audiences they could do just as well as Britt and the others in producing a show, Postma laid on all the production values he could: sets by Uiterwijk, décor by Baart, lighting by Waller, costumes by Jimmy Olds and Puck Jonkmans, and wigs by Jansen.¹⁹⁸

A Hollywood Ending

On 12 April, Gee was enlisted to help create the décor for the next show—an Australian-British-Dutch co-production entitled *Hollywood Interlude*.¹⁹⁹ After watching a dress rehearsal two days later, he wrote, “It looks as if it will ring the bell and be a success.”²⁰⁰

The revue was structured around a series of parodies of well-known Hollywood films, such as “*Bengal Lancers*,” “*Tarzan*,” “*Roman Scandals*,” and film types, such as “*a Desert Scene*,” “*Cowboy Scene*,” ending with a “star-studded ‘Brown Derby’ finale” that included a Laurel and Hardy sketch.²⁰¹ When *Hollywood Interlude* opened on 16 April, it didn’t just “ring the bell”—it raised an alarm!

The Incident Report

Like the *Thai Diddle Diddle* debacle, accounts of what actually happened to put the future of the theatre and its activities in jeopardy differ. In his diary, Gee summarized the opening night’s performance and the disruption that occurred:

Show began—got off to a splendid start—“Hollywood gate”—“Bengal Lancers”—“Tarzan” (big success for Wally McQueen and Ron Wells) when Nip interpreter came on the scene, slapped the three characters front curtain and

stopped the show saying “Since when are you allowed to speak on the stage.” He went backstage, said “I shall dismantle the theatre tomorrow.” To be no speaking or costumes—so under difficulties the Swingtette adjusted themselves and within a few minutes an improvised show was under way. . . . It was a fine success and a big moral victory. The audience lapped it up.²⁰²

Wally Davis, who was in the Swingtette, described what he could remember of the offending sketch: “During the Tarzan Scene, Dorothy Lamour and Bing Crosby were singing a love song together when Wally Mcween [McQueen] an Australian dressed like a monkey swung down from the rafters, jumped up and down each time he kissed Bing, who sung louder because he thought it was Dorothy. The audience roared.”^{xxxviii203}

But it was cast member Philip Brugman who identified the exact nature of the offense:

For the monkey they used a short Scot, and the costume was so real except for the face with slanted eyes, so that the figure appeared like a monkey with a Jap face. (They had done this on purpose, of course.)

And when this “monkey” also uttered some Japanese shrieks, the fat was in the fire. A Japanese officer jumped on the stage and started using many swear words that nobody understood. Only his gestures were significant. The play had to stop, but the “monkey” carried on, making faces at the Jap, whereupon he pulled his sword in rage. He tried to hit the “monkey” who was too fast for him. The furious Jap, with pulled sword running after the monkey, was such a comical sight that the whole audience was dying of laughter, you can imagine. At long last more Japs got on stage and captured the poor “monkey” who was then dragged to the guard house where he got a beating.²⁰⁴

After the show Gee went backstage to see how the performers were faring: “[A]ll disappointed in the ‘Hollywood Interval’ [*sic* Interlude] had been going so well but spirits high and all pleased at way a good entertainment had been resurrected from the debris. Some hopeful of producing it again soon, some doubtful if any more shows but Amazing British spirit soaring high and we can only wait to see what it will come of it all.”^{xxxix205}

The performers were greatly puzzled by what had happened. They had typed off and submitted the script to Ishikura, the Japanese interpreter—nicknamed “Turtleneck”—for his approval as required, and it had been returned without comment and stamped with his seal.²⁰⁶ To them his seal meant they had permission to produce the revue as submitted. What they didn’t realize is that Ishikura thought it quite clear that no words could be used during a performance and, therefore, hadn’t bothered to look at the script. No one could recall when costumes had been banned.

With no Bill Pycock in their midst to negotiate a less drastic outcome, there was great concern that this time the threat to tear down the theatre would be carried out. Gee voiced the fears of many:

^{xxxviii} This was the monkey act McQueen had originally performed in “jungle shows” in Burma (see Chapter 4: *The Interval*).

^{xxxix} Gee actually wrote “interval” here, but given his observations about the show’s conclusion, the word choice doesn’t make sense.

What a tragedy if our theatre days are over—and as I see it, apart from an occasional band show it wouldn't be worth carrying on if costumes, décor, make-up etc. are all banned. The glory of Chungkai theatre may have tonight blazed itself out. . . . The show was going to be a wow. It would have most certainly rung the bell. . . . The pity of it! I'm awaiting eagerly to see what develops from the sad situation.²⁰⁷

The Outcome

The next day a conference in Ishii's office was attended by POW commander R.S.M. Edkin, bandmaster Neale (officer in charge of the theatre), their interpreter, and the Dutch officer Cor Punt.^{xl} Conflicting rumors about the conference and its outcome flew around the camp:

By mid-morning it seemed that things were going well and that last night's issue wasn't so dramatic after all. We felt certain that there was no longer any question of the theatre coming down—the Nips had complained of the Interpreter's intervention and he had more or less found himself in the wrong. Shows would continue as per usual and in the afternoon there was even rumour that "Hollywood Interlude" would go on tonight! Ron and Wally were all set for a quick favourable verdict if it should be forthcoming, so that all preparations would be ready for such an eventuality!

But, at 4 o'clock, bandmaster Neale (W.O. i/c theatre but useless) arrived there with a working party and began to demolish same. The Nip i/c said a new one was to be built and so Bill Bainbridge went along to H.Q. and he and Camp Commandant Edkin had an interview with some higher-up Nip who informed them of the sad news that the theatre would NOT be re-built and that concerts were finished. Nevertheless during the evening there was rumour of occasional band shows to be permitted with a mixture of European and Nippon music! We shall see.²⁰⁸

The Chungkai theatre wasn't just pulled down—large sections of it were burnt to the ground. "It was almost heart-breaking," Gee wrote, "for those of us who love the theatre and were wrapped up in its life here."²⁰⁹

Anticipating just such an outcome, that morning,

Jimmy Old and gang, Lee Coombe, etc. rescued the entire wardrobe and working tools etc. so that the great job of acquisition has not been completely undone, tho' stage props, wings, flie's [grid?], screens, etc. have all been burned. Naturally it had taken a long time to acquire the many props etc. and get the theatre into such an adaptable position—it adds to the tragedy but it is good that

^{xl} Wim Kan's close friend who had been in Tamarkan as N.E.I. adjutant.

most of the stuff has been salvaged, tho' I doubt if we're ever going to have the opportunity of using them again. . . .

And so a grand show "Hollywood Interlude" was ruined and Bill Bainbridge's big band show completely upset. The Dutch show, too, which was just getting into rehearsal, has now had it. Poor Ron, poor Bill and poor Joop.²¹⁰

Among those who watched the theatre's demolition were Philip Brugman and Joop Postma. "I remember clearly," Brugman recalled, "that Joop Postma and I looked at the fire with tears in our eyes . . . two and a half years of work gone, just because of revenge. . . . You can understand our feelings towards the yellow barbarians."²¹¹

For Gee, the sad historic occasion called for a eulogy:

And so a sorry end to our splendid theatre which has been the scene of so many big successes. Who could ever forget "Wonder Bar," "Night Must Fall," "Youth at the Helm," "Von Lach tot Lach" etc.? Or the grand fun to be had mixing with the many personalities who have contributed so much to the entertainment of this camp—of the little thrill to be got from painting scenery or helping in some way to give the shows that high standard that prevailed. . . . It's a sad sad business indeed and many of us were there to witness, for a while, its destruction but it wasn't much fun really, tho' we made light of it. These Nips can't possibly break our spirit (now as high as ever it was) no matter how hard they try or how much they do to us. We are invincible!²¹²

"You Can't Keep These Show Folks Down"

But the plucky entertainers at Chungkai were not to be so easily defeated. They were not going to disappoint the troops, especially those in hospital, who depended on their performances to keep morale high. Later that evening, Gee attended a little concert in the hospital's surgical ward: "You can't keep these show folks down," he exulted. "Ron Wells, Wally McQueen, Johnny & Alfonse Ochkerse [*sic*], Mike Sands etc."²¹³

Since the stagehouse was a large structure, its demolition took time. By the next day, 18 April, everything had been destroyed but the roof and its support posts. Gee was struck by "how deserted the place looks." That night he attended another concert in the surgical ward—"a happy evening with this infectiously gay gang"—and spoke with Ron Wells, who was optimistic "that we shall have entertainment again soon, having heard rumour of the departure soon of Ishi [Ishii] and the interpreter, but there's too much wishful thinking to that and I'm sure it's an extremely unlikely probably [probability?]. 'We've had it!'"²¹⁴

When Gee went to the theatre site two day later, the demolition was complete. Adding to his concern about the future of musical entertainment in the camp, Gee learned that Bill Bainbridge, instead of working on orchestrations for new shows as was his usual practice, was out on a working party.²¹⁵

The rumor concerning Lieutenant-Colonel Ishii proved accurate. He was promoted to full colonel and left Chungkai for Bangkok. The POWs were glad to see the back of him, “tho’ it’s too late, I guess,” Gee reflected, “now that we’ve lost our theatre.”²¹⁶ But with the music-loving Kokubo back in charge, the ban on entertainment for the whole camp might change.

On 23 April when Commandant Edkin received his orders for the day, he was puzzled to find that the evening *tenko* was scheduled for 7 p.m. When he asked why the time change he was told, “It’s a show night, isn’t it?” whereupon Cadder Parfitt was called in and got a band show together for an 8 o’clock concert.” Unfortunately, at performance time, it was drizzling. The entertainers asked if the concert could be postponed and were told no—but that it could be held in one of the hospital wards instead, with the proviso that only patients could attend. So the band held their concert in Gee’s malaria ward, and there “were hundreds in the audience who weren’t patients!”²¹⁷

“What a strange and ludicrous position the Nips have put us in,” Gee mused. “They pull down our theatre and then say you can have a show!”²¹⁸ Though time for rehearsal became “practically nil,” weekly band concerts resumed.²¹⁹

“We’ve Had It!”

To ensure that only band shows would be produced, Joop Postma, Philip Brugman, Wally McQueen, and other members of the offending Australian-British-Dutch concert party were sent down to Tamuang. There, the troupe eventually performed once again, and those who got bashed up following the *Hollywood Interlude* incident would get their own back on Ishikura and his kind.^{xli}

At some point, the Swingtette sought and received permission to build a new theatre on the same site as the old one. It was not a proscenium theatre but one of the old open-air platform stages with woven mats at the back and sides to act as sounding boards. Gee was asked to create décor for the weekly shows.²²⁰

By the end of May, Medical Officer Robert Hardie voiced concern about the state of the returning maintenance parties: “Desperately sick men continue to arrive here from up-country camps—the usual complaints, ulcers, vitamin deficiency, constant malaria, severe anaemia. New parties are formed from time to time to go up to replace these men sent down.”²²¹

Geoffrey Gee and Huib van Laar were two of those replacements. On 10 June, Gee was sent up the line to Linson Camp/203 Kilo on a wood-cutting party; van Laar to Kran Krai/250 Kilo. With Gee’s departure, we lose his detailed account of the final days of entertainment in Chungkai. Drummer Wally Davis picks up the story.

In June another wave of paranoia engulfed the Japanese. This time they claimed the entertainers were communicating covert messages about the war through the titles of their selections, and public performances were temporarily banned once again. “We continued for a while,” Davis wrote, “but as Bill [Bainbridge] kept getting bashed up before we could find the interpreter to explain such things as ‘Tale[s] of Hoffman,’ or ‘Vienna Woods,’ but finished up by just the ‘Swingtette’ going round the Hospital Huts.”²²²

When the Japanese banned prisoners from gathering in groups outside the hospital huts to listen to the concerts, another heated debate “causing almost fights” took place between the POWs who were in favor of continuing the entertainment and those who were not.²²³ This time the arguments “against” won the day and no further concert parties at Chungkai took place.

In late June, the I. J. A. decided to close the camp and the Swingtette musicians rejoined Joop Postma, Ron Wells, and the other entertainers at the relocation camp at Tamuang. By the first of July,

^{xli} See Chapter 11: “Precious Personalities.”

Chungkai was abandoned to the jungle—and “to the chattering birds and the flying tree rats.”²²⁴

Endnotes

- 1 Richard Sharp, 53.
- 2 Coast, 181.
- 3 Gotla, Letter, 8 July 2001.
- 4 John Sharp, 3 June 1944.
- 5 Coast, 181.
- 6 John Sharp, 29 May 1944.
- 7 Coast, 181–182.
- 8 Coast, 181; Peacock, 225.
- 9 Richardson, “Memories Bittersweet,” 165.
- 10 Durnford, 145–147; Richardson, Memoir, 165.
- 11 Durnford, 147.
- 12 John Sharp, 29 May 1944.
- 13 Smith, 121–122.
- 14 Coast, 181.
- 15 De Wardener, Interview, 21.
- 16 De Wardener, Interview, 21.
- 17 De Wardener, Additions from his vetting of the chapter, 19, 20 March and 15 August 2011; 8 April 2012.
- 18 Coast, 181.
- 19 Davis, n.p.
- 20 Hardie, 28 May 1944.
- 21 Gee, Diary, 27 May 1944.
- 22 Davis, n.p.
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- 24 Richard Sharp, 52.
- 25 John Sharp, 27 May 1944.
- 26 John Sharp, 27 May 1944.
- 27 Tom Boardman, Interview, 57.
- 28 Tom Boardman, Questionnaire, 3–4.
- 29 John Sharp, 5 June 1944.
- 30 Richardson, Diary, 5 June 1944.
- 31 John Sharp, Diary, 6 June 1944; Gee, Diary, 5 June 1944.
- 32 Owtram, 104–105.
- 33 John Sharp, 6 June 1944.
- 34 Gee, Diary, 5 June 1944.
- 35 Richardson, Diary, 5 June 1944.
- 36 Richardson, Diary, 22 August 1942.
- 37 Gee, Diary, 8 June 1944.
- 38 Gee, Diary, 5 June 1944.
- 39 Hardie, “Biographical Index.”
- 40 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 101.
- 41 Richard Sharp, 53–54.
- 42 Gee, Diary, 13 June 1944.
- 43 Richardson, Diary, 16 June 1944.
- 44 John Sharp, Diary, 19 June 1944.
- 45 John Sharp, Diary, 20 June 1944.
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- 47 Gee, Diary, 19 June 1944.
- 48 Hardie, Diary, 26 June 1944.
- 49 Gee, Diary, 23 June 1944.
- 50 Coast, 182.
- 51 De Wardener, Interview, 26–30.
- 52 Coast, 182.
- 53 Tom Boardman, Interview, 42.
- 54 Chippington, 401.
- 55 De Wardener, Interview, 46.
- 56 Owtram, 105.
- 57 Gotla, Letter, 6 March 2001.
- 58 Coast, 182.
- 59 Richard Sharp, 53.
- 60 Coast, 182.
- 61 Gee, Diary, 7 July 1944.
- 62 Coast, 185–186.
- 63 Coast, 186.
- 64 Coast, 186–187.
- 65 Richardson, Diary, 15 July 1944.
- 66 John Sharp, Diary, 20 June 1944.
- 67 John Sharp, Diary, 23–25 June 1944.
- 68 John Sharp, Diary, 28 June 1944.
- 69 Marsh, Diary, 22 July 1944.
- 70 Coast, 181.
- 71 Richardson, Diary, 22 July 1944.
- 72 John Sharp, Diary, 26–28 July 1944.
- 73 Johnston, 113.
- 74 Coast, 200.
- 75 Coast, 182.
- 76 Coast, 182.
- 77 John Sharp, Diary, 31 July 1944.
- 78 John Sharp, Diary, 2 August 1944.
- 79 John Sharp, Diary, 12 August 1944.
- 80 Thorpe, Letters, 26, 29 September 2002.
- 81 Richardson, Diary, 19 August 1944; Marsh, Diary, 4 October 1944.
- 82 John Sharp, Diary, 27 August 1944.
- 83 Coast, 192.
- 84 Coast, 192.
- 85 Coast, 192.
- 86 Coast, 192–193.
- 87 Davis, n.p.
- 88 Richardson, Diary, 1 September 1944; Tom Boardman, Interview, 47.
- 89 Terry Morris, Self-Interview #1, 5.
- 90 Richardson, Diary, 8 September 1944.
- 91 Coast, 193–194.
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- 100 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, 21 February 1988.
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- 105 John Sharp, Diary, 6 October 1944.
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- 109 Baker, "Extracts from 'A Memoir,'" 5.
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- 111 Richardson, Diary, 2 October 1944.
- 112 Gee, Diary, 8 October 1944.
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- 117 Gee, Diary, 20 October 1944.
- 118 Gee, Diary, 28 October 1944.
- 119 Gee, Diary, 28 October 1944; see also Gee's poster for the show.
- 120 Gee, Diary, 10 October 1944.
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- 123 Gee, Diary, 28 October 1944.
- 124 Gee, Diary, 4 November 1944.
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- 126 Gee, Diary, 5 November 1944.
- 127 John Sharp, Diary, 14, 20 October 1944.
- 128 Gee, Diary, 10 November 1944.
- 129 Richardson, Diary, 11 November 1944.
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- 140 Baker, "Extracts from 'A Memoir,'" 14.
- 141 Richardson, Diary, 18 December 1944.
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- 144 Richard Sharp, 60.
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- 148 Richard Sharp, 60.

- 149 Richardson, Diary, 25 December 1944.
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- 151 Owtram, 106–107.
- 152 Owtram, 107.
- 153 Owtram, 108.
- 154 Baker, “Extracts from ‘A Memoir,’” 14.
- 155 Baker, “Extracts from ‘A Memoir,’” 14.
- 156 John Sharp, Diary, 5 January 1945.
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- 158 Coast, 207.
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- 160 Coast, 208.
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- 171 Carter, 182.
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- 176 Baker, “Extracts from ‘A Memoir,’” 17–18.
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- 186 Coast, 208.
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- 193 John Sharp, Diary, 21 February 1945.
- 194 Gee, Diary, 5 March 1945.
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- 197 Gee, Diary, 2 April 1945.
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- 199 Gee, Diary, 12–14 April, 1945.

- 200 Gee, Diary, 14 April 1945.
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