

## Chart I

# List of Hellship Voyages in Chronological Sequence of Departure Date

<u>Code #</u>	<u>Ship Name</u>	<u>Departed</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Arrived</u>	<u># POWs</u>
102	Shoun Maru	Philippines	01/01/42	Osaka, Japan		50
106	Tenshin Maru	Philippines	01/01/42	Osaka, Japan		50
110	Argentina Maru	Guam	01/10/42	Japan	01/15/42	800
114	Nitta Maru	Wake Island	01/12/42	Yokohama,Japan/ Shanghai	01/23/42	1187
118	Kuala	Singapore	02/01/42	?		65
122	Tanjong Penang	Pompong Island	02/01/42	?		65
126	Op ten Noort	Bandjarmasin, Borneo	03/04/42	Makassar, Celebes	03/05/42	900
130	Tatsuta Maru	Japan	03/12/42	Wake Island	03/16/42	200
134	Maru Ichi (1)	Makassar	04/02/42	Yokohama, Japan	04/16/42	32
138	Celebes Maru	Singapore	05/15/42	Mergui, Burma	05/24/42	1000
142	Toyohashi Maru	Singapore	05/15/42	Victoria Point/ Tavoy	05/26/42	2000
146	Kyokusei Maru	Belawan, Sumatra	05/16/42	Victoria Point, Burma	05/20/42	1200
150	England Maru	Belawan, Sumatra	05/16/42	Mergui, Burma	05/25/42	500
158	Maru Ni (2)	Batavia, Java	06/04/42	Singapore	06/09/42	500
162	Montevideo Maru	Rabaul, New Britain	06/22/42	Hainan		1053
166	Heiyo Maru	Wake Island	07/01/42	Japan	07/06/42	200
170	Interisland Steamer	Manila	07/01/42	Davao	07/09/42	200
174	Naruto Maru	Rabaul, New Britain	07/06/42	Yokohama, Japan	07/21/42	79
178	Ume Maru	Singapore	07/07/42	Sandakan, Borneo	07/17/42	1494
182	Samurusan Maru	Kupang, Timor	07/26/42	Java	08/05/42	500
186	Sanko Maru	Manila	07/29/42	Palawan	08/01/42	346
190	Tufuku Maru	Batavia, Java	08/01/42	Singapore		500

194	Nagara Maru	Manila	08/12/42	Takao, Formosa	08/14/42	180
198	Otaro Maru	Takao, Formosa	08/14/42	Karenko, Formosa	08/15/42	180
210	Tatu Maru	Mergui, Burma	08/16/42	Tavoy, Burma	08/17/42	300
206	Fukkai Maru	Singapore	08/20/42	Takao/ Pusan, Korea	09/22/42	1100
208	England Maru	Singapore	08/20/42	Takao, Formosa	08/29/42	400
214	Maya Maru	Manila	09/01/42	Shanghai		
218	Maru Shi (4)	Hong Kong	09/03/42	Japan	09/11/42	616
222	Nishi Maru	Timor	09/04/42	Surabaya,Java/ Singapore	09/18/42	1974
202	Maru San (3)	Cagayan, Mindanao	09/06/42	Cebu City, Cebu/Iloilo, Panay/Manila	09/14/42	100
230	Tachibana Maru	Wake Island	09/20/42	Japan	09/30/42	200
234	Lima Maru	Manila	09/21/42	Takao, Formosa	09/26/42	300
238	Dainichi Maru	Kupang, Timor	09/23/42	Surabaya, Java	09/29/42	1000
242	Lisbon Maru	Hong Kong	09/27/42	Shanghai		1816
246	Oyo Maru	Batavia, Java	10/01/42	Singapore		?
250	Maru Go (5)	Timor	10/01/42	Singapore	10/13/42	1000
254	Hokko Maru	Manila	10/01/42	?		?
258	Tamahoko Maru	Bugo, Mindanao	10/03/42	Manila	10/06/42	268
262	Shinsei Maru	Shanghai	10/05/42	Moji, Japan	10/08/42	840
266	Kenkon Maru	Batavia, Java	10/08/42	Singapore	10/11/42	1500
270	Tottori Maru	Manila	10/08/42	Takao/ Pusan/ Moji/ Osaka	11/11/42	1961
274	Asama Maru	Makassar, Celebes	10/10/42	Nagasaki, Japan	10/23/42	1000
276	Ex-British Ship	Singapore	10/10/42	Kuching/Jesselton, Borneo	10/19/42	1846
278	Dainichi Maru	Batavia, Java	10/11/42	Singapore	10/14/42	1000
282	Maebashi Maru	Singapore	10/14/42	Rangoon, Burma	10/22/42	1700
<b>286</b>	<b><u>Singapore Maru</u></b>	<b><u>Batavia, Java</u></b>	<b><u>10/17/42</u></b>	<b><u>Singapore</u></b>	<b><u>10/25/42</u></b>	<b><u>3000</u></b>
290	Maru No. 760	Bugo, Mindanao	10/18/42	Lasang, Mindanao	10/23/42	1000
294	England Maru	Singapore	10/20/42	Keelung, Formosa	11/06/42	1000
<b>298</b>	<b>No. 1 Yoshida Maru</b>	<b>Batavia, Java</b>	<b>10/22/42</b>	<b>Singapore</b>	<b>10/26/42</b>	<b>2700</b>
302	Yamagata Maru	Rangoon, Burma	10/23/42	Moulmein, Burma	10/24/42	1000

306	Shinyu Maru	Singapore	10/24/42	Burma		500
310	Taiko Maru	Ambon	10/25/42	Bakli Bay, Hainan	11/05/42	530
314	Erie Maru	Manila	10/28/42	Iloilo/ Cebu/ Lasang	11/07/42	1000
318	Tojuku Maru	Singapore	10/30/42	Japan		1200
322	Dainichi Maru	Singapore	10/30/42	Takao/ Moji, Japan	11/25/42	1200
<b>326</b>	<b><u>Singapore Maru</u></b>	<b><u>Singapore</u></b>	<b><u>10/30/42</u></b>	<b><u>Takao/ Moji, Japan</u></b>	<b><u>11/25/42</u></b>	1100

I overlooked this one, I forgot, on the roll of honour site, it says it anyway about the trips of the Singapore Maru..

The Singapore Maru left Batavia for Java on 17<sup>th</sup>/10/42 and arrived on the 25/10/42 at Singapore, according to the source:- [http://www.west-point.org/family/japanese-pow/Ship\\_sNum.htm](http://www.west-point.org/family/japanese-pow/Ship_sNum.htm)

The No.1 Yoshida Maru left Batavia for Java on 22//10/42 and arrived on the 26/10/42. If Granddad was on this one. It must have been a faster ship.. Check records. It took 8 days for the Singapore Maru and 4 days for the Yoshida Maru...Twice as fast as the Singapore Maru?

It is gleaned from Granddad's Japanese POW Index Card, that he was shipped to Singapore on 21/10/42 from Batavia.

22/10/42 is the nearest date of departure from Batavia, Java on this list...it could have been the No. 1. Yoshida Maru then? I need to get records of both the P.O.W. ships Codes 286 and 298 to confirm what ship he was aboard.

No. 1 Yoshida was torpedoed on 04/26/44 by USS Jack

SINGAPORE MARU CARGO x

www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?205199

home wrecks charts references diving/fishing biology interactive

## Singapore Maru (1919~1922) Shonan Maru (+1944)

**Details**

**general**  
 nationality: [japanese](#)  
 purpose: [transport](#)  
 type: [cargo ship](#)  
 subtype/class: [Taifuku Maru No.1 class cargo \(jpn.\)](#)

Taifuku Maru No.1 class cargo (jpn.): [Mount Pelion SS \(+1942\)](#)  
 propulsion: [steam](#)  
 date built: [1919](#)  
 status: [unknown](#)

**details**  
 weight (tons): 5859 grt  
 dimensions : 117.3 x 15.5 x -- m  
 material: [steel \[\\*\]](#)  
 engine: 1 triple expansion engine, single shaft, 1 screw  
 power: 440 nominal horsepower [\*]  
 speed: 10 knots  
 yard no.: 450

**about the loss**  
 cause lost: [torpedo](#)  
 date lost: [09/09/1944](#) [dd/mm/yyyy]  
 casualties:

**about people**  
 builder: [Kawasaki Dockyard Co. Ltd., Kobe](#)

next owners: [1] [Kobe Kilco](#)  
[Shonan Maru \(+1944\)](#)  
 period 1942 ~ 1944  
 [2] [Kobe Sanbashi K. K., Kobe](#)  
[Singapore Maru](#)  
 period 1932 ~ 1942  
 [3] [Kokusai Kisen K. K.](#)  
[Singapore Maru](#)  
 period 1922 ~ 1932  
 last owner: [4] [Kawasaki Kisen K. K. - 'K' Line](#)  
[Singapore Maru](#)  
 period 1919 ~ 1922

captain:  
 about the wreck

**Pictures**

[Letzens Jan](#) 16/01/2010  
[Taifuku Maru No.1 class cargo \(jpn.\)](#)  
 Taifuku Maru No.1, a Taifuku Maru class cargo.  
 copyrights: [Unknown - onbekend - inconnu](#)

insert new picture

**History**

[Letzens Jan](#) 10/01/2010  
 On September 9th, 1944, U.S. Submarine Seal (SS-183) sinks the Japanese army cargo ship [Shonan Maru](#) in the Sea of Okhotsk, north of Etorofu, Kurils, 47°57' N, 148°15' E.  
 ref. [Cressman R. J., Official Chronology of the U.S. Navy in WWII](#)

insert new history

**Advertisement**  
[advertise](#)

**search**

You may consider access to

- [British Isles Hydrographic Service](#)  
 + 454 maritime charts and wrecks shown on charts  
 + 144.300 wreck positions worldwide
- [France Hydrographic Service](#)  
 + 124 maritime charts and wrecks shown on charts  
 + 117.080 wreck positions worldwide
- [All Hydrographic Services](#)

search wreck:

name starts with

show prev. names:

[search](#) [A-Z](#)

search chart:

[chart catalogue](#)

search owner/builder:

**FAVOURITE CHART**

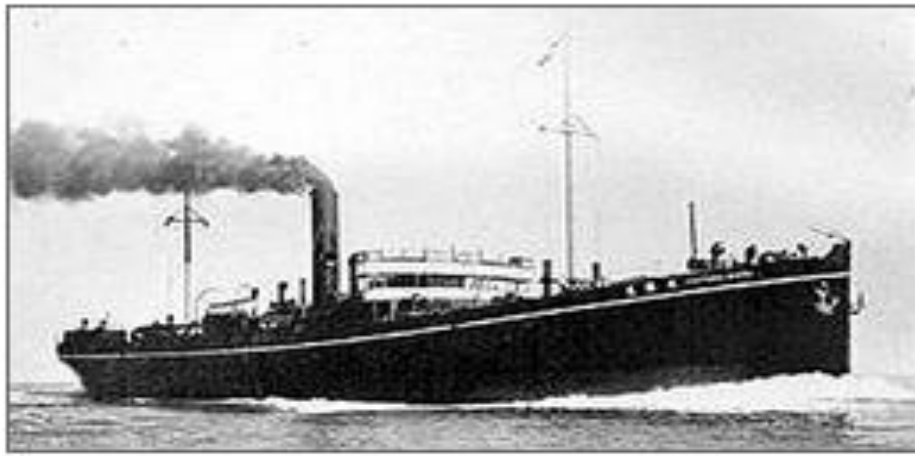
British Isles

**PAGES VISITED**

- Shonan Maru (+1944)

Above, this is a form that gives a lot information about the ship itself, you can use the zoom function, view command in MS Word to see it enlarged, if you have the digital copy, otherwise, just visit the website that will be referenced:-  
<http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?205199>

## The Singapore Maru



This is the actual ship that I believe Granddad died on. It was called The Singapore Maru, during the period 1932-1942, but was also known as the Shonan Maru after change of private ownership in 1942.

You will learn from the above report, that between 1932-1942 the ship was owned by Kobe Sanbashi K. K, Kobe and it was then purchased by Kobe Kikyo, who had owned the ship from some date in 1942, until 1944. Upon exchange of ownership, was probably the time when the ship was renamed the Shonan Maru... This should end any confusion as to why the ship had 2 names and is why the name Shonan Maru, (instead of the name Singapore Maru) appears on Granddad's Sea burial official documentation as being the ship he died on. It's actually the same ship!

See <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?205199> for more details of the ship, including its dimensions, speed capabilities, weight, ownership and when it was built.

# SS *Yoshida Maru*

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



*Yoshida Maru No. 1*

## Career ([Japan](#))



Name:	<i>Yoshida Maru No. 1</i> <sup><span>[</span>u<span>]</span></sup>
Operator:	<a href="#">Nippon Yusen</a> ( <a href="#">NYK</a> )
Builder:	Hakodate Dock at Hakodate, Hokkaidō
Completed:	August 1941
In service:	1941
Out of service:	1944
Fate:	lost in war

## General characteristics

Tonnage:	2,921 <a href="#">gross register tons (GRT)</a>
Length:	93 m (305 ft)
Beam:	13.8 m (45 ft)

Propulsion:	1 turbine, single screw
Speed:	11 knots (20 km/h)
Notes:	Steel construction

The **Yoshida Maru No.1** (第一吉田丸?) was a [Japanese cargo ship](#) owned by [Nippon Yusen Kaisha](#). The ship was built in 1941 by Hakodate Dock at [Hakodate](#) on the northern island of Hokkaidō.

## Contents

[\[hide\]](#)

- [1 History](#)
- [2 Pacific War](#)
- [3 See also](#)
- [4 Notes](#)
- [5 References](#)

## History[\[edit\]](#)

The *Yoshida Maru No.1* was built at Hakodate; and she left port in August 1941 on her maiden voyage.<sup>[2]</sup>

The 2,921-ton vessel had a length of 310 feet (93 m), and her beam was 45 feet (13.8 m). The single turbine, single screw propulsion produced an average speed of 11 knots (20 km/h).<sup>[2]</sup>

## Pacific War[\[edit\]](#)

*Yoshida Maru No.1* was requisitioned as a transport ship of the [Imperial Japanese Navy](#).

In April 1944, she departed [Shanghai](#) as part of the [Take Ichi convoy](#) carrying a full [Japanese regiment](#) of the 32nd Infantry Division. On April 26, 1944 she was spotted and sunk by the submarine *[USS Jack](#)*. There were no survivors<sup>[3]</sup> from the 2,586 soldiers, 81 ship's crew, and 2 armed guards aboard at the time of sinking.<sup>[4]</sup>

## See also[\[edit\]](#)

- [List of Japanese hell ships](#)
- [List by death toll of ships sunk by submarines](#)
- [Foreign commerce and shipping of Empire of Japan](#)

## Notes[\[edit\]](#)

- ↑ **Jump up** "[Yoshida Maru No. 1 Passenger/cargo ship 1919-1944](#)". Wrecksite.eu. Retrieved 18 January 2013.
- ↑ Jump up to: <sup>[b]</sup> Haworth, R.B. *Miramar Ship Index: [Yoshida Maru, ID#4048724](#)*.
- ↑ **Jump up** ShipHistory: [Yoshida Maru, April 26, 1944](#).
- ↑ **Jump up** "[Convoy Take Ichi](#)". All Japan Seamen's Union. Retrieved 2011-11-17.







## References[\[edit\]](#)

- Blair, Clay. (2001). *Silent Victory: The U.S. Submarine War Against Japan*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press. 10-[ISBN 1-55750-217-X](#); 13-[ISBN 978-1-55750-217-9](#); [OCLC 45207785](#)
- [Ponsonby-Fane](#), Richard Arthur Brabazon. (1935). *The Nomenclature of the N.Y.K. Fleet*. Tokyo : Nippon Yusen Kaisha. [OCLC 27933596](#)
- Tate, E. Mowbray. (1986). *Transpacific steam: the story of steam navigation from the Pacific Coast of North America to the Far East and the Antipodes, 1867-1941*. New York: Cornwall Books. 10-[ISBN 0-8453-4792-6](#); 13-[ISBN 978-0-8453-4792-8](#); [OCLC 12370774](#)

Categories:

- [1941 ships](#)
- [Ships of the NYK Line](#)
- [Steamships of Japan](#)
- [World War II merchant ships of Japan](#)
- [Auxiliary ships of the Imperial Japanese Navy](#)
- [Ships sunk by American submarines](#)
- [World War II shipwrecks in the Pacific Ocean](#)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS\\_Yoshida\\_Maru](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Yoshida_Maru)

home	wrecks	charts	references	diving/fishing	biology	interactive
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <span><b>Yoshida Maru No.1 (+1944)</b></span> <span style="float: right;"> <a href="#">EDIT</a></span> </div>						
<p><b>Details</b></p> <p><b>general</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>nationality: <a href="#">japanese</a></li> <li>purpose: <a href="#">transport</a></li> <li>type: <a href="#">passenger/cargo ship</a></li> <li>subtype/class: <a href="#">Yoshida Maru No.1 class</a></li> <li>propulsion: <a href="#">steam</a></li> <li>date built: <a href="#">1919</a></li> <li>status: <a href="#">unknown</a></li> </ul> <p><b>details</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>weight (tons): <a href="#">5425 grt</a></li> <li>dimensions : <a href="#">121.9 x 16.2 x 9.8 m</a></li> <li>material: <a href="#">steel</a></li> <li>engine: <a href="#">1 triple expansion engine, single shaft, 1 screw</a></li> <li>power: <a href="#">258 n.h.p.</a></li> <li>speed: <a href="#">10 knots</a></li> <li>yard no.: <a href="#">7</a></li> <li>IMO/Off. no.: <a href="#">22318</a></li> <li>call sign: <a href="#">NTDS</a> </li> </ul> <p><b>about the loss</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cause lost: <a href="#">torpedo</a></li> <li>date lost: <a href="#">26/09/1944</a> [dd/mm/yyyy]</li> <li>casualties: <a href="#">+ 2586</a> <a href="#">rank1 20</a></li> </ul> <p><b>about people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>builder: <a href="#">Asano Shipbuilding Co., Tsurumi</a></li> <li>last owner: [1] <a href="#">Imperial Japanese Navy - IJN - 大日本帝國海軍</a></li> <li><a href="#">Yoshida Maru No.1 (+1944)</a></li> <li>period --- ~ 1944</li> <li>IMO/Off. no.: <a href="#">22318</a></li> <li>call sign: <a href="#">NTDS</a> </li> <li>prev. owners: [2] <a href="#">Yamashita Kisen K. K., Kobe</a></li> <li><a href="#">Yoshida Maru No.1</a></li> <li>period 1919 ~ ---</li> </ul>		<p><b>Pictures</b></p>  <p><a href="#">Letzens Jan</a> 08/11/2013 copyrights: <a href="#">Unknown - onbekend - inconnu</a></p> <div style="display: grid; grid-template-columns: repeat(4, 1fr); gap: 5px;">         </div> <p><a href="#">insert new picture</a></p> <p><b>History</b></p> <p><a href="#">Letzens Jan</a> 26/04/2014</p> <p>On April 26th, 1944, US submarine <a href="#">JACK</a> (SS-259 Lt.Cdr. T.M. Dykers) encounters Japanese <a href="#">Take No.1</a> convoy off the west coast of Luzon and sinks army transport <a href="#">YOSHIDA MARU NO.1</a> and damages army cargo ship <a href="#">WALES MARU</a>.</p> <p><a href="#">YOSHIDA MARU NO.1</a> was carrying the 210 Infantry Regiment and sank at 0600 hours with 2,586 men, including crew.</p>			<p><b>Advertisement</b></p> <p><a href="#">advertisa</a></p> <p><b>search</b></p> <p>You may consider access to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">British Isles Hydrographic Service</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ 454 maritime charts and wrecks shown on charts</li> <li>+ 144,350 wreck positions worldwide</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">France Hydrographic Service</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ 124 maritime charts and wrecks shown on charts</li> <li>+ 117,130 wreck positions worldwide</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">All hydrographic Services</a></li> </ul> <p><b>search wreck:</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p><b>name starts with</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p>show prev. names: <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p><a href="#">search</a> <a href="#">A-Z</a></p> <p><b>search chart:</b> <input type="text"/></p> <p><a href="#">chart catalogue</a></p> <p><b>search owner/builder:</b> <input type="text"/></p>	

IMO/Off. no.: 22318

captain:

**about the wreck**

depth (m.):

orientation:

protected:

war grave:

**references**

references: [1] [Jordan, Roger, The World's Merchant Fleets, 1939](#)  
[2] [Cressman R. J., Official Chronology of the U.S. Navy in WWII](#)

**updates**

entered by: [Letzens Jan](#)

entered: 11/11/2009

last update: [Allen Tony](#)

last update: 26/04/2014

USS [JACK](#) clears the area to return to Fremantle and shells and sinks trawler [DAISUN](#) on April 27th, to make sure she does not use her radio-equipment.

ref. used [1] [Jordan, Roger, The World's Merchant Fleets, 1939](#)  
[2] [Cressman R. J., Official Chronology of the U.S. Navy in WWII](#)

id: 118091

[Allen Tony](#) 24/12/2010

A Japanese convoy (Operation Take-Ichi) transporting around 20,000 troops, en route from Shanghai to reinforce the Japanese garrison of Halmahera on the Vogelkop Peninsula, was attacked by the American submarine USS [JACK](#). The Yoshida Maru was carrying an entire Japanese Army regiment of 3,000 men. There were no survivors when the ship sank off Manila Bay.

ref. used [Maritime Disasters of WWII](#)

id: 87421

[insert new history](#)

#### Position

[1] [Letzens Jan](#) 11/11/2009

latitude: [hydro member](#)

longitude: [hydro member](#)

AIS: [hydro member](#)

mark: [hydro member](#)

dist. homeport: 5569.1 miles 55.8°

ref. used: [Cressman R. J., Official Chronology of the U.S. Navy in WWII](#)

position disp.:

show neighbour. wrecks:

[more positions](#)

[insert new position](#)

#### Documents

[insert new document](#)

The Wreck today

<http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?137602>



Changi:

Roberts Barracks - NAAFI Ward.

Robert Barracks housed Dutch and British Pows.

640 x 478 · 47 kB · jpeg · Heritage Tour around Colonial Changi, block 151



780 x 558 · 213 kB · gif · Roberts Barracks - Hospital orderlies tent lines.



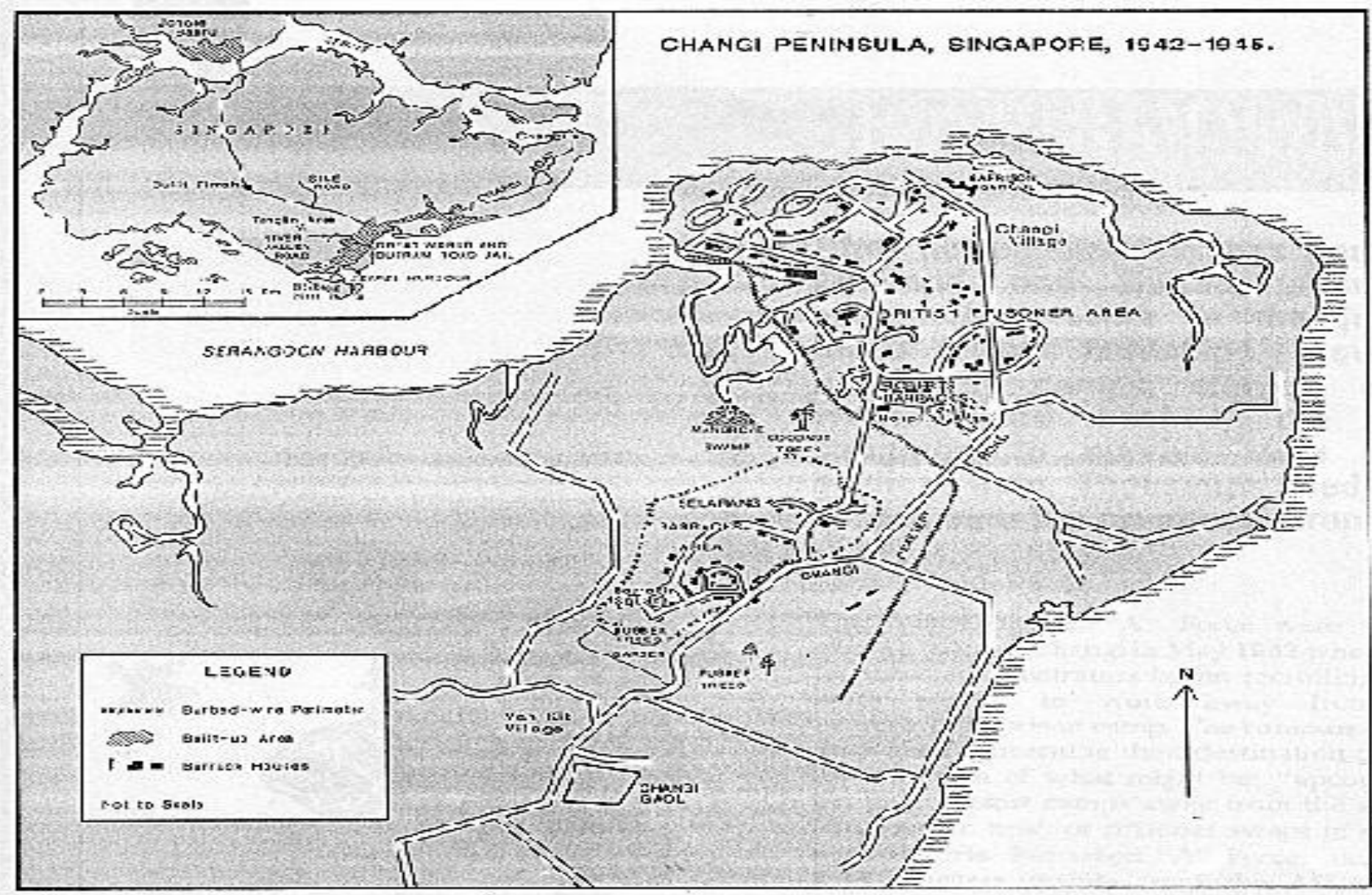
Roberts Barracks - General Theatre.



Roberts Barracks - View from Dysentery Ward.

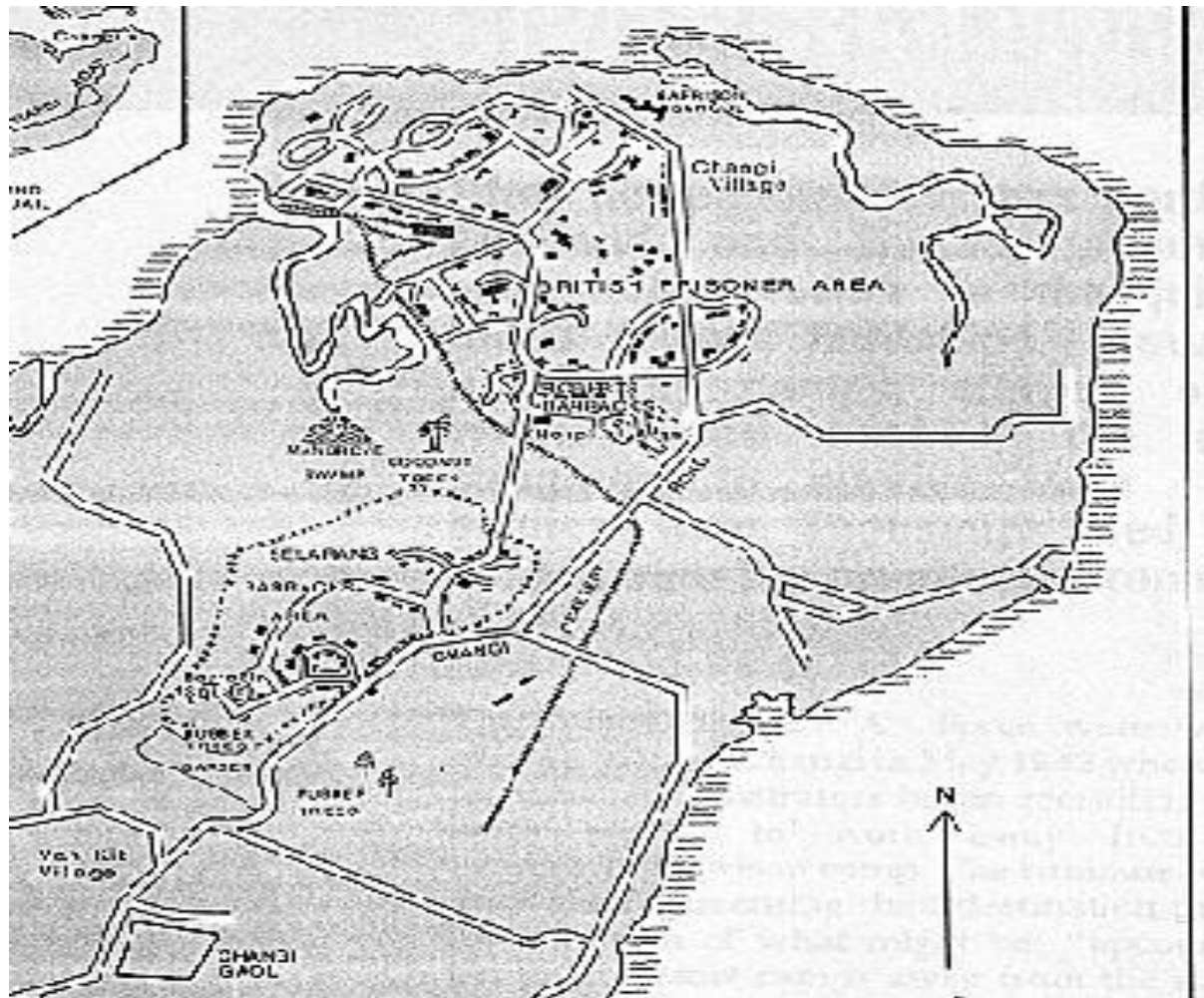
barrack buildings used by Japanese for internment of POW's

<http://www.ronlindeman.com/pow.html>



Here are some

views of the Changi area...sketch maps, show the British Prisoner of War camps area, during WW2.



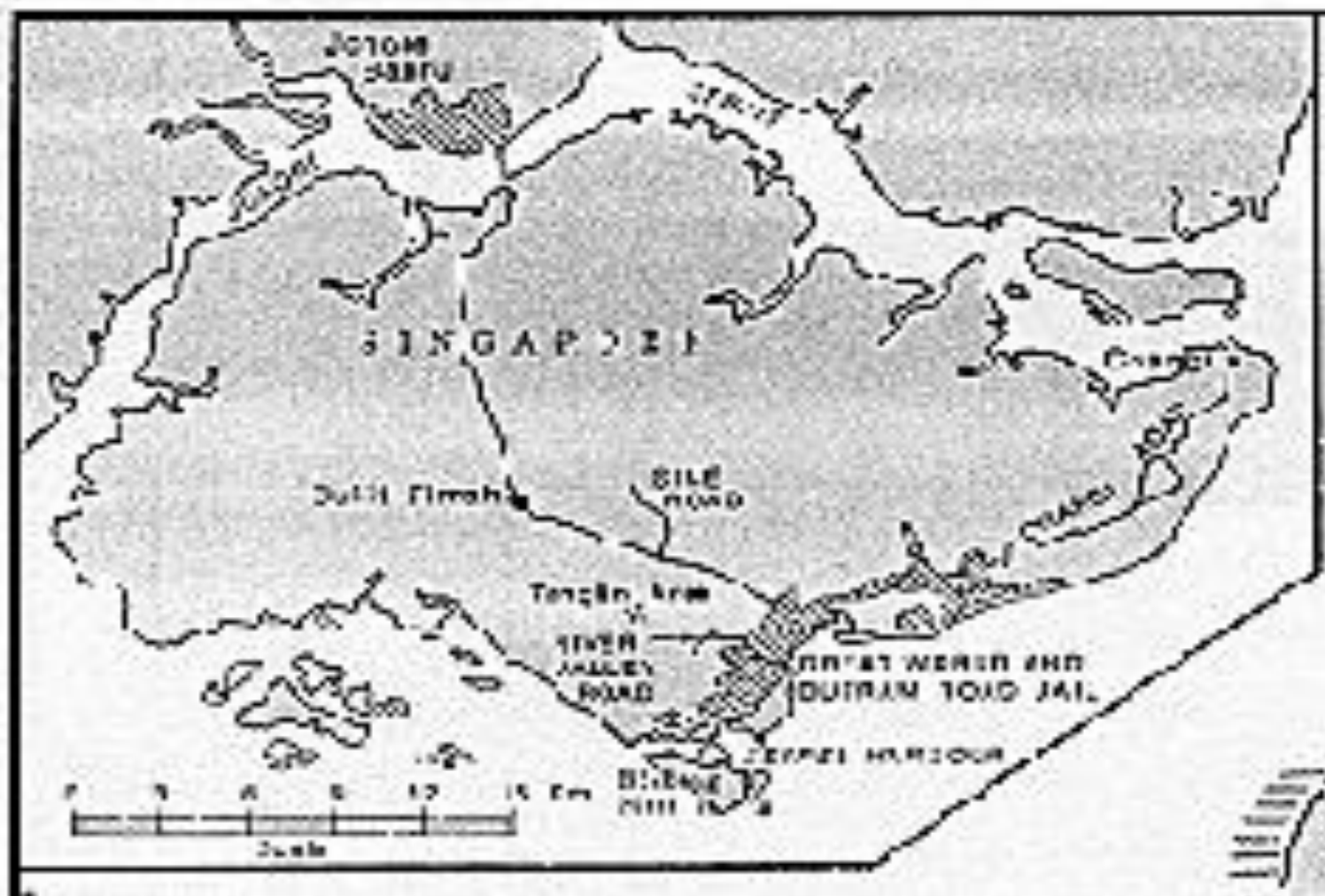
Here are some views of the Changi area...sketch maps, show the British Prisoner of War camps area, during WW2.

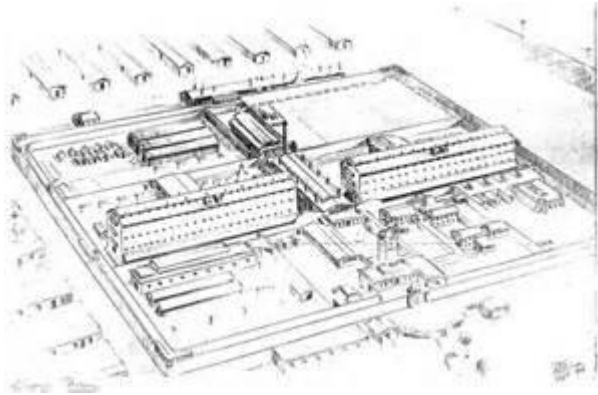


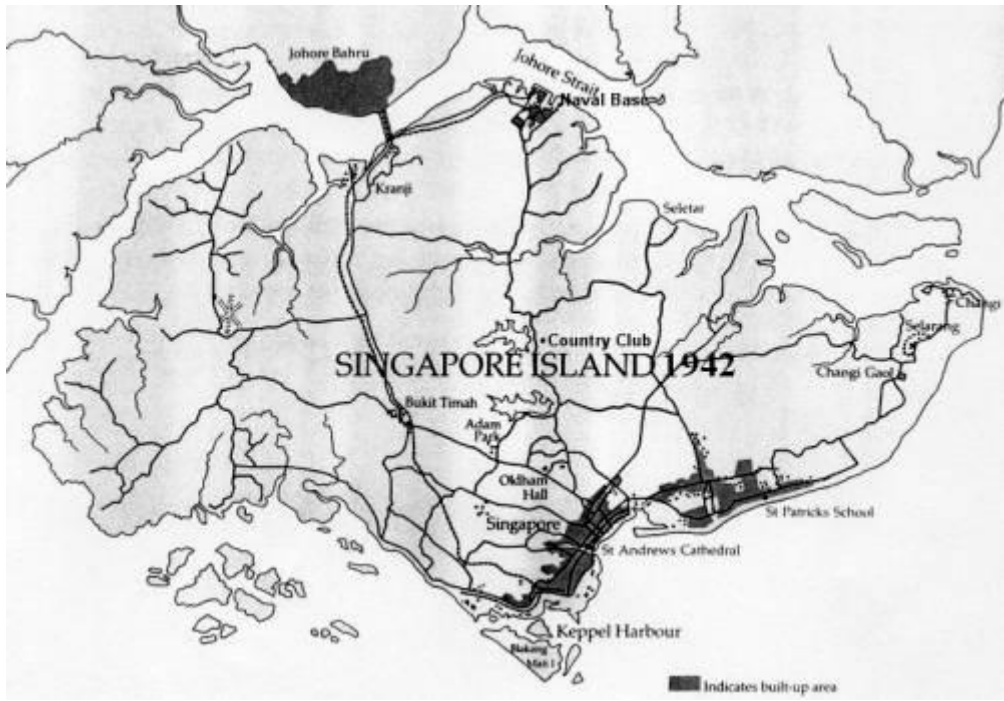
British POWs marching to Changi under the orders of the Japanese Army 1942



Photo Credit: National Archives of Singapore







G



randdad may have sailed on the Singapore from one of two harbours on the

island, one may have been:-

Source: Tsuji, M., Singapore: The Japanese Version  
(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), p. 249



The capture of Singapore.

Keppel Harbour



**Singapore docks Keppel Harbour.**



Photograph - Boat in Keppel Harbour, Singapore, World War II, 1941-1942 Image Reg. No: MM 112271. Photograph - Boat in Keppel Harbour, Singapore, World War

[museumvictoria.com.au](http://museumvictoria.com.au)

Photograph - Boats in Keppel Harbour, Singapore, World War II, 1941-1942.



A launch returning from an island in Keppel Harbour at Singapore after Royal Engineers had set fire to oil storage tanks there, January 1942.



DESPERATE LAST HOURS IN SINGAPORE



*A launch returning from an island in Keppel Harbour at Singapore after Royal Engineers had set fire to oil storage tanks there, January 1942.*

Royal Navy officer R. G. Curry (later Lieutenant Commander) had been assisting the RAF but now, after all the aircraft had been evacuated to Java, found himself without any responsibilities – he made his way to the Singapore docks to find a ship that he could volunteer to join. It was the 12th February:

From the ship's bridge I was horrified to see scores of children, and women, standing right up to the very edge of Clifford Pier, waiting desperately for rescue. Our guns on Pulau Blakang Mati were shelling the enemy lines, the shells passing over us. Jap planes were slowly circling over the city, throwing red anti-personnel grenades on to the soldiers and civilians which exploded before they reached the ground.

The Captain told me that our job was to proceed to the minefield at dusk, show a red light and guide escaping ships and craft through the minefields, and return to base at dawn.

The Japanese were at a radius of 3–4 miles away, and the people were being killed at a rate of 2000 per day, not counting wounded. He was telling me that he had to attend a conference at Fort Canning on Friday 13th Feb, when he heard the drone of planes, there were 27 Jap Bombers approaching the docks from the east. Before going below to take cover I looked at those children, dressed mostly in white with ribbons in their hair, waving to us – no shelter at all – Dear God.

Down below I found an air raid shelter built entirely of large tins of corned beef, and as I dived in, it was explained that the bomb splinters could slice through the sides of a ship, but could not penetrate the corned beef. Good old Admiralty ham. As the bombs exploded all around us I thought of those children standing on Clifford Pier unprotected. As soon as the crash of bombs finished, I rushed up top and thank God, the children were still standing there, waving to us. A large Chinese junk was burning and people, also on fire, were jumping into the sea.

At dusk we steamed away to the minefields to show our red light, the children and women stopped waving as they watched us leave. I have had the picture of those children in my minds eye for 34 years, even though I was slightly comforted by a shipmate who assured me that the Japanese even in their brutal unpredictable way, were fond of children.

Throughout the night we guided escape craft through the minefields to what we all thought was safety. None of us appeared to know that a Japanese Naval Squadron consisting of two 8inch Gun Cruisers, an Aircraft Carrier, and three destroyers, under the command of Admiral Ozawa, was already cruising between the escaping ships and the south, and they sank nearly all escape ships with tremendous loss of life.

At dawn we returned to our moorings at Keppel Harbour to witness the slaughter, the fires, the children, the bombings, and take refuge in our corned beef shelter. It was Friday 13th February 1942.

Read more of Lieutenant Commander R. G. Curry's story on **BBC People's War**.

## Bert Miller has also left a graphic description of the final few days:

Jap naval units had taken station around the island and sought, indiscriminately the few remaining 25-pounder batteries. Shells from the guns concentrated on the mainland, punctuated with the click, whine and 'crump' of nearby mortars, hammered the pockets of resistance still operational.

The never-ending flights of bombers blasted everything. Buildings folded like decks of cards on to streets festooned with wire that once fed telephones and power. An ominous web supported in its disorder by the uprooted poles and crumpled stanchions.

Thousands of refugees crouched in the hollow drainpipes and monsoon ditches, seeking protection from shells, bombs and the machine-gunning from the low flying planes.

No deep shelters existed the waterlogged ground and on the surface any substantial refuge was out of the question as the city was so congested, there was no space. Many of the streets were impassable. Civilians driven from their up-country plantations had abandoned their cars bumper to bumper, and when struck by bullet or shell fragment would burst into flames; igniting the car in front and behind. Such chain reactions would spread the fire to the length of a block.

Meanwhile, demolitions had gone ahead at the Naval base with the oil tanks well alight. Smoke darkened the sky and midday became dusk. So high and so vast the great columns seemed to reach forever. In the canals and ditches, bloated corpses of air raid victims and their animals floated on oil from the streaming tanks.

Among the ruins, stark and stiffening bodies lay unburied, while along the thoroughfares the water from burst mains dowsed corpses as it rushed to waste.

Still the bombing went on: unopposed. The same areas were struck again and again. It was devastation of devastation: if anything like that is possibly conceivable.

Casualties were reaching 2000 a day.

The air was full of choking dust and during the showers the clouds wept black tears as the rain passed through the oil-laden smoke: there was no escape from the stench of cordite, sewers and the rotting flesh.

Read more of Bert Miller's story on **BBC People's War**.

<http://ww2today.com/13th-february-1942-desperate-last-hours-in-singapore>



25-1-keppel\_harbour.jpg

sgfilmhunter.wordpress.com640 × 240Search by image

The view from Keppel Harbour after the British surrender, as depicted in the documentary.

<https://sgfilmhunter.wordpress.com/tag/singapore-harbour-board/> next

<https://sgfilmhunter.wordpress.com/2012/10/05/location-scouting-in-malayan-war-record-a-record-of-the-offensive-1942-part-1/>

<https://sgfilmhunter.wordpress.com/2012/10/08/location-scouting-in-malayan-war-record-a-record-of-the-offensive-1942-part-3/>

while the British POWs were placed in Roberts Barracks.

Tents at Malai...maybe the Japs called it Malai...

## THE STORY OF CHANGI

by Carol Cooper

Thousands of people every year fly into Changi Airport and head for the centre of Singapore without even giving the area of Changi a second thought, but this eastern sector of the island is steeped in history which is worth spending a little time in pursuing.

In the early 1900's Changi was little more than a low-lying mangrove swamp area which was punctuated by three main hills that were destined to become known as the Battery Hill, the Fairy Point Hill and the Temple/Changi Hill areas. Surrounding these hills was a thick undergrowth and virgin forest with trees up to 150 feet high. The name 'Changi' is the native word for the 'Balanocarpus' tree, some of the tallest trees that used to grow on Singapore.

By 1927, the only habitation in the Changi region was a small native village, a police station, a couple of bungalows, one being government owned and a small Japanese Hotel with a dubious clientele. Any military protection that was set up by the Government to defend the island during the First World War covered the harbour area only.

The strategic importance of Singapore as a military base had been realised by Sir Stamford Raffles, many years previous, but in the early days it was not considered necessary to build fixed defences around the whole island. As Japan flourished into a powerful nation in the Far East, Stanley Baldwin made the decision to build a gigantic Naval Base on the north coast of the island. It was thought, quite wrongly as it turned out, that any possible attack would come from the sea and the possibility of a land attack from the north was ruled out.

**In the overall scheme of things it was decided that Changi would be the base for the Royal Artillery batteries to cover the eastern approaches to the Johore Straits.** In 1927 the Army Council sent a commission of three officers, headed by Major General Webb Gillman to prepare a detailed defence scheme and considering that the whole area was virgin swampland and jungle, the task that lay ahead of them was a formidable one, but despite the drawbacks the scheme went ahead. This included the rough plans of the Changi cantonment (a small division of Changi Island) which had been prepared previously at the General Headquarters, Fort Canning, the previous year.

Blueprints were prepared for two main barrack areas which were later to become known as Kitchener and Roberts Barracks and in no time at all work on clearing the ground commenced. One very important aspect was to drain the mangrove swamps and destroy the ever present malarial mosquitoes as it was essential that they could not breed within half a mile of any of the living and working areas. Snakes were the second most dangerous hazard and were a constant danger until eliminated.

The initial clearing was started by two supervisors and eighteen labourers, but as land was cleared and temporary living accommodation and pathways laid down, more workers were able to be brought in. By December 1927 the first four officers married quarters on Fairy Hill Point were almost complete, followed by similar quarters on Battery Hill.

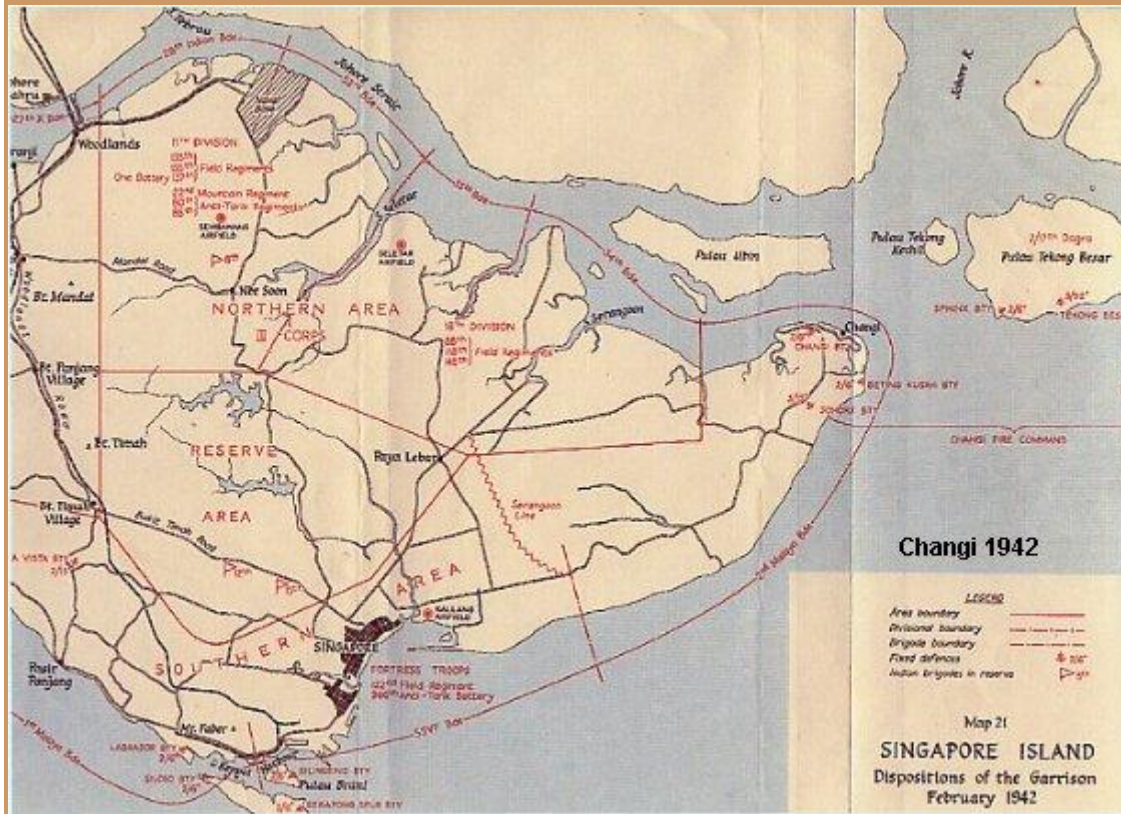
The first three years in the evolution of Changi saw it rise up from the swamps and the foundations of its future development were well and truly laid. Thought was even given to the horticultural enthusiasts. Many of the large stately trees were left standing and worked around, other flowering trees and shrubs were established and although Changi was first and foremost a Military base it also became an area of great beauty.

Unfortunately by the middle of 1930 all work on Changi came to an abrupt halt. Although the defence of Singapore was becoming increasingly urgent in the face of Japan's growing urge to become more powerful than its neighbours, back in England the political and economic situation demanded that money being spent on Singapore defences be cut. However, with a change in Government and Japan's intentions growing stronger, the work on Changi continued again in 1933.

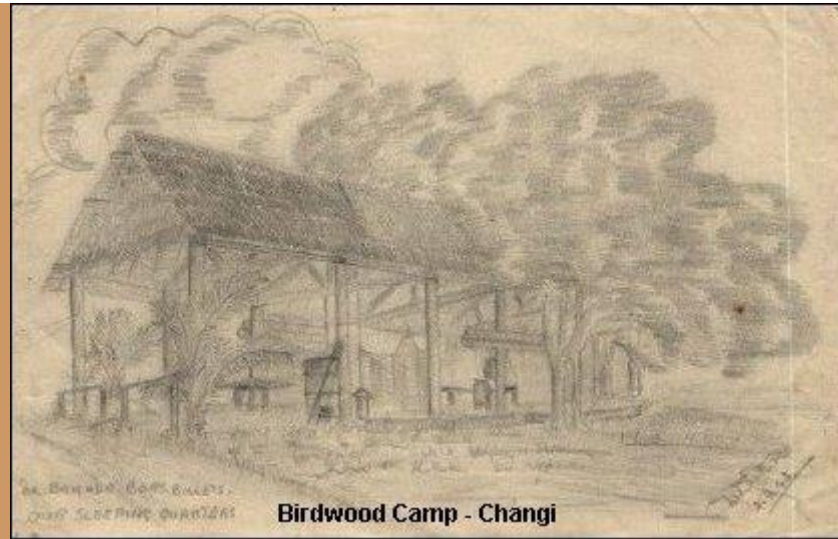
Between 1934 (when the India Barracks were built) and 1941 the work continued in earnest and by 1936 most of the barracks, married quarters and officers mess were completed. The Royal Engineers took over the Kitchener Barracks and the Royal Artillery Coast Artillery Regiment occupied the Roberts Barracks as more barracks and quarters continued to be built.

In 1936 a new site was selected to house a full battalion of infantry at Selarang about a mile from the Roberts Barracks and in the next two years the whole of Selarang Barracks was established and became the home of the Gordon Highlanders. Also built in 1936 in Changi village was a new civilian jail to house up to 800 civilian prisoners - this jail was to feature very dramatically when Singapore fell to the Japanese six years later. Further new barrack blocks and a NAAFI carried on being built as late as 1941.

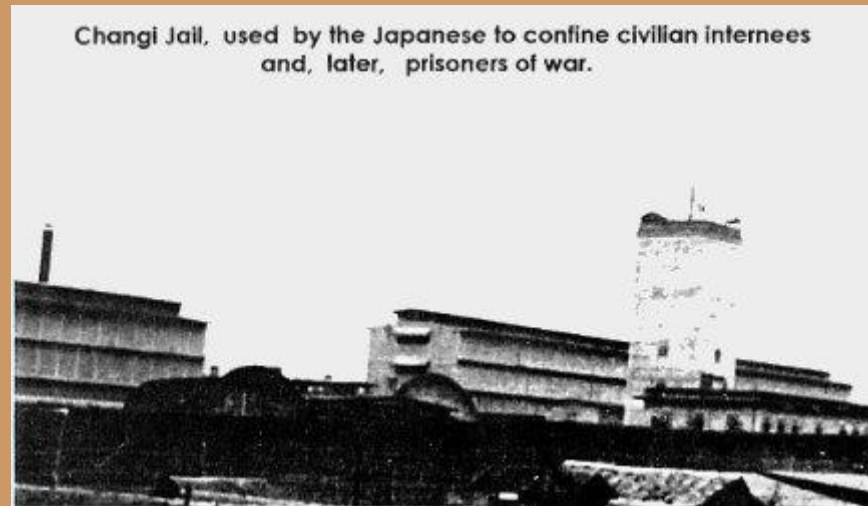
**A week before the capitulation on 15th February 1942, the Japanese were occupying Palau Ubin, overlooking Changi and heavy bombardment was exchanged. But defeat was inevitable and within hours of the surrender the Japanese decided that the Changi area and all the barracks would become one huge prison of war camp.**



It is not widely known that the civilian Changi Prison was not used initially to house the thousands of servicemen who became military POWs. Instead it was the surrounding area outside Changi and the nearby barracks that became the home of the dejected and disheartened prisoners. For some it was to be this for a few months, but for others it was for the full duration of the war. The 18th Division, which had landed in Singapore only weeks before the capitulation, were thrown immediately into the battle and now found themselves in two barrack blocks and several huts of the India Barracks. **Many Dutch and RAF prisoners taken in Java and later sent to Singapore were housed in tents close to the India Barracks and this area was known as the Java Lines.**



Changi prison itself and its bleak stone cold cells designed to take 800 prisoners, now became the home of the, mainly white, civilian internees - 3000 men and 400 women and children. For two years they endured nightmares and brutality within the prison's stone walls until May 1944 when they were ordered out and given a change of residence. From early 1944 thousands of prisoners had been returning to the Changi area following the completion of the Thai/Burma railway. The civilians were then moved out of Changi Jail into the Sime Road camps. Following the evacuation of the civilians, 5,000 POWs were moved into the prison and its cold, foul smelling cells. Each cell, crawling with bugs, was approx 6ft x 8 ft and had a concrete block in the centre which served as a bed for one prisoner. Two more prisoners slept on the floor on either side. One small window approx. a foot square gave a little light and the much needed fresh air while a hole in the floor in one corner served as a toilet. A further 12,000 POWs were concentrated in the surrounding area of the jail, living in camps made up of attap huts and rough accommodation. The Outram Road Jail was used as a punishment camp.



POWs were sent out from Changi every day to work in different locations on the island. Many worked on the Paya Lebar air field and others, mainly from the Bukit Timah camp, were sent to the centre of Singapore to build a Japanese shrine (which was later demolished at the end of the war).

However, returning to the period following the surrender, as food supplies dwindled the beautiful gardens around Changi were dug up and vegetables were planted and the Roberts Barracks became a much needed hospital

In the first early weeks following the capitulation, the Japanese placed no restriction on the movements of any prisoners within the Changi area and they were allowed to walk about at will over the whole eastern end of the island - until 12th March 1942, when the Japanese started to limit the activities and freedom of the POWs.

In September 1942 came the 'Selarang Incident' when 15,400 men were concentrated at the Selarang Barracks for refusing to sign a declaration that they would not try to escape. The POWs held out for three days but eventually the British and Australian commanders ordered their men to sign the declaration, pointing out that failure to do so would result in hundreds of very sick men dying of disease in the squalor, heat and unhygienic conditions. After the men signed on the 5th September they were allowed to return to their normal places of captivity.



By the time the Selarang Incident was over the number of prisoners who had been taken to Changi originally, seven months earlier, now numbered less than half. Many had died of hunger and disease and many more had been taken to other destinations to be put to work as slaves.

As already mentioned, many POWs from Changi were forced to labour for two years to build the Paya Lebar air strip for the Japanese, whose planes first started using this in 1944. The work was hard and laborious in the searing heat as the men slaved, excavating soil and rocks and filling hand trucks. These in turn were then manually pushed to the flat, low-lying swampland to fill the ground and form the air strip. In gruelling heat, working ten to twelve hours a day, suffering from starvation and many deficiency diseases, the men daily succumbed and the death rate continued to soar.

The barracks nearest the air strip were used as aircraft workshops and stores, but by this time the news was leaking through of the German surrender and those back in the jail, with well-hidden secret radios, were constantly picking up news that the days of the Japanese occupation were drawing to a close.

On the 15th August 1945, an unconditional surrender was announced and almost immediately POW working parties began returning to Singapore from other destinations, eager to return home. By early September over 17,000 men were congregated in and around the Changi jail compound and at the same time medicines and medics were parachuted in to assist the suffering men.

For over sixty years the name Changi has remained synonymous with hardship and cruelty, borne during this horrific chapter in British military history, a name that will not easily be forgotten. It will remain a lasting bitter memory to all those who were unfortunate enough to have been interned in the miserable foulness within its formidable stone walls or in the surrounding camps within its shadows.



Changi Gaol - 2000

Today the area around Changi and the nearby village is far removed from the stark Changi of sixty years ago. To reach this eastern corner of Singapore, one has to drive along beautiful clean, tree-lined roads, bedecked with exquisite flowers and colourful shrubs. Thousands of bougainvillea flowers, growing in abundance, bask in the dazzling sunshine, throwing a lilac cloak over everything within its grasp as if trying to purge itself of the dark and evil force that once occupied this small island.

As already mentioned, the word Changi is a tribal word for tall trees, but today the word could well take on another meaning which is far more familiar to everyone - **The Far East Prisoners of War.**

COFEPOW Children of Far East **Prisoners** ... Many Dutch and RAF **prisoners** taken in Java and later sent to **Singapore** were housed in **tents** ... The **POWs** held out ...



Aerial View of Changi Prison, 1960s

Photo Credit: The History of Changi



Prisoners of war at camp Fukuoka #6, Orso, Kyushu, Japan.  
Sept. 15, 1945







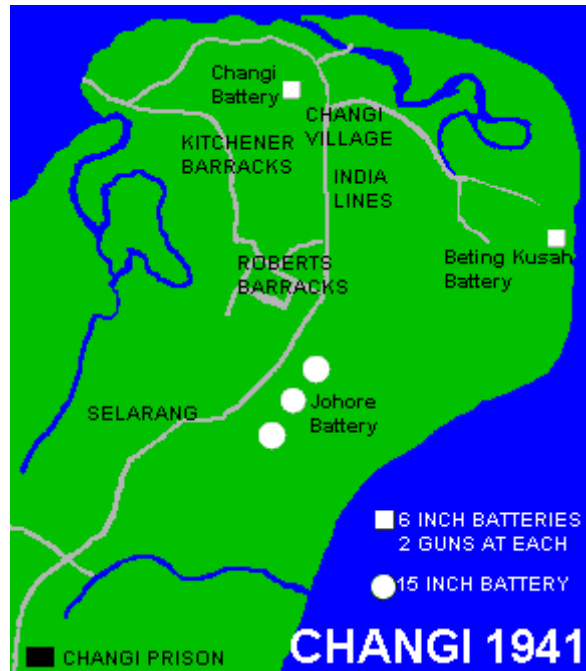
200 x 324 · 11 kB · jpeg · Changi POW camp

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/5433037/Prisoners-secret-war-dossier> SURVIVORS: Prisoners at Singapore's Changi Prison during World War II suffered terrible malnutrition



632 x 378 · 30 kB · jpeg-Block 151, Roberts Barracks

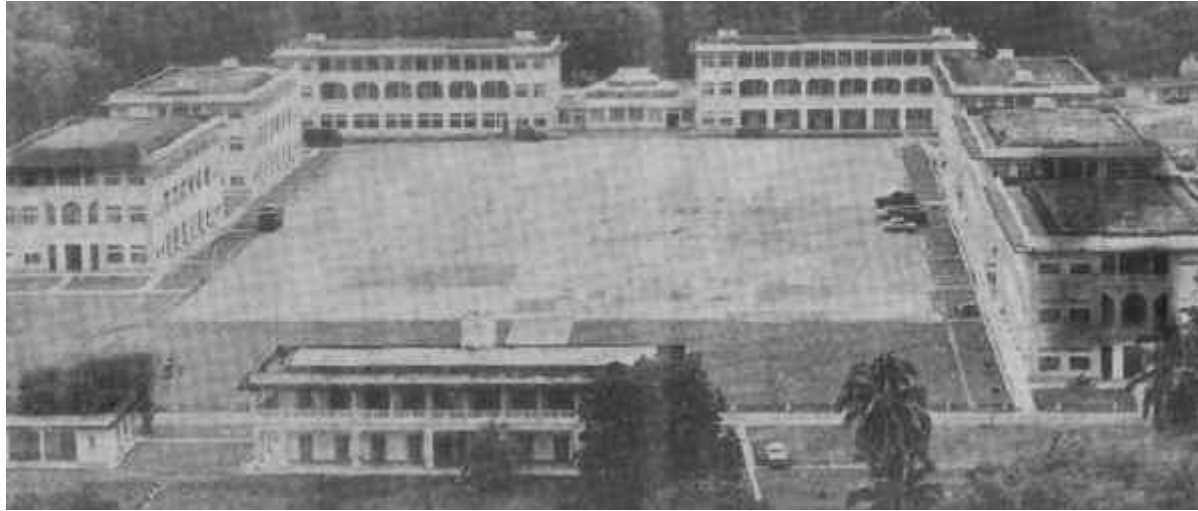
The British and Dutch were housed at Roberts Barracks, Kitchener Barracks and the wooden barracks at India Lines. Part of Roberts Barracks was used as the hospital.



## SELARANG BARRACKS, SINGAPORE



Selarang Barracks, September 1942. More than 15,000 Pows were incarcerated in the barracks when the Allies refused to sign the "no escape" pledge.

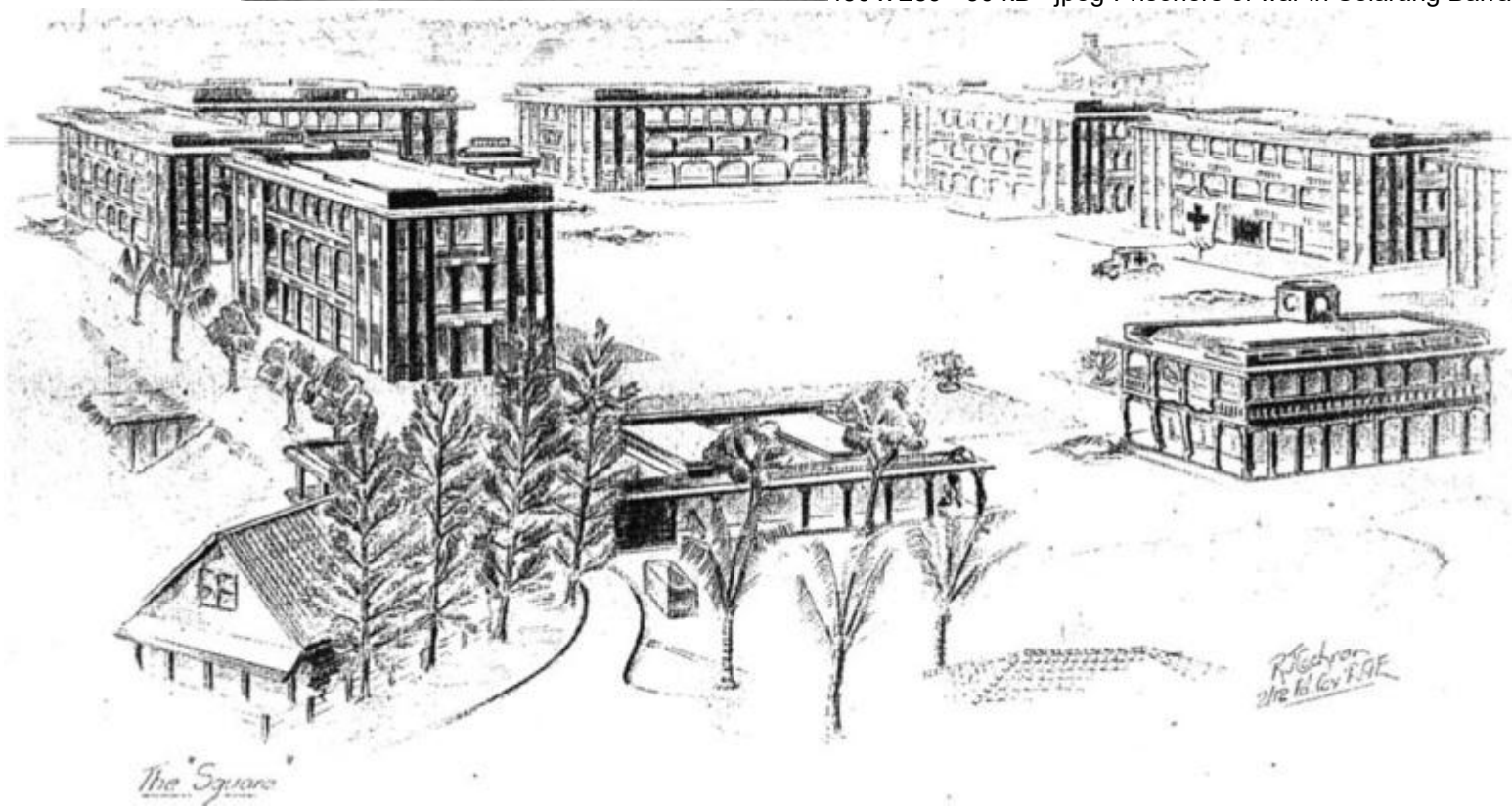


[http://www.oocities.org/digger\\_history\\_ww2/pages-changi/overview.htm](http://www.oocities.org/digger_history_ww2/pages-changi/overview.htm)

Australians POWs This is where they were incarcerated. Selarang Barracks, Changi, on the island of Singapore



450 x 289 · 30 kB · jpeg · Prisoners of war in Selarang Barracks, Changi, 1942.



Selarang Barracks - The Square.

# Selarang Barracks

## Incident[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selarang\\_Barracks\\_Incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selarang_Barracks_Incident)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jump to: [navigation](#), [search](#)



A view from above of a square crowded with prisoners-of-war surrounded by the buildings of a military barracks. There is one building to the left and one to the right, with another building in the background with trees and vegetation either side of it. Within the square are thousands of prisoners, some visible at work in the foreground, and a large number of tents, some with a red cross symbol painted on them.

The **Selarang Barracks Incident** also known as the **Barrack Square Incident** or the **Selarang Square Squeeze**, was an event during the [Second World War](#) started on 30 August 1942. The barracks was sited in [Changi](#), [Singapore](#) and were used by the [Japanese](#) to hold 17,000 [Anglo-Australian prisoners-of-war](#) (POWs). After the Japanese recaptured four escaped [Allied](#) POWs, the Selarang Barracks POWs refused to sign a pledge not to escape, and were forced to crowd in the areas around the barracks square for nearly five days with little water and no sanitation. The executions of the recaptured POWs failed to break the men. The commanders however finally capitulated on 5 September when their men started to fall ill and die from [dysentery](#). Upon signing the pledge, the men were allowed to return to the barracks buildings.<sup>[1]</sup>

### Contents

[\[hide\]](#)

- [1 History](#)
  - [1.1 Changi](#)
  - [1.2 The Executions](#)
- [2 Selarang Barracks today](#)
  - [2.1 Remembrance](#)

- [3 See also](#)
- [4 Notes and references](#)
- [5 External links](#)

History[[edit](#)]

Changi[[edit](#)]



A display of POW artefacts at the Changi Chapel and Museum. The picture in the background shows Changi Prison during [World War II](#)

Built in 1938, the Selarang Barracks was part of the Changi Garrison, a heavily fortified coastal defence where most of the British forces were based during the [Battle of Singapore](#). The Selarang Barracks housed the 2nd Battalion [Gordon Highlanders](#), a British Army infantry regiment which recruited its soldiers mainly from North East Scotland. The Royal Engineers and the 9th Coastal Artillery Regiment of the Royal Artillery were based in nearby Kitchener Barracks and Roberts Barracks respectively. After the British [surrender of Singapore](#) on 15 February 1942, Allied POWs were ordered by the Japanese to march to Changi for internment. As the British-built [Changi Prison](#) was already crowded with Allied POWs and civilians, the surrounding barracks including Selarang Barracks were used by the Japanese as a holding area for Australian and British POWs.<sup>[2]</sup>

On 30 August 1942, as a pre-emptive measure, the newly arrived Japanese Commander General Shimpei Fukuye wanted the wholly British and Australian POWs interned at Selarang Barracks in Changi to sign a "No Escape Pledge" after the recapture of four escaped prisoners from Changi Prison earlier. The four escapees were Australian [Corporal](#) Rodney Breavington and [Private](#) Victor Gale, and English soldiers, Private Harold Waters and Private Eric Fletcher. The pledge reads: "I the undersigned, hereby solemnly swear on my honour that I will not, under any circumstances, attempt to escape."<sup>[3]</sup> With three exceptions, everyone refused to sign. This was unacceptable to the prisoners as they saw it as their duty to escape if they could. Under the [Geneva Convention](#), POWs had the right to attempt to escape and they were not supposed to be punished if they were recaptured. However, at that time, Japan was not a signatory to the Geneva Convention. General Fukuye was furious at the mass display of insubordination and the following day, he ordered all prisoners except the three who had agreed to sign, to congregate at the parade square in Selarang Barracks. What ensued was to become known as the "Selarang Barracks Incident".<sup>[1]</sup>

The Selarang Barracks, originally built to accommodate 800 men, consisted of a parade ground surrounded on three sides by three-storey buildings. A number of smaller houses for officers and married couples were spread out in the spacious grounds. Nearly 17,000 men<sup>[4]</sup> crammed into a parade ground of about 128 by 210 metres and in the surrounding areas.<sup>[1]</sup> An Australian POW, George Aspinall documented the situation:

The first and most urgent problem we had to face up to was the lack of toilet facilities. Each barracks building had about four to six toilets, which were flushed from small cisterns on the roofs. But the Japanese cut the water off, and these toilets couldn't be used. The Japanese only allowed one water tap to be used, and people used to line up in the early hours of the morning and that queue would go on all day. You were allowed one water bottle of water per man per day, just one quart for your drinking, washing, and everything else. Not that there was much washing done under the circumstances.<sup>[5]</sup>

The Executions<sup>[edit]</sup>

When there were no signs of the POWs backing down on the third day, General Fukuye ordered the Commander of the British and Australian troops in Changi, Lt-Gen E. B. Holmes, and his deputy, [Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Galleghan](#), to attend the execution of the four recent escapees — Breavington, Gale, Waters and Fletcher. One of the Australians, Breavington, pleaded to no avail that he was solely responsible for the escape attempt and should be the only one executed. Their executions were carried out by the [Indian National Army](#) guards with rifles on 2 September. The initial volley was non-fatal, and the wounded men had to plead to be finished off.<sup>[1][6]</sup>

Despite the executions, the prisoners remained firm as the days ensued. Without food and little water available and coupled with latrine pits, kitchens and hospital beds crowded into an area of about a square kilometre, dysentery broke out quickly and the sick began to die. Realising that more would die needlessly, the prisoners' commanders decided that they and their men would sign the pledge "under duress". On 4 September, Lt-Gen Holmes issued a written order to his men:

The requirement by the [Imperial Japanese Army](#), issued under their Order No.17 dated 31 August '42 that all ranks of the POW Camp Changi, should be given the opportunity to sign a certificate of promise not to escape, has now been amended in a revised Imperial Japanese Army Order No.17 dated 2 September '42 to a definite order that all officers, [NCOs](#), and Men of the POW Camp shall sign this undertaking.

I therefore now order that these certificates will be signed by all ranks, and handed by Area Commanders to Command Headquarters by 1100 hrs on 5 September '42. The circumstances in which I have been compelled to issue this order will be made the subject of Selarang Special Order No. 3 which will be issued later.<sup>[7]</sup>

As the Japanese weren't familiar with British names, the POWs signed using false or meaningless names. One of the most common signatures among the Australians was [Ned Kelly](#), a famous Australian folk hero.<sup>[5]</sup> After the signing was completed, the Japanese allowed the prisoners back to their former areas on 5 September, thus ending the incident.

During the Singapore War Crimes Trial in 1946, General Fukuye was sentenced to death and executed by firing squad at the spot where the four POWs had been shot three years earlier. The four shot POWs were later honoured and buried at the [Kranji War Memorial](#) after the war.<sup>[8]</sup>

Selarang Barracks today[[edit](#)]

After the war, the Selarang Barracks became the home for most of the Australian Army units of [ANZUK](#), a tripartite force formed by Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom to defend the [Asia-Pacific](#) region, until its disbandment in 1974. Today, Selarang Barracks is the headquarters for the 9th Division of the [Singapore Armed Forces](#) (SAF), and access to the camp is restricted.<sup>[9]</sup>

Remembrance[[edit](#)]



The main entrance leading to the Changi Chapel and Museum at Upper Changi Road North, Singapore. In the background lies the replica of the [Changi Chapel](#)

In order to honour the deeds and inspirational stories that unfolded in Changi during the war, the Changi Chapel and Museum was built in 1988 as a dedication to all those who lived and died in Singapore during the years of [World War II](#). It also serves as an important educational institution and resource centre with documentation of significant events of the Japanese Occupation in Singapore.<sup>[10]</sup> The *Selarang Barracks Incident*, *Double Tenth Incident* and other similar stories that were mentioned by the survivors of Changi Prison are retold on the [storyboard](#) displays for posterity.<sup>[11]</sup> There are also showcases containing tools, materials and personal belongings of POWs and other artefacts related or used during World War II. The items displayed in the showcases were donated from organizations, POWs and their families, as well as other visitors.<sup>[12]</sup>

On 19 April 1996, [Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer](#) and his wife, Nicky, made a personal pilgrimage to Changi Prison, to see the cell his father was kept in as a prisoner-of-war during World War II. His father, Sir Alexander Downer, was interned in Selarang Barracks from 1942 to 1943 and then in Changi Prison from 1943 to 1944. Downer also visited the Changi Memorial Chapel, where Sir Alexander had worshipped during his internment, the Selarang Barracks, and the camp parade square, where 17,000 Allied POWs were ordered to assemble in 1942.<sup>[13]</sup>

<http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-battles/ww2/changi/0-changi-cat-index.htm>

---

**Changi Prison: was it a "hell hole"?**



550 x 263 · 15 kB · jpeg·Changi Prison in 1967.

[Sub category index](#)



436 x 252 · 22 kB · jpeg·further 12,000 POWs were concentrated in the surrounding area

Changi Maximum Security Prison, 1994. Contrary to the myth this is NOT where most Australians spent the period of captivity in 1942/45.

They were actually mostly incarcerated in Selarang Barracks, a former British Army base set on about 400 acres of farm-land and rubber plantations.

Over 22,000 Australians became prisoners of war of the Japanese in south-east Asia . The wave of Japanese victories ending with the capture of the Netherlands East Indies in March 1942 left in its wake a mass of Allied prisoners of war, including many Australians. Most of the Australians (14,972) were captured in Singapore ; other principal Australian prisoner-of-war groups were captured in Java (2,736); Timor (1,137); Ambon (1,075); and New Britain (1,049).



- Over the years the story of the dreadful treatment by the Japanese guards of Allied Prisoners of War (POWs) has been told a thousand times. Unfortunately many myths have grown up, particularly here in Australia. I make an attempt here to provide the truth. It is awful enough without having anyone gild the lily.
- First lets get a few things on record before the enraged mob comes for me with the rope.

- I am NOT an apologist for the Japanese or their treatment of POWs.
  - I fully recognise the horror of that time (as well as one can without living through it) and the deep and lasting effect it had on the men and women concerned. I do not try to downplay that at all. Each one who lived through it and returned to lead a close to normal life is a hero in my eyes.
  - Those who died in captivity are just as much to be respected on ANZAC Day as any other sailor, soldier or airman who was killed in action.
- My desire is to see the truth told so that when my grandson reads the "history" of WW2 and comes to the part about Changi he will be dealing with fact, not some urban myth that has grown up and gained a life and respectability from constant retelling.

"Changi became known as the most notorious camp in Asia, and in the minds of many people in England, Australia, and America, the Changi prisoner-of-war camp would invoke visions of atrocities, starvation, bad living conditions and emaciated men. It was the place where prisoners-of-war were reduced to a physical state more looking like living skeletons. As a prisoner-of-war, not only in the Changi Camp but in various camps in Singapore and Siam [Thailand], I cannot understand how Changi had earned such a reputation. My memories of Changi have never been unpleasant.

Prisoners-of-war in Changi did suffer deprivation and loss of self-esteem, but conditions were not appalling. Although food was rationed, it was provided every day. The camp was also provided with amenities, such as electric lights and piped water, which contributed to our cleanliness and good healthy conditions." [Lionel De Rosario](#)



Changi is and was much more than a prison.

It is both a village and a locality with an area of thousands and thousands of acres.

What we, in Australia, might call a rural suburb or village.

When the island "fortress" of Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1942 all the "captives" were sent to the area of Changi, which became a huge POW Camp.

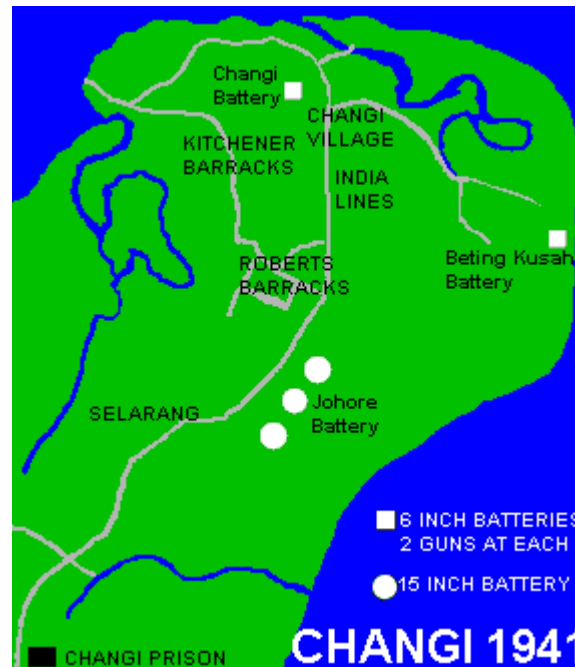
It was never just a prison in the normal European sense of a group of concrete buildings surrounded by a high concrete fence with guard towers.

Sheer numbers would have made that impossible even if it had been the desire of the Japanese. When Singapore fell there were 50,000 British, Dutch and Australian troops sent to Changi in the first week.

Three days later General Percival accepted the Japanese surrender terms, and within a matter of hours the enemy decreed that Changi should become a gigantic prison camp, in which all the British captives would be concentrated. The order for all troops to move to Changi was given on 16th February, and from then until 18th February a procession of over 50,000 prisoners trudged wearily along the long winding road leading eastwards from the city     Extract from [Changi History](#) by Sqn Ldr H A Probert

Most of the POWs were housed in former British Army barracks. The Australians were housed mostly in Selarang Barracks. It is made up of 8 major buildings, a dozen or more minor buildings and 400 acres of land. It had been home to the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders. In the 1970's it was home to the Australian Battalions that formed part of ANZUK, 1 RAR and later, 6 RAR.

The British and Dutch were housed at Roberts Barracks, Kitchener Barracks and the wooden barracks at India Lines. Part of Roberts Barracks was used as the hospital.



Over the years many myths have grown up, particularly in Australia, about the 'hell hole' of Changi Prison. This site seeks to present the facts. THE FACTS ARE BAD ENOUGH. To embellish them is counter-productive, and silly.

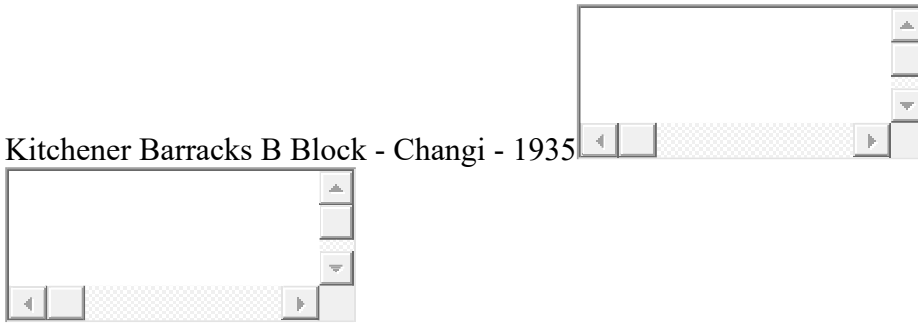
What is worse we now have South East Asian tourist operators providing "re-creations" of what we expect to see even though it may not be true [Details](#)

## Australian prisoners of war. Second World War. Prisoners of the Japanese

From the AWM Encyclopedia

Over 22,000 Australians became prisoners of war of the Japanese in south-east Asia . The wave of Japanese victories ending with the capture of the Netherlands East Indies in March 1942 left in its wake a mass of Allied prisoners of war, including many Australians. Most of the Australians (14,972) were captured in Singapore ; other principal Australian prisoner-of-war groups were captured in Java (2,736); Timor (1,137); Ambon (1,075); and New Britain (1,049).

Kitchener Barracks B Block - Changi - 1935



Barrack Hill Rd (later Hendon Rd), Changi Cantonment.

In the 1930s, Britain responded to the threat of Japan's growing militarisation in the Far East by strengthening its military defences at Singapore; the Royal Navy's biggest base east of Suez was enhanced by additional land and air forces in a huge defence construction project across the island to create what was to become known as 'Fortress Singapore'. Of course, these were to prove inadequate in the face of Japan's eventual invasion in February 1942 after two months' of fighting down the Malayan peninsula.

Located to the east of the island, Changi had bases for the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers whose respective tasks were to fire huge guns (RA) and man searchlights and carry out other essential engineering duties (RE). These defences covered the eastern approaches to the Straits of Johore with the Sappers (RE) based to the north of the cantonment at Kitchener Barracks and the Gunners (RA) to the south at Roberts Barracks.

This barrack block was one of six such blocks on Barrack Hill and is believed to have accommodated junior ranks. The building seems to be in good nick although the verandahs on all three storeys seem to have been filled in. The architect of many of the military barracks at Changi is believed to be Colonel CH Malan of the Royal Engineers.

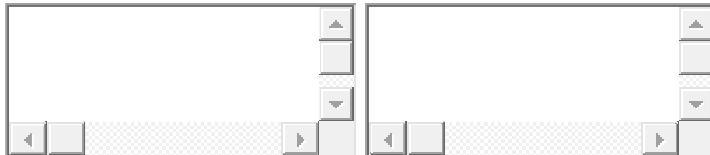
After the fall of Singapore, Kitchener, Roberts and the nearby India Barracks were used by the Japanese to house over 35,000 British PoWs. After liberation, the RAF took control of both Kitchener and the adjacent Roberts Barracks and it was transformed into the huge RAF Station Changi base; the roads were renamed and given 'RAF' names - hence Hendon Rd (named after the RAF Staff College). During this post-war period, these buildings housed the Headquarters of the RAF's Far East Air Force (FEAF).

An online account by a late former RAF airman Tony Cooke from those days recalls:-

"The ground floor was mainly stores and the upper two, large barrack rooms. A large open room with four rows of beds separated by lockers, opening out on each side to a balcony. Wash rooms at each end. We had a 'Batman' named Taza who we shared. His job was to make the bed, clean your boots or shoes and do your laundry. An old lady, 'Sewsew' came in each day do any sewing that was needed and 'Mary' to sell fruit."



Picture of Kitchener Barracks. Kitchener Barracks B Block - Changi - 1935



Barrack Hill Rd (later Hendon Rd), Changi Cantonment.

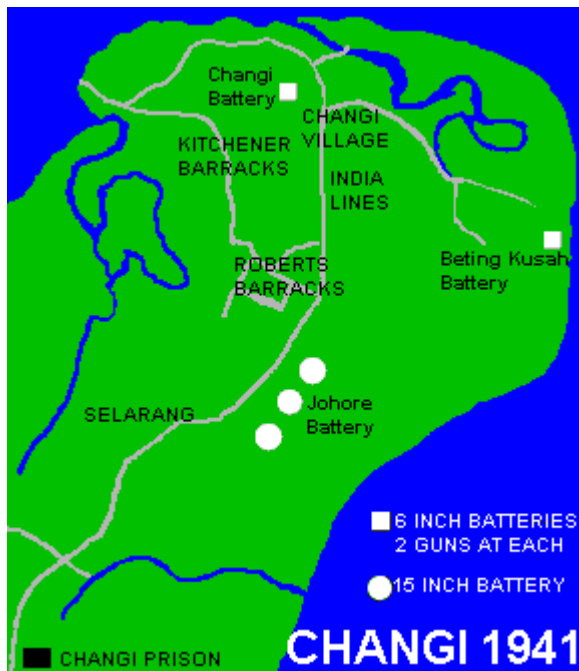
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/23268776@N03/8166883827/in/photostream/>

The British and Dutch were housed at Roberts Barracks, Kitchener Barracks and the wooden barracks at India Lines. Part of Roberts Barracks was used as the hospital...

Between 1934 (when the India Barracks were built) and 1941 the work continued in earnest and by 1936 most of the barracks, married quarters and officers mess were completed. The Royal Engineers took over the Kitchener Barracks and the Royal Artillery Coast Artillery Regiment occupied the Roberts Barracks as more barracks and quarters continued to be built.

‘.....two barrack blocks and several huts of the India Barracks.





<http://diggerhistory.info/pages-battles/ww2/changi/0-changi-cat-index.htm>

## THE STORY OF CHANGI

by Carol Cooper

Thousands of people every year fly into Changi Airport and head for the centre of Singapore without even giving the area of Changi a second thought, but this eastern sector of the island is steeped in history which is worth spending a little time in pursuing.

In the early 1900's Changi was little more than a low-lying mangrove swamp area which was punctuated by three main hills that were destined to become known as the Battery Hill, the Fairy Point Hill and the Temple/Changi Hill areas. Surrounding these hills was a thick undergrowth and virgin forest with trees up to 150 feet high. The name 'Changi' is the native word for the 'Balanocarpus' tree, some of the tallest trees that used to grow on Singapore.

By 1927, the only habitation in the Changi region was a small native village, a police station, a couple of bungalows, one being government owned and a small Japanese Hotel with a dubious clientele. Any military protection that was set up by the Government to defend the island during the First World War covered the harbour area only.

The strategic importance of Singapore as a military base had been realised by Sir Stamford Raffles, many years previous, but in the early days it was not considered necessary to build fixed defences around the whole island. As Japan flourished into a powerful nation in the Far East, Stanley Baldwin made the decision to build a gigantic Naval Base on the north coast of the island. It was thought, quite wrongly as it turned out, that any possible attack would come from the sea and the possibility of a land attack from the north was ruled out.

In the overall scheme of things it was decided that Changi would be the base for the Royal Artillery batteries to cover the eastern approaches to the Johore Straits. In 1927 the Army Council sent a commission of three officers, headed by Major General Webb Gillman to

prepare a detailed defence scheme and considering that the whole area was virgin swampland and jungle, the task that lay ahead of them was a formidable one, but despite the drawbacks the scheme went ahead. This included the rough plans of the Changi cantonment (a small division of Changi Island) which had been prepared previously at the General Headquarters, Fort Canning, the previous year.

Blueprints were prepared for two main barrack areas which were later to become known as Kitchener and Roberts Barracks and in no time at all work on clearing the ground commenced. One very important aspect was to drain the mangrove swamps and destroy the ever present malarial mosquitoes as it was essential that they could not breed within half a mile of any of the living and working areas. Snakes were the second most dangerous hazard and were a constant danger until eliminated.

The initial clearing was started by two supervisors and eighteen labourers, but as land was cleared and temporary living accommodation and pathways laid down, more workers were able to be brought in. By December 1927 the first four officers married quarters on Fairy Hill Point were almost complete, followed by similar quarters on Battery Hill.

The first three years in the evolution of Changi saw it rise up from the swamps and the foundations of its future development were well and truly laid. Thought was even given to the horticultural enthusiasts. Many of the large stately trees were left standing and worked around, other flowering trees and shrubs were established and although Changi was first and foremost a Military base it also became an area of great beauty.

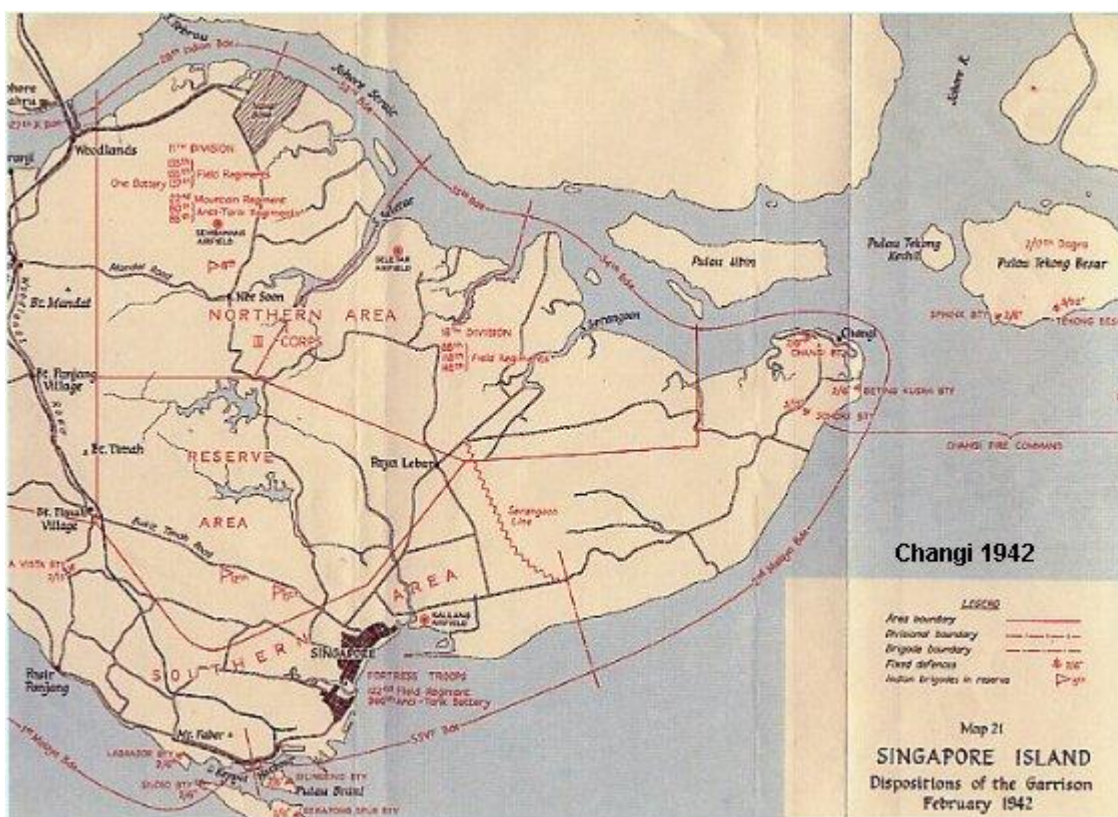
Unfortunately by the middle of 1930 all work on Changi came to an abrupt halt. Although the defence of Singapore was becoming increasingly urgent in the face of Japan's growing urge to become more powerful than its neighbours, back in England the political and economic situation demanded that money being spent on Singapore defences be cut. However, with a change in Government and Japan's intentions growing stronger, the work on Changi continued again in 1933.

Between 1934 (when the India Barracks were built) and 1941 the work continued in earnest and by 1936 most of the barracks, married quarters and officers mess were completed. The Royal Engineers took over the Kitchener Barracks and the Royal Artillery Coast Artillery Regiment occupied the Roberts Barracks as more barracks and quarters continued to be built.

In 1936 a new site was selected to house a full battalion of infantry at Selarang about a mile from the Roberts Barracks and in the next two years the whole of Selarang Barracks was established and became the home of the Gordon Highlanders. Also built in 1936 in Changi village was a new civilian jail to house up to 800 civilian prisoners - this jail was to feature very dramatically when Singapore fell to the Japanese six years later. Further new barrack blocks and a NAAFI carried on being built as late as 1941.

A week before the capitulation on 15th February 1942, the Japanese were occupying Palau Ubin, overlooking Changi and heavy bombardment was exchanged. But defeat was inevitable and within hours of the surrender the Japanese decided that the Changi area and all the barracks would become one huge prison of war camp.

[http://www.cofepow.org.uk/pages/asia\\_singapore\\_changi\\_story.htm](http://www.cofepow.org.uk/pages/asia_singapore_changi_story.htm)



It is not widely known that the civilian Changi Prison was not used initially to house the thousands of servicemen who became military POWs. Instead it was the surrounding area outside Changi and the nearby barracks that became the home of the dejected and disheartened prisoners. For some it was to be this for a few months, but for others it was for the full duration of the war. The 18th Division, which had landed in Singapore only weeks before the capitulation, were thrown immediately into the battle and now found themselves **in two barrack blocks and several huts of the India Barracks**. Many Dutch and RAF prisoners taken in Java and later sent to Singapore were housed in tents close to the India Barracks and this area was known as the Java Lines.

<http://www.shc.com.sg/educational-tour-programmes/other-programmes/>

<http://www.changimuseum.sg/links/>

## Links

- Singapore History Consultants([www.shc.com.sg](http://www.shc.com.sg))
- Journeys and Singapore Walks([www.journeys.com.sg](http://www.journeys.com.sg))
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission([www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org))
- Imperial War Museums([www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk))
- Australian War Memorial([www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au))
- The Thailand-Burma Railway Centre([www.tbrconline.com](http://www.tbrconline.com))
- Far East Prisoners of War([www.fepow-community.org.uk](http://www.fepow-community.org.uk))
- National Heritage Board([www.nhb.gov.sg](http://www.nhb.gov.sg))

- National Archives of Singapore ([www.nas.gov.sg](http://www.nas.gov.sg))
- Singapore Tourism Board ([www.stb.gov.sg](http://www.stb.gov.sg))
- Project BB
- Project HPV

## Colonial

## History

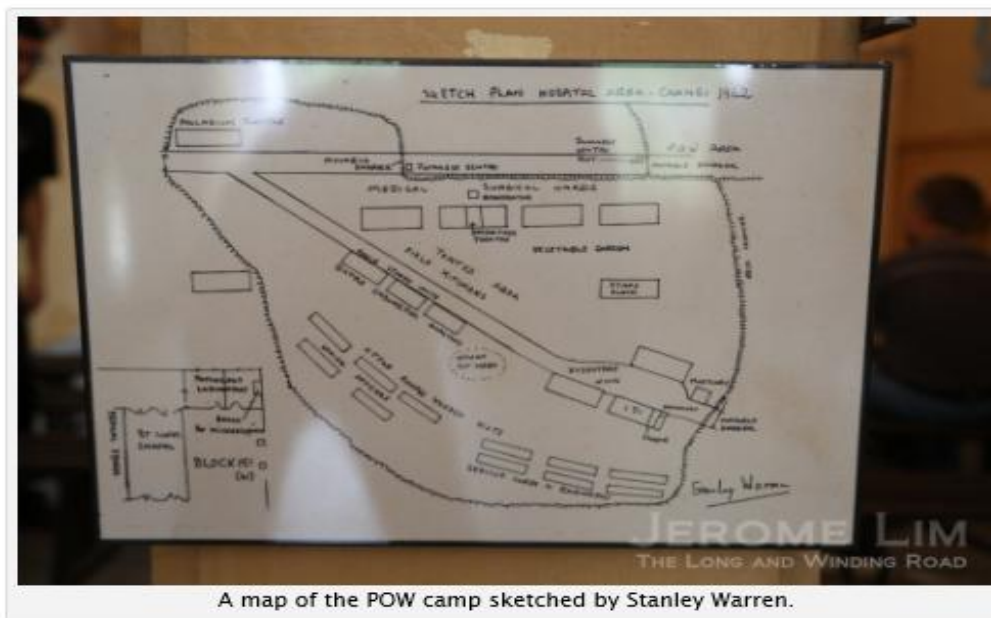
### *Development of Changi*

Changi was originally well-known for its coconut and sago plantations in the 19th century. Its actual development only began in the 1920s after the Army Council in London approved a proposal to convert Changi into a defensive fortress of Singapore. In summary, a colonial Changi could be divided in three phrases: Artillery Base (1927-1942), Japanese Occupation (1942-1945) and Royal Air Force (RAF) Changi (1946-1971).

<http://remembersingapore.wordpress.com/2013/09/20/colonial-changi-history/>

A photograph of the late Stanley Warren who passed away in 1992.

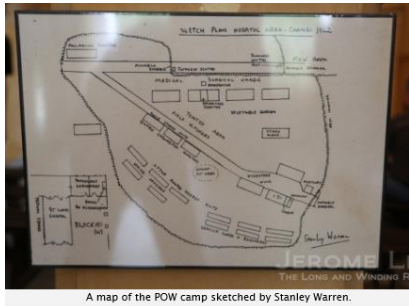
There was also a huge degree of improvisation involved – the colour blue for example, was obtained from crushing chalk used on billiard cues.



A map of the POW camp sketched by Stanley Warren.

Too ill to be sent to work on the Death Railway in Siam, which he is said to have said probably saved his life, Warren found himself recuperating in a ward above the chapel in 1942, Warren and many around him drew on the comfort provided by what could be heard of the strains of Merbecke's arrangement of the Litany being sung in the chapel.

Was this the Robert Barracks hospital, above:-



<http://www.britain-at-war.org.uk/>

## Promises

At the fall of Singapore , the 80,000 allied troops were ordered to get to the Army Camp area at Changi by the 17th February. Changi is in the North-East of Singapore, the first to arrive were the Royal Norfolks who were defending that part of the island, so they did get the choice of the quarters.

At 2pm on the 17th February Japan held its victory march through Singapore complete with its fifth column in their Malay and Chinese dress. This is how the Japanese knew in advance which roads to take to get behind the allied lines, causing the allied forces to retreat down Malaya and then into Singapore, till there was nowhere else to go. Then with the Japanese air and tank supremacy, surrender was the only choice.



**Surrender**  
*by Leo Rawlings*  
© Copyright J.Mullender 1990



**Birdwood Camp - Changi**

by Leo Rawlings

© Copyright J. Mullender 1990

Changi was very overcrowded and within a few days the food supplies had ran out. The Japanese then sent in sacks of rice. At first two to three ounces were issued per man, but it had to be increased to ten ounces as it did not provide nourishment. This new diet provided its problems, it took five

months for the stomach to adjust and get the goodness from the rice. This caused swollen joints and dysentery thus creating a bigger need for hospital space.

## Promises

The camp at Changi grew outside the Army Camp perimeter and the rain did not stop. There was a shortage of tents, so the prisoners copied the native dwellings and learnt to build atapi huts.

An atapi hut has an inverted V-shaped roof made of bamboo poles, thatched with atapi.



Atapi is a thatch made from Nipah Palm. The thatch had to be tight or rain would seep through it and wet the bamboo shelves which ran down each side of the hut with a gang way in the middle. The shelves were the sleeping quarters for the prisoners. Bamboo is of course hollow and the beds soon got infested with bugs which hid in the bamboo during the day and feasted at night.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq-Ym1x1bc&index=9&list=PL580DF9459CB21417>

### Camp Bulletin 18/9/42: Re New Arrivals

On 18 September, life in Changi was disrupted by the arrival of the first substantial party of POWs from camps in the Netherlands East Indies. These "Ex-Java Parties" (as they came to be known) contained Australian, British, Netherlands East Indies (hereafter N.E.I.), and American soldiers, as well as airmen and sailors.<sup>xiv</sup> The new arrivals were dispersed and billeted in different divisions. At the same time, working

parties stationed in and around Singapore began to be transferred back into their units in Changi, causing an acute housing shortage. The situation was exacerbated further at the end of the month when POWs who had been held in Malaya, including musicians “Ace” Connolly and Bob Gale, began to arrive. Changi was being transformed into an enormous transit camp in readiness for massive troop evacuations.  
<http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=thdabooks>

Other references sources.

[http://www.mansell.com/pow\\_resources/changi\\_research.html](http://www.mansell.com/pow_resources/changi_research.html)

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/worldwar2/theatres-of-war/asia/investigation/singapore/sources/docs/3/>

2014

## Chapter 1. "In the Bag": Changi POW Camp, Singapore

Sears Eldredge  
Macalester College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/thdabooks>

---

### Recommended Citation

Eldredge, Sears, "Chapter 1. "In the Bag": Changi POW Camp, Singapore" (2014). *Book Chapters*. Book 22.  
<http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/thdabooks/22>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Captive Audiences/Captive Performers at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Book Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact [scholarpub@macalester.edu](mailto:scholarpub@macalester.edu).

## Chapter 1: “In the Bag”

### Changi POW Camp, Singapore

The musical and theatrical entertainment that took place along the Thailand-Burma railway was performed by British, Australian, Dutch/Indonesian, and American POWs who had been captured in early 1942 when Imperial Japanese Forces conquered most of Southeast Asia. This chapter focuses on the performers sent to Burma or Thailand from Singapore between late spring and fall of that year. It acts, therefore, as a “curtain-raiser” to all that follows. The story of entertainment created by POWs sent directly to Burma from the Netherlands East Indies is told in Chapter 3: “Jungle Shows”: Burma.

#### Prisoners of War

On 15 February 1942, Lieutenant-General Arthur Percival of Malaya Command surrendered the British Commonwealth forces defending Singapore to Lieutenant-General Tomoyuki Yamashita of the Imperial Japanese Army. Two days later, all the “fit” Commonwealth troops were imprisoned in what had supposedly been the “impregnable fortress” at Changi on the eastern end of Singapore Island. They were now “in the bag”—prisoners of war.

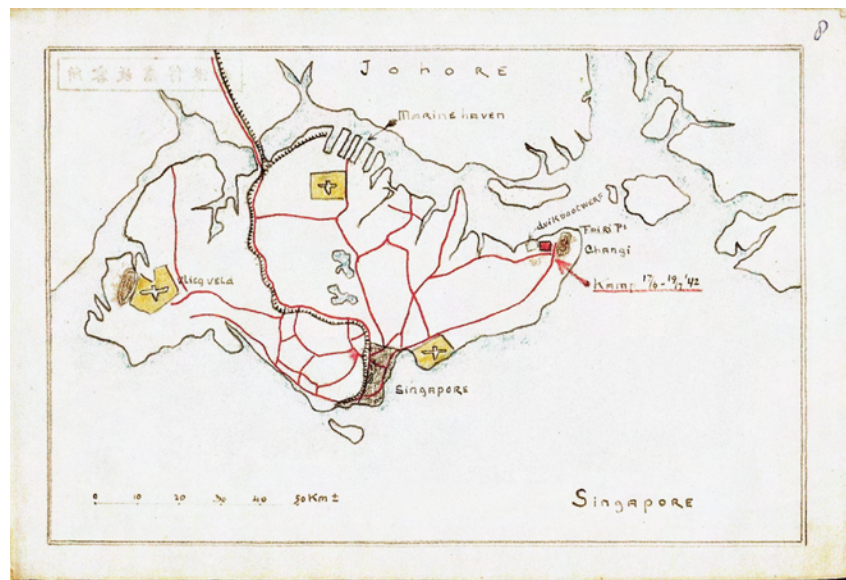


FIGURE 1.1. MAP OF SINGAPORE SHOWING CHANGI POW CAMP. H. J. D. DE FREMERY. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

#### Priorities

Once in Changi, first priority was given to bringing order out of chaos. This meant tackling several issues simultaneously, such as finding accommodation, food, water, and fuel for the more than 52,000 demoralized troops herded together within the confines of the former garrison. Concurrent with those priorities was the need to reestablish military discipline.

**Military discipline.** The POWs' disgust at the incompetence of those who had been in command in the battles for Malaya and Singapore created potential for chaos of another kind: anarchy—a situation that had to be resolved as quickly as possible. Whatever the POWs' thoughts and feelings about their situation and who was responsible for it, their only hope for survival lay in maintaining their military structure and discipline. Therefore, discipline was re-imposed—in some cases brutally.<sup>1</sup>

**Accommodation.** By the end of the first week, the sprawling POW camp at Changi had been subdivided into separate areas corresponding to the five divisions that had formed Malaya Command's battle order.<sup>1</sup> Sitting approximately midway on the peninsula, and adjacent to each area, were the Roberts Barracks, now designated as the general hospital for the entire POW camp.<sup>2</sup> Once the fit soldiers were in Changi, the sick and wounded troops were evacuated there from hospitals in Singapore.<sup>3</sup>

**Food.** For the first two weeks the POWs lived on any provisions they had brought into Changi or discovered in camp stores. By the third week, the Japanese started to provide some rations, but other than a few scraps of meat, it was mainly rice. Rice was served in some form at every meal, but, since the grain had never been a staple of the European diet, the military cooks did not know how to prepare it properly, and the result was widespread constipation.

**Water.** Many POWs were already suffering from dysentery after drinking contaminated water. Changi's water mains had been destroyed during the battle for Singapore; therefore, the only water available was at a few underground well "water points." Twelve days after the start of the POWs' incarceration, 800 cases of dysentery from drinking contaminated water were reported in Roberts Hospital.<sup>4</sup> Until the mains could be repaired, water had to be rationed to one full bottle a day per soldier (and "every drop had to be boiled or chlorinated").<sup>5</sup> The only water available for washing up, outside of a daily communal bowl, was the sea, so small groups made trips to the garrison's bathing beach at Fairy Point. On these outings, other useful items might be found. In order to survive, the POWs became expert scavengers.



FIGURE 1.2. CHANGI POWs BATHING AND SCAVENGING. WATERCOLOR BY ROBERT BRAZIL.  
COURTESY OF ROBERT BRAZIL.

<sup>1</sup> These were the Selarang Barracks Area (Australian Imperial Forces 8th Division); Birdwood Camp and the Garden & Woods Area (British 11th Indian Division); the India Lines Area (British 18th Infantry Division); the Southern Area [Singapore Fortress Command, which included Fortress Signals, Straits Settlements Volunteer Forces Brigade (S.S.V.F.), Federated Malay States Volunteer Forces (F.M.S.V.F.), the Royal Army Service Corps (R.A.S.C.), the Royal Army Medical Corps (R.A.M.C.), other smaller formations, as well as the abandoned indigenous settlement, Changi Village]; and the Command Area (Malaya Command, 3rd Indian Army Corp, headquarters for the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions, and the I. J. A. POW Administration).

**Fuel.** As Rob Brazil's watercolor of the early days in Changi illustrates, wood for cooking fires was more easily obtained.<sup>i</sup> There was also wood available from bomb-damaged buildings, and when that ran out, there were plenty of trees in the heavily wooded garrison that could be cut down for fuel.

## Morale

When the POWs entered Changi, it was clear to Staff Captain Gibby Inglefield that everyone was suffering from “utter depression, of failure, or wasted energy and useless loss of life.”<sup>6</sup> Changi was now filled with thousands of men with nothing to do but argue endlessly about the conduct of the war and the humiliation of the surrender or complain about their confinement and meager rations—especially the rice, lack of water, inadequate housing, and re-imposition of military discipline. Solving this morale problem was also top priority.

### “To Keep the Community Occupied”

The standard military response to morale problems was articulated by Inglefield: “to keep the community occupied and to make use of whatever leisure hours it had to the best advantage. Inactivity is almost worse than discomfort to a P.O.W., and more damaging to morale.”<sup>7</sup> One immediate way to keep the troops busy was to put them to work on essential camp duties.<sup>8</sup>

But of the 52,200 POWs in Changi, only so many could work on fatigue duties at any one time. The rest had to be employed in “make-work” duties, such as picking up leaves on the *padangs*<sup>iii</sup> or endless close-order drill practice—activities that would not endear the leaders to their troops. George McNeilly, the YMCA representative serving with the Australians, was among those who realized that camp fatigues would not do enough to address the issue:

A man who is working hard has little time while actively engaged to brood over the harshness of the fate that causes him to be so employed. . . . But all this was merely physical labour; and though it could fill some part of the day for everybody [it] could not fill the whole of the day for all: nor did it provide the mental stimulus which was necessary to provide food for thought in the non working hours or serve as an anodyne, or distraction to divert the mind from brooding over the present situation.<sup>9</sup>

The military had developed other more creative ways of maintaining troop morale. A pamphlet entitled “The Soldier’s Welfare,” issued by the War Office in London in 1941 and disseminated to all unit welfare officers, laid out suggestions for sports and games, entertainment, and education.<sup>10</sup>

Books found in abandoned barracks and base housing were collected in central locations and divisional libraries started.<sup>11</sup> Prisoners with academic degrees or expertise in some field were encouraged to deliver lectures and form classes that could take place during the day for those not assigned fatigue duties. Out of these endeavors, a “Changi University” sprang up in each area.<sup>12</sup> Because of Gibby Inglefield’s

*ii Robert Brazil is one of the numerous artists who documented the POWs’ lives with drawings and watercolors. Prior to enlistment he had studied art at Goldsmiths College in London. Before leaving England, Brazil glued his watercolors into a tobacco tin so that he could take them with him. The lid would function as the palette. When he was interviewed fifty-nine years later, Brazil still had his tobacco tin and paints.*

*iii Open areas used for drill practice and playing fields.*

background and musical abilities—he had already formed a choir that sang at Sunday chapel—he was “appointed ‘Professor’ to the Faculty of Music” in the 18th Division’s “university.”<sup>13</sup> Arts and crafts classes were also instituted and periodic exhibitions scheduled.

But the most troubling time of day—when boredom set in and morale was at its lowest ebb—was the POWs’ leisure time between the evening meal and “lights out.” To help fill these hours, pick-up games of soccer and other sports were initiated, although they had not been authorized by the Japanese. Even so, sports, lectures, classes, and arts and crafts proved insufficient to dispel the general malaise. For Charles Frisby, a trombone player in one of the military bands, the solution was obvious: “there was nothing more calculated to sustain the morale of the men than to set before them a form of activity which, under normal circumstances, they would expect to experience.”<sup>14</sup> He referred to entertainment provided by concert parties.

In fact, it hadn’t taken long for someone to start community singing to fill those evening hours—as had happened during basic training and on transport ships during the long voyage to the Far East. Anyone with a musical instrument, as William Wilder quickly discovered, was considered a valuable asset: “When I got back to my bed an officer wanted to start a sing-song to the accompaniment of my tin whistle. Played for an hour and quite a cheerful time was had by all.”<sup>15</sup>

Group singing (“sing-songs” or “sing-alongs”) after the evening meal became something the POWs looked forward to each day, “For then we could bear to be reminded of home,” wrote one other ranks soldier.<sup>16</sup> This assessment wasn’t true for everyone: “far from making us happy,” Thomas Pounder wrote, “these sing-songs only served to make us more miserable as memories of home, happy days and freedom flashed though our minds.”<sup>17</sup>

To keep the men’s spirits going through the long months of incarceration ahead, Malaya Command knew the POWs needed more than impromptu sing-alongs. Organized entertainment produced on a regular basis could go a long way to fill the men’s leisure hours. And given that performances created a common bond among audience members, they could help the men adjust collectively, as well as individually, to the reality of their newfound status as prisoners of war.

When permission for organized leisure activities was sought from the Japanese, the initial response was not positive. The conquerors felt it inappropriate for men who had suffered the shame of defeat to be engaged in such activities as sports and entertainment. They were convinced otherwise, according to Aussie George Sprod, “when our commandant, intrepid ‘Black Jack’ Gallegan, put it to them that a few such diversions would deter the prisoners from indulging in evil thoughts, such as escaping.”<sup>iv18</sup>

### The Reorganization of Divisional Concert Parties

Once permission was granted, each division was encouraged to establish an entertainment committee and a concert party. The officer in charge of the concert party would have “full authority to draw on the best talent available” from the various units within the division.<sup>19</sup> Performances were to take place six days a week after the evening meal and before lights out, but not on Sundays. Each entertainment committee could determine how its concert party could best serve the men in its area with regard to the location and how often programs should change. In order to have time to produce the shows, “members of the concert party were excused all other duties.”<sup>v20</sup>

This latter provision elicited more than one grouching comment from POWs about what they saw

*iv Gallegan represented the A.I.F., but he wasn’t the only officer present at this meeting.  
v Release time from camp duties was also extended to the lecturers in Changi’s fledgling universities.*

as preferential treatment, but those voices were quickly silenced by others who understood its necessity. Producing “rattling good shows”<sup>21</sup> every week, or every other week, or even once a month would be an enormous challenge requiring huge amounts of talent, skill, stamina, perseverance—and luck. Happily, what transpired in response was, in Jack Chalker’s words, a “releasing and discovering [of] great creative talent.”<sup>22</sup>

To find material for their shows, entertainers scoured divisional libraries, recycled every old song and comedy bit they knew, and dredged their collective memories to recall every stage show seen, every radio show heard, and every film viewed during their civilian lives.

### Divisional Concert Parties

Of the five divisional concert parties formed in the spring of 1942, only the four that supplied entertainers to the Thailand-Burma railway become our focus here.<sup>vi</sup> Three had been in operation before the war, and depending upon who had survived the battles for Malaya and Singapore, and in what condition, these concert parties would get a head start in reactivating their troupes and presenting shows.

**“The A.I.F. Malayan Concert Party.”** “On 11 March 1942, Major [Jim] Jacobs was asked to come forward and he, with the assistance of Lieut. Val Mack and Sergeant John Wood as the Entertainment Committee, reformed the AIF Concert Party,” recalled Corporal Leonard Stewart in his official report on the concert party, written in 1944.<sup>23</sup>

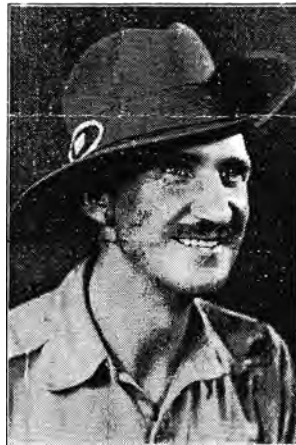


FIGURE 1.3. MAJOR JAMES WILLIAM (JIM) JACOBS. VX 40983.



FIGURE 1.4. CAPTAIN VAL MACK. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF KERRIN FREY.

Jim “Hole-in-the-road” Jacobs (the nickname acquired from a comic sketch he performed) noted that all but three of the former “Digger” troupe were “still available. These men formed the nucleus of the new party, and to them we added many new performers whom we discovered in the camp.”<sup>24</sup>

**“The Optimists.”** By contrast, only five members of the original 18th Division’s Optimists concert party had been located. Their popular magician, Fergus Anckorn, was in Roberts Hospital recovering from war wounds.

<sup>vi</sup> As far as is known, no performers with the fifth group, “The Malayan Command Players,” were sent Up Country.



FIGURE 1.5. FERGUS ANCKORN. COURTESY OF FERGUS ANCKORN.

Anckorn had survived the battle for Singapore, but just barely. During one Japanese bombing attack, he had been driving a lorry:

*And I got blown up. . . . The shrapnel came in—I got hit in the face; hit in the back . . . and the lorry was on fire, and I couldn't get out of it. So I went to open the door, and I saw my hand was hanging off—my right hand—this one. (That's why I wear this splint.) And so I couldn't open it [the door]. In the end I kicked the door open and I jumped. And when I was in midair, I was shot. . . . I got a bullet went through the back of my leg into my kneecap. And down I went.<sup>vii25</sup>*

The injury to his hand might have ended Anckorn's career as a magician, but an alert orderly managed to save it. (To hear how Anckorn's hand was saved and about his narrow escape during the Japanese massacre of patients in Alexandra Hospital, listen to **Audio Link 1.1**).

[Audio](#)



[1.1](#)

It was May before Anckorn was discharged from hospital and able to rejoin the Optimists. While recuperating, he learned to compensate for his shattered left knee by using a homemade pulley contraption. Later he taught himself to do card tricks with his left hand.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>vii</sup> Anckorn would later believe that he had been shot by friendly fire.

Of the several new recruits for the company, Aubrey King (tenor) and George Wall (bass-baritone) were professionally trained singers and Reginald Renison a classically trained pianist—additions that pleased music director Denis East, who had been a violinist in the London Philharmonic Orchestra.<sup>viii</sup> Norman Pritchard, an architect in training pre-enlistment, became the company's stage manager.



FIGURE 1.6. NORMAN PRITCHARD. COURTESY OF NORMAN PRITCHARD.

**“The P.O.W. WOWS.”**<sup>ix</sup> It is unclear who was responsible for the formation of “The P.O.W. WOWS Concert Party” in the 11th Indian Division’s Garden & Woods Area. Musical conductor “Ace” Connolly and his “Kings of Swing” orchestra (including songwriter Bob Gale), who had participated in a shipboard concert organized by Major Cary Owtram on their way out to Malaya, had been captured early in the war and incarcerated in Pudu Gaol in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>x27</sup>

**“The Southern Area Central Concert Party.”** This concert party supplied a significant number of entertainers for the Thailand side of the railway—entertainers who remained together through most of the ensuing three and a half years—and thus will be examined more closely in terms of its personnel and productions.

## The Southern Area Central Concert Party

### The Artistic Team

The three key figures on the Southern Area’s entertainment committee were “General Manager and Stage Director” Major Leofric Thorpe of Singapore Fortress Signals, “Musical Director” Second Lieutenant Norman Smith, and “Producer” Corporal Leo Britt.<sup>xi28</sup>

<sup>viii</sup> Renison and East were both recruited by John Coast to teach music in the 18th Division’s university [Coast, 18].

<sup>ix</sup> Another group of POW entertainers in Bicycle Camp on Java will call their group “The Pow-Wow Concert Party.”

<sup>x</sup> This information comes from a recent interview with “Bunny” Austin who met Connolly and Gale while incarcerated in Pudu Gaol. He would later become a member of “Ace” Connolly’s band in Nong Pladuk [Callum Austin, “Interview with ‘Bunny’ Austin,” 29 August 2011].

<sup>xi</sup> Others on the entertainment committee were Second Lieutenant R. Green as box office manager, Lieutenant P. Finch as stage manager—personnel, and Corporal H. Jones as stage manager—sets & properties.



FIGURE 1.7. LEOFRIC THORPE. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF DAVID AND CHRISTINE STYLES.

Leofric Thorpe had been posted from India to Singapore in September 1939. Soon after his arrival, he became involved with a local community theatre called The Island Committee, comprised of rubber brokers, tin miners, solicitors, and other British colonials as well as military personnel from the units stationed in and around Singapore. Besides functioning as the theatre's honorary secretary and treasurer, Thorpe also stage-managed several productions, including the *Fun Fare* concert parties that toured to Alexandra Military Hospital and Royal Artillery installations in June and August of 1941.

In late November 1941, he was the director, stage manager, and business manager for the "Stand Easy Concert Party" that toured Northern Malaya "to entertain the troops in the rubber."<sup>xii29</sup> They were performing in Ipoh on 2 December when orders were received that all troops should return to barracks immediately. In his official report on the tour, submitted three days after the Japanese attack on 8 December,<sup>xiii</sup> Thorpe wrote, "With the war being fought, there will be an even greater need now [for entertainment]. When the situation stabilizes, and the number of troops perhaps increase, no better way of maintaining the morale of the men could be tried. . . . Another show should start as soon as circumstances permit."<sup>30</sup> But the situation didn't stabilize and the circumstances didn't permit until after the British surrender.

<sup>xii</sup> *Protecting the strategically valuable rubber plantations.*

<sup>xiii</sup> 7 December in the United States.



FIGURE 1.8. NORMAN SMITH. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER N. SMITH.

Norman Smith had been a dance band leader before the war. Because of his unusually large stature, he was described by John Durnford as an “enormous, cheerful figure” and John Coast would call him “the vast Norman Broad.”<sup>xiv31</sup> Later, in Chungkai hospital camp in Thailand, Richard Sharp would write that his “brusque good nature and common sense smoothed many a situation.”<sup>32</sup>



FIGURE 1.9. LEO BRITT.  
PHOTOGRAPH DETAIL. *THE ARGUS*  
(MELBOURNE), 7 JULY 1948.

*xiv John Coast's memoir, Railroad of Death (1946), was one of the first works published about the Thailand-Burma railway. Unfortunately, Coast used pseudonyms for all the surnames of the British, Australian, and Dutch soldiers, fearing that what he had written might, in some cases, be considered libelous. His device has been a bane to all serious researchers. Yet most of his pseudonyms were cleverly devised to rhyme with the person's actual name ("Benson" for "Renison") or to describe a unique physical characteristic ("Norman Broad" for "Norman Smith"), so that those who had been there would know whom he was talking about. In this text, these pseudonyms have been restored to the individuals' real surnames whenever possible.*

Leo Britt had been a professional actor in London's West End theatre before enlistment. He met Leofric Thorpe in September 1941 when performing in the Island Committee's production of *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse* that Thorpe had stage-managed. Given Britt's years of professional stage experience, Thorpe designated him the concert party's producer.

## The Company

To get his new company off the ground, Thorpe first enlisted personnel from the two prewar theatrical organizations he'd been involved with. Those from the "Stand Easy" concert party were Arthur Butler and Frankie Quinton.

**Old Faces.** Lance Bombardier Arthur Butler had been well known in Singapore before the war as a female impersonator named "Gloria d'Earie." With his "delightful tenor voice," he sang on Singapore Radio every Sunday and at society birthday parties, and he even gave a command performance for the sultan of Johor.<sup>33</sup> "Butler was slim and gracious, with small features and ardent brown eyes," wrote Tom Wade. "He was always known as Gloria and the jokes about him were almost as numerous as they once use[d] to be about Mae West. It was said that when he gave an order to the gunmen in his artillery battery, they would always reply, "Yes, darling."<sup>xv34</sup>



FIGURE 1.10. ARTHUR BUTLER AS "GLORIA D'EARIE" IN FRONT OF HIS BILLET. IWM PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVE DOC 843. COURTESY OF R. T. KNIGHT & PAMELA KNIGHT.

Another soldier remembered that Butler "undertook, on one occasion, to spend, dressed as a woman, an afternoon and evening in the city visiting Raffles Hotel<sup>xvi</sup> and meeting people without being recognized as a man. And he got away with it."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>xv</sup> Given his stage name it must have really been, "Yes, dearie."

<sup>xvi</sup> The most prestigious high-class hotel in Singapore.



FIGURE 1.11. FRANKIE QUINTON AND FRIENDS IN MALAYA PRIOR TO HOSTILITIES (FRANKIE QUINTON IS ON THE LEFT). COURTESY OF TOM BOARDMAN AND MRS. QUINTON.

The accordionist Frankie Quinton carried his instrument with him everywhere he went. “Frankie was a short, cheery laddie,” recalled Laurie Allison, “who only needed an audience to bring out his accordion and for hours would play any tune requested. If he didn’t know the tune, which was rarely, he would get the requester to hum it and then would pick up the melody. . . . However, being the cheery chappie he was, his theme song was ‘When You’re Smiling’ and smile songs featured predominantly in his playing.”<sup>36</sup> Frankie’s “instrument often wanted ‘patchin’ up,” wrote Tom Boardman, who became a close friend, “and somehow he did it, and carried on with the show.”<sup>37</sup>

Those enlisted in the concert party from the Island Committee were Lieutenant Jack McNaughton, Captain Wilfred Pearson, Captain Eric Griffith-Jones, and Lieutenant Terry Morris.

Jack McNaughton had been a professional actor in London revues before the war. With “much comedy experience and a mobile and highly expressive face,” he became the concert party’s leading comedian.<sup>38</sup>



FIGURE 1.12. CAPTAIN WILFRED "FIZZER" PEARSON. COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER N. SMITH.



FIGURE 1.13. CAPTAIN ERIC GRIFFITH-JONES. COURTESY OF CHRISTOPHER N. SMITH.



FIGURE 1.14. LIEUTENANT TERRY MORRIS. COURTESY OF TERRY MORRIS.

"Fizzer" Pearson was described by John Coast as "an amateur actor and comedian of great ability, and seemed equally at home acting a straight part in a play, a genial ass in a Musical Comedy, or on occasion he would get down to what he and his lyric-writer called 'the real, red-nose stuff.'"<sup>xvii39</sup> According to Jack Chalker, he acquired the nickname "Fizzer" because of his "bubbling humour."<sup>40</sup>

Eric Griffith-Jones had appeared with Britt in *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*. He and Pearson became close friends and would stick together until liberation.

Between 10 May and 21 August 1941, Terry Morris had appeared in three Island Committee productions, including Thorpe's *Fun Fare* tours. He was typecast by Thorpe to play "young 'boyish' parts."<sup>41</sup>

**New Faces.** Once the "old faces" were on board, Thorpe auditioned other possible participants from the varied constituencies in the Southern Area. One of the new faces was Bobby Spong, a female impersonator who had already made a name for himself as a performer in his unit's shows.

---

<sup>xvii</sup> Farce.



FIGURE 1.15. BOBBY SPONG. *WONDER BAR*  
PHOTOGRAPH DETAIL. COURTESY OF MARTIN  
PERCIVAL.

Thorpe recalled Spong's repertoire: "His favorite two numbers were 'I'm an old Norman Castle with a ruined Tudor wing. Ten architects have had a hand in me,' and 'A tisket, a tasket, my little yellow basket.' I have heard him sing them a hundred times."<sup>xviii42</sup>

Butler and Spong would be the company's top female impersonators. When the troops saw these two "glamorous" figures on stage, Tom Wade noted that their reactions were both ecstatic and erotic:

These two young men, slinkily dressed and well made-up, caused immeasurable happiness to thousands of prisoners. They were frankly adored. In POW camp we had no heroes: no war heroes, political heroes, sport heroes. The only people about whom there was any glamour were the actors and most idolised of these were the female impersonators. Crowds escorted them from stage door to their barracks each evening. I often heard troops say, "If Gloria were a woman I could really go for her," and others, "I had a wonderful dream about Bobby Spong last night."<sup>43</sup>

**Musicians.** While Thorpe was recruiting comics and singers, Norman Smith was scouting out musicians and instruments for his "Melody Makers" orchestra. Among the troops who entered Changi as POWs were members of several different regimental bands and orchestral units. During combat they had served as stretcher bearers. In addition, there were soldiers like Tom Boardman who carried musical

<sup>xviii</sup> Thorpe went on to write, "The first of these songs, with its double entendre, was made popular by the famous British female impersonator, Douglas Byng in the 1930s. The second was a children's song which had been given an early 1940s American swing treatment [by Ella Fitzgerald] and could easily—and at times did—have additional, or altered, lyrics that made sarcastic references to their captors" [Thorpe, *Fax*, 23 June 2000]. Norman Smith recalled that Spong also "impersonated Beatrice Lillie. 'She' had a complete repertoire of solo numbers such as 'Love for Sale' and 'Falling in love again' and 'See what the boys in the back room will have,' the latter two, of course as Marlene Dietrich" [Norman Smith, 18–19].

instruments for their own enjoyment and that of their barrack mates.



FIGURE 1.16. TOM BOARDMAN IN MALAYA BEFORE THE WAR. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF TOM BOARDMAN.

Whatever musical instruments the Changi musicians didn't have they would try to make. Tom Boardman lost his "bongulele"<sup>xix</sup> during the battle for Singapore, so he constructed a small ukulele out of scrap wood with signal wire for strings and "gears" from a "badly broken mandolin" found in a village hut on work detail.<sup>44</sup> The Optimists' Denis East lost his violin as well, and after much trial and error a new one was constructed.<sup>45</sup>

Before Smith was done recruiting, he had acquired fifteen musicians along with a collection of instruments.<sup>xx46</sup> Two pianos were commandeered from military clubs or married quarters. Preparing musical scores for his orchestra was an arduous task: "All the band parts had to be handwritten and the scores done from memory," wrote Smith. "I had lots of assistance from army musicians used to copying music and the music teacher-pianist, Lieutenant Eric Cliffe<sup>xxi</sup> contributed several pieces all of which had to be suitably arranged for the rather unbalanced orchestra I had collected together."<sup>47</sup>

"It must have taken about a month," Thorpe remembered, "to get the cast and orchestra and others together and rehearse the first show."<sup>48</sup>

### First Divisional Productions

On 18 March 1942<sup>xxii</sup>—one month after surrender—the A.I.F. Malayan Concert Party was once again on tour, "but this time around the [Selarang] Barrack square, and adjacent areas," wrote Corporal Stewart. "Each camp or unit had built its own platform staging, and the party did the rounds of these 'theatres' once a week with a change of programme."<sup>49</sup> The variety shows were brief, lasting no more than thirty to forty minutes so they could visit as many units as possible "after the evening meal and before the

<sup>xix</sup> A combination bongo and ukulele.

<sup>xx</sup> These were four violins, two flutes, two clarinets, a saxophone, an oboe, two trumpets, two piano accordions, two Spanish guitars, two pianofortes, and percussion.

<sup>xxi</sup> Cliffe had been on the piano faculty at the London Academy of Music.

<sup>xxii</sup> The date is from Val Mack's production logbooks and confirmed by Major Jacobs' statement in his autobiography that their first show took place a week after the formation of the company. In his report, Stewart gives the first performance date as 19 March.

sun set.”<sup>50</sup>

The P.O.W. WOWS and Optimists presented their first productions three days later. The *1st Edition* of the P.O.W. WOWS' variety show was performed for the troops in the Garden & Woods section at the base of a natural amphitheatre dubbed “the Rice Bowl Theatre.” The show was also toured to troops across the way in Birdwood Camp. New “editions” of the show were produced every two weeks.

In contrast, the first of the Optimists' monthly shows, *Rice and Shine: A Topical Revue*, was performed indoors in an atap hut that had previously been a dining hall.<sup>51</sup> Since everyone was sick to death of their rice diet, the pun in the title was cheeky. As the subtitle indicates, the show was filled with topical humor, in monologues (“Rumours,” “Ode to Rice”) and sketches (“Food Fracas,” “The Soldier's Return”).

“The Soldier's Return” was the Optimists' version of a comic sketch that had originated in First World War concert parties. It satirized the misunderstanding that occurs when a soldier comes home from the front after a long absence and uses military terminology and jargon not understood by his wife or family. The climax involves the soldier's discovery that he is the father of a newborn baby boy—clearly not his. In the long tradition of barracks humor that “busted” what the audience held most dear, the POWs at this point could laugh about this soldier's unfortunate fate. Two years later, a repeat of this sketch in Chungkai hospital camp in Thailand would get the producer in a great deal of trouble.

The Southern Area Troops Central Concert Party opened the first of its monthly productions, *Red, Bright and Blue: A New Laughing Revusical*,<sup>xxiii</sup> on 14 April in what had been an open-air Chinese Opera playhouse-cum-cinema in Changi Village.<sup>52</sup> As Leofric Thorpe had been stationed in Changi before the war, he knew the camp well, and once assigned to the Southern Area, he commandeered the abandoned theatre and set about renovating it: “I, of course, managed to get a hold of school desks and benches and tiered benches came from a cricket field just before it went out of bounds, so we seated about 2000. . . . I was able to get my own curtains from Singapore<sup>xxiv</sup> via one of the working or ration parties.”<sup>53</sup>

In recognition of a well-known variety theatre in London, it was called “the Pavilion Theatre.” When D. S. Cave attended the theatre, he was amazed by its professional look: “Around the façade of the Pavilion were hoardings showing the cast, strung on painted palms in true theatre style.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>xxiii</sup> As the name suggests, a revusical was a hybrid form, but in actuality the term was more of a publicity gimmick to pull into the theatre audiences expecting to see something new.  
<sup>xxiv</sup> From the Island Committee.



FIGURE 1.17. PROGRAM COVER FOR *RED, BRIGHT AND BLUE*.  
IWM 65/144/1.

*Red, Bright and Blue* was written and produced by Leo Britt but staged by Leofric Thorpe. Among the thirteen sketches and musical numbers on the playbill were “Latest News: Official Rumourtism” (a satire of the insidious rumor mill); Gloria d’Earie’s strip-tease act, “Nina Pulloffski: The Beautiful Spy”; and “Black Fantasie,” a “Concerto Negro Spirituals” by “The Savoyard Singers.” Following tradition, the show closed with everyone standing and singing the national anthem.

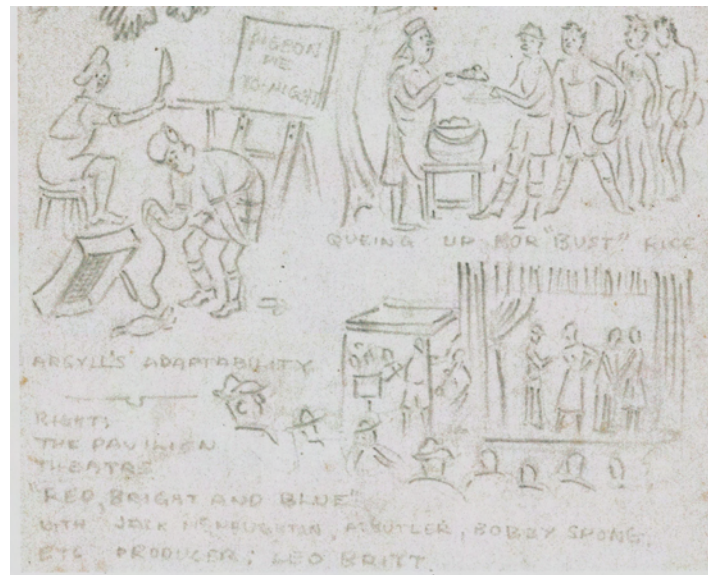


FIGURE 1.18. “CHANGI SCENES” DETAIL. CHARLES A. SIMPSON. IWM ART 15592 [8].

A detail from Charles Simpson's cartoon "Changi Scenes" shows the Pavilion Theatre with performers on stage and Norman Smith's orchestra under the marquee at audience left (see **Figure 1.19** for the complete cartoon in the Image Gallery).

Item ten on the playbill was a very pointed topical sketch, "The Men who Stayed Behind: Penalties for Desertion."<sup>xxv</sup> According to R. J. Godber, it showed "the absolute imbecility of the High Command." One actor was made up "to look just like General Keith Simmonds," the Singapore Fortress Command G.O.C.,<sup>xxvi</sup> who attended one performance along with General Percival of Malaya Command and other senior officers and staff<sup>55</sup>—a performance Thorpe remembered:

I well remember a satirical sketch with Jack McNaughton as a Colonel staff officer "Colonel Mango," Fizzer as the Adjutant "Capt. White-teeth," Terry Morris, and another (I forget who). The Colonel was told that Ululand had invaded Blunderland, and the Col asked which side they were on—Blunderland of course. After a lot of very witty dialogue, which made no secret of the ballsup which had taken place, they ended with a song and dance. . . . General Percival came of course to see the show, and I watched his reaction with great interest through the curtains; he took the ribbing very well.<sup>56</sup>

Another member of the delegation from Malaya Command was Other Ranks John Sharp of Command Signals Headquarters. This performance was the first he had seen in captivity, and the brief comment he made on it in his diary was the first of many during the next three and a half years: "Went to concert in Changi Village—several good sketches and a female impersonator, with an amusing news bulletin."<sup>xxvii57</sup>

## Censorship

As the Optimists' and Southern Area's shows illustrate, the false rumors that tormented the men, the unpalatable rice, and the debacle of losing Malaya and Singapore provided fertile ground for the comedians' caustic wit—and would continue to do so. This line of humor would be endured as long as it wasn't perceived to cross the line and undermine morale.

The Japanese did not attend the POWs' musical and theatrical productions during that first year in Changi, and the only instance of their censorship was an order issued two months after concert parties were up and running that forbade the singing of the British national anthem because it might inspire patriotic thoughts in defeated men. To satisfy the need for some sort of rousing patriotic-like number, concert party producers substituted "Land of Hope and Glory" instead, which seemed satisfactory to the I. J. A.<sup>58</sup>

With no requirement to submit scripts to Japanese censors for approval, the shows were replete with attempts by the POW comedians to get back at their captors by mocking what they saw as peculiar

<sup>xxv</sup> "Very pointed" because just before capitulation, General Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of the combined American-British-Dutch-Australian Command, fled Singapore by flying boat to escape capture. His last orders to the officers and men left behind were a reiteration of Churchill's that Singapore must be defended to the last man. Many POWs interpreted Wavell's escape as desertion.

<sup>xxvi</sup> General Officer Commanding—the title for the general at the top of the division's command structure.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Before mobilization, John Sharp had been in training as a librarian and carried these interests and skills into captivity with him, establishing lending libraries in several of the Thailand camps. His voluminous diary is one of the most extraordinary documents to come out of the Second World War in the Far East. It is a blend of factual and gossipy information that gives the reader a feel for the day-to-day existence of an other ranks POW. Immediately after the war, Sharp transcribed the miniscule handwriting in his original diary onto the lined pages of twelve school exercise books totaling 1,293 pages. A separate exercise book contains an index of subjects and names with the pertinent pages in the main diary. These now reside in the Imperial War Museum.

customs and/or racial and physical characteristics. When one of these turns was performed, there were always lookouts posted to avoid surprise by an unannounced Japanese patrol. When the Japanese later started to attend POW shows Up Country, censorship rules were quickly imposed—challenging the entertainers to find clever ways to subvert them.

### “Entertainment Everywhere”

As troops in each area were only allowed to attend their division’s shows on a rotation basis, there could be long gaps in time before they got to see another one. This situation proved intolerable, and to fill these gaps more entertainment was encouraged at the regiment and battalion level—in fact, anywhere a large number of POWs were stationed for any length of time. Keith Wilson noted an important difference in the status of these new unit or work site performers: “Unlike the chaps who performed in the main concert party, who were excused other duties, our performers worked during the day and had little time to rehearse or put acts together.”<sup>59</sup> Before long there were so many concert parties operating in Changi that John Lane observed, “There was entertainment everywhere.”<sup>60</sup>

### Unit Concert Parties

One of the new unit concert parties was in the Selarang Area, where Jack Turner, a member of the 2/2nd Transport Company, took on the role of female impersonator. One song he sang during his act was “The Singapore Retreat,” a parody written by Frank L. Huston of Tommy Tucker’s popular song “The Man That Comes Around.” The first verse gives an example of the song’s satirical sting:

*There’s the man that said that Singapore shall not, must not fall,<sup>xxviii</sup>  
He pushed us in the scrum and he left us with the ball.  
We’ll resist them on the land, repel them everywhere,  
But little did we realise, his words were all hot air.<sup>61</sup>*

Huston also wrote a number of other parodies for Turner based on old music hall songs (see the lyrics for all these songs in “The FEPOW Songbook”).

### Work Site Concert Parties

Toward the end of March, the Japanese ordered thousands of POWs from Changi to work sites in Singapore and environs. Their job was to clean up debris from the bombing campaign and restore essential services. Some of the men were assigned to day jobs where they moved from place to place as needed and returned to Changi each night. Others were sent to locations such as River Valley Road or the docks at Keppel Harbour, where they would stay for several months. It was at these long-term work sites that concert parties were initiated.<sup>xxix</sup>

**River Valley Road.** River Valley Road Camp functioned as the field hospital for the working

<sup>xxviii</sup> Prime Minister Winston Churchill had ordered that Singapore be held at all cost.

<sup>xxix</sup> Besides River Valley Road and Keppel Harbour, concert parties were created in the work camps at Adam Park, Caldecott Hill Estate, The Great World, Havelock Road, Serangoon Road, Sime Road, and Towner Road.

parties in and around Singapore. It was located on the edge of Singapore Town just across a stream from Havelock Road Camp, situated in the heart of Chinatown.



FIGURE 1.20. LEN GIBSON AND FRIENDS IN LIVERPOOL BEFORE EMBARKATION. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF LEN GIBSON.

Len Gibson and three mates from the Highland Regiments, Michael Conlin, Charley Carney, and Johnny Glancy, organized concert parties in the camp.<sup>62</sup> Jack Chalker, who had been transferred to River Valley from Havelock Road after contracting malaria, drew a pencil sketch of the “Gaiety Theatre” they built at one end of a hut.<sup>xxx</sup>

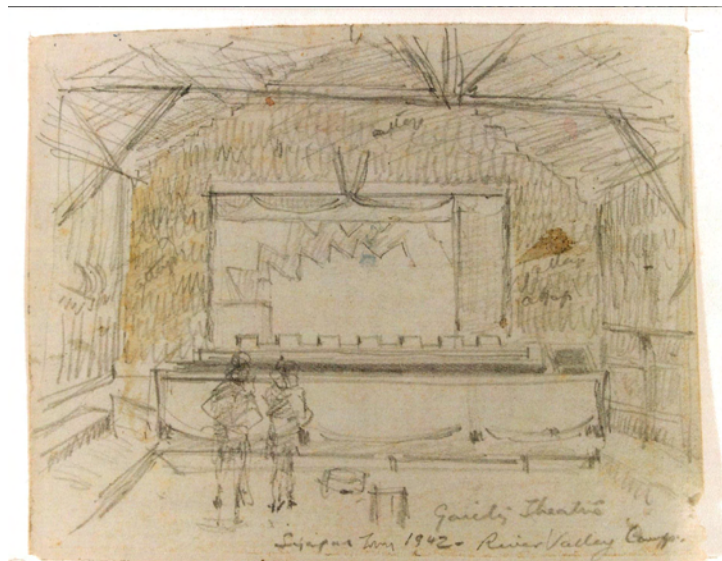


FIGURE 1.21. THE GAIETY THEATRE. JACK CHALKER. COURTESY OF JACK CHALKER.

<sup>xxx</sup> Jack Chalker had been an art student preparing to take up his post-graduate scholarship at the Royal College of Art when his induction notice came. With his powerful drawings documenting the tropical diseases suffered by the POWs in Thailand, the ingenious medical practices used to combat them, and daily life on the Thailand-Burma railway, Chalker became one of the best-known railway war artists. He would also become significantly involved in the entertainment Up Country.

**Keppel Harbour.** The POWs posted to the docks at Keppel Harbour—Singapore’s port of entry—worked as stevedores loading and unloading cargo from ships and turning the Singapore Police Station into an I. J. A. headquarters. Jimmy Walker, who had produced a show aboard the transport ship on the way out to Malaya, was asked by welfare officer Lieutenant John D. V. Allum to organize weekly shows. Sergeant Major “Tug” Wilson volunteered to perform and write songs as well. With a nod to their locale (and to the popular song), they called themselves “The Harbour Lights Concert Party.”

Walker recalled how they converted one of their godowns, or warehouses, into a theatre:

Under cover of darkness, we sawed off lamps and fittings from under the eaves of Godown 21 within the camp’s perimeter. We “laid on” electricity and the lamps, gaily painted, became our footlights. Bales of cotton stolen from Godown 21 were transformed into curtains and scenery cleverly painted by Lieutenant Greig. Every item, every costume and prop was stolen at the risk of someone’s life. The mechanism to dim the lights was once the innards of an electric fan in Jap. H.Q., formerly Singapore Police Station.<sup>63</sup>

“Every Wednesday,” Walker wrote, “the men would dash for a place in the ‘theatre’ for their one spasm of entertainment. . . . The ‘hit’ song of each episode became the song echoing through the camp for the following week. We heard no others.”<sup>64</sup>

To be a complete success, the troupe had to find somebody willing “to put a skirt on”—i.e., become a female impersonator—“so when a look-alike Carmen Miranda danced gracefully on stage,” Walker wrote, “hope danced as well. Her swirling coloured skirt was once a mosquito-net, her bra, two twisted towels and her head-dress out-Mirandered Miranda! Her dancing was the performance that two Jap guards dashed back-stage and caused ‘Carmen’ to undress completely and reveal a laughing signalman, Johnny Mutton!”<sup>65</sup>

This kind of mistaken identity by Japanese guards would plague the female impersonators wherever they performed, either in Changi or Up Country. Each episode would usually end with the indignant performer lifting up his skirt to reveal the fact that he was, unequivocally, male.

Jimmy Walker, Hank Phillips, and Bert Compton became the Harbour Lights’ comedians. Their most popular sketch was “Smiles on the Nile.”<sup>66</sup>

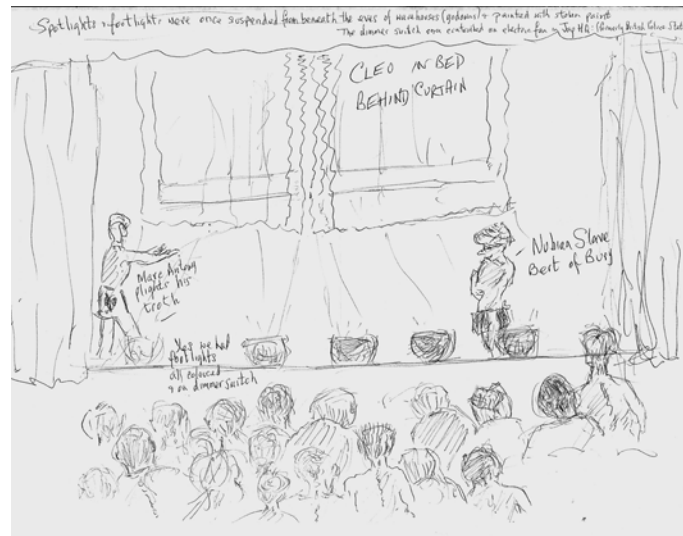


FIGURE 1.22. "SMILES ON THE NILE" ON STAGE IN THE KEPPEL HARBOUR THEATRE. JIMMY WALKER. COURTESY OF JIMMY WALKER.

(To hear Walker narrate this sketch and other variety acts and how costumes were produced from scrounged materials, listen to **Audio 1.2.**)

[Audio](#)



[1.2](#)

More problematic for the entertainers, whether at work sites or in Changi, would be acquiring costumes and makeup, but as Thorpe's and Walker's accounts reveal, the POWs proved very resourceful. "It was admirable the way tailors and carpenters provided such colourful and attractive costumes and props," wrote Tom Wade. "We all contributed what we could in the way of brightly coloured clothing or civilian hats, but most of these things and other like dresses were brought in from working parties in Singapore, always on the look-out for such valuables."<sup>67</sup> For female impersonators like Jack Turner, makeup items like "rouge, face powder, lipstick and creams were obtained from former Australian nurses' trunks which were left on the Island when they evacuated Singapore."<sup>68</sup> When that supply ran out, chemists in the prisoners' midst would concoct substitutes.

### Camp Bulletin 05/42: Re Up Country Construction Project

In early May, I. J. A. headquarters notified Malaya Command that 8,000 POWs would be sent from Changi to Up Country locations to work on a huge construction project, rumored to be a railway. The first of these drafts, known as "A Force" and composed of 3,000 Australians under the command of Brigadier General A. L. Varley, embarked by ship to Burma on 14 May.

Among them were Major Jim Jacobs, formerly officer in charge of the A.I.F. Malayan Concert Party, Bandmaster Norman Whittaker with his 2/18th Infantry Battalion's Brass Band (including all their instruments), and female impersonator Jack Turner. Many Australian POWs volunteered to go on these

drafts in order to stay with their mates as well as to get out of Changi's stultifying atmosphere.<sup>xxx</sup> The Japanese had led them to believe that food and living conditions would be better Up Country. They would soon learn otherwise.

### "The Mummie Bees"

The British POWs in the other areas of Changi were unaffected by this evacuation of Australian troops. Once their concert party was established, Thorpe and Britt imposed a rigorous repertory-style rehearsal and performance schedule on the company in the Southern Area: "We played a musical show 6 nights a week, rehearsing the one which would follow during the daytime, and writing, orchestrating, and planning the one to follow that during the evening until late at night."<sup>69</sup>

Their new show, *Hellsabuzzin'!*, was Britt's rewrite of Lupino and Eyton's popular West End musical comedy *Runaway Love*, with topical references (Britt had been in a tour of the show back in Britain, so he knew it thoroughly).<sup>xxxii</sup> Musical comedies of the 1930s differed from revues more in degree than in kind. They had tighter plots, more developed characters, and music more integral to the action. To identify the musical theatre troupe and its shows from other Southern Area productions, such as orchestral concerts, the group was christened "The Mummie Bees."

Among the new performers added to the company was John "Nellie" Wallace, who had studied ballet prior to the war. As he was willing to "put a skirt on," Wallace gave the company a much-needed third female impersonator. His campy acting style got him typecast by Thorpe as "a low comedienne."<sup>71</sup> With the success of this second show, Leo Britt's reputation as a quality producer began to grow—and so did his ego.

### Something New / Something Different

When concert parties started in March, "Every joke, every grotesque gesture, every sly dig at the Japanese, many of whom would be standing on the fringe of the crowd, sullen and frowning, provoked frantic cheering and laughter," explained Hew Crawford.<sup>72</sup> But after more than two months of variety and revue-type shows, some performers were dissatisfied with this format and its content. There was also need for a wider variety of entertainment to appeal to other segments and tastes in the vast POW community.

In the Optimists, classically trained singers George Wall and Aubrey King and musicians Denis East and Reginald Renison felt their talents were being wasted. They wanted to give themselves, and their audiences, an alternative to the popular songs, show tunes, and farcical sketches. So when the run of their current show ended, the company disbanded, and they, along with accordionist Fred Coles, formed the "Quo Fata Vocant"<sup>xxxiii</sup> ensemble to perform concerts of light classical music. Other Optimists performers like Fergus Anckorn became "free agents," available to any producer in the area. After a successful debut on 29 May, the ensemble began to tour different venues in the 18th Division.

Another response to demands for variety in programming was the 18th Division's formation of "The New Windmill Players"—a dramatics group that presented plays on a renovated stage in the ballroom of a recreational center renamed the New Windmill Theatre.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Its sets were designed by other ranks cartoonist Ronald Searle.

<sup>xxx</sup> But their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel "Black Jack" Galleghan, steadfastly refused to allow any other members of the concert party to volunteer for these drafts. They were to stay in Changi to keep up the morale of his troops there. For this reason, there is little in this chapter about the marvelous Australian performers or the series of shows they produced under the guidance of Captain Val Mack, who was given a field promotion to run the company when Major Jacobs was sent away.

<sup>xxxii</sup> The new title was "borrowed" from Olsen and Johnson's wacky and surreal 1941 movie, *Hellzapoppin*.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> "Whither the fates call": motto of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> The windmill was a reference not only to the unit "flash" [emblem] worn on their uniforms but to the famous London theatre that was kept open during "the Blitz."

In the Southern Area, the need was met by the development of two smaller production companies. Leofric Thorpe's *The Weekenders* performed on Sundays,<sup>xxxv</sup> when the Mummie Bees had their one day off. "It had no real rehearsal," wrote Thorpe, "but was not at all bad and [had] chaps like Sam Drayton who sang in one of the big London bands. He was very wooden in appearance so I put a microphone in front of him consisting of a boot polish tin with a wire to it which the Japs inspected very carefully."<sup>74</sup> *The Weekenders* proved to be enormously popular. Whereas audiences for the main shows were booked on a rotation basis, the "Sunday shows were first come, first in—you can imagine the rush weekly."<sup>xxxvi75</sup>

Leo Britt's *Café Colette*, on the other hand, was a tour show devised so it could be performed anywhere in the Southern Area during the week. "Leo put on shows during the day with no help at all. They were done at any convenient place, always a different one. . . . It consisted of three or four rhythm sections conducted by Leo, one or two singers, and an occasional man dragged up from the audience."<sup>76</sup> Britt's band leader character was called "Maestro," and since this title seemed to fit his personality and style, everyone started to address him this way.

### Camp Bulletin 18-26/6/42: Re More Up Country Evacuations

The call for additional drafts to complete the I. J. A.'s request for 8,000 POWs for Up Country duty was finally received. Between 18 and 26 June, 3,000 POWs from various divisions in Changi were transported in railway boxcars to Thailand. Designated "Mainland No. 1 Work Party," this advance group would construct the supply depot and maintenance base camp at Nong Pladuk and the staging camp at Ban Pong. It would also lay the track from Ban Pong to the provincial city of Kanchanaburi in preparation for the start of major construction.

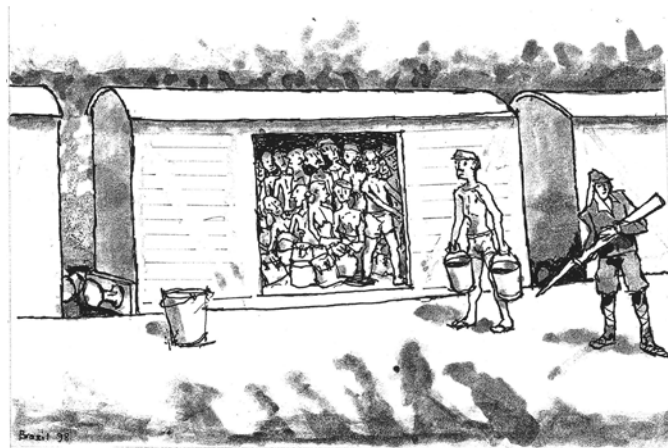


FIGURE 1.23. TRANSPORT TO THAILAND. ROBERT BRAZIL. COURTESY OF ROBERT BRAZIL.

Major Cary Owtram and others from Birdwood Camp were part of this draft, as was Norman Pritchard from the 18th Division and John Sharp from Malaya Command Signals Headquarters.

<sup>xxxv</sup> In the interest of keeping morale up, the ban on Sunday performances had been lifted.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> But Thorpe's agreement to let the padre use the theatre for Sunday services created a problem: "He asked me if he might have a service before the show and I said it would bring in a good congregation. It started with about 50 worshipers and then people realised it was the way to get good seats at the show, and hundreds turned up. The Padre had rigged up a small bamboo altar and found someone sitting on it. He remonstrated but was told, 'Bugger the fucking altar; I've come to the show! So it ceased to be a church' [Thorpe, Letter, 24 May 2000].

### “Fizzer’s Flute”

Once again, the evacuation of these additional 3,000 troops had little impact on the vast number of POWs who remained in Changi, although rumors circulating about more overseas drafts added to their uncertainty about the future. With Leo Britt occupied touring *Café Colette*, comedian Jack McNaughton produced the Mummings Bees’ new “non-stop revue,” *New Pins and Needles*, which ran during June in the Southern Area.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

One item on the bill was “Fizzer” Pearson’s solo turn, “Balalaika,” that contained his first performance of a song especially written for him by Leslie “Biggles” Bywaters to music by Norman Smith. The first verse gives a good idea of Bywaters’ gifts as a lyricist, especially for double entendre:

*Behold in me a member of the Oswaldtwistle band,  
When you hear my music you will think it simply grand.  
I told my wife that playing second fiddle was the cause  
Of much of our unhappiness, she answered without pause,  
You’re lucky to be in the band at all with an instrument like yours.  
(Flute).<sup>77</sup>*

“Fizzer’s Flute” would become Pearson’s signature song, repeated many times Up Country.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

On the back page of the show’s souvenir program was an announcement of Britt’s imminent return to the Pavilion stage with a new production: André Charlot’s musical *Wonder Bar* (Britt had been in the cast of the original West End production). As a musical comedy with scenes taking place indoors and out at a ski resort in St. Moritz, Switzerland, it would need extensive rewriting before being presented to Changi audiences.

### More Entertaining Solutions

By the sixth month in captivity, participation in sports had fallen off due to the inadequate diet. As a consequence, dependence on entertainment intensified, which meant additional viewing opportunities had to be found. One solution was to grant touring concert parties like the P.O.W. Wows permission to travel outside the boundaries of their area. With the addition of Padre John Foster-Haigh as officer in charge, the Quo Fata Vocant ensemble began to tour other areas as the “Changi Celebrity Artists.”<sup>xxxix</sup>

Another solution was to allow officers to take their men to see shows in other areas. To accommodate them, concert parties performing in theatres, like the Mummings Bees, would need to extend their run. With this expectation in mind, Leo Britt put aside his prep on *Wonder Bar* and produced instead *Pass The Nuts: A New Screamlined and Nutty Revue*, which ran during July and August.

As the Mummings Bees’ company now numbered approximately fifty-two people, including administrative personnel, performers, stage technicians, and an orchestra of fifteen, *Pass the Nuts* was Britt’s biggest show yet.<sup>78</sup> The finale was a spectacular “Blood and Sand” sketch that had more than twenty

<sup>xxxvii</sup> The “old” *Pins and Needles* had been a very popular London revue that had opened in 1921 and gone through numerous yearly “editions.”  
<sup>xxxviii</sup> Other verses from this risqué song will be found in later chapters.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Padre John Foster-Haigh had been a professional singer in civilian life, “known throughout England as John Foster, the B.B.C. Tenor” [McNeilly, “Changi Celebrity Artists,” 1]. Foster-Haigh had already founded a Male Voice Choir, which Gibby Inglefield joined.

costumed characters on stage performing their drama of passion and death to music from Bizet's *Carmen*.

One of the new faces in the cast was Nigel Wright, a member of the F.M.S.V.F. (Federated Malay States Volunteer Forces) who had worked as a chemist for the rubber planters in Malaya and had years of experience leading an amateur theatre there. But two star performers—comedian Jack McNaughton and female impersonator Arthur Butler—were absent from the cast. When *New Pins and Needles* closed, they had put together a show to tour other areas in Changi.

### Camp Bulletin 20/6-16/8/42: Re Decapitation

On 20 July, rumors were confirmed about another overseas deployment—but not for a working party. With thousands of POWs in Changi and Singapore and relatively few I. J. A. or Indian National Army<sup>xl</sup> troops to guard them, the Japanese feared the POWs might attempt a breakout. To prevent such a possibility, all the senior officers above the rank of lieutenant-colonel were ordered removed from Changi and sent overseas—presumably to Japan. Jack McNaughton and Arthur Butler were scheduled to leave with them as members of their support staff.

The actual evacuation of these senior officers did not take place until 16 August. Before departure, General Percival placed Lieutenant-Colonel E. B. Holmes in charge of the British troops and Lieutenant-Colonel “Black Jack” Galleghan in charge of the Australians.<sup>79</sup> A month after their arrival in Taiwan, McNaughton and Butler were transferred to Chosen [Korea], where, by Christmas, they appeared in a series of shows in Keijo [Seoul] POW camp.

With Butler's departure, Bobby Spong became the Mummie Bees' leading female impersonator. Lieutenant James Richardson, who had seen both Butler and Spong on stage, much preferred Spong's abilities to create the illusion of a glamorous female: “Bobby Spong as a girl—very good (luscious, seductive bitch who always looks like a forthright whore!).”<sup>80</sup>

### And the Shows Go On

If the I. J. A. believed removal of the senior officers would make a significant difference in the ongoing life in Changi, they were mistaken. The POWs were more concerned about the possibility of a diphtheria epidemic, as the illness had already caused two deaths and put nearly two hundred men in the hospital.<sup>81</sup> When that fear proved unfounded, each area tried to encourage attendance at its shows by showcasing new performers, putting on different types of programming, and playing new venues.

In the 18th Division, the New Windmill Theatre's *Windmill Variety No. 1* featured two new groups, John Foster-Haigh's Male Voice Choir and the 18th Division Signals String Band, as well as Fergus Anckorn performing several of his conjuring tricks. In the Southern Area, Eric Cliffe organized a concert of classical music performed in the officers' mess. After the concert, Richardson, who loved this type of music, wistfully mused, “What a wonderful place the world would be.”<sup>82</sup>

<sup>xl</sup> These were Sikh soldiers who had been members of the 3rd Indian Corps. When they were first captured, the Japanese removed them to a separate area to recruit them for the I. N. A., whose goal was the liberation of India from colonial rule. Many of these Indian soldiers willingly—or under duress—renounced their allegiance to the British Crown and became members of the new army. Those that refused were eventually sent to Thailand and held in a secret section of the hospital camp at Nakhon Pathom (see Chapter 8: “Breakout”).



FIGURE 1.24. SOUVENIR PROGRAM FOR *FUN FARE: A NEW EDITION*. IWM 65/144/1.

While *Pass the Nuts* continued its run in the Pavilion Theatre during August, Britt went back to work on his revision of *Wonder Bar*. To serve the needs of Southern Area troops who had already seen *Pass the Nuts*, “Fizzer” Pearson produced “a new quick-fire revue,” *Fun Fare: A New Edition*, with a group of performers from *Nuts* that toured area units during the day.<sup>xli</sup>

### Camp Bulletin 2-5/9/42: Re the “Selarang Incident”

With the senior echelon of POW officers off the scene, I. J. A. headquarters issued a demand that every POW sign a form swearing that he would not under any circumstances attempt to escape.<sup>83</sup> This command was in direct contradiction to the treatment of POWs laid down in the Hague and Geneva conventions. After much debate, the POW administration refused to sign, and in retaliation, all the POWs in Changi, except those in Roberts Hospital, were ordered to assemble in Selarang Barracks square by 2 September or be shot.<sup>84</sup> So 15,000-plus POWs<sup>xlii</sup> trundled to the parade ground of the Selarang Barracks with everything they could carry or load onto hand-drawn trailers, including their food. In Selarang Square they found no latrine facilities and only one water point. To further intimidate the POWs, machine gun emplacements were set up at the corners of the square and Japanese and Sikh guards with fixed bayonets patrolled the perimeter. That night thousands of POWs slept out in the open.

The standoff was finally resolved two days later when the POW negotiating team proposed that the prisoners would sign the form if it was acknowledged they had done so “under duress.” The I. J. A. agreed to this provision, and the deadlock was broken.<sup>xliii</sup> By 6:30 p.m., all the POWs had signed the “no-escape” forms. Denis Russell-Roberts, for one, thought, “What a lot of ballyhoo it all was.”

<sup>xli</sup> Another program gives credit for producing the show to Leofric Thorpe.

<sup>xlii</sup> Not everyone agrees on the exact numbers.

<sup>xliii</sup> See Ronald Havers’ *Reassessing Changi for a blow-by-blow description of these negotiations.*

Nevertheless it gave us an excuse to celebrate, and that night[,] the eve of release, we put on a grand camp concert. A stage was somehow made out of two or three trailers parked together; lights, curtains and props were organised, and when the curtain went up, there must have been nearly fifteen thousand pairs of eyes riveted on that stage. All the stars of the Southern Area Concert Party were in their best form, ably supported by Bill Middleton and his orchestra.<sup>xliv</sup> And when Bobby Spong came on magnificently dressed as a woman, the roar that went up from that square must have been heard all over the island.<sup>85</sup>

The transgressive nature of Spong's appearance in all "her" finery was instantly recognized by the POWs as a defiant "Up Yours!" to the Japanese—and as an affirmation of their ability to prevail. If they had lost the battles for Malaya and Singapore through the incompetence of their leadership, they had at least won this round. Further acts of transgression ensued.

When the concert had ended we stood to attention and sang *God Save the King*. The few lights on the square had gone out and we stood in the darkness facing the Japanese on the Guard Room balcony. We sang as we had never sung before, with the orchestra seeming to encourage us to even louder and greater efforts. This was a truly wonderful act of defiance, directed upwards at those figures on the balcony from the throats of fifteen thousand men.<sup>86</sup>

Keenly aware of their spectators' gaze, the performers and audience members saw the activity they were engaged in from a totally new perspective: concert parties were not simply entertainment but acts of resistance—an important lesson for those headed Up Country, where the enemy would attend the shows and sit in the front row, always in sight of the POWs behind them.

The next day the POWs returned to their separate areas of Changi and continued on as before, buoyed by their newfound solidarity.<sup>87</sup>

### Something Old, Something New

Once the men were back in their respective areas, entertainment seemingly picked up where it had left off. On Saturday, 10 September, Australian medical officer Charles Huxtable, as he had many times before, accompanied two patients from Roberts Hospital to see the variety show in the New Windmill Theatre (the same show that had been running prior to "the Selarang Incident"). There Huxtable took special note of Fergus Anckorn and his performance: "A tall, fair young man dressed in full evening dress with white tie and tails (where did he get his clothes?) was very clever with a pack of cards and he entertained and mystified the audience with various tricks."<sup>88</sup>

<sup>xliv</sup> A show hastily produced by Leo Britt with the A.I.F. concert party's orchestra.



FIGURE 1.25. FERGUS ANCKORN AS "WIZARDUS." COURTESY OF FERGUS ANCKORN.

Emboldened by his earlier success, Eric Cliffe convinced Norman Smith that the Southern Area should offer a series of classical concerts during the rest of the month, modeled on the popular "Proms" at the Royal Albert Hall in London. All members of the British Empire knew about these iconic promenade concerts because the annual festival of music was broadcast each year on the BBC. The concerts would also give Leo Britton time to rehearse his production of *Wonder Bar*.

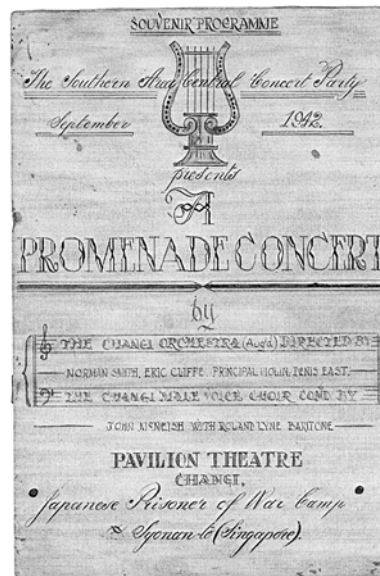


FIGURE 1.26. PROGRAM OF MUSIC FOR PROMENADE CONCERT. IWM 65/144/1.

For these concerts, the Southern Area's orchestra was augmented ("Aug'd") by musicians such as Denis East from other areas.

### Camp Bulletin 18/9/42: Re New Arrivals

On 18 September, life in Changi was disrupted by the arrival of the first substantial party of POWs from camps in the Netherlands East Indies. These "Ex-Java Parties" (as they came to be known) contained Australian, British, Netherlands East Indies (hereafter N.E.I.), and American soldiers, as well as airmen and sailors.<sup>xlv</sup> The new arrivals were dispersed and billeted in different divisions. At the same time, working parties stationed in and around Singapore began to be transferred back into their units in Changi, causing an acute housing shortage. The situation was exacerbated further at the end of the month when POWs who had been held in Malaya, including musicians "Ace" Connolly and Bob Gale, began to arrive. Changi was being transformed into an enormous transit camp in readiness for massive troop evacuations.

As several of the N.E.I. men were performers who had been entertaining their campmates on Java, their arrival proved a boon to Changi concert parties and their audiences by offering new faces and new acts. On 10 October, an A.I.F. concert party variety show concluded—much to the delight of the audience—with a trio of N.E.I. troops from Java performing a medley of Hawaiian songs enhanced by the presence of a hula dancer.



FIGURE 1.27. HULA DANCER. CHARLES BURKI. IMAGE COPYRIGHT MUSEON, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.

This trio and hula dancer would become extremely popular in POW camps Up Country.

### "The Great Migration"

In early October the long-anticipated massive troop evacuations got under way. Between 9 and

<sup>xlv</sup> The American soldiers were from the 2nd Battalion of the 131st Field Artillery Brigade (Texas National Guard); the sailors had been rescued from the U.S.S. Houston and the H.M.A.S. Perth, both of which had been sunk in the Sunda Straits off Java early on in the Japanese advance south.

16 October, the Australians at River Valley Road, along with the Dutch/Indonesian and American ex-Java POWs in Selarang, were ordered to Burma as “Williams Force” to join “A Force” already there. British POWs, including Len Gibson and his mates and Jack Chalker, were sent to Thailand instead. Four parties of British soldiers from Sime Road Camp led by Lieutenant-Colonel Philip Toosey followed soon after. As they departed, ten additional parties arrived from Java. David Nelson labeled these troops movements “the Great Migration.”<sup>89</sup> Major construction on the Thailand-Burma railway was about to begin.

At first the impact of these work site and ex-Java evacuations on the POWs remaining in Changi was minimal. Their attention was focused instead on another diphtheria outbreak that had temporarily closed the New Windmill Theatre. But in the third week of October, when word came from Malaya Command that 8,650 more POWs would be needed in Thailand—and supplied only from troops in the British divisions in Changi—morale among those remaining began to plummet.

Troops in the Southern Area were among the first targeted for transport Up Country. The initial draft of 200 left by rail on 24 October, followed daily by drafts of 650, eventually including members of the Mummings Bees. Providing “farewell concerts” for these departing troops became top priority. “It was decided,” Norman Smith wrote, “to keep concerts going as long as there were people to entertain and those of us running the theatre were on the last group to leave. This turned out to be advantageous in that the group tended to remain together. Later on this made it easier to repeat the setting up of theatres in the destination camps.”<sup>90</sup>

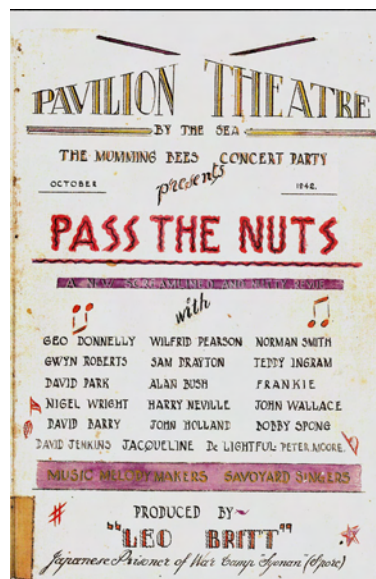


FIGURE 1.28. SOUVENIR PROGRAM FOR *PASS THE NUTS*. IWM 65/144/1.

Given these exigencies, Leo Britt’s production of *Wonder Bar* was abandoned, and a remount of *Pass the Nuts* was produced instead. One new performer in the cast was Ted Ingram (see **Figures 1.29–31** in the Image Gallery for the playbill listing other cast members). Since electricity had just been restored to the Southern Area, the remount would at least have the added attraction of stage lighting.

In the audience on 23 October was Lieutenant G. Stanley Gimson, whose diary entry captures both the nervous, unsettled atmosphere among the troops about to leave Changi as well as the magic of that

evening's spectacular "Blood and Sand" finale:

Tonight with all the mental upset of impending move . . . , to a concert. There was all the usual stuff—funny, sentimental & naughty—most of it excellent. For the first time we had lighting, and so as the sun set, the concert moved on toward the final scene. The setting was Spain; outside a bullring. The back cloth white with leafy branches across it. The stage was crowded—costumes in black, white and & scarlet, as colourful as one might wish. The soft lighting only half-lights the stage and overcame its smallness with deep shadows. A dancer—surely a girl—with tambourine, weaved in and out. The toreador sat drinking. The Dona Isabella sat sipping her wine, the aged priest beside her. The music from Carmen. It was wistfully, unbelievably beautiful.—When it was all over, and a few sad speeches made, the National Anthem—fervently sung. . . . Outside the moon was brilliant, shining over the valley between the palm trees.<sup>91</sup>

Although many troops from the 11th and 18th Divisions were also included in these drafts, members of the P.O.W. WOWS, the Changi Celebrity Artists, and the New Windmill Players were spared. Padre Foster-Haigh's choir was not so lucky. By 26 October he had lost half of the forty members who had started rehearsing excerpts from Handel's "The Messiah" for their first Christmas in captivity.<sup>92</sup> With so many men leaving, classes in the Changi Universities dwindled and eventually came to an end.

Farewell shows in other areas of Changi were taking place as well. On 1 November in the 18th Division, there was a farewell concert for ex-Java POWs leaving from the Divisional Signals' sector: "It was a show one won't easily forget," wrote Captain Charles Wilkinson, "as the turns were all provided by British, Australian, American and Dutch troops and by U.S. Navy, all of whom are P.O.Ws here and have been brought in from various islands such as Java, Batavia, and some of them even out of the sea!"<sup>93</sup>

When the New Windmill Theatre reopened on 2 November, performances of the revue *Gentlemen Only* were given twice nightly for departing troops.<sup>94</sup> The hit of the show was a Dutch/Indonesian illusionist who went by the stage name "the Great Cortini." Viewers were thrilled, Fergus Anckorn recalled, when he "visibly turned into a perfect skeleton in front of the audiences' eyes. And then back to normal. NO MIRRORS!"<sup>95</sup>

The next day British division commanders received an urgent message from Malaya Command requesting an additional party of nearly 2,000 men, with the last group scheduled to leave on 9 November. This time, members of the P.O.W. WOWS, as well as newly arrived "Ace" Connolly and his musicians, and actors Michael Curtis and W. S. Milsum of the New Windmill Players, were included in the drafts.

Fearing he might be called up as well, the classical pianist Reginald Renison was in despair. Fergus Anckorn "came across him sitting on the ground looking very despondent, and on my enquiring, he said he could not go on without his music which was his life. I told him to put up with things and we would soon be back home."<sup>96</sup> Renison lucked out: he was not included in the current drafts. Anckorn was not so lucky: he was.

By now, almost all the troops scheduled from the Southern Area had left. On 6 November, Leofric Thorpe, Norman Smith, Leo Britt, Bobby Spong, and other members of the Mummy Bees followed in the last draft.

## Roll Call

These are the men who, with their music and theatre, would become instrumental in helping the POWs on the Thailand-Burma railway endure the unimaginable hardships of that construction project and the years of imprisonment that followed its completion. The entertainment they produced would be for many the difference between living with hope and sinking into despair. They would be joined by other entertainers sent directly to Burma from Java and Sumatra, and by new faces who step forward from among the ranks. Their experience producing concert parties on improvised stages with scrounged materials in Changi or on Java would serve them well for the more difficult circumstances encountered Up Country.

But this is not the end of the story. In January 1943 another large contingent of POWs arrived in Changi from Java—called, this time, the “Java rabble.” Among them were Australian medical officer Lieutenant-Colonel Weary Dunlop and the Dutch/Indonesian cabaret entertainers Joop Postma, Philip Brugman, Ferry van Delden, and accordionist Han Samethini.



FIGURE 1.32. HAN SAMETHINI, PREWAR PHOTOGRAPH.  
COURTESY OF ROBIN KALHORN.

The “Java rabble” were quickly sent on to Thailand.

In the spring, when starvation, illness, and death decimated the Up Country workforce, raising serious doubt as to whether the railway could be completed on time, urgent calls for more POWs from Changi would follow.

## Endnotes

- 1 Barwick, 3.
- 2 Probert, 38–39.
- 3 Inglefield, 21.
- 4 Nelson, 14.
- 5 Inglefield, 20.
- 6 Inglefield, 16.
- 7 Inglefield, 24.
- 8 Nelson, 18.
- 9 McNeilly, 3.
- 10 “The Soldier’s Welfare: Notes for Officers,” 1.
- 11 Coast, 15.
- 12 Inglefield, 28.
- 13 Inglefield, 29.
- 14 Frisby, 205.
- 15 Dewey, quoting Wilder, 14.
- 16 Anonymous, IWM 95/9/1, 44.
- 17 Pounder, 41.
- 18 Sprod, *Bamboo*, 62.
- 19 Jacobs, 16.
- 20 Sprod, *Bamboo*, 62.
- 21 Richards, 3.
- 22 Chalker, Letter, 2 March 2000.
- 23 Stewart, 2.
- 24 Jacobs, 16.
- 25 Anckorn, Interview, 8.
- 26 Anckorn, Interview, 25.
- 27 See F. A. Brimlow, IWM 3657 85/29/1.
- 28 Information taken from *Hellsabuzzin!* souvenir program, D. W. Jenkins Papers, IWM 65/144/1.
- 29 Thorpe, “Stand Easy” Report, title page.
- 30 Thorpe, “Stand Easy” Report, 21.
- 31 Durnford, 177; Coast, 178.
- 32 Richard Sharp, 50.
- 33 Riley, 128.
- 34 Wade, 46.
- 35 Anonymous, 43.
- 36 Allison, *Begone Dull Care*, 75.
- 37 Tom Boardman, “Questionnaire,” 4.
- 38 Wade, 46.
- 39 Coast, 175.
- 40 Chalker, Letter, 3 March 2000.
- 41 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, n.d.
- 42 Thorpe, Fax, 23 June 2000.
- 43 Wade, 46.
- 44 Tom Boardman, Letter (“Reply to Further Questions”), n.d.
- 45 East, Interview, 42–44 passim.
- 46 Norman Smith, 18.
- 47 Norman Smith, 16–17.
- 48 Thorpe, Letter, 24 May 2000.
- 49 Stewart, 2.

- 50 Jack Boardman, Letter, 3 June 2004.  
51 "Div Concert Party," Col. D. A. S. Houghton Papers, IWM P259 Cont'd Dash 2/2 Cont'd.  
52 Boardman, Interview, 25–26.  
53 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, n.d.; Letter to author, 11 August 2002.  
54 Cave, 10.  
55 Godber, Diary, 29 April 194?.  
56 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, n.d.  
57 John Sharp, Diary, 15 April 1942.  
58 Nelson, 24.  
59 Wilson, 42.  
60 Lane, 34–35.  
61 Turner, "Parodies . . .," J. W. Turner Papers, IWM: Turner, J. W. 71/41/1.  
62 Gibson, Memoir, 3.  
63 Walker, *Of Rice and Men*, 18–19.  
64 Walker, "Report," 1–3.  
65 Walker, Interview, 26; "Report," 1–3.  
66 Walker, Interview, 10.  
67 Wade, 46.  
68 Jack Turner, 4.  
69 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, n.d.  
70 Thorpe, Letter, 11 September 2002.  
71 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, n.d.  
72 Crawford, 47.  
73 Wilkinson, Diary, 3 June 1942.  
74 Thorpe, Letter, 24 May 2000.  
75 Thorpe, Letter, 11 August 2002.  
76 Thorpe, Letter, 24 May 2000.  
77 Norman Smith, 135.  
78 Thorpe, Letter to Allison, n.d.  
79 Nelson, 38.  
80 Richardson, Diary, 22 August 1942.  
81 Nelson, 39.  
82 Richardson, Diary, 8 August 1942.  
83 Nelson, 40.  
84 Nelson, 41.  
85 Russell-Roberts, 204–205.  
86 Russell-Roberts, 204–205.  
87 Havers, 75.  
88 Huxtable, 78.  
89 Nelson, 51.  
90 Norman Smith, 21.  
91 Gimson, Diary, 23 October 1942.  
92 Huxtable, 89–90.  
93 Wilkinson, 48.  
94 Horner, Diary, 30 October 1942.  
95 Anckorn, Letter to Pritchard, n.d.  
96 Anckorn, Letter, 17 July 2000.