

THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI

Starring: ALEC GUINNESS, WILLIAM HOLDEN, JACK HAWKINS, JAMES DONALD

The film opens as two or three hundred soldier prisoners, half starved, unclean and unshaven, are emerging from the tropical jungle after a 500 mile trek up from Singapore, and getting their first glimpses of the prison camp which is to be their home.

It would be hard in the extreme to imagine the members of Ceylon West Receiving Station, who are, for the most part, well-fed, plump and in fact, disgustingly healthy, as portraying these soldier prisoners, but that is the case, and the wonders of the camera and make up teams worked miracles of transformation.

The film of the above title will be generally released in Great Britain in September this year, barring accidents, of course.

The film tells the story of British prisoners of war in a Japanese P.O.W. camp in Burma, and of their work on the Burma Death Railway and, in particular, of their work on the Railway Bridge over the river Kwai, from which the film gets its title.

Also threaded through the story is a battle of wits between the Senior British Officer, Colonel Nicholson, who is played by Alec Guinness, and the Japanese Camp Commandant, Colonel Saito, who seems to think that the Geneva Convention is to quote him, "A coward's code". It also tells of the cold war of the officer prisoners, to gain their rightful status in the camp, and how, although they are sorely put to it, what with solitary confinement and the loss of one of them through machine-gun fire, they eventually get their rights.

If I say much more about the story I shall be spoiling the effect of seeing the film, so I shall leave it at that. However, it remains to be said that with a director like David Lean, who directed "The Robe", and the stars mentioned above, there should be no



The C.W.R.S. "Prisoners"



ALEC GUINNESS
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L/Tel. Mott, L/Tel. McKinnon,
L/Tel. Morgan, P.O. Tel. Bradley
and L/Tel. Ashby.

doubt as to the final calibre of the film. It should, in fact, be extremely good.

The film company have been employing the majority of the staff of Ceylon West, during their 24 hours off watch of course, as extras for about two months, the pay being £3 a day, which was very welcome.

The work which we were called on to do was to fill in all the prominent places before the camera in crowd scenes, such as parade ground or hospital group scenes, where Europeans had to appear in the foreground.

Those of the cinema audiences who have friends or relations in Ceylon West, and who go to see this film, will, if they are fairly quick witted and have sharp eyes, probably see fleeting glimpses of them.

The only "matelot" who will be seen more than once or twice is P.O. Tel. Lowe, who has landed himself the job of Sergeant Major for the film, thus enabling him to speak in the film and also to gain more money than the rest of the Film Star Staff.

Sparkers who have already done a commission out here in Ceylon, at C.W.R.S., will probably not be able to recognise the prison camp as being the Quarry at Mahara Prison, just slightly over three miles from the station, but they will of course be quick to realise that there is no river, of the size of the river Kwai, near Mahara; this river is situated about 72 miles away between Hatton and Avisawella, thus making the march to work from the prison camp slightly more than the 10 minutes walk which you will see in the film.

I will say nothing of what happens during the building of the bridge in the film, except that in actual fact the building is costing approximately £17,000, rather a lot considering what happens to it. But then, of course, it has to take the weight of a

troop train and about 200 men marching over it during the actual shooting.

The conditions under which the extras from the C.W.R.S. are working are, to say the least, very far from being in keeping with the atmosphere of the film. The meals, for instance, which although eaten on the Quarry Railway lines, were on a par with the Ritz or Waldorf Astoria in quality and, if I may be allowed to say so, equally as agreeable in quantity, the meal allowance per man per day being about 15/-, out of which comes breakfast, lunch and a small tea.

The Stars of the film are for the most part very co-operative; Alec Guinness, being far from as reserved as he would have you believe, would always stop to speak with any of our members and on odd occasions has been known to stay talking for over an hour during the slack periods of filming. He could and would talk on any subject and, when asked by a budding Kirk Douglas what he thought of filming as a career, he said, "I don't think that I would advise filming as a career." Not even for the money it brings in.

But having been amongst them now, and working with them for the past two months, I feel that the majority of the chaps out here now know a little more of what it actually takes to make a film, both in Sweat and Patience, Patience being, I think, the main paying quality for the Big Stars.

If, and when, you see this film I think you will be favourably impressed by it, as it is a true story in very real surroundings, even though our chief was heard to say. "Ee I wuz in a Jap camp durint war, but it wernt nowt like this."

And finally, as a parting word we will quote James Donald, when asked if he would go to see the finished article, "I'm paid to make 'em, not to see 'em."

Now I will leave it to your own judgment.