

English Major

Option 2. *Write a scene where the women are interviewed by an Australian or British officer whilst they are in hospital in Singapore recovering after the war.*

Bridie and Sheila are in a small hospital room in Singapore. Sheila is asleep on one of the beds and Bridie reading a book in a chair in the corner. There is a knock on the door.

Bridie Hello? [puts down here book] Come in.
Woman Hello Bridie, is Sheila awake?
Bridie Yes, I think so. Hey Sheila wake up!
Sheila What? Oh I'm awake, what is going on?
Woman There is a man here, an Officer from the British army. He wants to talk to you two.
Sheila Really? What about?
Woman I don't know, he didn't say, but I think it is about your time in the Japanese prison camp.
Bridie Well tell him we don't want to see him. I've had just about enough of you British and your meddling ways!
Sheila And you think that your guys are any different!
Woman Hey! Calm down, he will only be here for about twenty minutes, he just wants to ask you a few questions, that's all.
Bridie OK. Let him in.
Woman I will just go and get him [the woman goes back out the door and closes it]
Sheila I wonder what kind of questions he wants to ask us?
Bridie I don't know, probably the usual, did they treat you well, how were the conditions, you know.
Sheila Yeah. [A knock at the door] That's probably him now. [opens the door and a British officer with a huge moustache is standing in the hallway]
Bridie Come in, please. Hello, I am Bridie, and this is Sheila.
Sheila Hi.
Officer I am Major Reginald Johnston Esquire, but since you are not in official army service any longer, you may address me as Reginald.
Bridie Well, hello Reginald. I understand you have some questions you would like to ask us.
Reginald Yes, quite. Let's begin shall we. You were both in Singapore when it was invaded by the Japanese?
Bridie Yes we were, no thanks to you British!
Sheila I am terribly sorry about her Reginald, she can be rather hostile sometimes. She blames here imprisonment on the British.
Bridie No I don't....
Reginald [interrupts Bridie] Ah! I see we have a little hostility to work through here, excellent [takes out a small notebook, and begins to make notes].
Bridie What are you doing?

Reginald Just taking a few notes, for my report on the imprisonment of the nurses during the war.

Bridie Well just make sure you get it right, I don't want someone thinking I said something I didn't.

Reginald I assure you Miss, I don't make mistakes, I am an officer of the British Army! Now, where were we, what happened after your ships were wrecked off the coast of Singapore?

Sheila I was floating around, hanging onto a piece of driftwood and I ran into Bridie.

Bridie Sheila was just hanging onto a piece of wood with nothing to hold here up, so I hit her with my shoe-horn to keep her awake.

Reginald Yes, well, very interesting, hit her with a shoe-horn, [mumbling] mmm hostility.

Bridie What did you say? Hostility.

Reginald Well it's just something that you have to work through, I'm sure a smart girl like you can manage it. What were the conditions that you experienced in the prison camp.

Sheila Which one, Muntok or Belalau?

Reginald Lets start with the first one, Muntok, that was in Sumatra right?

Bridie Yes, it was the first camp that we were taken to, right after we got captured by the Japs. It was just 14 Bungalows with a barbed wire fence around it. 800 women and children stuffed into 14 bungalows.

Sheila And the toilet, I was terrible, just a big concrete pit in the ground, it didn't flush, we had to empty it into buckets or it would overflow.

Reginald Well it can't have been all that bad, what did the Japanese treat you like?

Sheila They used to go around and beat us for fun.

Bridie Yeah, and not to mention watch us go to the toilet.

Reginald My god, those dirty blighters. They didn't ever try to take advantage of you did they?

Bridie Well, they did once, they had a place called the "officers club".

Sheila We named it Lavender Street.

Bridie Anyway they picked the more good looking ones among us and took us there, but we all pretended that we had tuberculosis and that made them send us home.

Reginald Well, jolly good thinking then, hooray for you. Why don't you tell me about Belalau then ok.

Sheila Well in April 1945, the Japs decided to move us inland to Belalau. We were taken there by cattle boat, shoved into a stifling hot cargo hold with no food and no water. Anyone who died was just dumped overboard into the water. Well we got there eventually.

Reginald Do you know why they moved you?

Bridie No [Reginald makes a note], but the guards started getting a lot more harsh, beating us more of the time and the introduction of the no work, no food rule.

Reginald So if you didn't work, you didn't eat any food.

Bridie That's right.

Reginald So what kind of work did you do?
Sheila Grave digging mostly, there was always a lot of work because there was a lot of people dying all the time, from all sorts of diseases, dengue, beri beri.

Reginald So why didn't you use the Red Cross medicine?
Bridie Yeah, right, like we ever got anything from the Japs! They kept it for themselves and left all of us to die [Reginald makes a note].

Reginald Well at least some of it must have got through.
Sheila The medicine we did get in was smuggled in from some of the native people around.

Bridie We had to trade some of the last things we had left for a small amount of medicine.

Reginald Yes, quite bad, I can imagine.
Bridie No, I don't think you can! Were you ever in a Japanese prison camp? Did you ever have all basic needs denied, beaten and tortured for fun!

Reginald Well, no.
Bridie Then shut up with your consolations, you don't know anything and I don't need you and your pompous British army telling me it will be OK. You messed up bad and you are just too proud to admit it, it just really gets to me, bloody English! [breaks down into choked sobs]

Sheila Bridie! I can't believe I am hearing this, just calm down please. [to Reginald] I really am sorry about her, she has had some bad experiences and she is still recovering, I really think you should go now.

Reginald Yes, I think I would be for the best, I will leave you two to cool off for a bit then, jolly good. Look there's one more thing, can I take any personal effects to be fumigated, diaries, etc, they could be carrying dangerous virii, we wouldn't want you to get sick again now would we.

Sheila I think you have done enough damage for one day, so could you please go now.

Reginald Right, jolly good then, goodbye then ladies, I'll see myself out [opens the door and exits].

Bridie Is he gone yet? [looking up]
Sheila Yes, he's gone now. You get some rest now OK, you've had a big day.
Bridie OK then [Bridie goes and lies down on bed and goes to sleep, Sheila sits down and writes something on a piece of paper, puts it next to Bridie's bed, then gets all her things and leaves the room].

Rational

The reason that I did this particular option was because I wanted to explore in depth the animosity of Bridie toward the British and expand on some of the issues that I felt were important in the play. Issues such as the lack of transmission of the Red Cross parcels to the prisoners in Muntok and Belalau and the inhumane treatment of the English and Australian women and children. I felt that I just couldn't connect with any of the other questions that were presented as options for this assignment, this option just seemed to me to be the one I wanted to do. I wanted to fully explore the capabilities of the two main

characters and join the loose ends of the play together in and try to explain why some of the things that happened did. This option allowed me to display the attitudes of Sheila and Bridie to a living target of their frustration and in Bridie's case some anger and rage. I tried to get Bridie and Sheila to talk about their horrific experiences in the camp and show the way that the British just tried to cover it up, deny and try to convince them that it wasn't really as bad as they once thought. The British Officer hadn't actually been in a POW camp or went through any of the things that they had been through and through his intermittent note-taking I was trying to emphasize that. You can't put that kind of anguish on paper, or try to summarize their pain, I think that this is a powerful theme and I felt that it needed to be explored. And so through all these methods I was trying to fully demonstrate the important themes and the in depth behavioral patterns of the play and the various characters therein