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## Chapter 10. Strike a New Note!": Kachu Mountain and Ubon

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## Chapter 10: “Strike a New Note!”

### Kachu Mountain and Ubon

In early 1945, fit and light sick POWs from the hospital and relocation camps were redeployed to new locations in Thailand to construct airfields for the Japanese Air Force. These airfields would be used to defend the Japanese Army if a full retreat from Burma became necessary or in the event of any Allied invasions of Thailand and Malaya. The aerodrome camps at Kachu Mountain and Ubon are of particular interest because they contained a number of musicians and theatrical performers whose activities have been noted elsewhere. They offer a look at how these individuals continued the fight to keep fellow POWs' morale high at the start of their fourth year of captivity.

What is evident from the sources on Kachu Mountain, at least, is a war-weariness that weighed heavily on everyone, prisoners and captors alike. One of the Korean guards would tell the POWs, “Me No. 1 prisoner—prisoner all day, guard all night.”<sup>1</sup> This wasn't the only evidence of poor morale among the Japanese troops. Besides a general lack of discipline, the POWs noticed the guards looked shoddy, as they were wearing patched uniforms.

After months rehabilitating in rest camps, the renewed heavy work schedules and deficiencies in food, clothing, and medical supplies would take some POWs back to their earlier days on the railway—not an association that was good for morale. And building airfields whose “planes would be used against any Allied invasion and hinder our release,” Laurie Allison believed, “seemed to affect people more than the railway work.”<sup>2</sup>

New players in the military theatre of operation were the Free Thai guerillas. The fear that Allied military personnel had parachuted into Thailand under the cover of bombing raids to organize and lead a guerilla movement put the Japanese on high alert. Their recent losses to the advancing British forces in Burma might embolden the guerillas to take action. Attacks on the camps might free POWs to join those fighting forces.

Since the POWs at Kachu Mountain and Ubon did not have secret radios available, they were completely cut off from direct news about the ongoing status of the war, which only increased their sense of isolation and abandonment.

### Kachu Mountain Aerodrome Camp

Kachu Mountain Aerodrome Camp was located some one hundred miles south of Bangkok at the beginning of the Kra Peninsula near a town called Phetchaburi; many of the POWs knew the camp by that name.<sup>i</sup> Douglas Harris remembered it was called Kachu Mountain Camp, “after a large mountain on the plains a few miles distant. On top of Kashu [*sic*] Mount itself was a tall white pagoda, evidently a landmark for our planes; often on moonlight nights we would hear them overhead and then hear them change direction as they reached the Pagoda.”<sup>3</sup> Because of its role in guiding Allied bombers to their targets, Kachu Mountain with its white pagoda became a beacon of hope for the POWs.

<sup>i</sup> Also called by the POWs *Petburi*, *Phetburi*, or *Petchburi*.



FIGURE 10.1. AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE PHOTOGRAPH OF KACHU MOUNTAIN CAMP. COURTESY OF TOM BOARDMAN.

This aerial reconnaissance photograph of Kachu Mountain Camp was taken later in 1945 when the camp was fully operational. Visible in the distance is the mountain from which the camp got its name.

Situated on a plain in the midst of former rice paddies, Kachu Mountain was not a pleasant location. When Laurie Allison arrived from Chungkai in mid-February, he described it as “flat, hot and dusty.”<sup>4</sup> John Sharp, arriving a few days later, wrote, “Camp is little more than a clearing with a row of huts for our men, and a few others—eleven hundred prisoners (500 British, 600 Australian).” One interesting feature of the camp Sharp noted was that it was not surrounded by a bamboo fence but by a *zareba* (thorn fence). The I. J. A. commandant, Lieutenant Ishito, was rumored to be “well-meaning” but ineffectual. The POW administration was headed by Lieutenant R. Davidson, an Australian.<sup>ii</sup> Their interpreter, Mitsushita, had been educated in the United States.<sup>iii5</sup> The other ranks’ workforce was composed of Australians from Tamarkan and British drafts and volunteers from Chungkai.

Since Kachu Mountain was meant to be a temporary work camp, it contained only limited facilities and amenities: “new latrines were not allowed to be dug, nor a barber’s shop built.”<sup>6</sup> As it was not situated near a river, a well was dug in the camp, but the chronic shortage of water and inadequate number of latrines would eventually cause serious health problems.

Under Lieutenant Ishito, the Koreans guarding the camp had become so lax in their duties that the flogging of camp goods by POWs through the thorn fence to local Thais for extra food was endemic. Fearing the Japanese would take reprisals on their fruit and vegetable rations if this activity continued, the POW administration established its own internal police force to put a stop to it. By 11 March the camp had increased to 2,281 POWs with 831 of these in hospital.<sup>7</sup> The POW administration was disturbed by the

<sup>ii</sup> He may have been in charge at Kachu Mountain before officers were ordered to Kanburi.

<sup>iii</sup> Mitsushita, who still had a wife and family in the States, occasionally visited “the American quarters for a chat” [J. Sharp, *Diary*, 4 March 1945].

number of light sick being sent from Chungkai to work. Having just come from Chungkai himself, John Sharp understood why: “[The administration] Don’t realize that the opportunity was taken at Chungkai to get rid of them.”<sup>8</sup>

To construct the airfield, the POWs had to hand-drill and break stones from a nearby quarry to ballast the airstrip. Both sites were several miles away from the camp. Local Thais were employed on these sites as well, and their attitude toward the Japanese was noted by Sharp as “very impudent,” indicating that the Japanese had lost the good will of the Thai people at this point in the war—if they ever had it.<sup>9</sup>

### **Ubon Aerodrome Camp**

Ubon Aerodrome Camp was located outside the town of Ubon Ratchatani, some 390 miles northeast of Bangkok. The first draft of other ranks and medical officers arrived in Ubon from Nong Pladuk on 26 February. By the middle of March the transfer of troops would be complete. Major Chida, who had been the I. J. A. commandant in Nong Pladuk, remained in charge at Ubon. Unlike at Kachu Mountain, the POW administration at Ubon was in the hands of two noncommissioned officers. Before leaving for Kanburi Officers’ Camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Toosey had made an unusual decision about who should be in charge at Ubon: though several medical officers would remain with the other ranks when they were evacuated, Toosey turned over command of his British and Australian troops to his Regimental Sergeant Major A. McTavish and the N.E.I. troops to Warrant Officer 1 S. J. Slotboom.<sup>10</sup>

Since no previous camp existed at Ubon, the first order of business for the POWs was to build their living quarters, cookhouse, and canteen. But the Japanese insisted that they start work on the two airfields immediately; their own needs had to take second place. Until accommodation huts were built, they would camp out in the open paddy fields.<sup>11</sup> For William Wilder, the first months at Ubon were miserable:

No huts, Sleep in open. Just too bad if it’s wet. Some time before they [accommodation huts] will be ready. Work on an aerodrome about 7 or 8 miles away. March both ways. . . . A camp to build and an aerodrome. Doesn’t look as if the war will end soon. Cold at night, hot in the day. I haven’t enough clothes to keep warm. Shirt and shorts are in rags. I’m in a bad way.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after the POWs’ arrival an Australian other ranks was caught trying to escape and subsequently executed. Before their time at Ubon was over, there would be another attempted escape, this time by an Englishman, who would suffer the same fate. Both events placed severe restrictions on the lives of the POWs who remained in Ubon.

### **Entertainment Efforts at Kachu Mountain**

When Laurie Allison arrived at Kachu Mountain in February, he noticed a small platform stage near the entrance of the camp.<sup>13</sup> John Sharp reported that a “Concert at night” took place on 28 February and another on 15 March, but these early concerts were no more than halfhearted affairs with single artists and emceed sing-alongs.<sup>14</sup>

After living in the Kachu Mountain camp for a little over two weeks, Sharp recorded some troubling observations about the physical and psychological effects of a drawn-out war on the POWs:

“a noticeable deterioration in discipline, conduct (urinating in public, etc.) and mental ability.”<sup>15</sup> Allison believed the depressing atmosphere in the camp compounded these deficiencies. “Of all my POW camps,” he wrote, “Petburi was the most hopeless. . . . [It] lacked the attractions of other camps with very little in-hut discussions and there was a more morose attitude among its inhabitants.”<sup>16</sup>

Allison nearly died at Kachu Mountain. He was diagnosed by medical officer Hugh de Wardener with malaria and pneumonia, but there was no medicine to treat him. That he did not die was thanks to a mate, Peter Gwillim, whose visits with food and companionship strengthened his will to live. Placed on water-carrying detail to other sick patients as he recovered, Allison remembered, “the remainder of my stay was confused and pretty lifeless.”<sup>17</sup>

If the deterioration in discipline and mental ability and the morose attitude continued, many of the POWs would not have the will to carry on. Faced with the stress of another construction project, an erratic food supply, and scarce medical supplies after the respite of 1944, when many POWs had regained some semblance of normalcy, there had been a rapid regression to the mental condition of the terrible “Speedo” days on the railway. The few impromptu concerts on the makeshift stage were not proving adequate to combat the slide toward despair.

In a replay of arguments used by POW commandants during the railway construction, Lieutenant Davidson informed Ishito that if steps weren’t take soon to address the morale problem, there wouldn’t be enough workers left to complete the airfield. As in the past, one of the remedies proposed was to establish a concert party. And, as had happened in those railway camps, its approval produced an immediate positive effect on the POWs. “Word of mouth enquiries soon sparked off interest,” Tom Boardman recalled, “and with the prospect of ‘camp duties’ sufficient talent was soon recruited by interviews or past records.”<sup>18</sup>

### “The White Pagoda Players”

On 21 March, formation of “The White Pagoda Players” was announced. The group was composed of performers, designers, and technicians who had previously been involved with concert parties at Tamarkan and Chungkai, along with an assortment of new faces.

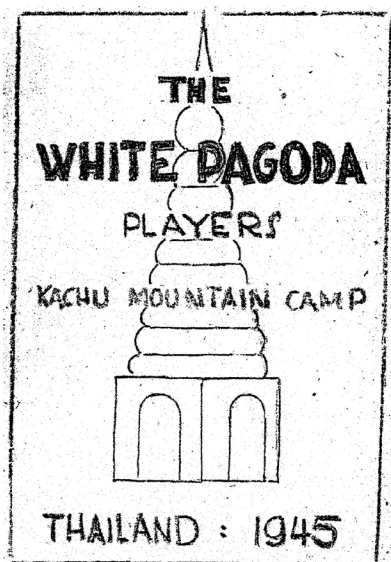


FIGURE 10.2. PROSPECTUS FOR “THE WHITE PAGODA PLAYERS.” COURTESY OF JOHN SHARP.

An elaborate prospectus for the new concert party detailed the membership: Lieutenant Nelson was officer in charge with a production staff of four.<sup>iv</sup> Musical direction was under the leadership of Tony Gerrish, the dance band leader from Tamarkan, whose ensemble included the U.S. Navy musician G. L. Galyean. Four musical groups were proposed: a “Theatre Orchestra” of seven players; a “Tzicane [Hungarian Gypsy] Orchestra” of eight mandolins and ukuleles; a quartet who called themselves “The Lost Chords”; and a ten-member male chorus conducted by Stan Arlett.

Five producers were announced, among whom were Keith Neighbour and Leo Britt.<sup>v</sup> “Maestro” Britt had volunteered for deployment to Kachu Mountain when censorship restrictions at Chungkai forbidding any words spoken from the stage became intolerable. No such restrictions were in effect at Kachu Mountain. Although Medical Officer Dudley Gotla was also in the camp, he did not become one of the producers, though he did perform in shows.

Twenty men were listed as “Players.” Among the British performers from Chungkai were Sandy Munnoch, Hugh de Wardener, Keith Neighbour, and Tom Boardman. From Tamarkan came the Australians Jim F. Anderson, Johnnie Branchflower, R. F. Clare, A. J. Copson, and Val Middleton.<sup>19</sup>

Tom Boardman came into his own as a performer at Kachu Mountain. He played in all the musical groups, sang in “The Lost Chords,” and was a bit player in sketches. While at Kachu Mountain, he would give his smaller camp-made ukulele—the one he had played up country to entertain the troops—to Leo Britt and play instead the larger one he had constructed at Chungkai just before leaving.<sup>20</sup>

All in all, the White Pagoda Players prospectus lists a total of fifty-odd men, a formidable group of entertainers for such a small camp. With five producers and a production staff responsible for costumes, scenery, props, makeup, etc., the players were imagining themselves as a full-blown Chungkai- or Tamarkan-style concert party, with high expectations for what they would be able to achieve.

## A New Theatre

One of the first items of business for the new concert party was to construct a proscenium theatre to replace the platform stage. Like the first theatre at Tamarkan, it would be a shed-like structure with a flat roof instead of a pitched one.<sup>21</sup> When finished it was dubbed “The White Pagoda Theatre.” Shows could only take place in the afternoon or early evening, as lights would attract Allied aircraft. Since the POWs were allowed only one yasume every ten days, the first concert was announced for 1 April.<sup>22</sup>

By 29 March, the work on the airfield was nearly finished, but a rumor was circulating that the POWs would next be put to work building a second one nearby.<sup>23</sup>

## Entertainment Delayed at Ubon

The beginning of April found the POW camp at Ubon still unfinished, and Charles Steel wrote in his diary, “Restrictions are now very tight. Plenty of nit-picking, the worst being the order to crop our hair. You wouldn’t recognize me, I’m sure.<sup>vi</sup> Men are very badly off for clothes now—many almost naked.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>iv</sup> T. P. Crankshaw, wardrobe; Keith Neighbour, décor; H. B. Reay, makeup; L. V. C. Luff, props and scenery; and J. H. Pi?? [unreadable], stage manager.

<sup>v</sup> Other names are unreadable.

<sup>vi</sup> Steel composed his diary entries as letters to his wife.



FIGURE 10.3. NORMAN PRITCHARD. SKETCH BY JAN VAN HOLTHE.  
COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

This sketch of Norman Pritchard by Jan van Holthe shows the close-cropped hair required in Ubon.

Unlike Kachu Mountain, Major Chida had not yet given permission for the large contingent of British and Dutch/Indonesian entertainers from Nong Pladuk to reorganize. Waiting eagerly in the wings were the Harboured Lights veterans “Ace” Connolly and his “Kings of Swing” (including the extraordinary song and musical comedy writer-producer Bob Gale); “Wizardus” (magician Fergus Anckorn); the comedians Hank and Frank, as well as the Dutch comic De Zwart; the brilliant solo violinist Nico Brunz; and the female impersonators Basil Ferron and “Skippy”—plus a host of other British and Dutch/Indonesian performers. And, of course, the amazing technical staff led by Jock Cameron and the publicity and set design team of Norman Pritchard and Jan van Holthe. When concert party activities were allowed to resume, the troupe members’ prior working relationship would prove of enormous benefit in generating new and exciting shows. In the meantime, everyone was engaged full time in either building the camp or working on the aerodromes.

### The White Pagoda Players in Production

The first show by the White Pagoda Players at Kachu Mountain opened on 1 April. Nothing is known about it—its title was not recorded by John Sharp in his diary, although he continued to write detailed entries that offer an insider’s view of daily life in the camp.<sup>25</sup> As Leo Britt was the group’s most experienced producer, it’s very likely this was his first production in the camp.

Back in Chungkai, Britt had been in final rehearsals with Sutton Vane’s *Outward Bound* when the theatre was suddenly closed and all the officers sent off to Kanburi. Without the officers, who were the mainstay of his cast, any chance of his production going ahead became impossible. But he was not going to be foiled in producing a show he had become passionate about. He would leave Chungkai and remount

the show at Kachu Mountain with the group of British and Australian actors who were leaving with him. To that end it's possible he took all the scripts, costumes, and even the painted backdrop for the aborted Chungkai production with him.

The cast for his new production came from a pool of excellent performers that included British medical officers Dudley Gotla, Hugh de Wardener, and Leslie Stock and British RSM Sandy Munnoch, and Australians Keith Neighbour, Pat Fox,<sup>vii</sup> and bandmaster Tony Gerrish.

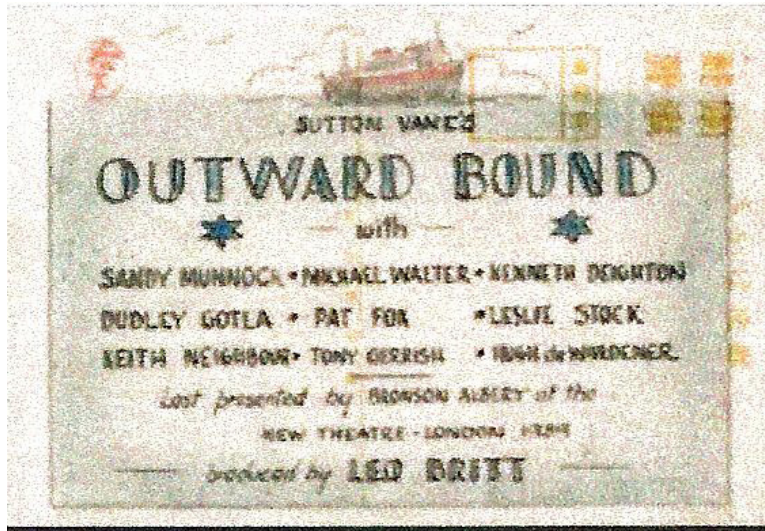


FIGURE 10.4. SMALL POSTER FOR *OUTWARD BOUND*. KEITH NEIGHBOUR. COURTESY OF GUDRUN TAMANDL.

This small poster for *Outward Bound* was painted by Keith Neighbour to advertise the show. There are posters for three other shows performed at Kachu Mountain also painted by Keith Neighbour, but since there are no dates on any of them, and Sharp didn't always record show titles in his diary, they will simply be listed here. They are: *They Come And They Go* and *The Citadel* (both produced by Keith Neighbour) and an unreadable title for a show that featured the Tzicane Orchestra.<sup>viii</sup>

### The War: Abroad and at Home

The rumor about an additional airfield construction project proved accurate. Sharp, Boardman, and others were sent to the new site to begin work.<sup>ix</sup> Here, as on other occasions, the local Thais secretly tried to keep the POWs informed of the conduct of the war. A Thai official visiting the new site one day wrote the latest war news about Germany, Burma, and the Philippines in the dirt with a stick. They also heard “that Tamarkan had been bombed again; also Wampo viaduct and shelf were demolished and lying in the river.”<sup>26</sup>

Back “home,” life at Kachu Mountain itself was becoming hazardous. When a new I. J. A. headquarters was built a short distance from Kachu Mountain camp, the Free Thai guerillas found a way to put the Japanese on notice that they were in the area and could take action whenever they wished. On 12 April “two Japanese guards were reported murdered on old 'drome and one missing,” noted Sharp. In

<sup>vii</sup> Since his name does not appear in the *White Pagoda Players* prospectus, the Australian singer Pat Fox must have arrived in Kachu Mountain shortly after the formation of that company.

<sup>viii</sup> This information has been taken from a photograph of a collage of posters supplied by Keith Neighbour's wife, Gudrun Tamandl.

<sup>ix</sup> Boardman's inclusion on this draft may suggest that not all the *White Pagoda Players* were placed on light camp duties after all.



retaliation, nine Thais were arrested and interrogated with the use of water torture.<sup>27</sup>

If a concert party was given on 10 April, there is no record of it. Sharp did note, though, the news that the POWs would be given a half-yasume every fifteen days in addition to their full yasume every ten days—another opportunity for concerts. But this new ruling would not go into effect until June.<sup>28</sup>

### “Strike a New Note”

Lieutenant Ishito’s lack of discipline in running Kachu Mountain had not gone unnoticed at I. J. A. headquarters. On 20 April, a high-ranking officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Fukujima, arrived to take over the camp, which indicates that the runways under construction at Kachu Mountain had increased in strategic importance as the Japanese army’s losses in Burma increased. Rumor had it that Fukujima, in contrast to Ishito, was “a stern disciplinarian.”<sup>29</sup> Fukujima intended to “strike a new note” by restoring military discipline and whipping his POW workforce into shape.

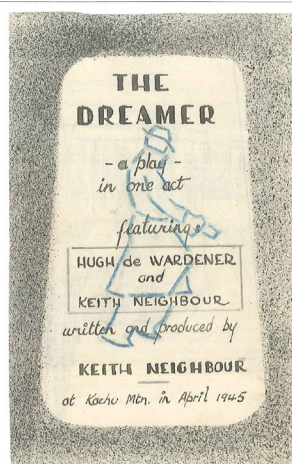


FIGURE 10.5. PROGRAM COVER FOR *THE DREAMER*. KEITH NEIGHBOUR. COURTESY OF GUDRUN TAMANDL.

The White Pagoda Players’ show scheduled for that evening was cancelled due to heavy rain—evidence that another monsoon season was fast approaching. It was to have been an original one-act play, *The Dreamer*, written by Keith Neighbour, starring himself and Hugh de Wardener. For some reason it appears never to have been produced: no one among the FEPOWs at Kachu Mountain, including de Wardener, remembered anything about it, and the extant program does not contain a playbill.

One of Colonel Fukujima’s first acts as commandant was to rescind Ishito’s order allowing the British reveille bugle call.<sup>30</sup> Two days later, during a camp inspection, he visited the POW cemetery, which he found in a disgusting state and for which he immediately donated five dollars for flowers to rectify the situation.<sup>31</sup>

With Fukujima now in charge, the POW medical officers made a pitch for changes to the food situation, warning “that if the diet doesn’t improve, serious illness though lack of vitamins will result.” Fukujima agreed with their assessment and promised to do what he could about it.<sup>32</sup> Thinking he was in the giving mood, the POW administration tried once again to secure approval for lectures in the huts, but this request was denied. On 23 April, the monsoon rains arrived in full force and flooded part of the camp.<sup>33</sup> In spite of the rain—and revealing his military mindset—Fukujima ordered air-raid trenches dug.

The emperor’s birthday was celebrated on 29 April, and the POWs at Kachu Mountain were all

given special *presentos* in honor of this event: “2 eggs, 2 packets Red Cross tobacco (our own!) And an extra bullock, making three.” The day’s festivities included a cricket match and a demonstration of the Japanese martial art *kendo*, understood as “bayonet fighting” by Sharp. As usual, the concert party was required to present a show. Its title, *Mountain Music*, was meant to focus the POWs’ attention, not on the emperor, but on Kachu Mountain with its white pagoda—and all that it signified about the defeat of the Japanese and the end of their captivity.”<sup>34</sup>

At the beginning of May, Fukujima ordered a high bamboo fence constructed around the camp with an earthen bund and moat inside it.<sup>35</sup> Suspicious that the POWs were disobeying his orders regarding activities permitted in their living quarters, he sent the Japanese interpreter, Mitsushita, “around the huts before lights out presumably to detect any singing or lectures which are forbidden.”<sup>36</sup>

On 9 May, ballasting began on the new aerodrome runway, what Sharp called a “tedious job—task of 25 square yards to one hundred men,” so the concert the next evening was a welcome relief. It was a new Leo Britt production called *Strike A New Note*.<sup>37</sup>



FIGURE 10.6. HAND-DRAWN AND COLORED POSTER FOR *STRIKE A NEW NOTE*. COURTESY OF JOHN SHARP.

A roughly drawn, hand-colored poster on scrap paper advertised the show and its highlights as Leo Britt’s “Third Little Show.” With its title, Britt alerted his audience that he had heard their complaints and made a concerted effort to “strike a new note” with the show’s content. Given their workload and present physical and psychological condition, the POWs wanted entertainment that would be fast-paced and laugh-filled, rather than another wordy drama that demanded too much concentration. Kachu Mountain was a work camp, not a hospital convalescent camp.

Britt’s “new note” was a variety show that brought immediate pleasure with a sparkling array of turns. The music was presented by the popular singer Pat Fox<sup>x</sup> as well as Tony Gerrish’s “Swingette,”

<sup>x</sup> It is interesting to note that Pat Fox’s name does not appear on the White Pagoda Players prospectus

with vocals by Jim Anderson. This time Hugh de Wardener would deliver a comedic monologue, and Branchflower, Copson, and Ballanger (“And Full Supporting Cast”), a short one-act play. Other performers gave a radio show version of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Kachu Mountain’s own “Crazy Gang” appeared in a wild farce with uproarious topical references, and Segal and Nelson delivered a sketch based on the American singer Sophie Tucker’s old standby number, “My Yiddisha Momma!”<sup>xi</sup>

At the moment, the grand scheme for a Chungkai- or Tamarkan-style theatre—with elaborate sets and costumes—was not working out. Resources like bamboo and atap to make scenery and props and fabric to make costumes had proven impossible to come by. All Laurie Allison, who was “billeted in the last hut directly in front of the stage,”<sup>38</sup> could remember about the theatre in his “confused” state was that the theatre was “always empty with a drooping atap roof.”<sup>39</sup> Given this situation, Britt felt it was important to point out that *Strike A New Note* was a “little” show, because he still had plans to produce “big” shows.

### Entertainment Starts at Ubon

Meanwhile, at Ubon the airfield and camp construction had progressed to a point where Major Chida allowed the entertainers to start producing shows for the benefit of the camp. Their first was an *Impromptu Show* on 12 May, followed by another a week later.<sup>xii</sup> “Everything was in flux at the time,” recalled Fergus Anckorn, “we hadn’t even got a stage at one stage. So they said, ‘Well, let’s put on a show tonight of some sort.’ And they would make something up and we would all do a bit.”<sup>40</sup>

In one of these early shows, a magic act by “Wizardus” produced some childish delight: “At Ubon I borrowed a hat and after showing it empty produced from it 3 live kittens.”<sup>41</sup> In another, one of the comedians got them in serious trouble:

*Now in some camps we weren’t allowed to laugh, ever. If you laughed, they suspected you were laughing at them, and you could end up being beaten. So, no laughter. And we would get comedians on the stage, trying to make us laugh, and we’re busting a gut not to laugh. It was hilarious.*

*And I remember on one occasion, this bloke was marching up and down . . . he had a little cane [swagger stick] under his arm . . . he was pretending to be an officer. And the Japs thought that he was making . . . knocking the mickey out of them (they used to carry canes). So they went up on stage and beat him up. And then we laughed.*<sup>42</sup>

In retaliation for this infraction of the no-laughing rule, shows were banned for several weeks.<sup>43</sup>

During the hiatus, Dental Officer “Toothy” Martin, who had participated in shows at Nong Pladuk, sought permission for the POWs to build a theatre. Once approved, the entertainers went right to work and discovered they had plenty of volunteers who “were pleased to help as it gave them something to do.”<sup>44</sup> This project would keep them busy until the ban was lifted.

<sup>xi</sup> The subject of this skit suggests that Segal and Nelson may have been Americans.

<sup>xii</sup> Besides the interviews with Fergus Anckorn and Norman Pritchard and the scenic designs of Jan van Holthe and Pritchard, the only knowledge we have of what shows were produced at Ubon comes from a hand-printed list in one of the souvenir programs for the shows at Nong Pladuk now thought to have been kept by the performer Fred Knightley [IWM Misc 116 Item 1834].

### Mixed Blessings at Kachu Mountain

Back at Kachu Mountain, Colonel Fukujima's insistence on the strictest discipline was proving a mixed blessing. On the negative side was the fact that his administrative staff, frequent recipients of his harsh treatment, took out their frustrations on those lower down the chain of command, and those men, in turn, on whoever was beneath them. The last links in the chain were, of course, the POWs. John Sharp detailed the outcomes:

13.5 Incident on bund—eight men beaten savagely with spade because at break they didn't lay down tools in prescribed fashion.

14.5 Tightening up of discipline—no smoking on parade, no eating during rest-breaks—no carrying home pig-weed, firewood, etc. into the camp. We must march in 4's smartly, saluting CO's seat in Japanese office and also his house when passing. M.O's recently surprised at 3 a.m. by search party.<sup>45</sup>

As a consequence, some of the POWs reverted to ever more desperate measures to survive, as they had during railway construction days: "Scarcity of men with any integrity now—most are in some racket (cookhouse, canteen, etc)," noted Sharp.<sup>46</sup>

On the positive side, Fukujima's resolve to shape up the camp was making life in Kachu Mountain much more agreeable.

20.5. The colonel has given orders for (1) roofing the latrine (2) building a barbers shop and a canteen (3) raising and roofing paths from one hut to another. He has bought a Thai pony and employs an Australian groom with permission to ride it. Yasumi [*sic*] today from 1 o'clock—slat bashing, anti-cholera inoculations, and search (on the square—and me with my diary tied round my belly). This was the worst *quart d'heure* I have ever spent (I think)—the guards came round patting us to see if we had anything concealed on us !!!!<sup>47</sup>

Luckily, Sharp's diary escaped detection. The compulsion of men like Sharp to take this risk so that an account of their horrific life during those lost years would be preserved was truly brave—and, perhaps, foolhardy—but we would be much the poorer without these records of endurance.

On 20 May, a scheduled half-yasume day, the afternoon show was *Sunny Side Up*.

### "I Also Am a Prisoner"

Like Major Chida at Ubon, Lieutenant-Colonel Fukujima's behavior in Kachu Mountain revealed him to be a more interesting and complex person than original thought. As a Japanese officer, he was intent on running his camp along strict military lines and on treating the POWs under his command according to the guidelines laid out in the Geneva Convention. At the same time that he instituted an exacting code of

discipline, he also distributed Red Cross clothing and food, including chickens from the Japanese kitchens, to the POWs. (This is the basis for Jim Whittaker's memory that Kachu Mountain was a good camp: "the food was better than in many of the Burma camps and we were able to purchase duck eggs, bananas and some other locally available produce."<sup>48</sup>)

But an interesting entry in John Sharp's diary reveals the private face behind Fukujima's public face. "Colonel has a mound covered with turf outside his house," Sharp observed, "said to be a replica of Fujiyama: new house building—made of bambu [*sic*], lath, mud and straw, and a new mountain in front of the east window."<sup>49</sup> What Sharp unknowingly describes is the construction of a traditional Japanese teahouse and landscape—a retreat for contemplation and meditation.

Nevertheless, Fukujima's staff was chafing under his harsh regimen. On 23 May, Sharp heard the interpreter Mitsushita complain, "You are prisoners: I also am a prisoner. I'm fed up."<sup>50</sup> But if life was difficult for the Japanese staff, for the despised Koreans forced into the Japanese military as guards and cooks it could only have been worse.

As the end of the month approached with both the new airfield and fence-embankment-moat running behind schedule, Fukujima declared a "Speedo" to complete the projects. Once again this order revived memories of the worst days of the railway construction as convalescing POWs were turned out for work over medical officers' protests and men older than fifty were no longer exempt from heavy labor.<sup>51</sup> Fukujima may have been trying to treat his POWs humanely, but with an I. J. A. headquarters nearby, he also made sure he obeyed his orders.

### *Runaway Love*

As promised, the beginning of June started with a half-holiday, and Leo Britt had a brand-new show—a musical comedy entitled *Runaway Love*—ready to open. This was the "big" show Britt had been promising his audience. It was a revival of a hit show he and Leofric Thorpe had produced back in Changi, Singapore, under the title *Hellsabuzzin'!*, with a large cast and numerous costumes and settings. With its "fast music, fast dancing, and fast women," it had been a huge success. At Kachu Mountain Britt must have put enormous energy into getting the concert party's small support staff and technical crew to assemble sets and costumes and rehearse a large cast.

### **The Complication**

But in the afternoon of opening night, *Runaway Love* had to be cancelled because the interpreter and censor Mitsushita wasn't available to review the text for approval before it could be performed, as was standard procedure. He had left camp temporarily to seek medical advice.<sup>52</sup> The show's sudden cancellation must have been extremely disappointing to Britt and his company—and his audience. Any performance would have to wait until the interpreter returned.

As a substitute, the POWs had a soccer match during their free time after dinner—that is, until their loud cheering brought the game to Fukujima's attention and it was stopped because it had run over half an hour beyond the 6 p.m. deadline for such activities.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, further flooding of the camp by monsoon rains, combined with the inadequate number of latrines and water drawn from a single well, created highly unsanitary conditions. On 11 June, Sharp was admitted to the dysentery ward when mucous and blood had appeared in his stools. Even there he continued making entries in his diary, including the startling news that a lorry had been found abandoned outside the camp, three Koreans guards were missing, "the Japanese sergeant had been murdered, and

. . . one of the Koreans was [the] interpreter during the recent torture of the Thais.”<sup>54</sup> The guerillas were retaliating for the mistreatment of the Thai laborers.

Kachu Mountain was by all accounts a troubled camp—and not just because of Fukujima’s policies or the Japanese staff’s and Korean guards’ unhappiness with their commandant. From the beginning, the POWs had been dissatisfied with the actions—or inactions—of the Australian POW commandant and his staff, and Sharp’s diary includes numerous references to others’ statements about the need for new leadership. Two days after his release from hospital, Sharp was “standing easy”<sup>xiii</sup> during evening *tenko* when an attempt was made to suppress illegal activities taking place in the ranks:

19.6 This evening, the W.O’s on parade read out KR’s [King’s Regulations] on the subject of mutiny, sedition, and attending political meetings. The first is aimed against the Australians, who are disgusted with the weak conduct of the [POW] camp administration, and are said to have formed a “shadow cabinet” to replace it: and the third against British communist circle “Red Square.”<sup>55</sup>

The following evening saw the concert party’s revue *Jungle Jinks*, which, like the titles of previous shows at Kachu Mountain, had an odd correspondence with recent events.

Sharp’s bout with dysentery was only the first indication of its rapid spread throughout the camp. The well water had become contaminated, and orders were given to boil all water for drinking.<sup>56</sup>

## The [Anti-]Climax

Further disruption to camp life was caused by an announcement that there would soon be several evacuations of POWs to other locations. The heavy sick were to be sent back to the hospital at Nakhon Pathom, where they could receive better care, and 1,000 “part fit, part light sick” volunteers would be sent to join POWs already working at Nakhon Nai in northeastern Thailand.<sup>57</sup> At this point, lots of volunteers wanted out of Kachu Mountain.

On 27 June, Sharp reported that Colonel Fukujima had become seriously ill with dysentery: “benjo speedo forty times per day—Our M.O’s wish to give him emetine, but the Japanese won’t allow him—he was sent, yesterday to Bangkok—‘To paradise’ say the guards hopefully.”<sup>58</sup>

The first party of volunteers left for Nakhon Nai on 30 June. This group included British and Australians and all the Americans in camp. POWs assigned to camp duties, which included those in the concert party, had not been permitted to volunteer. With interpreter Mitsushita finally back after a four-week hiatus, Leo Britt’s postponed production of *Runaway Love* was about to open (one can almost see Britt behind the scenes pulling the strings, desperately trying to keep his cast intact).<sup>59</sup> But the god of theatre did not smile on Britt’s “big” show. It went on, but it was performed in the drizzling rain, which didn’t make for the best audience response. The second performance, scheduled for the following evening, held out the promise of being the singular triumph Britt knew it could be.

<sup>xiii</sup> *The British command for “Parade Rest.”*

### The Ubon Theatre

Since the POWs at Ubon could only work on building their theatre during leisure time in the evening, it had taken them four and a half weeks to finish it. Norman Pritchard described the process: “as it was on the flat parade ground, tons and tons of earth were moved by hand (no vehicles!) to make a platform. The Theatre was designed by a P.O.W. Architect. . . . The platform was, I think, about 35 feet square, 3 feet high at the front and about 4 feet high at the back! The building was usual Far East construction—bamboo, matting and atap.”<sup>60</sup>

During his interview, Pritchard elaborated on how the men had moved the earth by hand to form the platform:

*We carried the earth umpteen dozens of times. You know how it was carried? In a stretcher . . . two-person carried. Yeah. And that’s how they built the railway. All the earth and sand was transported on stretchers. . . . And it was roughly about 20 feet across and 30 feet deep.<sup>xiv</sup> There’s plenty of room for maneuvering round behind.<sup>61</sup>*



FIGURE 10.7. PHOTOGRAPH OF UBON THEATRE. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

A photograph of the POW theatre at Ubon taken immediately after the Japanese capitulation shows a large theatre with a pitched roof. There is no orchestra pit. The proscenium arch is wide and deep, forming an inner frame that contains two entrances allowing access to and from the stage. The pitched

<sup>xiv</sup> These figures do not exactly square with his earlier estimations. Memory is faulty.

roof's height suggests a grid that could be used for hanging scenery was in place. Bamboo and atap wings project out from the proscenium on either side, concealing the offstage areas behind them. A traveler curtain, made from rice sacks stitched together, hangs from the upstage side of the proscenium. The white box suspended from the center of the proscenium arch tells us that the concert party at Ubon, unlike at Kachu Mountain, was allowed to use stage lighting. A ground row hiding slush-lamp footlights is also visible at the front of the stage.

The photograph also shows a unique structural feature of this theatre that Fergus Anckorn remembered well:

*We built the proscenium up against a tree . . . big old tree, like an oak—couldn't have been an oak—but it was that type of tree. And you could get from inside the proscenium into this tree where illicit things were hidden. And where we had decided, when we were all going to get killed, to get in there. We could have gotten about six of us in there.*<sup>62</sup>

Pritchard explained how the earthen stage allowed settings to be changed easily: “The thing with that one was that they were earth. Raised earth . . . so that all you had to do with creating a set was just to pull up the post and dig another hole so you can post it in another place” (see more information about the unique architectural and staging features of the Ubon theatre in Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”).<sup>63</sup>

### **“The Ubon Concert Party”**

The ban on performances had another positive effect, giving the entertainers time to form “The Ubon Concert Party” and to plan the series of shows that would appear in their new theatre. These would not be simple impromptu variety shows but plays, revues, band shows, and musical comedies with all the sets, costumes, and staging surprises their former Nong Pladuk audiences had come to expect.

Unlike Kachu Mountain, Ubon was in an area surrounded by lush vegetation, so bamboo for flats and props was readily available. Slush lamps were easily made out of found objects, and kerosene pressure lamps or hurricane lamps could be borrowed from the Japanese. And it's entirely possible that when the large numbers of Harboured Lights entertainers evacuated Nong Pladuk, they carried as many of their curtains, costumes, and other theatrical paraphernalia with them as they could. Since it was a full camp evacuation, the Japanese may even have transported these goods as necessities to the new locale. At Kachu Mountain, where the entertainers had arrived from different camps, a like scenario had not played out: with the dissolution of Tamarkan, the costumes and props had gone to the officers' camp at Kanburi; at Chungkai, concert parties remained active.



### *Hollywood Revue*

The show that opened the new Ubon theatre on 20 June was *Hollywood Revue*, which, according to Pritchard, was “simply a vehicle for getting people to come in and impersonate film stars.”<sup>64</sup>

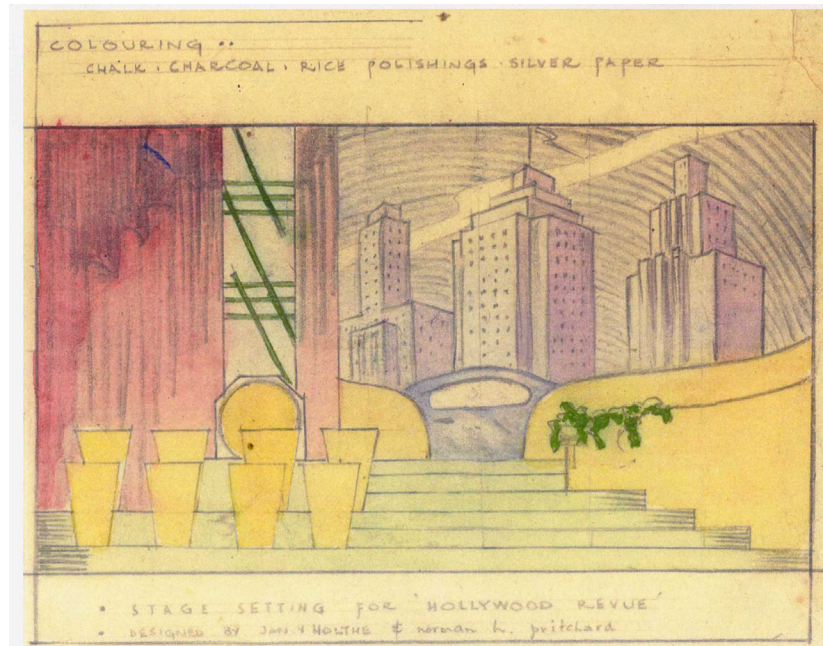


FIGURE 10.8. SET RENDERING FOR *HOLLYWOOD REVUE*. JAN VAN HOLTHE AND NORMAN PRITCHARD. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

With *Hollywood Revue*, Jan van Holthe and Norman Pritchard resumed their role as set designers that had started back in Nong Pladuk (see more about their set designs for the shows at Ubon in Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!”). Upstage center, framed by the entrance between two half-walls, is the profile of a limousine, its door directly opposite the opening between the walls. “So this bamboo matting became a car,” Pritchard explained. “The car came in and the door opened, and out steps Mae West (or someone) and did a performance.<sup>xv</sup> And somebody would open the door [the artiste would get back in the car] and close it again, and the car would be gone.” Then the car would reappear, bringing in the next “star.”<sup>65</sup> Jock Cameron and his tech crew had created the limousine and figured out how to “drive” it on and off stage.

Following the inaugural performance, dentist “Toothy” Martin went onstage and thanked the performers for a great show; in return, he received a round of applause for his efforts in getting a theatre approved.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>xv</sup> The Dutch female impersonator “Skippy” would have been perfect as Mae West.

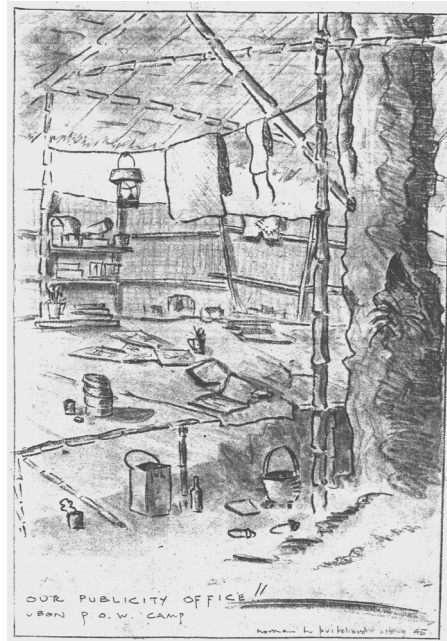


FIGURE 10.9. "OUR PUBLICITY OFFICE." SKETCH BY NORMAN PRITCHARD. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

A sketch by Norman Pritchard shows his and van Holthe's "publicity office" at Ubon. Bamboo supports hold up an atap roof, and partial walls of matting enclose the space. It was built around a tree for stability. Art materials are scattered around the floor along with paper and paintbrushes. A hurricane-type lamp hangs overhead, suspended on the same line as a "jap happy" loincloth. In the background are shelves holding other supplies. Since no Pritchard and van Holthe souvenir programs for the shows at Ubon have come to light, it's possible they decided to concentrate their artistic efforts and scarce supply of paint and paper solely on set designs instead. Without programs, we have very little knowledge of the content or the performers in the Ubon shows.

Only a week after *Hollywood Revue*, the concert party continued the varied programming that had become its trademark with a remount of the mystery-thriller *Crime Does Not Pay*, performed at Nong Pladuk in July 1944. Entertainment at Ubon was up and running.

### Runaway Love: The Denouement

More volunteers left Kachu Mountain for Nakhon Nai on 1 July, one of whom was Dudley Gotla. And then, once again—this time for unexplained reasons—the Japanese refused to allow Leo Britt to present the final performance of *Runaway Love*. (In response, he must have thrown one of his famous tantrums.) Inexplicably, the next night the Korean guards noisily celebrated a yasume with Thai whiskey. On 3 July, the reason for all this inexplicable behavior was made clear: Colonel Fukujima had died of dysentery in Bangkok. This news accounted both for the show's cancellation and the Korean guards' party.<sup>xvi67</sup>

The last draft of volunteers left Kachu Mountain for Nakhon Nai six days later. This time the group included members of the White Pagoda Players: Hugh de Wardener, Pat Fox—and Leo Britt. Frustrated

<sup>xvi</sup> With dysentery samples easily obtained, this has all the hallmarks of a "fragging" incident.

by his inability to produce shows up to his standard, or to secure the preferential treatment from the Japanese he had received at Chungkai, Britt was “no doubt hoping for fresh fields to conquer.”<sup>68</sup> These men’s departure dealt a serious blow to the concert party at Kachu Mountain, depriving them of their best and most prolific producer and two of their most valuable players. Would those left behind be able to carry on without them?

## Kachu Mountain Carries On

More immediately disturbing to the remaining POWs were the implications of new work details issued by their new commandant and recorded by Sharp.<sup>xvii</sup>

7.7. Heavy machine gun pit has been built on the hill at the quarry. . . . New guardroom being constructed at end of camp: weapon and machine gun pits also being built.

9.7. Engaged on the excavation of a large pit—perhaps a receptacle for bombs. Work flagging on the [new] ’drome—almost finished.

11.7. Working on new guardroom today, at entrance to camp: on raised mound and commanding two sides of the bund.<sup>69</sup>

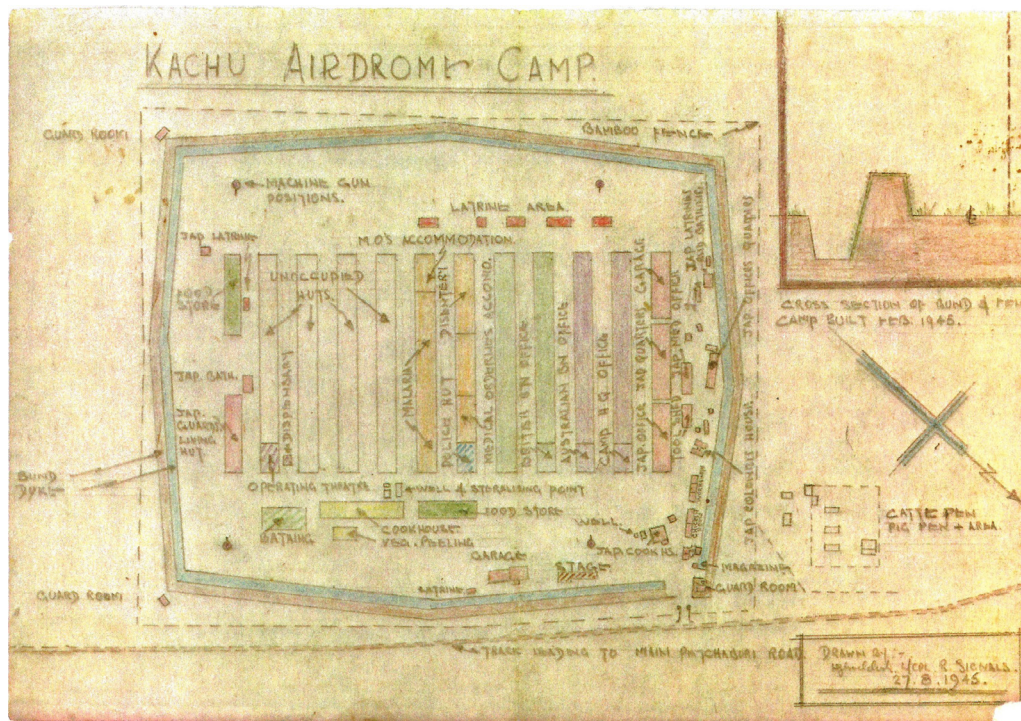


FIGURE 10.10. GROUND PLAN OF KACHU MOUNTAIN AERODROME CAMP. UNIDENTIFIED ARTIST. COURTESY OF JOHN SHARP.

<sup>xvii</sup> The name of the new I. J. A. commandant at Kachu Mountain was never recorded by Sharp.

A hand-colored ground plan of “Kachu Airdrome Camp” [sic] shows the bamboo fence, bund, and moat surrounding the camp. A smaller schematic drawing in the corner illustrates the relative heights and relationships among these three elements.<sup>70</sup>

The “excavation of a large pit” noted by Sharp wasn’t for bomb storage. Secret orders had been delivered to all units in the Far East from Imperial General Command in Tokyo that in the event of an attack by Allied forces, all POWs were to be executed. Confirmation of this secret order, which itself reveals the level of unrest in the camp, comes from a comment made by a disgruntled Korean guard that Sharp happened to overhear: “If anything happens, they [the Koreans] won’t know whether to shoot the prisoners or the Japanese.” Aware of the growing hostility toward them among the Korean troops, the Japanese allowed the guards only one round of ammunition when they left the camp.<sup>71</sup>

In spite of the loss of some key personnel and the increasingly tense situation, the White Pagoda Players did continue to produce entertainment: the latest, a Tony Gerrish band show entitled *Kashu Rhythm*, on 10 July.<sup>72</sup>

Two days later, three POWs escaped from the airfield work detail, causing a panic: a Japanese officer threatened to shoot the *honcho* and sergeants in charge if the men weren’t found.<sup>73</sup> A thorough search was initiated and continued for several days, but the escapees had vanished. What the Japanese feared was that the escapees had made contact with Free Thai guerillas and would provide strategic information about the internal operation of the camp. By the middle of the month, the bund-cum-moat and bamboo fence were finished and the “Speedo” came to an end. On 17 July, the guerillas struck again: an “explosion and fire at the Japanese h.q. nearby—said to have been caused by Thais, who also cut a guard’s throat.”<sup>74</sup>

### ***And The Villain Still Pursued Her***

On 20 July, the POWs received a full-day yasume which concluded with the concert party’s production of a totally new kind of entertainment: an old-fashioned melodrama, *And The Villain Still Pursued Her*. Once again, the show’s title has a strange coincidence with recent events offstage.<sup>75</sup> If the audience was encouraged to hiss the villain and cheer the hero—or in this case, the heroine—as a veiled reference to the recent escapes, it would have been a smash hit. A week later, when the new Japanese commandant permitted new activities to take place, quizzes and similar competitions were initiated to help fill the evening hours.<sup>76</sup>

On 28 July, an Allied bombing raid hit an I. J. A. garrison in the nearby town of Phetchaburi, causing significant loss of life. Because Japanese soldiers had been killed in the raid, the POWs in Kachu Mountain were restricted to their huts and not permitted to sing, play cards, or have their half-yasume concert. They were warned once again that if anyone tried to escape either from work details or the camp, he would be shot. The new Japanese commandant attempted to have the POWs sign a “no-escape form,” but after much argument among staff and resistance from the rank and file, POW commandant Lieutenant Davidson told the Japanese that he would only recommend his men sign it, not order them to do so.<sup>77</sup> The Japanese did not press the matter further.

### ***Ubon Gets Bright & Breezy***

Once they had gotten their theatre built and their first two shows up, the entertainers at Ubon began to hit their stride. *Crime Doesn’t Pay* was followed on 4 July by *On The Spot*, an “Ace” Connolly and his “Kings of Swing” band show. As in Nong Pladuk, Major Chida continued to be a strong supporter of the POWs’ leisure time activities, especially their music. But his support came with a catch:

There we had a first-rate orchestra and had concerts once a week but a condition of our being allowed to have them was a quarter of an hour should be devoted to Japanese tunes. Chida played the flute [shakuhachi] and he usually sent for the leader of the orchestra—"Ace" Connolly—a few hours before the concert was due to begin and played to him the tunes he wanted the orchestra to play. And "Ace" had to memorise the tunes, transcribe them, rehearse the orchestra in them and "put them over" in the evening.

We had to admit that some of the tunes were catchy ones.<sup>78</sup>

A week later, the first Dutch/Indonesian production took place at Ubon.

Allied victories in the war in the Pacific made life in Ubon more difficult, with restrictions tightening up day by day. But there was also beginning to be an air of expectancy that something significant was about to happen.<sup>79</sup> Late in July, Charles Steel noted, "working parties are bringing in very insistent rumours that the war is over."<sup>80</sup> Even more indicative that something was up was the fact that the prisoners were "digging holes across the new runways they had just made" so the paths could not be used by any aircraft.<sup>81</sup> Still, there was no announcement of any change in status of the war indicated by Major Chida.

The British performers returned to the stage on 21 July with their latest revue, *Bright & Breezy*. Van Holthe and Pritchard again did the set design with a nautical motif.

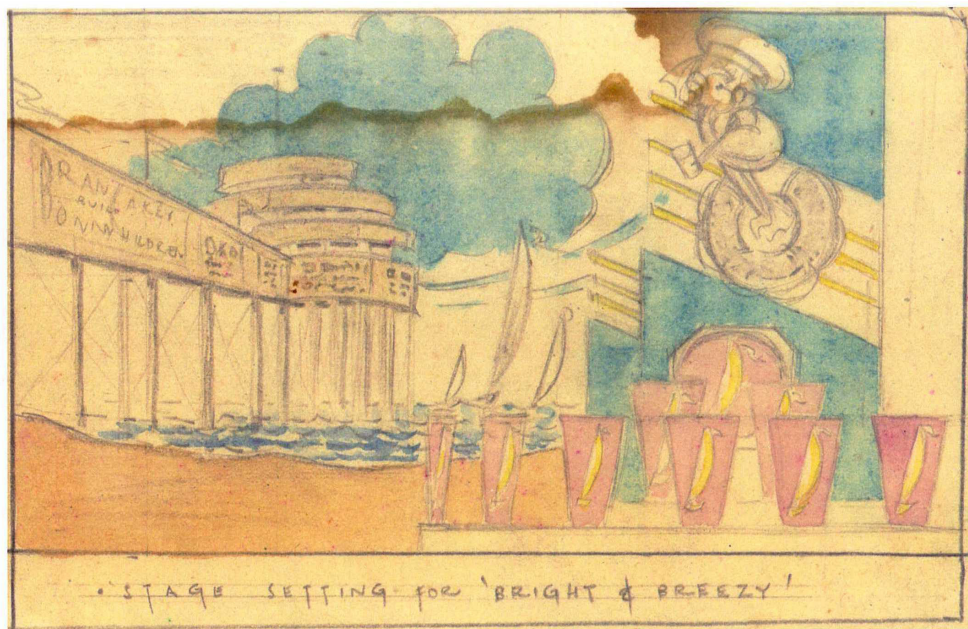


FIGURE 10.11. SET DESIGN FOR *BRIGHT & BREEZY*. JAN VAN HOLTHE AND NORMAN PRITCHARD. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

The backdrop, with its pier projecting out over the water and the pavilion at the end, resembled seaside resorts back in England. *Bright & Breezy* was followed a week later by another N.E.I. show.

### *Hot Ice*

Due to the continual heavy rains falling on Kachu Mountain Camp, the show scheduled for 1 August was cancelled. On 4 August at Ubon, the British concert party returned to the stage with Bob Gale's latest musical comedy, *Hot Ice*. Although we know nothing about the musical except that it took place in the Swiss Alps, its title suggests the plot involved a jewel theft—a “caper.”

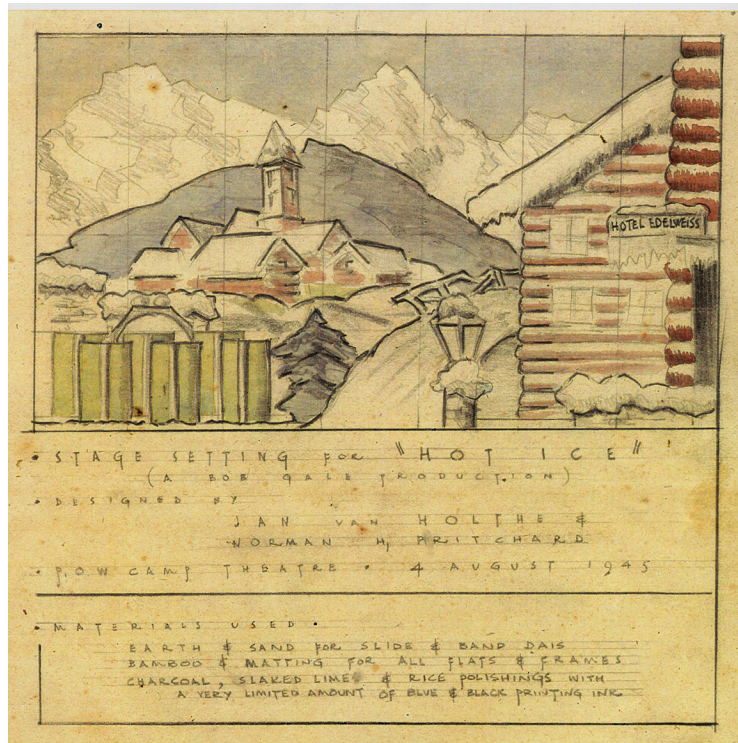


FIGURE 10.12. SET DESIGN FOR *HOT ICE*. JAN VAN HOLTHE AND NORMAN PRITCHARD. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

With its snow-laden “Hotel Edelweiss” and backdrop of a snow-covered Swiss town and high mountain peaks, the exterior setting for *Hot Ice* is van Holthe and Pritchard’s most complex and beautiful scenic design. As the POWs sat in the audience on a hot and humid tropical evening in Thailand, what could be better than watching a fantasy taking place in a world of snow? Two spectacular scenic features engineered by Jock Cameron and his technicians involved characters entering on a toboggan down a slide up center and a special lighting effect that created the illusion of ice skaters gliding to “The Skaters’ Waltz” (see Chapter 12: “Jolly Good Show!” for details on these two features and other interesting technical aspects of the *Hot Ice* setting).<sup>82</sup>

### “All’s Well that Ends Well”

On 5 August at Kachu Mountain, a Korean guard privately told a POW, “‘All’s well that ends well,’ and added ‘Very soon,’ also ‘RIP, all men rest in peace.’”<sup>83</sup> The ambiguity in that mangled English might not have given the POWs much comfort.

On the afternoon of 8 August there was another Allied bombing raid on the nearby town of

Phetchaburi. Two days later Sharp recorded a borehole rumor that the Koreans “are obviously insubordinate now: progressively so, it is said.” In order not to lose control of the situation, the Japanese reissued the camp regulations stating that there should be “no singing or playing of games during working hours.” They “comment[ed] on slack saluting” by the POWs. “Also: no chess sets or other games to be made without permission (We are not supposed to have knives, anyhow!).”<sup>84</sup>

Strange events were taking place at Ubon as well. On 10 August the Japanese announced there would be an all-camp festival on 15 August celebrating the three-and-a-half-year anniversary of the fall of Singapore and the third anniversary of the start of the POW administration in Thailand. The POWs were expected to celebrate these events with a day of sports, but Charles Steel was dubious that the festival would ever take place:

The Nips are also putting on a Concert in their own quarters. For this purpose, they are using a lot of the large quantity of Red Cross clothing they keep for themselves. I know one Sodjo<sup>xviii</sup> is having a robe made from Red Cross towels, while dozens of blankets have been sewn together for backcloths. Both these articles are badly needed in the Camp.<sup>85</sup>

In the three days (11, 12, and 13 August) leading up to this “celebration,” numerous and insistent rumors of the war’s end made the POWs at Ubon extremely restive. In order to take their minds off their hopes and anxieties, regulations regarding concert parties were relaxed, and they were allowed to put on three successive nights of impromptu variety shows.

Back at Kachu Mountain, the White Pagoda Players’ next production, *Bits and Pieces*, was staged on 12 August. Ironically, its performance coincided with the discovery that the camp stores were full of clothes but most had been destroyed by rats and would have to be burnt.<sup>86</sup> The next day Sharp wrote, “At 12.30 today all the Nips and Koreans were called to the Camp Office and addressed by an officer—later a Korean cook said all would be over in three days.” Other indications that the end was near resulted in heightened expectations, but no announcement of any change was forthcoming.

Up at Ubon, Steel’s prediction had come true: on 15 August the Japanese suddenly cancelled the sports day, giving the reason that “they were in mourning.”<sup>87</sup> At Kachu Mountain that day, the Japanese held a celebration that Sharp interpreted as either an “anniversary of foundation of group—or perhaps a farewell party.”<sup>88</sup>

Two days later, ignorant of what had taken place elsewhere on 16 August, Sharp made the following entry in his diary:

17.8 Yasumi [*sic*] today again, except for a few men. We’re very thankful for this rest after the recent hard labour. . . . Koreans said to be disarmed—during the night three were heard “weeping” outside the end hut.<sup>xix</sup> . . . Nip quartermaster pulls up the notice on the air raid shelter and pissed on it. . . . Drivers returning from Pechburi report scenes of rejoicing there—singing, drinking, dancing, etc.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>xviii</sup> *Mimicking the Japanese pronunciation of the word “soldier.”*

<sup>xix</sup> *They knew they would soon be the prisoners of war and could face severe penalties for any “war crimes” committed.*

There was no doubt now that some major event had taken place. But with no announcement from either of the Japanese commandants, the POWs in both Kachu Mountain and Ubon had to be extremely circumspect about what they said and did. Their worlds seemed trapped in suspended animation.

## Endnotes

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- 2 Allison, E-mail, 3 December 2005.
- 3 D. Harris, 146.
- 4 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 103.
- 5 J. Sharp, Diary, 28 February and 1 March 1945.
- 6 J. Sharp, Diary, 1 March 1945.
- 7 J. Sharp, Diary, 6, 11 March 1945.
- 8 J. Sharp, Diary, 2 March 1945.
- 9 J. Sharp, Diary, 4 March 1945.
- 10 Toosey, "Official Report," 26.
- 11 Best, quoting Steel, Letter 157, 117.
- 12 Dewey, quoting Wilder, 53.
- 13 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 103.
- 14 J. Sharp, Diary, 28 February and 15 March 1945; Allison, Letter, 10 October 2000.
- 15 J. Sharp, Diary, 16 March 1945.
- 16 Allison, E-mail, 3 December 2005.
- 17 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 103–104.
- 18 T. Boardman, Questionnaire, 2.
- 19 J. Sharp Collection.
- 20 T. Boardman, Letter [2005], 3.
- 21 Allison, E-mail, 3 December 2005.
- 22 J. Sharp, Diary, 21 March 1945.
- 23 J. Sharp, Diary, 29 March 1945.
- 24 Best, quoting Steel, Letter, 118.
- 25 J. Sharp, Diary, 1 April 1945.
- 26 J. Sharp, Diary, 4 April 1945.
- 27 J. Sharp, Diary, 12, 14 April 1945.
- 28 J. Sharp, Diary, 10 April 1945.
- 29 J. Sharp, Diary, 20 April 1945.
- 30 J. Sharp, Diary, 20 April 1945.
- 31 J. Sharp, Diary, 22 April 1945.
- 32 J. Sharp, Diary, 27 April 1945.
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- 35 J. Sharp, Diary, 1 May 1945.
- 36 J. Sharp, Diary, 1 May 1945.
- 37 J. Sharp, Diary, 10 May 1945.
- 38 Allison, E-mail, 3 December 2005.
- 39 Allison, E-mail, 3 December 2005.
- 40 Anckorn, Interview, 58.
- 41 Anckorn, Letter to Prichard, n.d., 3–4.
- 42 Anckorn, Interview, 86.
- 43 Pritchard, Interview with reporter, *Rangoon Liberator* 123 (4 October 1945): n.p.



- 44 Martin, Letter, March 2006.  
45 J. Sharp, Diary, 13–14 May 1945.  
46 J. Sharp, Diary, 13 May 1945.  
47 J. Sharp, Diary, 20 May 1945.  
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50 J. Sharp, Diary, 23 May 1945.  
51 J. Sharp, Diary, 25–26 May 1945.  
52 J. Sharp, Diary, 1 June 1945.  
53 J. Sharp, Diary, 1 June 1945.  
54 J. Sharp, Diary, 11–12 June 1945.  
55 J. Sharp, Diary, 19 June 1945.  
56 J. Sharp, Diary, 23 June 1945.  
57 J. Sharp, Diary, 25 June 1945.  
58 J. Sharp, Diary, 27 June 1945.  
59 J. Sharp, Diary, 30 June 1945.  
60 Pritchard, “the undefeated . . .,” 6.  
61 Pritchard, Interview, 70–71.  
62 Anckorn, Interview, 36.  
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77 J. Sharp, Diary, 31 July 1945.  
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79 Best, quoting Steel, 123.  
80 Best, quoting Steel, 130.  
81 Best, quoting Steel, 130.  
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