

*ALAN AUSTIN*

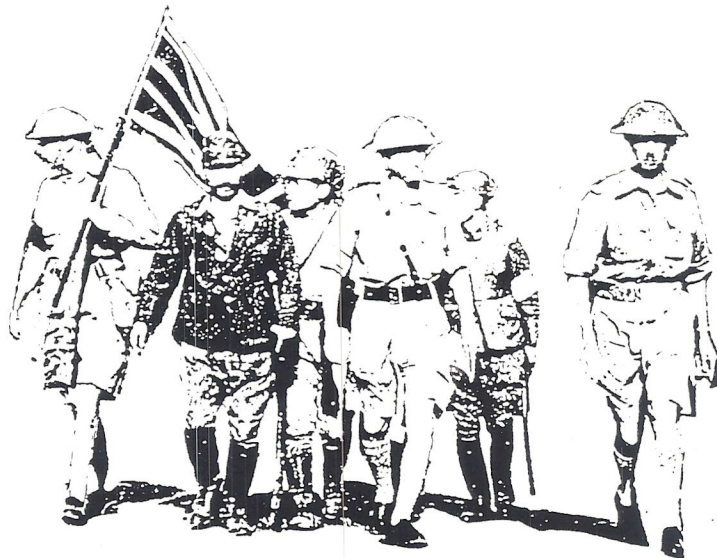
PERCEIVAL



# Percival

*by*

Alan Austin



## Percival

The play 'Percival' was born in the decayed colonial bungalow which passes as the headquarters of The Stage Club in Singapore and which is within shouting distance of the final perimeter which in February 1942 was the last obstacle between the Japanese General Yamashita and the city of Singapore. The team of actors involved in the play's initial staging participated wholeheartedly in detailed research into the period to ensure the accuracy of the costumes, of the language and details of the script and together with a band of devoted crew recreated for a few brief hours in a theatre a hundred yards away from Percival's headquarter on Fort Canning, the atmosphere of those few weeks when Singapore became a battlefield.

Percival is an "entertainment" and covers the period between June 1941 and February 1942 but it is also the story of the British Empire on its last legs. Percival, one of the key decision makers, who took the blame for the defeat, is at the centre, a man of great personal courage but unprepossessing appearance. He was put in charge of what was clearly destined in hindsight to be a failure. The play is also the story of ordinary men and women who were swept along by the tide of history.

## Set

Stage left barbed wire and timber defences stretching downstage. There is planking at eye level and a ship's gangplank descending to stage level. Corrugated iron sheeting at the back and side form the silhouette of a boat. Stage right has similar construction but steps instead of gangplank leading down into a command post so as to look like a bunker. Underneath is a room with maps on the wall, table with telephones which can be slipped out easily and the paraphernalia of a command post. Cyclorama at the back used for slide projection and lighting effects. Both areas are sandbagged. There is a chair down right and a timber packing case down left. Trays for explosions are set underneath the stairs and in barbed wire area down left. The set is an obvious representation; it is dowdy, run down and lit faintly. There should be no curtain.

In the original production speakers were stationed in all the four corners of the auditorium so that there was the sense of sound coming from all directions.

Musical accompaniment suggested: piano, double bass, drums  
plus optional brass instrument(s).

## CHARACTER PROFILES

**Lieutenant General Arthur Percival CB, DSO, OBE, MC, DL:** a highly qualified, brave professional soldier. Admired by those who worked with him for his coolness under pressure. Chose to go into captivity with his men. Carried with him, throughout captivity the lines from Kipling's poem "If":

"If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you..."

Had great personal dignity and charm but had an unprepossessing appearance. After the war he devoted his life to raising funds for F.E.P.O.W. (Far East Prisoners Of Wars) an organisation of which he was the President. Died 31st January 1966.

**Lieutenant General Tomoyuki Yamashita:** Commander of the 25th Japanese Army. Nicknamed "The Tiger of Malaya". Used the "blitz" technique which he learned from the Germans. Executed in Manila three and a half years after the fall of Singapore for the many war crimes committed by his troops.

**Brigadier I. Simson:** Percival's Chief Engineer in charge of both military and civilian defences. Encountered severe problems convincing both his commanding officers and local administration that proper defences ought to be constructed.

**Major General Gordon Bennett:** Commander of the Australian Imperial Force. His escape from Singapore resulted in an official enquiry which cleared his name. A tough abrasive and difficult General, utterly fearless and an inspiration to his troops. Died in 1962 still swearing that if he had to go through it all again, he would still have escaped.

**Air Vice Marshall Pulford:** Senior Air Officer. Escaped from Singapore but died on a deserted malarial island. On saying goodbye to Percival, he said prophetically "I suppose you and I will be blamed for this but God knows we have done our best with what we have been given."

**George Hammonds:** Assistant Editor of the Malayan Tribune.

**Philip Bloom:** A South African in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

**Julienne Glover:** wife of Jimmy Glover

**Freddy Retz** (short for Elfrieda): An American who drifted down to Singapore after the death of her husband. Married Philip Bloom and spent the war in Changi.

**Jimmy Glover:** Shrewd Yorkshire born Managing Director and Editor of the Malayan Tribune.

**Sir Tom Philips:** Admiral of the Fleet. His plan was to attack Japanese transports. He knew of the dangers of taking his ships out without fighter cover. Believed that the Japanese made poor airmen and was distracted by a false report of a landing at Kuantan which resulted in HMS Prince of Wales being spotted.

Percival was first presented by

**THE SOUTH EAST ASIAN CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE THEATRE ENSEMBLE**

at The Drama Centre, Fort Canning Rise Singapore on 3rd October 1989.

*THE LADIES:*

Penang Resident/Civilian	- P. Arul
Julienne Glover/Civilian	- Janthi Nagtegaal
Mourning Woman/Civilian	- Lin Pang
Freddy Retz/Civilian	- Nuala O'Sullivan
Civilian/Doris	- Sarah Waud
Karen Hammond/Civilian	- Rachelle Yeo
Civilian/Gladys	- Cindy Baynes
Penang Resident/Civilian/Soloist	- Suzanna Paul
Children	- Emma & Louise Baynes

*THE GENTLEMEN:*

Percival	- Lionel Power
Major/Air Chief Marshall Brooke-Pophan	- Peter Lugg
Major Philip Bloom/Jarvis/Fred	- Rupert Glasgow
Drowned Sailor/Japanese Officer	- Ken Low
Soldier/Peters	- Jonathan Marshall
Soldier/Officer/Robinsons Store Manager	- Andy Chew
Gordon-Bennett/Sergeant/Fight-Commentator	- Tim Dore
Soldier/Bert/Japanese Boxer	- Farron B.
Admiral Sir Tom Philips/Brigadier Simson	- Peter Roberts
Lone Trumpeter	- David Mason
George Hammond	- Bob Robinson
Jimmy Glover/Officer/Ringmaster	- Martin Baynes
Soldier/Soloist	- Ang Chong Lee
Waiter/Japanese Officer	- Colin Lin
Japanese Officer	

## ACT 1

*Lone trumpet silhouetted centre. Plays 'Reveille.'*

*Lights up on stage. Opening fanfare of "Over There", roll of drums, enter Cast marching smartly.*

SONG

CHORUS

Well we're here, yes we're here  
And we're pleased to be here, over here  
We're the South East Asian, the South East Asian  
Theatre Company

In Singapore, Singapore  
Where our mums and our dads fought the war  
We'll entertain you, we'll entertain you  
We're the South East Asian  
Theatre Company

Give a cheer, never fear,  
Let us hear, you give a cheer because we're here  
We're the South East Asian The South East Asian  
Theatre Company

So join the song, sing along  
Don't be shy, have a try sing along  
Come and join us, come and join us  
We're the South East Asian  
Theatre Company.

*(Exeunt)*

*Darkened theatre. There a crackle over the radio and then the voice of Churchill.*

"In the defence of our island fortress of Singapore there must be no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population. The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs.... Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops...." *(fades away to crackles).*

### Scene 1

*(There is a shrill whistle, the clattering of boots.)*

SERGEANT: *(Off-stage) (very loudly)* Right lads. Fall in on the double. Come on Jarvis. That includes you. There's a bleedin' war on if you

didn't know.

*(Six soldiers in World War 2 khaki dash on stage and take up position front stage in at ease position).*

JARVIS: *(between his teeth)* Reckon this is it mate. We're off to fight Jerry.

SERGEANT: *(coming on stage)* Shut up you horrible little man, Jarvis. Right lads. Atten ... tion.

*(Squad comes smartly to attention. They have the air of a well drilled expectant squad. He makes them practise until it's perfect.)*

SERGEANT: Ready when you are Major. *(salutes)*

MAJOR: *(avuncular)* Thank you Sergeant Major. Stand the men at ease.

SERGEANT: Squad, squad, stand at ease.

MAJOR: Alright lads. Well you'll be pleased to hear that all the waiting and the training you've been doing is finally going to be put to good use. Nothing's final of course and we can't divulge anything until we're on the way so to speak. Careless talk and all that and the less you know the better. Anyway, everyone's got a forty-eight hour pass. Report back by Wednesday 21.00 hours sharp. They're finally going to let us have a crack at the enemy. All right Sergeant, carry on. *(Exit)*

SERGEANT: Yes Sir. Right. Attention! O.K. you heard. For some reason unbeknown to myself, their lordships in higher places have decided that the war is going so badly that they can afford to sling you lot at the enemy. Personally I wouldn't send you lot out to rescue my granny. That was not a joke Jarvis. Having survived Dunkirk I do not intend to get my arse peppered because some dick doesn't know what he's doing. Got it Jarvis.

JARVIS: Yes Sir!

SERGEANT: Right. So back here Wednesday 21.00 hours. Got it. Dismiss. *(Exit)*

JARVIS: *(mock solute)* Yes Sir, no sir, Three bags

full sir. Where would you like this bayonet Sir?  
With pleasure sir.

SOLDIER 1: Shut up Jarvis will you. Don't you  
ever give up?

SOLDIER 2: This is it boyo. The next bloody sand  
dune I have to crawl up will be a real one. I'm  
going bloody mad crawling round the dunes on  
the bloody British seaside. Besides nothing can  
be worse than being yelled at by Sergeant Wil-  
liams.

SOLDIER 3: Don't you believe it Taff. When  
those bullets start flying for real, you'll be wet-  
ting yourself.

SOLDIER 2: Well maybe but we've trained hard  
enough. One year we've been at it. How to keep  
sand out your rifle, how to shit in the desert,  
without setting bitten by a scorpion, how to  
preserve water. I already feel like a bloody camel.

SOLDIER 4: Come on lads, let's get going. This is  
the last weekend in Blighty and I don't want to  
keep the wife waiting. I want to leave her with  
something remember me by. (*exit via gang  
plank...*)

JARVIS: Quite right. You never know when it's  
going to be your last time do you? I'm off. See  
you in the war lads.

SOLDIER 1: Well, we'll give Jerry something to  
think about.

SOLDIER 2: I wouldn't bank on it. They'll proba-  
bly send us to fight the fuckin' eskimos.

(*Exeunt*)

*Men are next seen on balcony with kit ... woman enter  
stage left. Sound of a troop ship, water lapping, gulls.  
Shouts of "Bye Terry." "Give 'em hell."  
"Bye" "Come back safely" "Look after  
yourself Bill" Handkerchiefs being waved.  
"Wave bye bye to Daddy" "There he is."  
"Bye. Bye."*

SONG

SOLDIER: Let's say goodbye with a smile dear  
Just for a while dear  
We must part

Don't let the parting upset you  
I'll not forget you sweetheart

MEN: We'll meet again  
Don't know where, don't know when  
But I know we'll meet again some  
sunny day  
Keep smiling through  
Just like you always do  
Till the blue skies drive the dark clouds  
Far away

SOLDIER: So will you please say hello  
To the folks that I know  
Tell them I won't be long  
They'll be happy to know  
That as you saw me go  
I was singing this song

ALL: We'll meet again  
Don't know where, don't know when  
But I know we'll meet again some sunny day

(*They wave, exeunt. ... "Bye Fred, Bye Terry, Bye  
Bill"*)

*Chorus fades, lights fade ... a gale blows up. Sound of  
heavy seas.*

*Enter Jarvis staggering as if on heaving deck and very  
seasick. Gets to the front of the stage and is sick over the  
edge.*

JARVIS: Oh my bloody God. (*retches horribly*) I  
think I'm going to bloody die. Oh my God  
(*retches he has nothing left to be sick with.*) Please let  
me die God ... please. I don't care about the war.  
Honestly (*retches*) I just want to die. Please let me  
die ... oh no ... oh no ... not that as well ... oh  
bloody hell ... oh no ... (*gets up clutching backside  
and staggers off-stage.*)

(*Lights goes up stage right. Enter Gladys mixing some-  
thing in a bowl. She is dressed in traditional "pinny"  
and has her head scarf on, as in WW2. She gets to the  
kitchen table.*)

GLADYS: That's marvellous that is. Cheerful Dr  
Charles Hill gives us this recipe over the wireless  
every morning. The only trouble is there are only  
three ingredients, at least only three ingredients  
you can actually buy in the shops. And do you

know what those are? Guess. Shall I tell you? Potatoes, onions and carrots. Actually there's a limited number of things you can do with potatoes, onions and carrots. Though the way Dr Charles Hill talks about it you'd think they'd only just been discovered and are on a par with caviar. As for red meat, I've forgotten what the stuff looks like let alone tastes like. One rasher of bacon per person per week, we get. Wonderful isn't it? Today we're having potato and onion hotpot, tomorrow we're having potato and carrot rissoles and the day after tomorrow with a bit of luck we'll be having, just for change, you guessed it, fried carrots, onions and potatoes. Next week it's 501 things you can make with dried egg powder. The whole thing is specially designed to give you indigestion. Still mustn't complain I suppose while the war's on. There's a lot worse off.

*(Enter from upstage, small child wearing gasmask)*

CHILD: *(she chants)*  
We're being ga-assed. We're being ga-assed.

GLADYS: Hoi, I've told you before you're not to play around with that gasmask. How many times have I told you....

CHILD: We're being ga-assed.

GLADYS: *(she shouts)*  
Wendy, take that gas mask off this minute.

WENDY: Wo-n't, wo-n't ... we're being ga-assed  
*(disappears off stage making aircraft noises)*.

GLADYS: I'll smack your bottom if you don't behave yourself. Go and wash your hands. It's time for dinner. Of course the trouble is, she hasn't seen her dad for two years. They go wild the kids do round here what with all the bombing and half the dads being away ... they should've been evacuated but ... well I couldn't bear sending her away but it's not good for them.

*(Re-enter Wendy without gasmask but pretending to fire imaginary gun.)*

WENDY: Bang bang you're dead, forty bullets in your head.

GLADYS: Have you washed your hands?

WENDY: Yes mum *(displays hands for inspection)*.

GLADYS: That's good. Your dad'll be ever so proud of you.

WENDY: What's for dinner?

GLADYS: Hotpot.

WENDY: I don't like hotpot. Can't we have rissoles?

GLADYS: We're having rissoles tomorrow. Too much fried stuff's not good for you.

WENDY: When's daddy coming home?

GLADYS: Soon.

WENDY: Is he killing the Germans?



GLADYS: I don't know love. I doubt it.

WENDY: Who's he killing then?

GLADYS: He's probably not killing anybody.



WENDY: Why isn't he killing anybody?

GLADYS: I wish you'd stop asking all them questions. Go and set the table will you.

WENDY: Yes mum. *(pause)* Will the war go on for ever?

GLADYS: Stop asking questions and go and set the table.

WENDY: Can I be a nurse?

GLADYS: If you set the table.

WENDY: I'm going to be a nurse. My friend Barbara is going to be a nurse as well. *(she skips off)* Bang bang you're dead, forty bullets in your head.

GLADYS: Kids. 'A tell you sometimes if I had to make a choice between the kids and Herr Hitler I'm beginning to wonder who I'd choose. *(Sound of Air Raid warning)* Here we go again. It's early tonight. *(Shouts)* Wendy come on love. We'll have our dinner in the shelter. Wendy. Hurry up love. We've got to go to the shelter. Hurry up love. Wendy? Wendy! *(angrily)* Get to the shelter. And bring that gasmask.

*(Exit)*

*Sergeant and soldiers enter as on deck of ship.*

SERGEANT:

O.K. lads ... let's have you round. Major wants to talk to you.

*(Men gather round). (Major enters)*

MAJOR: Now you have probably gathered by now that we're on a special mission. Actually some of you are going to be pretty disappointed. But you have to remember that we are all part of a larger plan and as long as we do our job well then we're going to win this war. We can't all be up in the front line. I know most of you have been training for desert warfare and that's what we thought ... well that's what we'd been told but it seems that plans have changed a bit. Instead of heading for North Africa, we've been ordered to the Far East. Now as I'm sure you know there's nothing much happening there at

the moment but we think ... or at least people at the War Office think that there could be a bit of a blow up there and it's very important that we should be seen showing the flag to those little fellahs the Japs. Apart from that we want to show the Aussies the way it's done. Right? O.K. We'll be stopping in Bombay and then we'll be on to Singapore. We've got a bit of knowhow about fighting in the jungle but I'm afraid I'm as much in the dark as you are. We're going to see what can be done about getting some gear and of course mosquito nets and that sort of stuff. We'll be running a few courses but from what I've heard of Singapore the sort of action you'll be seeing will be strictly night action ... ahm *(vague attempt to laugh at his own joke)* That will be all then. Sergeant will you take over. Thank you. *(Exit)*

SERGEANT: O.K. lads. Tomorrow morning on the No 2 deck, lectures on jungle warfare. Everyone attends. That includes you Jarvis. We don't want you frightening the natives to death do we? Right. Dismiss. *(Exit)*

*(Soldiers in a little huddle)*

SOLDIER 1: And I thought we were going to fight in the desert.

JARVIS: You are old son. It's just a desert which happens to have jungle. Surely you don't expect the planners of this mighty exercise to preserve democracy to know the difference between desert and jungle. I mean these lads have had an education my son. They aren't ignoramuses like you you know.

SOLDIER 1: Shut up Jarvis.

SOLDIER 2: If they used your mouth Jarvis as a secret weapon, we'd win the war tomorrow.

SOLDIER 3: My dad was in Singapore before the war. He said it was a great place. He said you couldn't move for brothels.

JARVIS: That's probably why the Japs want it.

SOLDIER 1: What are they like these Japs?

SOLDIER 2: They're all little aren't they. We'll

swat them like flies.

SOLDIER 1: I read somewhere that they all have bad eyesight and they can't see. They're short-sighted.

JARVIS: That's a great comfort. We've been sent to fight, short arsed, short sighted nymphromaniacs. That should really be a bundle of fun. Here got a fag?

SOLDIER 1: Here Jarvis (*offers him one. They all light up.*) Here did I tell you, when we was on leave, I took the wife and kids to see Snow White and the Seven Dwarves. Marvellous it was ... all cartoons ... (*Sailor with binoculars top of ramp.*)

(*Enter Chorus on runway*)

### SONG

With a smile and a song  
Life is just like a bright sunny day  
Your cares fade away  
And your heart is young  
With a smile and a song  
All the world seems to waken anew  
Rejoicing with you  
As the song is sung

There's no use in grumbling  
When raindrops come tumbling  
Remember you're the one  
Who can fill the world with sunshine  
When you smile and you sing  
Everything is in tune and it's spring  
And life flows along  
With a smile and a song.

(*There's a sudden crump of an explosion. Siren going. Action stations*)

SAILOR: (*Peering through binoculars*) U Boat on the starboard bow.

*Shout off stage: Fire Depth Charges.*

(*There's a crump of explosions.*)

SAILOR: Take cover.

### Scene 2

(*Sound of the same tune from Snow White. Lights up on The Sea View Hotel. White tables, spread with linen. Servants setting the tables, waiters serving Tigers and stengahs. There is an atmosphere of normality. Lights are bright. Everyone knows everyone else. The date is Sunday December 8th*)

*Enter Freddy - New Yorker 27, pert attractive, coming in from tennis, followed by Philip Bloom Major RAMC, good-looking, athletic, South African accent.*

PHILIP: Do you want a drink?

FREDDY: Sure, make it a G&T and ask them to put some gin in it for a change.

PHILIP: Waiter. Waiter a Tiger and large gin and tonic ... ask them (*he says it slowly*) to put some extra gin in it. (*Waiter looks confused*) Oh it doesn't matter, just bring a beer and Two gin and tonics. Super game Freddie. Where did you learn to play like that? You had me running all over the place.

FREDDY: My husband was a great player. Never off the court.

PHILIP: (*disappointed*) You never told me you were married.

FREDDY: Well I'm not actually. (*lights a cigarette*) He died last year in Penang. Oh I say isn't that the Hammonds ... yes it is ... George, we're over here.

PHILIP: Oh I am sorry about that ... anything serious...? I mean well ... eh ... of course it was.... Yes I think you're right ... it is George.

(*Enter George Hammond 35 followed by his very beautiful Eurasian wife. George is 35 confident*)

FREDDY: It was a heart attack actually.

GEORGE: Hi you lot. Had a good name? Looking for the Glovers. Haven't seen them have you?

FREDDY: I saw Julianne in the lobby, she was phoning, look there she is. (*points off stage*)

GEORGE: So she is. Julianne. We're over here. (*turns to Freddy*) You've met Karen haven't

you?

FREDDY: Of course. Philip have you met Karen?

PHILIP: No I haven't. How do you do? Very pleased to meet you. Do come and sit down. Would you like a drink? (*Waiter arrives*)

KAREN: Just an orange juice.

FREDDY: Well George, what's the latest with you....

GEORGE: Oh there's some flap on as usual. (*lights a cigarette*)

PHILIP: (*to barman*) An orange juice ... and George ... do you want a beer?

GEORGE: Thanks. That's why I wanted to talk to Julienne. We ran a story about Japanese troop transports sighted off Cambodia this morning.

PHILIP: (*to barman*) That's an orange juice and another beer please.

FREDDY: I can't understand why you Europeans have to be at everybody else throats all the time. You don't have to be always shooting each other. Why don't you do what America does? Sit this one out. You don't expect us to come and rescue you again do you?

GEORGE: Well, it's not quite as easy as that.

PHILIP: I don't know. It's a pretty good life here. We seem to be sitting it out pretty nicely.... It'll probably all be over by the end of the year.

(*Enter Julienne ... she is middle aged and speaks with a French accent*)

GEORGE: Ah ... there you are Julienne. (*goes to her and kisses her*) Where's Jimmy? ... let me get you a drink ... have a seat.

JULIENNE: (*flustered and annoyed*) I don't know where he is. He said he'd meet me here. He got this call this morning. It seems to be the same every week. He promised me we would go for a swim at the Tanglin Club this afternoon and I have already told the servant to prepare for this evening. Vraiment c'est impossible.

(*Drinks arrive*)

PHILIP: Drinks everyone.... Orange juice wasn't it Karen? Do you play tennis?

GEORGE: Did he say who it was? ... Gin and tonic please.

JULIENNE: The military I think. He seemed very angry ... something about today's paper.

(*Waiter comes over with the chit for the drinks*)

PHILIP: Here let me sign that. Don't want to be accused of being pencil shy. I say. Are we all eating here? ... (*general agreement*) ... shall I include Jimmy? ... (*Julienne nods*) Right that's tiffin for six. (*he signs*)

KAREN: I've played one or two times.

FREDDY: Well you must come down and join us here at the Seaview next Sunday.

PHILIP: Oh you must ... we often have a little bash during the week up at the Tanglin Club. It stops you getting bored out of your mind. Freddy's an incredibly good player. She'll give you lessons.

KAREN: (*embarrassed*) Well I don't think....

PHILIP: Why don't you come?

FREDDY: Philip ... I don't think you quite appreciate.... The Tanglin Club doesn't allow ...

PHILIP: Doesn't allow what?

FREDDY: (*annoyed at having to spell it out*) Philip surely you know you can't be a member of the Tanglin Club unless you're the right, you know, colour....

PHILIP: (*embarrassed*) Quite forgot ... sorry ... maybe we could come here....

KAREN: That would be very nice.

(*Changing the conversation*)

GEORGE: Well if I know the military ... it'll be their usual knee jerk reaction.

PHILIP: Now wait a minute ... I'm the military remember.

GEORGE: They ... still treat it as if they are playing a team from the fourth division football club....

PHILIP: Now come on, the Japs have never had to face real opposition, now have they? With two battleships prowling around. They can hardly do very much.

GEORGE: Oh there's Jimmy.

*(Enter Jimmy, Yorkshire bluntness....)*

GEORGE: Well?

JIMMY: Bloody marvellous. Get us a beer will you. Sorry I'm late ... luv.

GEORGE: So who was it this time?

JIMMY: Oh ... big brass this time.... Sir Robert bloody Brooke Popham no other....

GEORGE: What did he say?

JIMMY: I got a roasting. He didn't appreciate our headline of 27 Jap transports sighted off Cambodia point. Said it was alarmist and pessimistic. Said it wasn't half so serious as we made out.

GEORGE: Where on earth does he think they're going?

JIMMY: Probably for a health cruise in the South China sea I expect.

GEORGE: Seriously.

JIMMY: He didn't say but he reckons they're heading north so presumably they must be going to attack Thailand.

GEORGE: Well if he's wrong ... in any case what do they want to attack Thailand for?

JIMMY: Don't ask me.... I don't understand the

army's mentality. They bring God knows how many troops out here turn the place into an armed fortress which they say is impregnable and then assume the Japs are too frightened to attack it.

GEORGE: I don't see how the Japs can....

JIMMY: *(beer arrives)* That's better ... as for preparations ... I don't know.... Oh I almost forgot ... Julienne ... my love.... All O.K. for this afternoon.... Hey what about some food. I'm starving.

FREDDY: *(looking at her watch)* My god it's twelve thirty, time for the Brits to sing their nursery rhymes ... why we have to suffer this every week....

GEORGE: Part of the ritual my dear. We didn't found the British Empire for nothing you know. Just because you Americans opted out. It's good for morale in any case ... oh they're starting ... come on everybody....

PHILIP: I don't know the words.

GEORGE: They're printed on the card, ... on the table ... there. Come on now everybody ... and you.... This is the British Empire on which the sun never sets.... Freddy you've got to stand....

FREDDY: Oh hell ... I've spilt my drink.

GEORGE: Never mind that ... one, two three.

*(The band strikes up ... the chorus emerge, dressed in tropical white, waving small union jacks and clutching a drink)*

SONG

I give you a toast  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
I give you a toast  
Ladies and Gentlemen  
May this fair land we love so well  
In dignity and freedom dwell  
Though worlds may change and go awry  
While there is still one voice to cry

*(They move in a stately march ballet, a bit like guards-*

men)

There'll always be an England  
While there's a country lane  
Wherever there's a cottage small  
Beside a field of grain  
There'll always be an England  
While there's a busy street  
Wherever there's a turning wheel  
A million marching feet

Red White and Blue  
What does it mean to you  
Surely you're proud  
Shout it aloud  
Britons awake  
The Empire too  
We can depend on you  
Freedom remains  
These are the chains  
Nothing can break

FREDDY: (*centre-stage when there is silence*)

Oh shit ... (*All chorus turn to watch her*) She drops her glass. It shatters. Air-raid sirens start. Chorus bewildered, look out front. Sound of aircraft and then bombs falling. Lights continue up and bright. (*They stare upwards.*)

GEORGE: Turn the bloody lights off will you. We're being bombed. (*shouts to lighting box*) For God's sake turn the lights off. (*Nothing happens*) (*screams*) Turns the lights off. Hoi ... you.... (*points to gallery*) Turn the lights off.

SOLDIER ON BALCONY: Sorry Sir (*explosion ... sirens*) Can't sir.

GEORGE: What do you mean can't?

SOLDIER: Can't sir. Can't turn the lights off.

GEORGE: Why not?

SOLDIER: Can't find the switch.

GEORGE: What do you mean you can't find the switch?

SOLDIER: Nobody knows where the switch is.

GEORGE: But surely (*massive crump of shell burst*)

Someone must know. We're being bombed.  
The enemy can see everything.

SOLDIER: Quite understand sir but there it is. Nobody knows where the switch is to turn all the lights off. We're looking for it Sir. (*salutes*)

GEORGE: (*explosion, flashes of light. Chorus have flattened themselves*) Who on earth is in charge of this lot. (*Blackout*)

SOLDIER: (*in the darkness*) (*shouts*)  
We've found the switch Sir.

### Scene 3

(*Percival enters, picking his way carefully across prostrate bodies of the Chorus. He has an easel and maps.*)



PERCIVAL: Terribly sorry about that. Excuse me. How do you do? All right are we? Jolly good. Sorry. Just need a small space. (*fixes up easel and maps then looks out at the audience and then pleasantly surprised*) Very good. Delighted so many of you could make it. Very good ... and I must say you all seem to be doing jolly well. Well ... things looked pretty bad in 1942 you know ... and look at everything now ... very, very good. I'm absolutely delighted. Couldn't have wished for a better outcome. Just shows you ... out of the old ashes comes the ... you know ... the new. Still very important to put the record straight. Yes,

that's what it's about. Putting the record straight. Don't want those men of mine up at the Kranji War Cemetery to feel I haven't put the record straight. Not much fun when you get killed in a campaign that's called a defeat. History tends to ignore you. Dying's the same, victory or defeat though. Must remember that. A lot of good men died a long way from home and it's damned important to put the record straight. Right ah yes.

*(Brigadier Simson has come on stage and it standing next to easel.)*

*(Percival's manner should switch. He becomes younger, more sure of himself.)*

PERCIVAL: Ah Simson ... good to see you.

BRIG.: My report sir. I wonder if I could ...

PERCIVAL: Yes?

BRIG.: I think the Japanese will use tanks sir.

PERCIVAL: Tanks?

BRIG.: Yes Sir, tanks.

PERCIVAL: Oh I don't think so Simson.

BRIG.: Sir, I've done a complete recce of the Malaysian mainland over the last month and I think the terrain will take it. I think they'll use tanks.

PERCIVAL: Well, I'm not sure you know.

BRIG.: Well I am Sir. And the men have no instructions on how to cope with tanks.

PERCIVAL: Haven't they? I thought there were some instructions....

BRIG.: Yes, but they're out of date.

PERCIVAL: Can't have that.

BRIG.: Perhaps we should redraft and issue to the troops.

PERCIVAL: Yes, indeed Simson. Just in case.

BRIG.: Thank you Sir. *(salutes exits)*

PERCIVAL: Fine officer. Now where was I? Ah yes, the defence of Malaya. *(Addresses prostrate Chorus)* All right you people, the party's over. We're at war at last. You didn't believe me did you? Well you'd better believe me now. We're at war with Japan and it looks as if they've invaded and I'd better tell you now, if you didn't know it already, we're not in very good shape *(pause)* but whatever happens we're going to do our best. Do you hear that? We're going to do our best.

*Chorus (slowly coming to life someone brings army/nurse uniforms on stage throws them in a heap and gradually they begin to get changed into war gear as they sing. Percival arranges his maps and checks his notes seemingly oblivious)*

*(Song Hi Ho from 'Snow White').*

Hi Ho

Hi Ho *(The chorus is picked up as they get into costume and is echoed as in SSD)*

Hi Ho, Hi Ho

It's off to war we go

*(whistle the next two lines of the song)*

Hi Ho Hi Ho

It's off to war we go

*(whistle)*

*(They march off)*

*(The singing has to get feebler and feebler as chorus disappear.)*

*Sound effects of operations room, shouting*

*Fort Canning comes to life. Signals operations room. Two signals officers taking signals, translating codes non-stop, shouting out, runners coming in going out. Command pouring over maps, arrows being moved. Percival remains at front stage. The generals consult about messages coming in. This is the first day and there's a feeling of chaos and excitement.*

PERCIVAL: *(to audience)*. Now it's very important that for you to understand what happened you have to go back five years before the war. During that time no British government was prepared to spend large sums of money on the defence of a country it was not sure was going to be attacked. Furthermore, by the time 1940 came around, Britain was in no position to defend itself let alone a possession on the other side of the world.

So I'm afraid it was all a bit of a shambles, a bit temporary ... or Heath Robinson as the expression goes. However, the chaps we had, were raring to go, and we were jolly well going to do our best with what we had.... Yes ... (*looks around....*) I say ... (*looks at his watch*) ... sun's over the yard arm ... isn't it time for ... as yes ... (*enter his batman with a whisky and soda, Percival drinks with great relief and pleasure*) jolly good, that's better ... personally I believe that in these very hot countries, a whisky and soda in the evening is no bad tonic after a hard day's work. I really don't like all these terrible accusations in the press that the whites in Malaysia were nothing more than a party of drunks. The press I'm afraid has been totally irresponsible. If we hadn't had a noggin in trenches, I don't think any of us would have survived. Now where were we? Ah yes the defence of Malaya.... I say ... (*looks round*).... Must check with Brooke-Popham that the order of the day got off....

(*Exit*)

(*Enter Brooke-Popham with a chair. He is older than Percival and looks and sounds rather like a man who has been brought out of retirement.*)

BROOKE POPHAM: (*He reads energetically*)  
Order of the Day.

Japanese action today gives the signal for the Empire Naval, Army and Air Forces to go into action with a common aim and common ideals. We are ready. (*he yawns*) We have had plenty of warning and our preparations are made and tested. (*he tries to suppress another yawn*) We have borne the petty insults inflicted on us by the Japanese in the Far East.... Oh dear I say (*he yawns*) ... need a bit of the old shuteye ... (*sits... tries to revive himself*) ... where were we ... yes.... We know that these things were done only because Japan thought she could take advantage of our supposed weakness. (*he is falling asleep rapidly*) Now she will find out that she has made a grievous mistake. (*During this speech he falls sleep on stage where he remains*)

(*Enter Percival*)

PERCIVAL: (*addresses audience*) Did you get that? Did you get that? (*waits for a response*) Yes? Fine courageous man Brooke-Popham.... Now where

were we. Yes the defence of Malaya. (*Points to the map on which are the main dispositions of the force in Phase I of the battle. He is now sharp and incisive ... the commands are clipped as from a man used to command, he bangs the map with his stick.*)

11th Indian Division  
Penang Garrison  
9th Indian Division  
Australian Imperial Force under Major Gordon Bennett  
Singapore Fortress

and various units in reserve, largely Indian troops who had I am afraid received little training.... (*he is interrupted*) According to intelligence the Japanese attack will concentrate on Northern Malaya and....

OFFICER 1: (*emerges from Operations Room*)  
Excuse me Sir.

PERCIVAL: Yes.

OFFICER 1: Landing reports at Singora and Patani on the Thai coast. The Thais offering heavy resistance. (*Gives the signal to Percival and returns*)

PERCIVAL: Ah yes. Thank you. You see the problems are multiple and interrelated. There's a massive shortage of officers. All the best chaps have been earmarked for the North African campaign and the newly promoted officers just haven't got the experience.

OFFICER 1: (*returns*) Excuse me Sir.

PERCIVAL: Yes?

OFFICER 1: Beach Defences at Kota Bharu being shelled. Five transports sighted off-shore.

PERCIVAL: What? Right. Carry on.

OFFICER 1: (*salutes*) Thank you Sir. (*returns smartly to Operations Room from which the buzz continues*)

PERCIVAL: Now you see the problem is the airfields. Give the Japanese control of the airfields in Southern Thailand and they can bomb our airfields and wipe out our aircraft. Without aircover our whole campaign will be at a distinct disadvantage. But you can't just go invading

neutral countries. Lieutenant.

OFFICER 1: *(returns)* Yes Sir?

PERCIVAL: Order an all out attack of enemy transports off Kota Bharu.

OFFICER 1: Immediately Sir.

PERCIVAL: We have this plan Matador which entails the invasion of Southern Thailand. Timing is crucial however. Brooke-Popham. Operation Matador? Brooke-Popham?

POPHAM: *(wakes up)* What? Yes? Up over the top lads. Bayonets fixed. Let's give these Huns a bit of the cold steel ... what?

PERCIVAL: *(impatient)* Do we put Matador into operation?

POPHAM: What, Matador? Yes? Well what's happening? Better check operations. *(goes to operations at back)*

OFFICER 1: *(returning)* 3rd Battalion of the 17th Indian Division wiped out to a man defending the beach Sir.

PERCIVAL: *(ignoring this and showing some anger)* I must have permission from G.H.Q Far East Command to move troops into Southern Thailand.

OFFICER 1: *(goes back to operations)* Yes Sir.

PERCIVAL: We must hold the position around Kota Bahru. *(points)* But we must move north to stop the Japanese getting control of the airfields.

OFFICER 1: Enemy convoy moving in on Singora.

PERCIVAL: Damn. If our men were to move now they would meet them on the road *(men sing lines from Run Rabbit, Run Rabbit)*.

MEN: *(softly)* Run rabbit, run rabbit run, run run. Run rabbit, run rabbit run, run run.

PERCIVAL: Most of them haven't heard a shot fired in anger *(he turns abruptly - singing stops)* and they're up against experienced men.

OFFICER 2: Sir. Permission from GHQ to move into Southern Siam.

OFFICER 3: Sir. Japanese invasion being held two miles south of Kota Bharu. We are reinforcing.

MEN:

Bang bang bang bang.  
Goes the army gun.

*(Stage left. An officer is cranking an army telephone. Speaks into the phone)* Can I move my men into Thailand or not? *(he shouts)* For god sake man. I have had my men ready to move for the last six hours. Do we have orders to move or not? What do you mean the connection is poor? Just find out. Do we go or don't we? *(slams phone down)*

OFFICER 1: Aerodromes at Kelantan, Kedah and Penang under attack Sir.

MEN:

So run rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run.

PERCIVAL: Send up air reconnaissance to Singora and Patani at dawn.

OFFICER 1: Commander of 11th Indian Division wants to know whether to move back to defensive positions.

MEN:

Run, rabbit, run rabbit run, run, run.

PERCIVAL: Tell the 3rd Indian Corps to occupy defensive positions on the Singora and Kroh Patani Roads.

*(The pace quickens)*

OFFICER 1: Sir. The Japanese are deploying tanks on the Singora Road.

MEN:

Don't give the Japanese their fun, fun, fun.

PERCIVAL: Order the C.O. of the 2nd Frontier Force to counter attack against the Japanese bridgehead when he is in position.

OFFICER 1: Thai troops attacking the Third Indian corps as they crossed the border. Troops attempting to progress but severely hampered by



sniper fire.

MEN:

They'll get by  
Without a rabbit pie  
So run rabbit, run rabbit run run run.

PERCIVAL: We're behind schedule. We won't make it. We won't make it. We haven't got the time. *(He is carried off while cast sing full version of Run Rabbit.)*

## Scene 5

*(Once they have left, lights go down and there is an eerie silence. Then the sounds of the jungle. A monkey screeches. Sound of a long tailed nightjar. The noise rises to a crescendo. Sound of a machete hitting bamboo.)*

SOLDIER 1: *(in the dark, off stage)* Shit.

SOLDIER 2: What's the matter?

SERGEANT: *(from the other side of the stage)* Shut up will you, you two.

SOLDIER 1: *(whispers)* I've trodden on something.

PETERS: I can't take much more of this.

SERGEANT: *(comes on stage)* O.K. lads we'll rest here.

*(The six emerge from the shadows. They are exhausted. Their kit is wet. They are wet and dirty.)*

SERGEANT: Take a rest lads. Jarvis you're on sentry. I'm going to recce.

JARVIS: Gives you the heebie-jeebies this place. Bloody jungle. Listen.

*(There is silence)*

JARVIS: One minute you can't hear yourself speak and the next it's like a morgue. I keep thinking what do they know that I don't know.

PETERS 1: How are you supposed to fight? I can't even see? *(throws himself down)*

SOLDIER 2: Here Jarvis you're meant to be on

watch.

JARVIS: Oh shaddap. Wait till you get a bloody stripe before you start telling me what to do.

SOLDIER 3: Sergeant's coming back.

SERGEANT: *(returning)* There's signs of a kampong up ahead. Now no one breathe. Peters What's the matter with you?

SOLDIER 1: I'm all in Sarge. I can't see. My eyes are all swollen up.

JARVIS: He's going blind Sarge.

SERGEANT: Stay here and rest, Peters while we go and see what's in this kampong. We'll be back for you in fifteen minutes. The rest move up that slope. Keep your eyes open. This is perfect ambush country.

*(Rest pick up rifles and leave)*

*(Jungle noises resume)*

PETERS: *(to himself) (pause)* God I hate this jungle ... the bloody noise, droning on and on, like bits of metal ... and you never see anything, it's as if there are thousands of the bloody things, but you never see anything. *(There's a sudden loud screech of a monkey. He grabs his rifle)* What was that? *(Another screech)* Bloody bastards. Come on out here. Thousands of them. *(the drone of the crickets reaches a crescendo)* Why doesn't that noise shut up *(he rocks backwards and forwards)* I can't even see them. And snakes. I hate the snakes. The whole place is twitching. You never know what you're going to get next. Leaves moving all over the place ... you don't know what you're going to step on, *(slaps his face)* Got you ... *(picks off the mosquito squashing it viciously)* Got you ... bloody mosquitoes ... and another ... oh God I've bloody got ants all over me ... *(he begins hitting himself frantically ... trying to get them off his clothes) (it is a terrifying dance of a man whose patience has run out and who is at the edge of his endurance)* I can't bloody see cos my eyes are all swollen, my legs are all sore, I've got cramps. Get off you sods ... get off *(almost crying)* I haven't slept since we arrived. *(he slows exhausted by his efforts)* Bloody jungle ... *(he sits rocking backwards and forwards)* I wish I was out

of this place. *(There's a sudden crack of a branch. He grabs his rifle again ... swinging round. There's a chatter of monkeys and the noise of the cicadas resumes) ... (he murmurs under his breath ... it's a low nervous cry which seems to help him control himself) I've got to get out ... I ... I ... I've got to get away ... get some air ... I've got to see ... I've got to be able to see ... get away from this noise ... I've got to get away ... if I get away I'll be alright ... I'll do me bit ... I'll fight the Japs ... you bet I'll fight ... but get me out of this place ... I don't like the noise ... and the snakes. I hate fucking snakes ... I've got to get out ... (he takes off his equipment ... he plucks at himself to stop ants and mosquitoes from biting him ... he keeps hitting his arm ... first one, then the other, then his legs....) Stop the bastards ... (rips his shirt off) ... stops the bastards ... and the noise ... (he puts his hands over his ears) Stop the bloody noise.... (he shouts) Stop the bloody noise. (He stands down front, his hands over his ears. A single shot rings out. He clasps his head which jerks him back. He falls to his knees. A long, low cry. The blood drips down his face. He shudders and falls. There is silence. Then a cricket starts up and the jungle noises start up again. A monkey calls. In the distance the Chorus can be heard. Run Rabbit, run rabbit run run run.... Don't give the Japanese their fun fun fun. He'll get by with out his rabbit pie so run rabbit run rabbit run run run. They emerge and lift his body off stage. They sing 'Run Rabbit' like a hymn.)*

*Lights go up on either side. A Caucasian woman, well-dressed, the typical ex-patriate doing her nails; she has an air of idleness about her. Enter Indian lady stands in spotlight watching caucasian with interest.*

1ST INDIAN LADY Rubbing, rubbing, rubbing always rubbing her nails.

*(Enter 2nd Indian who is not quite so well dressed. She is holding up a newspaper and reading it)*

2ND INDIAN: I am not understanding these British people.

1ST INDIAN: If I spent all my time rubbing my nails, how would I feed the family?

2ND INDIAN: It says here that the Japanese army is being beaten.

1ST INDIAN: It is not good for a woman to have



too much time on her hands.

2ND INDIAN: My husband says not to worry. You must trust the British but I am thinking....

1ST INDIAN: We've got nothing to fear here in Penang. It is very safe.

2ND INDIAN: *(lowers paper)* I don't know. Somehow I am feeling that all this talking talking....

1ST INDIAN: You don't want to be trusting your feelings. If there were anything to worry about, the British families would be all going away, they would be leaving but look ... *(indicates)* they are rubbing their nails.

2ND INDIAN: But I'm feeling very, very uncertain. I am hearing in the market this morning about bombs being dropped on Singapore.

1ST INDIAN: You must not be listening the tittle-tattle in the market place.

2ND INDIAN: Always there are rumours.

1ST INDIAN: If it were true we would not be collecting monies for orphans of the war in Britain. We would be preparing ourselves.

2ND INDIAN: But....

1ST INDIAN: My father always told me, the Brit-

ish are people of their word. You can always trust what they are saying. What can the Japanese do? The British Empire is very big. It is far too big for being attacked. They will get a very bloody nose if they are attacking the British. My husband says that the British have many fine Indian troops also. You are worrying too much.

2ND INDIAN: I think you are right. We must not always be believing what we are reading in the newspapers.

1ST INDIAN: Sometimes they are only printing rubbish.

2ND INDIAN: You are right.

*(Exeunt)*

*(Enter Doris she cleans a window.)*

DORIS: Gladys.

*(Enter Gladys below she has a pan which she is stirring)*

GLADYS: What?

DORIS: Did you hear about Mr Smith from number 42?

GLADYS: What about him?

DORIS: You know, his house got hit last night.

GLADYS: Oh yes ... such a nice man.... I thought they pulled him out though.

DORIS: They did but he died in hospital this morning.

GLADYS: Oh dear, what a shame ... he was such a nice man.

DORIS: They said it was 'is lungs ... all the dust .. he 'ad bad lungs from being gassed in the First World War.

GLADYS: Fancy that ... surviving all that and then gettin' yer house on top of you. That is a shame, isn't it?

DORIS: What are you making?

GLADYS: Just some cinder toffee. It's the only

thing our little one will eat. She's got a terrible sweet tooth and what with the rationing ... still, she seems to be surviving.

DORIS: Well save a bit for me will you luv. 'ere have you 'eard from your old man lately?

GLADYS: We got a letter just after Christmas. Bored out of his mind he said he was.

DORIS: We got a letter yesterday from our boy Chris.

GLADYS: Oh yeah ... how is he? ... he's in the Navy isn't he?

DORIS: Yes on The Prince of Wales. Safe as houses he said it is. It's his seventeenth birthday just coming up, next week. We sent him a lovely card. It'll be ages before he gets it I expect.

GLADYS: That's nice. Did he say anything in his letter?

DORIS: Nothing much. Getting a sun tan he said he was. Censor took out most of the other bits.

GLADYS: Sun tan? Must be somewhere nice and warm then.

DORIS: Said he was looking after himself and we weren't to worry.

GLADYS: Oh that's nice. Just seems like yesterday he was at school.

DORIS: Yes, I know, but as long as he's safe. I mean on a big ship like that, he should be alright shouldn't he? 'ere did you know they're opening a new factory down by the station.

GLADYS: Are they?

DORIS: They want machinists. No previous experience required it said on the notice.

GLADYS: Oh I don't know if I could.

DORIS: Five and sixpence a day.

GLADYS: Get away. That's not bad.

DORIS: I could certainly do with it.

GLADYS: So could I. My man's pay doesn't go anywhere.

DORIS: I had to borrow from my mum last week and I really wanted to see that Ronald Reagan film tonight. I think he's a lovely man ... that black hair I saw in his last film as a pilot ... oo'e was lovely:

*(Enter Wendy)*

WENDY: Mummy, mummy, mummy there's a letter.

GLADYS: I'd love to go but I don't know ... what's that dear?

WENDY: It's a letter mummy from the postman.

DORIS: I'll call round for some of that toffee later Gladys. If you're thinking about the job let me know, we can go down together.

*(Exit)*

GLADYS: Thanks Doris.

WENDY: Mummy can I go and play at Barbara's house.

GLADYS: All right love ... as long as you behave yourself. And don't forget to say please and thank you.

WENDY: *(skips off)* We're playing nurses. I'm going to have my leg cut off.

GLADYS: Off with you. Oh *(with pleasure)* it's from your dad. What's he up to now? *(she reads)*

Dearest Glad,

Well, how's my old girl doing? Cheeky so and so. I can't tell you what we're up to really but you'll be pleased to hear that I'm way out of the action and am on a really cushy number. We had a bit of a scare the other day but it wasn't us and nobody got injured so it was O.K. I can't see much happening where we're going in any case so with a bit of luck I'll be back digging the garden and sorting out the roses before you know it.

How is the garden? By the way. I got your letter telling me about the bombing. It's a good job I was there to fit all the black out curtain on my last

leave. Doesn't that seem a long time ago? How's Wendy? I bet she must have grown. Tell her I saw some porpoises...*(she peers at it)*..oh porpoises...he always was a rotten speller...yesterday off the side of the ship..they were beautiful swimming along.

The ship's very cramped and the food's awful but we're surviving. I think of you a lot and the good times we used to have...you remember...down the Palais just about every Saturday night..how's Doris by the way? Same old gossip I expect..she was a terrific dancer...yes and you used to dance with her a lot...I will be glad when this war's over and I suppose the sooner we do what we have to do to win it, the sooner we'll all be home. ...*(she peers at it)* well that bit's been censored....Remember I love you very much and am longing to get back home. Take care of yourself. Lots of love, Brian. P.S. Pop round to me Dads to tell him I'm O.K. *(she folds the letter carefully and places it carefully in her pocket)*

#### SONG

*Lady on Stairs.*

There'll be bluebirds over  
The White Cliffs of Dower.  
I'll never forget the people I met  
Browsing those angry skies  
I remember well as the shadows fell,  
The eight of hope in their eyes.  
And who' I'm far away  
I still can hear them say "Thumbs up!"  
For when the dawn comes up:  
There'll be blue birds over  
The white cliffs of Dower  
Tomorrow first you wait and see  
There'll be love and laughter  
And peace ever after  
Tomorrow when the world is free.  
The shepherd will tend his sheep  
The valley will bloom again  
And Jimmy will go to sleep  
In his own little room again.  
There'll be blue birds etc...

## ACT 2

Lights come up on stage.

### Scene 1

#### SONG

CHORUS. (*marching in their various uniforms*)

It's a long way to Changi Prison  
We've a long way to go  
It's a long way to Changi Prison  
But we'll be there soon we know  
Goodbye Kuala Lumpur  
Farewell to Johore  
It's a long long way to Changi Prison  
That's in Singapore

Well we're fighting the Nippon army  
But we're not doing too well  
They have bombed out all our airfields  
And shot our lines to hell  
Goodbye Kuala Lumpur  
Farewell to Johore  
It's a long long way to Changi Prison  
That's in Singapore

(Repeat, Whistling tune and march off)

JIMMY: (*enters ... he clutches a sheaf of papers ... he is reading them ... he mutters*) I don't believe it. I don't bloody well believe it.

(enter George ... in a rush)

GEORGE: Jimmy!

JIMMY: Over here, Listen to this. The bloody Japanese photographer who had a shop in the Raffles Hotel was a spy. He's did a bunk last week ... he must have photographed half the British Army....

GEORGE: Order of the Day ... just issued ... do we use it?

JIMMY: Let me see ... (*reads*) God ... I can't believe anyone could deliberately tell so many lies. Listen to this.... "Our preparations are made and tested" ha.... "Our defences are strong and our weapons efficient" (*laughs*) ... he must be referring to bows and arrows ... listen to this.... "We see before us a Japan drained for years by the exhausting claims of her wanton onslaught

on China.".... (*he laughs more loudly*) The Japs have just wiped out the American fleet at Pearl Harbour ... and the man writes this ... he's mad ... the man's a lunatic ... this is like some music hall farce with most of the character supplied by the Boys Own Paper....

GEORGE: Well what do we do?

JIMMY: (*sarcastically*) Oh print the thing will you ... it's so ridiculous that perhaps people here will begin to see some sense...Now. What about the casualties last night?

GEORGE: There were about sixty killed and double that wounded.

JIMMY: Any Europeans?

GEORGE: No ... just the locals. Mainly in China town. Didn't stand much of a chance I'm afraid ... oh and there was a message from Wing Commander Pulford.... (*hands it to him*)

JIMMY: (*reads it*) No ... not another one. Now. Question: Do you know why the Allied night fighters didn't take off last night to attack the Japanese planes? Answer: Because Pulford was frightened they might get shot down by our own anti-aircraft gunners. Brilliant, isn't it?

GEORGE: Oh come on Jimmy. It can't be as bad as that. It's just a matter of getting them deployed and getting ourselves organised. Singapore's impregnable anyway. I can't see the Japanese being able to cope with miles of impenetrable jungle.

JIMMY: I suppose you might be right. Come let's get back to the office. I'm getting another press set up in case there's more bombing.

(Enter Brooke-Popham on the walkway)

BROOKE-POPHAM: Excuse me. (*George and Jimmy stop in their tracks*) Look you chaps. It's about time you press people started to show a bit more responsibility. Let me tell you chaps before you start printing those fabricated stories (*Exit George and Jimmy*) that unlike some of you people who have only just arrived we are thoroughly acquainted with the local conditions and

we are tired of you people misleading the general public about the lack of preparation, the inexperience of our men, the shortages of equipment. *(he yawns)* Let me tell you that the Japanese forces have been held at Kota Bharu, that our men are counterattacking fiercely and delivering ... delivering ... er ... er ... yes ... knockout blows to the enemy. *(he yawns again. A light comes up stage right runway on look out sailor peering at the skies through binoculars)* Didn't get much sleep last night ... no.... The forces of Empire.... *(there is the whoop, whoop of a battleship through the loud-speaker ... other noises)* The Forces of Empire ever vigilant and and.... *(exit)*

*Enter Sailors.*

### SONG

*(Chorus of sailors)*

Praise the Lord and Pass the ammunition  
Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition  
Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition  
And we'll all stay free

*Sailor: (shouts) Aircraft bearing 27 degrees north north west.*

Praise the Lord and swing into position  
Can't afford to be a politician  
Praise the Lord we're all between perdition  
And the deep blue sea

*(Through loudspeakers "Action Stations Action Stations" Enemy aircraft bearing 28 degrees.)*

Yes the sky pilot said it  
You've got to give him credit  
For a son of a gun of a gunner  
Was he

Praise the Lord we're on a mighty mission  
All aboard we're no a going fishing  
Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition  
And we'll all say free.

*Exit Sailors.*

*Enter ADMIRAL SIR TOM PHILIPS. He is a short stocky man, square faced, bright eyed and tough. His face is very pale and there are deep shadows under his eyes.*

*(The sailors hum in the background)*

SIR TOM PHILIPS: Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. *(he smiles at the audience)* My story is a short one. I had the honour of going down with my ship. It wasn't difficult. The ship gave a great shudder, and keeled over. The deck was already at an angle of thirty degrees. There was no panic, just the water, swirling green against the steel plating and then the darkness. *(he begins to pace.)* Ha! It's all about risks you see. Once you're a sailor and it's in the blood, you know all about risk. Do you risk the storm? Do you risk running aground? Do you risk going into battle? *(He pauses)*. The sea is all about risk. If you're wrong, you drown, along with the rest of your men. You carry their lives in your hand. That's the way it has always been. You give the final decision. *(pause)* Tell me, what would you have done? *(he pauses)*

*(Enter Sailor)*



SAILOR: It were all over so quickly  
Not like the waiting  
All those days and nights waiting  
Waiting for the action  
We all wanted to fight  
We wanted to show 'em, the Japs  
Show 'em back home  
Raring to go we was.

PHILIPS: The books all say, and your experience tells you that you don't send a battleship into a fight without aircover. Basic rule. No aircover means you're vulnerable. One bomb down the funnel and that's it. Without aircover you're a sitting duck. That's the way the Bismark got it.

SAILOR: I'm down in the engine room  
God it's hot down there  
And noisy  
I always wear this towel round me neck  
Catches the sweat.

*(He turns suddenly as if hearing a voice)*

A great ship though the Prince of Wales.

PHILIPS: What's that? The Prince of Wales? Oh  
What a ship! A spanking new battleship. The  
pride of the fleet. You stand there on the deck.  
You can feel the pulse of the turbines. All that  
power. It throbs through the plates, through the  
decks. You sleep with it, you wake to it. It binds  
you together with your men. And the racks of  
shells, the heavy sound of the gears turning the  
turrets. That power ready to be unleashed. You  
can hurl death fifteen miles in a great salvo of  
smoke and fire and noise.

Sailor: Getting out's the problem  
If the ship gets hit  
Three decks to climb  
I made it half way up the second one  
Me mate Patrick got it  
He went all limp, twitched a bit  
I never seen a dead man before.

*(He turns again as if hearing another call and in the distance faintly the strains of There'll always be an England)*

PHILIPS: Oh The Flag! Yes! Red white and blue  
that great battle flag, fluttering in the breeze. A  
flag that men have killed and died for. Look it's  
there in the squares at Waterloo holding fast  
against the French cavalry, with Nelson in the  
line off Trafalgar, the thin Red line in the Cri-  
mea. It's there, fluttering, stained and holed in  
the heat of battle. Come death, come destruc-  
tion, come victory, the flag holds the centre ...  
it's there.

Sailor: Then it went all dark  
Me mates we're shouting  
There was a lot of steam from the boilers  
I would like to have seen the sky  
One more time  
Then everything started to tilt  
There was no way out  
I was thinking of me mum  
I remember she said, Take care of yourself

lad  
Don't do anything daft  
Keep out of trouble

PHILIPS: What could I do that Sunday in Sin-  
gapore? The Japanese were invading. The men  
were raring to go. They could smell battle. Our  
training was almost complete. The men were  
hungry for battle. And we sat in Singapore doing  
nothing sitting on top of all that power. *(Pause.)*  
I gambled. I gambled with the weather, with  
Japanese inexperience, hoping against hope that  
the AirForce would come up with something.  
That we wouldn't be spotted. It was a risk.

Sailor: The water was so warm  
Funny that  
Not like the Atlantic  
It was warm  
South China Sea  
Funny that  
Maybe....  
If I'd ... nah  
What the 'ell  
*(turns goes)*

PHILIPS: 845 men went down with their ships. 845  
highly trained men at the bottom of the South  
China Sea. Far from home, far from their fami-  
lies. Young men. You gambled ... commanders  
must gamble. You must gauge and then take the  
risk. That's what leadership means. *(Slowly and  
with great tension.)* Perhaps you should give the  
order No 1. Abandon Ship. Abandon Ship. *(He  
stands erect and slowly salutes.) (Over the speakers.  
Abandon Ship. Abandon Ship. Klaxon sounds)  
(Muffled explosions.... Popham heads for cover.  
Philips turns and walks off stage.)*

*(Darkened stage)*

#### SONG

*(Faintly at first. "There's Long Long Trail a Wind-  
ing" Enter the ghosts of the sailors. They take up po-  
sitions in relaxed groups. Lighting must be dark and  
low. Their faces are blackened from the oil. Some have  
blankets draped over them. Philips comes on, goes round  
the groups, talking and moves on. The men acknowl-  
edge him shyly.)*

Nights are growing very lonely  
Days are very long

I'm a growing weary  
Only listening for your song  
Old remembrances are thronging  
Thro' my memory  
Thronging till it seems the world is full of  
dreams  
Just to call you back to me

There's a long, long trail a-winding  
Into the land of my dreams  
Where the nightingales are singing  
And a white moon beams  
There's a long, long night awaiting  
Until my dreams all come true  
Till the day when I'll be going  
Down that long, long trail with you.

All night long I hear you calling  
Calling sweet and low  
Seem to hear your footsteps falling  
Everywhere I go  
Tho' the road between us stretches  
Many a weary mile  
Somehow I forget that you're not with me yet  
When I think I see you smile

There a long, long etc.

*(Exeunt The song begins to tail away)*

*(Enter Brooke-Popham)*

BROOKE POPHAM: Now look here everybody. There's absolutely no need to panic. Our aim is to prevent war. As long as the Japanese believe that we are very powerful, they'll be far too frightened to attack us. We must be confident and firm. We must show no sign of weakness. We going to join up with our friend Mr Chiang Kai-Shek in China and with our friends in the Dutch East Indies as well as all our friends in The United States of America and then the Japanese won't dare attack us will they?

*(Handed a note ... he reads to himself)* This is terrible news, terrible news ... *(he is badly shaken)* I regret to have to announce the loss of H.M.S. Prince of Wales and H.M.S. Repulse with the loss of 800 men.... This is indeed a sad day ... and most unexpected ... the loss of two great ships ... most unexpected ... *(he tries to recover)* but we must remember that even in the darkest hour,

even when things look the blackest ... the courage and fortitude of the fighting men of the Empire will win through. Just as on the Battlefields ..... in the Great War the young men of the Empire gave their blood for the sake of freedom so even now ... even now ... we shall ... we shall win through ... even in the darkest hour....

*(Exit)*

*This is interrupted in turn by the clash of cymbals and gongs of a Chinese funeral. The contrast in mood should be shocking. There are the cries of the mourners. Black out.*

*(In the darkness there is a Chinese woman wailing, as the lights go up. She is centre stage, there is the body of a child, covered with rough sacking in front of her, the black hair just sticking out. She rocks backwards and forwards as she cries staring at the body.)*

*(In Hokkien if possible)* They say, cross the Seven Seas, leave your homeland, leave your father's house and his friends, go to make a good life. Go where the British *(she spits viciously)*, where the white man is, there you will be safe. You will find work, you will find money. The pavements are made of gold, they said. So I go, I leave the place of my ancestors and come to Singapore. The white man is rich and invincible. You will not know hunger. *(she cries)* Better not to have been born. Better your parents have put your face in the ash than this. And now. My child *(she touches the body and bends over it, crying)* Japanese bombs they said. Japanese bombs. Can the whiteman not stop Japanese bombs? The whiteman with his iron ships, and his guns and his armies and his planes and all his money. Can he not stop Japanese bombs....?

*(Exit)*

*(Sound of Chinese drums banging)*

*(Light up on two Indians)*

1ST INDIAN: We have waited and waited and waited and not said anything.

2ND INDIAN: We have been too quiet. We have not been saying anything.

1ST INDIAN: We have been waiting too long. We



must tell the British what we think. We must tell them.

2ND INDIAN: You are quite right. Our people in India have been fighting the British. We must tell the British once and for all that they can no longer take us for granted.

1ST INDIAN: (*Turns to thin air*) Are you hearing us?

2ND INDIAN: We are telling you very clearly now.

1ST INDIAN: (*angry*) You have given us two six pounder guns and you say that we are going to stop the whole Japanese army in its track. This is quite unbelievable.

2ND INDIAN: What is more, you have been telling us all that there will be no discrimination between white people and Asian people. That you will be looking after and caring for everybody. How can we believe you people? You are saying one thing and doing very different things.

1ST INDIAN: We are hearing rumours that European women and children are being evacuated.

2ND INDIAN: We are hearing very reliable rumour that you are packing and leaving for Singapore.

1ST INDIAN: We regard this as a very serious betrayal.

2ND INDIAN: Very serious indeed. We are not trusting you.

1ST INDIAN: If the situation is being alright, why are we hearing these stories.

2ND INDIAN: This is very true. We are hearing stories of rapes and murders by these Japanese soldiers. That British soldiers do not have the courage to face the enemy. (*contemptuously*) The soldiers of the British army are being defeated by Asian soldiers.

1ST INDIAN: What are we to believe?

2ND INDIAN: We are thinking that you are caring only for European people and leaving us to our

fate at the hands of the Japanese.

1ST INDIAN: At least have the decency to give us a reply.

2ND INDIAN: We are waiting Sir, for your reply.

1ST INDIAN: What is your reply Sir? (*Pause*)

2ND INDIAN: What is the great British Empire doing? (*Pause*)

1ST INDIAN: Why are you not giving us a reply?

2ND INDIAN: (*Angrily*) Talking to you British Sir, is like talking to thin air!

(*Exit*)

### Scene 3.

(*Faint chorus of Run Rabbit, Run Rabbit, lights up Fort Canning. Operation Room. Much more chaotic than before. Signals coming in. Maps on the wall with the positions of forces. There is a more serious atmosphere. The men hum, the tune. There is a table left centrestage with maps on it. This is Gordon Bennett's HQ. There are files of orders and a telephone. A sergeant sits typing orders*)

SERGEANT: (*singing*) Once a jolly swagman, sat by a billabong.

(*All the other soldiers stop and look at him. He looks at them, gets nervous, tails off and resumes humming. The rest get back to business as soon as he does.*)

SERGEANT: (*loudly*) Under the shade of a coolibah tree.

THE REST: (*there is a pause. They all look at each other. Shrugs their shoulders and then tentatively.*) Under the shade of a coolibah tree.

SOLDIER: And his ghost may be heard.

THE REST: (*echo*) And his ghost may be heard.

(*This may go on for as long as thought appropriate*)  
(*Enter Percival*)

PERCIVAL: Alright men. Carry on. (*men hum run*)

*rabbit, run rabbit again and resume duties)*

PERCIVAL: I'm afraid things are not going well. But the men are doing their best. They've fought splendidly. Our problem is time. As soon as we make a stand and stop the enemy in its tracks, they outflank us and pop up behind our lines. The Japanese soldiers are doing all sorts of things we didn't expect. Apparently they commandeered all the bicycles and are cycling through the rubber plantations with a good deal of assistance I might say from the local population. We regard this as a very serious act of betrayal. The Japanese tanks are also a great cause for concern. Large numbers of our Indian troops haven't even seen a tank before, let alone fought with one and er.. given the fact that we have very little appropriate anti-tank weaponry,... we have obviously been at a disadvantage.

*(angrily)* I am particularly disturbed by the secret radio stations in the Johore-Singapore area transmitting information to the Japanese about British troop deployment and we shall pursue these people vigorously.

*(Enter Gordon Bennett. He is a blunt acerbic man who has the guts and imagination to lead. He goes to the desk. Looks at the latest order, grunts.)*

GORDON BENNETT: *(mutter)* Stupid Pommie bastard. He wouldn't know the end of a rifle from a sheep's arse.

SOLDIER: Yes Sir!

PERCIVAL: It's been a very tough fight but we're all determined to give of our best to the limit of our resources.

*(Enter Simson)*

SIMSON: *(Salutes Percival)* There's something I must ask.

PERCIVAL: Yes, go on Simson.

SIMON: Sir, Would you reconsider my request Sir?

PERCIVAL: What request was that?

SIMSON: To construct defence works on the North

West shore of the island.

PERCIVAL: Defences are bad for morale.

SIMSON: Sir, with respect the Japanese are already within twenty miles of the island. If we don't start construction soon it will be too late.

PERCIVAL: There is no guarantee that the Japanese will attack from the North West.

SIMSON: It is the most likely.

PERCIVAL: Their troops will get bogged down in all the mangrove swamps. The terrain is almost impassable. There are no landing areas.

SIMSON: But it's the shortest distance.

PERCIVAL: They are far more likely to attempt a landing East of the Causeway.

SIMSON: But they'll know we're expecting them there.

PERCIVAL: Constructing more defences now at this late stage would further exhaust the troops.

SIMSON: Sir, I am certain the Japanese will come across West of the causeway.

PERCIVAL: I am equally certain they won't.

SIMSON: Once he has a bridgehead, it's the shortest distance to the centre of the city. We must construct defences.

PERCIVAL: Defences are bad for morale for both troops and civilians. You may discuss the matter further with the Fortress Commander if you wish. Thank you Simson.

SIMSON: But Sir... if we don't the island will be ....

PERCIVAL: Thank you Simson. I have other matters to attend to.

SIMSON: Yes Sir. *(salutes and exits)*

GORDON BENNETT: *(Looking at another order)* What the hell is he thinking now? Why doesn't he make his mind up. He's like a rabbit being

chased by a ferret.

SOLDIER: (to G.B.) It's the Order of the Day.

GORDON BENNETT: Let's have a look at that.. (he reads) Our task is to hold this fortress until help can come, as assuredly it will come.... you must be joking son. The last reinforcements they sent us were recruited two weeks ago and most of those couldn't even hold a bloody rifle let alone fire the thing. (reads) The enemy within our gates must be ruthlessly weeded out. ... what the hell is he rabbiting on about the enemy within. The guy's gone out of his mind (he reads) With firm resolve and fixed determination we shall win through.... (he laughs) (angrily) It's like bloody Gallipoli all over again. A load of public school wimps who've done a two weeks course in tactics and who ought to be running the Boy Scouts.



SOLDIER: Yes Sir.. (whistles "Under the shade of a coolibah tree")

(Enter Simson)

SIMSON: Sir?

PERCIVAL: Simson

SIMSON: (he brandishes order) This counter order to redeploy our supplies in the North East section of the island.

PERCIVAL: Yes Simson Reconnaissance reports heavy Japanese activity opposite Pulau Ubin.

SIMSON: It's a feint Sir.

PERCIVAL: I don't think so.

SIMSON: If we move our supplies now and the Japanese come from the North West we have no means of reinforcing.....

PERCIVAL: That's an order Simson. Please see that it's carried out.

SIMSON: But with respect Sir.

PERCIVAL: Simson

SIMSON: (reluctantly salutes) Yes Sir. (about to leave)

PERCIVAL: And Simson Good luck.

SIMSON: Thank you Sir, but...

PERCIVAL: Yes?

SIMSON: er..nothing Sir.....(exit)

PERCIVAL: (comes to front stage. He looks pale, worn, tired, he has aged and speaks in a sad but friendly way) After the war was over, ...I was on the ship you know... the ... I forget.... the Missouri. I saw the Japanese surrender.. MacArthur. He gave me one of the pens they used for the surrender. I got back to U.K... my wife met me along with two men from the War Office.... spent my days with fellows from the regiment... the Cheshires... fine men. Great record the regiment. Spent most of the time looking after the FEPOWS... Far East prisoners of war... there was... a lot to do, the men had a bad time...in the camps.

(They are two old men arguing with each other.)

GORDON BENNETT: (enters stage right. Both are in their spot lights) Is that you Percival?

PERCIVAL: Gordon Bennett?

GORDON BENNETT: The trouble with you Poms is that you had no guts. There was no aggressive spirit.

PERCIVAL: It's too late to argue with you now.

GORDON BENNETT: Yer officers were gutless. They behaved like a bunch of women.

PERCIVAL: Our men fought as well as they could given the circumstances. They did their best.

GORDON BENNETT: Their best? You call that their best? Apart from the Argylls they fought like women, they had no aggressive spirit.

PERCIVAL: We had to pull back. We had no choice.

GORDON BENNETT: No choice. We held them didn't we? The Australians held them.

PERCIVAL: May I remind you that your men were young volunteers with no experience of warfare.

GORDON BENNETT: O.K. so they were innocents. They were clerks, farmers and shopkeepers but they were Aussies. And we stopped the bastards. We stopped the crack Japanese division in its tracks. We blew the bastards to smithereens

PERCIVAL: Their action was heroic and commendable.

GORDON BENNETT: If my flank hadn't been turned.

PERCIVAL: It's too late now.

GORDON BENNETT: Yer whole defence of the island was up the creek.

PERCIVAL: I made my dispositions....

GORDON BENNETT: You were too spread out... You tried to hit them on the beaches...but you didn't have the troops. You couldn't reinforce. You should've kept yer strongest force at the centre of the island then when you knew where the bastards were landing. Then you hit them....then in with the reserves.

PERCIVAL: I did what I had to do.

GORDON BENNETT.: We didn't even have a bloody map. I was defending a Naval Base which had been abandoned.

PERCIVAL: At least I didn't walk out on my men.

GORDON BENNETT: What do you mean?

PERCIVAL: I'm sorry. That was unfair.

GORDON BENNETT: I left Singapore only when you surrendered. I risked my life to get back to Australia so that my experiences and knowledge wouldn't go to waste. Those meally mouthed military hats who attacked my reputation didn't know what they were talking about. I wasn't going to stick around in some prisoner of war camp.

PERCIVAL: Quite.

GORDON BENNETT: We were betrayed. We were betrayed, by bloody Churchill. The reinforcements which might have saved us went to Burma. Australia was betrayed. Admit it Percival. Battle fodder that's all we were. All Churchill wanted was a Stalingrad. He wanted piles of corpses to brag over. We were just Australians. We could be dispensed with...just another name on a carved white stone.



PERCIVAL: We did our best.

GORDON BENNETT: But we could have beaten them. We could have beaten the Japanese. My Aussies whipped the pants off the Japs. They got tired of being ordered to retreat all the time.

PERCIVAL: We were short of ammunition and supplies and water were running out.

GORDON BENNETT: It was a farce. You Poms

should stick to boxing matches.

*(This is a signal. A bell rings. Table removed. Two stools either side of the stage. Two boxers surrounded by their trainers, supporters come on. The referee stands in the middle. One boxer wears a Jap cap and his shorts are the Japanese flag. The other has union jack shorts on)*

RINGMASTER: Ladies and Gentlemen *(cheers)*  
Quiet now for the fight of the century. In the red corner wearing the red and white shorts and the emblem of the rising sun and weighing in at 150 lbs, the challenger, the lightweight champion of the South East Asian Co-prosperity Scheme, fighting under the colours of The Japanese Emperor, it's Tojo from Tokyo. *(cheers and boos)* And presenting in the blue corner wearing the red white and blue *(cheers)* the Champion of the British Empire, weighing in at 200 lbs, defending his title as ruler of high seas, and the Empire of which the sun never sets, Tommy the trooper *(boos and cheers)* from..... where's he from? *(there's a brief pow wow)* Tommy the Trooper from Britain, Australian, Nepal, Southern India, The Punjab, Malaya, etc etc etc....

The fight is fought under the rules of the Geneva convention with your referee..... *(referee looks at both sides, shakes his head and runs out of the theatre)* It looks as if this will be fought without a referee. So it's over to you Mr. Commentator.

COMMENTATOR: *(over the speakers and in the hushed but tense tones of Harry Carpenter)* Well it's welcome to Singapore for this exciting title fight. The Champion looks in pretty good shape, a little over weight perhaps. He's got lots of support from the Australians, and there's his manager, Percival, just giving him a last piece of advice. I've heard rumours that the training hasn't been going too well and that he isn't yet used to the climate. The Challenger, well what can you say. He's a bit small but he looks in very good shape.

*(The two boxers prepare, do a little practice sparring. Shouts of encouragement from each side)*

He's been training hard for this fight and looks very fit. There's his manager, Yamashita, I think his name is. He looks very confident. That's

him. He really looks in control. Dear me, there seems to be an argument in the champion's camp. No it's alright. They're getting their act together. And it's round one *(bell sounds)* Here comes the champion, using the good old fashioned British stance. Lovely to see, but not er well very effective. In comes the challenger. I say, he's using his feet, this is a bit unorthodox. *(Tommy circles trying to punch Nip but missing. Nip keeps hitting him in the stomach and kicking his shins)* The Champion is soaking up the pressure but not being very effective.

He's taking the pressure well. But look at the Jap. He's doing really well. This is a new style of fighting. Goodness me, he's using the edges of his hands. This is really new.

The Champion, looks a bit groggy. He's on the ropes. No he's up. He's taking the punishment. This is a really good fight. *(bell rings)* The Challenger is hitting the Champion after the bell. I say this is a bit much. It's been sorted out.

Well. They're back in their corners. Yamashita is smiling and encouraging his man. The Challenger looks very confident. In the other corner Percival looks a bit worried. He's trying to get his man back into some sort of shape. But he doesn't look too good. *(the corner splashes water on Champion.)*

And it's round two. The Challenger is out already. He's looking really fit and confident. The Champion is trying. He hit him a good one there. That's made the Jap really angry. Goodness me. The Champion looks all in. I don't think he can hold out much longer. Oh he's cut. The champion's cut. He's still fighting. Look at that courage. But he's falling back all the time.

He's on his knees, he's on his knees. I think it's the end. Wait a minute the Jap going to his corner. What's he going to do now? The Champion is trying to get up. The corner are shouting encouragement. What's the challenger doing? Yamashita has given him a sword. Good god what's he doing. He's got a sword. *(The Challenger draws the Japanese sword and stands over the Champion who is in the position of a man about to have his head chopped off. The sword is raised. It is a very tense moment. The lights go out as the sword*

*comes down. There is a thud of the head hitting the floor)*

SONG

*(Solo from runway)*

Keep the homes fires burning  
While your hearts are yearning  
Though your lads are far away  
They dream of home

There's a silver lining  
Through the dark clouds shining  
Turn the dark cloud inside out  
Till the boys come home.

*(Enter Fred who takes up position in emplacement, front of stage, rifle pointing at audience).*

FRED: Bert! *(pause)* Bert!

BERT: *(off-stage)* What?

FRED: *(relieved)* I thought you'd gone for a moment.

BERT: *(off-stage)* I'm trying to close that hole in the barbed wire.

FRED: Well hurry up will you.

BERT: Coming. That's it.

*(keeping very low, he dives back into the sandbagged position)*

BERT: Oh shit.

FRED: What's the matter?

BERT: This hole's wet.

FRED: That's not my fault.

BERT: It's not deep enough either. I'm beginning to feel like a dwarf crouched up like this.

FRED: You should have dug it yourself.

BERT: Give us a chance will you.

FRED: I wish they'd make up their minds. Move here, move there, dig in here, dig in there. Do you suppose they know what they're doing?

BERT: Here what was that?

FRED: What?

BERT: Look over there.

FRED: Where?

BERT: There. On the other side of the strait. In the jungle.

FRED: I can't see anything.

BERT: Don't suppose it's anything. *(pause)*

FRED: *(quietly)* Bert!

BERT: What?

FRED: What do you reckon to our chances?

BERT: Chances of what?

FRED: Of getting out of this lot.

BERT: What and going home?

FRED: Yes

BERT: I dunno.... could do I suppose. If the last two weeks are anything to go by...

FRED: Yes?

BERT: Who knows? The Japs seem to be all round us all the time. I dunno... It depends on our luck really.

FRED: What do you reckon they'll do?

BERT: Who?

FRED: The Japs

BERT: Well they'll try to take the island.

FRED: No I mean if we were to ... you know...get captured.

BERT: They'll take yer bloody head off mate... that's what they've done so far. I'm taking no prisoners I can tell you. They're animals those

people. Coming screaming out of the night at you, yelling banzai... If I go I take a few of the bastards with me. *(he clutches grenade)*

FRED: We could get a boat I suppose.

BERT: A boat?

FRED: Yeah a boat.

BERT: Where the hell are you going to get a boat from?

FRED: Well I heard there was a group up at battalion headquarters collecting boats for an evacuation.

BERT: First I've heard of it.

FRED: So some guy said.

BERT: That'll be for the top brass to save their bloody hides.

FRED: You could probably get a boat down by the harbour. One of those bum boats. You could easily get to the East Indies and then it's home.

BERT: Bigger that for a laugh mate. I was sea sick coming over here. I don't fancy that..... here got a fag.

FRED: Sure mate

BERT: *(lights up) (inhales)* That's better.

AUSTRALIAN VOICE: *(off-stage)* Put that bloody cigarette out for Christ's sake you stupid bastard.

BERT: *(squashes cig.)* Shit.

*(Japanese guns start up in the distance.)  
(sounds of explosions. Strobe lighting effect starts.)*

FRED: It looks like it mate.

BERT: Look there's boats coming. Bloody hell. There's hundreds of them.

VOICE: *(off-stage)* Hold your fire men. Wait until they're within range *(his voice is drowned by shells)*

*exploding. There is an explosion stage left)*

FRED: Christ. *(smoke effect) (desperately)* I can't see a bloody thing.

VOICE: *(off-stage)* Fire at will. Fix bayonets....good luck lads.

FRED: Bert I can't see a bloody thing.

BERT: Fire you silly sod *(he gets up to wrestle the gun from Fred)*

FRED: I can't see. *(we see Fred's face for the first time. It is completely blackened - and he has lost both eyes)* I can't see. *(he starts to climb out)*

BERT: Get down Fred. Get down!

FRED: I can't see....Bert I can't see. We've got to get out. We've got to get out. I've got to get home. Why can't I see. *(he stands... the shells and flashes intensify.)*

BERT: Get down Fred *(he gets hold of the gun and tries to restrain Fred)*

FRED: I'll get a boat Fred. I'll get a boat *(he wanders off like a blind man) ... I'll get a boat.. why can't I see Bert... Bert*

BERT: Come back Fred... come back you fool, you stupid bastard *(more flashes, shells and small arms fire)*. O.K. you bastards. This is it mate. If you want it. *(he screams)* Come and get it you bastards. *(he stands clutching the gun... there's a flash and he falls over the front of the sandbags sounds of battle recede, Chorus enter and come towards sand-bagged position singing faintly at first. They remove the body Bert and carry him off and remove position.)*

*(Enter Chorus of ladies)*

SONG

Yours till the stars lose their glory  
Yours till the birds fail to sing  
Yours to the end of my story  
This pledge to you dear I bring  
Yours in the grey of December  
Here or on far distant shores  
I'll never love anyone the way I love you  
How could I

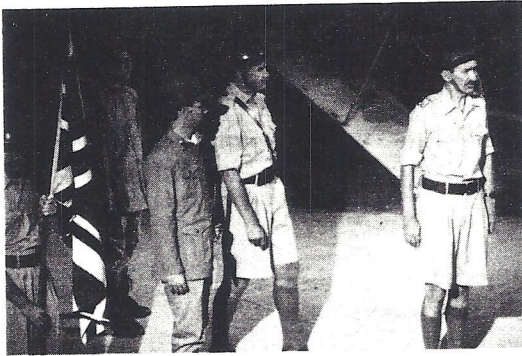
When I was born to be just yours.

OFFICER: This way Sir.

*(Enter Percival with two officers. One carries a Union Jack and the other a large white flag which is in fact a torn segment of bedsheet)*

OFFICER: The minefield stretches two hundred yards. *(he points)* That's the Bukit Timah Road up there Sir. The Ford Factory is about two miles further down.

PERCIVAL: Thank you. *(he turns to the officers a*



*flash bulb goes off and the party freezes in pose)* Wait a minute. *(he comes down to the audience)* You may ask why I surrendered. It is a fair question. Nor is the answer a simple one. Battles are lost not necessarily because of incompetence. A brilliant commander like Rommel having lost an army in North Africa continued to command. What was clearly evident at the time was that if the defensive perimeter around the city of Singapore were to be breached by a Japanese army in the heat of battle, the casualties to the civilian population could have equalled those of Nanking or Hong Kong. If I had not surrendered there are many among you now who would not have been born because your parents or grandparents would have been killed. The surrender was a rational, military decision. We were clearly fighting superior forces. Our cause was lost. There was no point in prolonging the agony. There had been enough suffering.

The loss of Singapore was nobody's fault. There were other fields of battle where the Allies were fighting a life and death struggle with the dark forces of Fascism and which required the sup-

plies of materials and trained manpower which might have saved Singapore.

OFFICER: Excuse me sir. I think we should be leaving.

PERCIVAL: Yes, well we'd better get on with it. *(They climb down, onto the supposed Bukit Timah Road)* This way?

OFFICER: Yes, Sir.

*(Enter civilian cast.. bedraggled, faces dirty, weary, they wander around confused and upset.. there are little worried conversations. They carry pathetic bundles of possessions. Soldiers wounded... one man on a stretcher.. tended by nurse) (they shake hands)*

### SONG

I'll be seeing you  
In all the old familiar places  
That my heart and mind embraces  
All day through

In that small cafe  
The bar across the way  
The children's carousel  
A chestnut tree  
A wishing well

I'll be seeing you  
In every lovely summer's day  
In every thing as night and day  
I'll always think of you that way  
I'll find you in the morning sun  
And when the night is new  
I'll be looking at the moon  
And I'll be seeing you

*(Enter Manager)*

ROBINSON'S STORE MANAGER: Ladies and Gentlemen I am very pleased to announce that in order to provide for the brief period of internment before the forces of Empire come to rescue us, Robinsons is very pleased to announce that every woman and child will be provided with two sets of clothing absolutely free of charge. Please form an orderly queue and our assistants will give you every help needed.

CIVILIAN 2: I say, that's very decent isn't it?



CIVILIAN 1: It's awfully difficult to decide what you'll need

*(Enter Officer on walkway)*

OFFICER: Ladies and Gentlemen *(the civilians and soldiers gather and each stands in a square isolated from the other, their backs to the audience looking up. The lights brighten.)* The Japanese High Command have ordered.....have ordered us to march... to march to Changi.

ALL: To what?

OFFICER: To march to Changi.

ALL: To Changi?

OFFICER: To Changi.

CIVILIAN 1: In this heat?

OFFICER: I'm afraid so.

CIVILIAN 2: But there are old people and children. It's 15 miles. There are wounded men.

*(Enter Japanese Officer on other side of walkway. The cast freezes)*

JAPANESE OFFICER: *(In Japanese and translated by his interpreter if possible, who follows at a distance.)* You will obey instructions. *(Walks to officer. Slaps his face)* All people will bow when they see Japanese officers. Failure to bow correctly will be severely punished. *(Cast bow heads. He climbs down. The atmosphere is tense. There is absolute silence. He comes up to one officer)* Why did you not destroy Singapore?

OFFICER: Because we will return again.

JAPANESE OFFICER: Ha! Do you not believe Britain is beaten in this war?

OFFICER: We may be defeated ninety-nine times, but in the final round we will be all right - we will win that.

JAPANESE OFFICER: You white people are arrogant. *(He comes to the audience)* The fighting men of the Japanese Empire have shown the limita-



tions of this arrogance. The fifth division of the Japanese Imperial Army raised in the city of Hiroshima have shown the superiority of the Asian fighting man. Asia for the Asians. For too many years we have been exploited and bullied by the Anglo-American conspiracy. Asians must never again fight Asians. We must join together in the South East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere to build a better world for our people. England and America whose desire it is to hold the Far East in a permanent state of subjugation and colonization dread the thought of solidarity between Asian peoples. The final reckoning of our holy crusade to free the peoples of S.E. Asia will be fought out on the battlefield. Hundreds of thousands of the heroic dead will be watching over us. Already our Indian comrades have demonstrated their solidarity and thrown off the yoke of the colonial powers and joined us to begin preparations to free their great country from the British. Soon new factories and enterprises will be springing up in Singapore to help us build up the economy of the motherland to help us in this great act of liberation. People of Syonan, the Tiger of Malaya has given you freedom. Grasp this opportunity and throw off the tyrannous yoke of the whiteman.

We have shown your white masters that they are no match for Asian fortitude and courage. Now we shall tell them what to do. *(He turns)* March. March. Do you hear. March

*(Japanese soldier threaten with bayonets - there is an unpleasant scuffle. The men leave muttering.)*

*(Enter Chinese Man, Woman)*

CIVILIAN FEMALE: *(stops)* What's the matter with you all? *(As they leave they discard shoes,*

*belongings.*) We'll get there. Come on. Ladies, if the men can get there we can. When we get to Changi, no matter if we are dying, we'll sing at the top of our voices and we'll let these bastards know what we think of them. *(They exit limping and discarding baggage)*

*A woman remains, holding a child. At the back a Japanese soldier with rifle and bayonet.*

CHINESE MAN: *(In Cantonese)* Where are you going woman?

CHINESE WOMAN: I'm going to give them water.

CHINESE MAN: Don't be a fool. We don't want trouble.

WOMAN: There are women and children. They have walked from the Padang. They have done us no harm.

MAN: But if the Japanese see you. They'll shoot you.

WOMAN: You think I'm afraid of that. You think the Japanese are fair people? If they do that to the whiteman what will they do to us?

MAN: Don't be a fool. Get back in the house.

WOMAN: Tch....

*(She goes with cup which she offers to woman with child.)*

*(The woman with the child who drinks the water and then is picked up again by mother)*

And now what?  
What does it all mean?  
This killing  
And this dying  
This England *(smiles wryly)*  
This Singapore  
And what does it mean for him? *(indicates child)*  
The struggle, the misery  
Perhaps now all that matters is survival  
Survive, stay alive.  
And hope *(she is interrupted by the Last Post. The lights dim to the sole trumpeter)*

*Cast re-enter to "Is a long way to Changi Prison." for final bows.*

FAREWELL CHORUS: 'We'll Meet Again'  
*(Final verse only).*

FINIS

