

“Women bow”: The shifting power dynamics between nurses and doctors in *Tenko*

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The BBC television drama *Tenko* (1981-85) focused on the stories of women placed in a female prisoner of war camp in Singapore during the Second World War. Across the course of thirty episodes, and a reunion television film, the series followed a group of women from different walks of life who were interred together and sought to find ways to survive in a world that was markedly different to the society that they had come from. In the first series of ten episodes three of the main characters had medical backgrounds, including Dr. Beatrice Mason (Stephanie Cole), and two nurses who were under her supervision in the outside world, Kate Norris (Claire Oberman) and Nellie Keene (Jeananne Crowley). In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which *Tenko* portrayed these two nurses, paying particular attention to how the series expressed changing power dynamics and a new idea of social order once the characters were in the camp, compared to the outside world. Concentrating on the first series, which shows the contrast most dramatically, I will first outline the important background context of the series’ creation, before providing a textual reading of key episodes and moments. I will then draw on existing scholarship and other material relating to both *Tenko* and female ensemble dramas in general in order to highlight the distinctive approaches made by the series’ writers and production team.

The origins of *Tenko* are particularly important, as they demonstrated that real-life experiences of nurses in particular would be a key component of the program’s influences and identity. The series was created by Lavinia Warner, who had worked as a researcher for a 1978 episode of *This Is Your Life* that celebrated the achievements of Dame Margot Turner, who had risen to the rank of Brigadier as a British military nurse. When in a more junior position in 1941, Turner had been posted to Singapore when the Japanese invaded. Despite attempting to evacuate, the ship in which she was travelling was sunk following an air attack, and after escaping first by swimming and then on a life raft (on which she was to be the only survivor), she was eventually found and captured by Japanese forces who interred her in a camp on Bank Island, off Sumatra, where she would stay for three and a

half years. Warner found this story fascinating and admired the fortitude of both Turner and those who had been in the camp alongside her. Consequently, Warner was inspired to tell their stories in more depth, which first resulted in a 1979 BBC documentary *Women in Captivity*. A memorable section saw Margot Turner reunited with fellow nurse (and captive) Betty Jeffrey, who stated that:

I often make people laugh when I say I like women, I like nursing women, but never again do I want to be locked up with a thousand other women, never, I want to be locked up with some men next time! Because women can be unreasonable, they can be very very brave, very very tenacious, if it hadn't been for their tenacity their bravery their sheer guts to win, but to live with a lot of women, they all had minds of their own, and for some reason or another you can't regiment women like men. And I think they had tremendous amount of guts, I really do, to do what they did, and to be able to survive, because we had no men to help us. It was only our strength, it wasn't anybody else's. (*Women in Captivity*, BBC 1979)

As this recollection showed, for Jeffrey being imprisoned alongside women was an impactful part of the experience, rather than a secondary consideration – hers was not just a story of imprisonment, but of living in a world where she co-existed only with women, and this would come to be an important part of *Tenko*. The stories told by the camps' survivors helped to convince Warner that there was dramatic potential in the series, and with Turner and Jeffrey having been nurses it was perhaps obvious that such characters would have a central role to play in the series. Nevertheless, despite the influence that her experiences would have on the program, when Margot Turner was asked if *Tenko* was authentic, she replied that “No, I don't think it was. They had too many clothes for a start ... But then one is apt to judge a thing by your own circumstances and your own camp.” (Imperial War Museum interview, quoted by Starns 2010: 171)

However, *Tenko* was not designed to take a strict documentary-drama approach to its topic, even though it was based on real experiences. It was not intended to tell a single person's story, nor to closely depict specific events, but instead to give an overall impression

of a largely untold history that had been largely neglected, possibly because it was one that was concerned almost entirely with women. In her exploration of female ensemble dramas, Ros Jennings, drawing on Alison Landsberg's writings on "prosthetic memory", discusses both *Tenko* and *Call the Midwife* (BBC, 2012-), suggesting that they perform "as technologies of prosthetic memory which immerse viewers into a 'larger history' (Landsberg 2004: 2) of both the historic periods in view and also a rich 'herstory' of women who have been marginalized by dominant historical accounts." (Jennings 2017: 182) In *Tenko*, women's stories were not sidelined, and were instead given prominence, even though the more general popular historical retelling of the war had paid them little attention. By contrast, the gender of the program's key characters and creatives would be important to its development, and would allow the stories of two female nurses to be elevated to a position in drama where they might otherwise be neglected in favor of more male-dominated environments. Perhaps more significantly, the series would also tell a story that depicted the realities of women's experiences in a way that had previously been considered to be too unpalatable for television drama.

In the first two episodes of *Tenko*, which deal with the Japanese invasion of Singapore and life before the characters' imprisonment, the two nurses Kate and Nellie are initially shown to have important but inherently subservient positions in their roles at the hospital, where they work under Dr. Beatrice Mason (an example of the series showing women in a position of authority). Jennings points out that these opening episodes "highlight the initial tensions and divisions of class, nationality, race, education and sexuality that exist between the central characters before they are then forcibly confined and grouped together as prisoners." (Jennings 2017: 185) They do this by establishing the complex power-relations between characters, in which public expectations can be contrasted with private thoughts. For example, in the first episode, the nurses describe Dr. Mason as a "battle-axe" and "wicked witch of the west" in private while fastidiously following her orders on the hospital ward. There are already hints that the superficial attitudes are not necessarily all that they seem, however, when the nurses' request to change shifts for social reasons is granted by the doctor, albeit begrudgingly, showing that her brusquely professional exterior is at least partly for show. The series does not pay much attention to the relative unusualness of a female doctor at this time (although camp records

show that there were indeed female doctors imprisoned alongside Margot Turner), but the audience can surely draw an inference from the fact that they will understand that Dr. Mason will have had extra struggles to contend with in order to reach her position of authority, and that this may explain her no-nonsense attitude. She is certainly someone who has worked hard to ensure that she commands respect, and perhaps does not wish to show any weakness that could be ascribed to her gender, such as taking on a motherly role for the younger nurses.

These early appearances of the nurses show the duality of their lives, with the formalized work environment in which they are required to follow instructions contrasting with their relaxed and liberated personal lives. In the following months and years their professional skills will become an important and valued part of life in the prison camps, but prior to this they are shown to be less important in the British community than the military wives and socialites who attend dinner dances with regularity, whereas for the nurses this is a special occasion, and they revel in its glamour. The strongest character of the two is certainly Kate, an Australian who is brimming with confidence and is not shy when it comes to making her voice heard. In his comprehensive book that covers the history of the series, Andy Priestner reproduces the original character outline for twenty-five-year-old Kate, who we are told, had decided to become a nurse in order to travel the world, and that “she did not start out very dedicated to her profession.” Once she reached Singapore she started work under Dr. Mason, but (in what became a recurring character theme) this “was not a happy working relationship as the doctor found her to be too independent and free with her opinions. The arrival of another nurse, Nellie Keene, ameliorated the situation somewhat and the pair became friends as well as colleagues” (Priestner 2012: 67).

While Nellie seems uninterested in lasting relationships, Kate enjoys dating the British man Tom Redburn (Daniel Hill), and lives a somewhat carefree life outside of the hospital. She is also sexually liberated, as she works with Tom to hire a hotel room where they can sleep together for the first time. Just as Dr. Mason is to-the-point in her professional life, so Kate is in her personal life, and so when Tom proposes after they have had sex she unromantically but pragmatically replies, “Okay sport, let's give it a go.” Minutes later, an explosion signals military action from the Japanese, and the consequent medical emergency means that Kate must quickly revert to being under the command of Dr.

Mason, a position that she accepts. In the series' second episode, Dr. Mason tells the nurses to evacuate Singapore, demonstrating that despite her clinical manner she clearly cares for her nurses' wellbeing, even at the expense of the local patients. Dr. Mason's initial plan is to remain at the hospital – "She's going to stay behind and play the hero," says Nellie – but all three characters will find themselves in a prisoner of war camp by the next episode, at which point the pre-existing boundaries between professional roles and personal lives will start to break down.

These first two episodes of *Tenko* are anomalies in the series, as they are the only two to be written by a man, Paul Wheeler (all the others were written by Jill Hyem or Anne Valery), and the explanation for this mirrors the gender presumptions that occasionally occur in *Tenko*. Julia Hallam (2013) and Ros Jennings have both drawn attention to the fact that female creatives in the television industry have been influential in the creation of female focused dramas; as Jennings puts it, such programs often "evolved as vehicles for female writers and producers who, on entering a previously male-dominated television industry, took opportunities when they arose to make both the representation of women and their own industry presence more meaningful." (Jennings 2017: 182) However, while the core team of Warner as creator, with Hyem and Valery as lead writers, was entirely female, this was not the whole picture. As Hyem herself pointed out in a 1987 article:

... the two producers, five directors and the original script editor appointed to the series were all male, as were the designers, the composer and the person in charge of publicity. It is also worth noting that a man was commissioned to write the first two episodes before the women reached the camp. These dealt with the fall of Singapore. It was not thought that a woman writer could "handle the military side", in spite of the fact that Anne Valery had been in the army at this period and that anyway events were meant to be seen through the eyes of the women (Hyem 1987: 153).

Even with these gendered assumptions in the wider production team, the creation of such a female focused series which would eschew glamor in favor of the miserable (but dramatic)

reality of life in the camps was not seen as a recipe for success among the male-dominated “powers-that-be”. Hyem recalls that the general feeling was that “No-one’ll want to know about an all-woman cast looking their worst,” and that the series was “such a depressing subject, they’ll switch off in droves” (Hyem 2017: 153). In the event, the series was a commercial and critical success, with reviewers drawing attention to the realism of the camp environment as one of the program’s biggest attractions (Priestner 2012: 221).

An early indication of the ways in which the (perceived) class and backgrounds of characters would come to be important points of drama in the series, at least initially, occurs when many of the show’s regular characters board a ship to evacuate Singapore. Kate and Nellie comfortably assert themselves and fit in with the overcrowded surroundings, as they appear to draw on their nursing backgrounds that allow them to cope and keep calm in a crisis. However, when society lady Rose Millar (Stephanie Beacham) expectantly asks them to separate so that she can be more comfortable by sharing the cabin with her lover she is given short shrift by a dismissive Kate. Great play would be made of the fact that Rose’s socialite background did not make her suitable for life in the camp, as she misses the excess and glamour that she had become accustomed to in Singapore – while the nurses understand that they will need to adapt to their new lives. They also understand their own strengths and skills – when the ship is attacked and sunk, Nellie is seen to tend to one of the survivors on the beach where they have been washed up, shortly before they are captured and moved to the camp. Jennings has highlighted the way that these differing experiences and attitudes of women placed together in a single environment can resonate as a universal theme, perhaps particularly with female audiences, as she points out that once “tensions and divisions continue to permeate the women’s relationships in the camps,” and that “their differing worldviews ... are then explored throughout the series in ways that resonated with the experience of female audiences” (Jennings 2017: 185).

The creation of these interactions, friendships and divisions in the camp that would not have occurred in the characters’ previous lives is rooted in the truth of the situation. In her book about the real-life camps, *Women Beyond the Wire*, series creator Lavinia Warner quotes one unnamed prisoner as saying that “One learnt to live with and understand people better. The old order of politeness broke down and one got to the bare bones of living.” (Warner in Warner and Sandilands 1983: 5) This is a crucial aspect of the series, which soon

establishes that pre-existing values and expectations quickly lose their currency in times of crisis, which has a levelling effect on society.

The removal of the prisoners from the men in their lives - whether friends, relatives or lovers - creates an entirely new structure for the relationships between the women as, apart from the guards almost all of their time is spent as a single-sex unit, where their character interactions do not need to rely on day-to-day lives lived alongside men in the way that most dramas demand. Jilly Hyem was acutely aware that female characters often seemed to only operate in relation to men on television, often either as allies or enemies of a central male protagonist, rather than as independent entities. She wrote that “There is a tendency among men to dismiss women characters who are not young and attractive as ‘unappealing’ or ‘uninteresting’. Unless, that is, they fulfil the usual stereotype of nagging wife or mother-in-law.” (Hyem 1987: 154) The series needed to create its own idea of relationships and character types, and the placement of nurses and a doctor within this new order automatically gave them significance and importance – for the first time, in the case of the nurses, who had been used to being ordered around as staff, rather than praised and consulted as trained professionals. Thus, things that had been considered important outside of the camp – such as wealth, connections, and ancestry – no longer had any value, and characters such as Rose and Marion Jefferson (Ann Bell), wife of a British colonel who had risen to the top end of society’s hierarchy, now found that they would no longer be treated in the way that they had been accustomed to. More than this, they would be mixing with people whose lives would never normally intersect with theirs.

Despite its attempts to break away from the established order, *Tenko* does foreground its middle-class characters by assigning them important roles, either within the new camp hierarchy or in terms of story development. However, Anne Valery was very aware that history tends to preserve the voices and stories of those who have the opportunity and means to tell it, as she told a contemporary documentary about the writing of the program:

There was one danger here in that all the books one was able to read by women were obviously written by middle class women, it was nurses, doctors, families ... But

one realised, out of the corner of your eye from things you read, that there were other women in the camp, there were tarts, there were whores, there were people who'd been in Shanghai who'd been washed up, there were cockneys, and they hadn't had a voice, so one had to invent the voice for them (*General Studies: TV Writer*, 1982).

For Valery, then, nurses were seen as middle-class, even if the characters may not have felt that themselves, and other characters such as Blanche Simmons (Louise Jameson), a cockney sex worker, help to challenge the pretensions of some of the previously more privileged characters, although she stands out precisely because the middle class characters are given more of a voice. However, despite that fact that the established order is seemingly destroyed, as all characters are placed in the same difficult situation, writers Valery and Hyem then placed Marion as the voice of the prisoners who will liaise with the camp's commandant, the complex Captain Yamauchi (Burt Kwouk). Marion's background as a wife of a man of high rank in the military had previously required her to do little more than issue instructions to her servants each day, and yet the privileges of her earlier life gave her some weight within the camp. "In real life I was sure that there must have been irritation," said Hyem (*General Studies: TV Writer*, 1982). Nevertheless, whatever the characters' backgrounds, Warner saw a similarity in the types of women who would then survive the camp. She felt that there was "a confidence and a strength and a predisposition to the same kind of humour, understated and wry" (Warner in Warner and Sandilands 1983: 4). Such understatement and humor would allow what would seem to be a superficially gloomy series to feature characters who could make the most of their situation, and provide entertainment as well as interest.

Given the appalling conditions of the camp, illness inevitably follows, and so the role of the nurses becomes important for the camp. The assumption that they would continue their outside paid roles in this new free-for-all environment initially goes unchallenged by Kate and Nellie, but it soon becomes clear that the power structures that had limited their autonomy in their professional lives have now been somewhat dissipated. In the third episode, the first to take place inside the camp, Dr. Mason pointedly refers to Kate and Nellie as "my nurses" (emphasis mine), which immediately irritates them. So does the

doctor's decision to volunteer Nellie for work without consultation, referring to her by her surname – “we're not being paid to work with her any more,” they grumble to each other. Despite being characters who had spent some time together before the camp, even imprisonment is not enough to allow Dr. Mason to dissolve the barriers between professional distance and personal friendship. At this point, Kate's character in particular is not driven by her nursing background, as instead it is her confident attitude that marks her out, as she demands to know about food and drink and refers to one of the guards, Sato, as “Satan”. When one of the prisoners appears to be pregnant, she offers a decidedly un-medical response – “Oh boy!”.

In the following three episodes, irritations continue to rise, although they generally simmer under the surface as characters accept that offering medical support is the top priority. Dr. Mason continues to maintain the pretense of a hospital environment in a hut being used as a sick bay, as she firmly orders the nurses as she considers necessary, but this sows the seeds of division, with Kate and Nellie both making it clear that they are unhappy. For Dr. Mason, the preservation of order as she understands it is essential, and she complains to Marion that she is losing authority over “her” nurses. However, it is clear that Dr. Mason is clinging to these pre-existing structures of authority and order because she is so concerned by the reality of the situation, particularly in the case of an unwell baby, who subsequently dies, and then an outbreak of malaria. In a telling judgment about their feelings about the apparent authority figures in the camp, Nellie (who even dons a makeshift nurse's hat) later remarks that the Marion is “out of her depth” in her role as ostensible leader of the prisoners. Kate responds that “Aren't we all?”, tacitly acknowledging that simple survival is the priority.

By the sixth episode the differences between Kate and Dr. Mason finally boil over as Dr. Mason tries to enforce relatively minor points of order in a traditional hospital environment, including nurses not talking over a patient. This leads to an argument in which Kate argues that she is not Dr. Mason's nurse, she is a nurse. Kate cannot see why the new relationships between prisoners needs to mirror the pre-existing expectations adhered to outside of the camp, including the ways that she and Dr. Mason interact. However, Dr. Mason struggles to see beyond the old power relations that offer her stability, and perhaps even comfort in an impossibly difficult new environment. Both are sympathetic to the

patients, but each feels devalued in a different way – Dr. Mason because she perceives there to be a rebellion from her nurses, and Kate because she feels that she and Nellie are not given the voice and autonomy that they deserve. The argument is a tempestuous one, far beyond any minor disagreement that may occur on a traditional hospital ward. This stand-off between the two characters is indicative of the fact that the disruption of the previous social hierarchies is welcomed by those who had less power, and angrily reacted against by those who did, including the likes of the wealthy Dutch woman Dominica Van Meyer (Elizabeth Chambers), who snootily and selfishly refuses to see herself as operating on the same level as most of her campmates. For a while, Dr. Mason can't see how to continue in the face of such disruption. "I never realized how protected I was before," she says. "Hospital routine. Everything to hand."

As Jennings points out, the "usual order" is upset by *Tenko* because of the way that different backgrounds are not only juxtaposed, but that the characters are forced to cooperate in a way that would be unthinkable outside of the camp. Instead, rather than a typical emphasis on youthful femininity so prevalent in popular dramas, the program offers "a more diverse range of age groups and female identities: celibate, lesbian, single mother, leader, doctor, housewife, secretary, nurse, teacher and, indeed, combinations and intersectionalities of all of these that form a more diverse female imaginary for the construction of possible identities along the whole life course." In *Tenko*, such matters are more significant than just questions of friendship – as Jennings says, such co-operation is a "necessity for survival and the day-to-day realities of disease, starvation and physical punishment mean that frailty, so often culturally associated with older age, is understood to strike in a remarkably egalitarian way at any age" (Jennings 2017: 187). Indeed, those who had led privileged but sheltered lives are just as much at risk of death or disaster as any other character, perhaps even more so. The way that the series strikes against traditional depictions of femininity may have been a cause for concern amongst some of the senior (male) management at the BBC, but in *Tenko* it proves to be an essential component of its levelling out of characters so that they face the same dangers and problems, even if their coping mechanisms differ.

These "unfeminine" conditions (which included the cast growing their body hair and donning an array of wigs and unkempt hairstyles) marked out the program as something

different, offering women coping in situations little acknowledged or understood elsewhere, either directly or through similar scenarios being depicted. Hyem recalls that maintaining this was difficult when the series went into production, as “we found that music and lighting would often be used to soften or romanticise scenes which we had intended to be stark” (Hyem 1987: 156). Even with a series telling the story of such appalling circumstances, the BBC production struggled to grapple with the idea of presenting women in a realistic way – although the actors themselves had mutually agreed to lose gradually weight for the camp scenes, a task that resulted in the short-lived installation of scales in the rehearsal room (Priestner 2012: 153).

Cat Mahoney points out that despite the distinctiveness of certain aspects of the story told in the program (particularly in terms of gender), there are elements of the series that feel both familiar and yet are presented in a new way. As Mahoney argues: “The setting of *Tenko* within a female prisoner-of-war camp is conducive to more recognisable wartime narratives. This removes it from the domestic and elevates it beyond the dichotomy of the masculine front line and the feminine home front” (2015). Although there had been earlier screen depictions of women in prisoner of war camps, such as in *Two Thousand Women* (1944), it was generally male prisoners whose stories had been told most frequently, and the serialized format of *Tenko* allowed individual stories to be told with more depth. Vicky Ball has drawn attention to the way that the series “offered some insights into those marginalized aspects of women's history” (2013: 246), and points out that, along with other programs of its type, “the female ensemble drama moves to centre stage that which is celebrated only periodically in British soap opera: women's relationships with other women outside of their familial roles as wives and mothers” (2013: 246). These relationships may be questions of respect and diplomacy, as well as relationships of all types – including, as *Tenko* demonstrated, friendships and rivalries alongside occasional romance. Ball goes on to say that “the female ensemble drama constructs alternative lifestyles for women based upon meaningful social relationships with other women. In so doing, it undermines the heteronormative ideologies that have governed the normative feminine life course” (2013: 246). In *Tenko*, the breakdown of this heteronormativity is never more apparent than in a storyline that sees nurse Nellie Keene form a romantic attachment with fellow campmate Sally Markham (Joanna Hole) shortly after Sally loses her unborn baby.

Such a relationship between the two characters is a striking contrast to the rigidly structured order imposed in the professional world of the hospital that Nellie had been familiar with, and is perhaps the first season's most explicit acknowledgement that it was not only the environment that had changed for the characters, but also a different sense of freedom to express themselves in ways that may have been frowned upon outside of the camp. However, the series' producer was unhappy with the inclusion of a lesbian storyline, demonstrating that there seemed to be a somewhat vague set of boundaries of what would be considered acceptable in a mainstream television series, even one based on such traumatic events that would surely be more troubling than a dash of homosexuality. Nevertheless, Jill Hyem, who wrote the episode that focused on the relationship, recalled the difficult journey that the story had to take in order to reach the screen:

I wanted to write a story about a relationship between two of the younger women. This was not such an unlikely occurrence in a camp with several hundred of them; indeed, ex-prisoners had told us of women who were "special friends". The idea was rejected out of hand. I was told that if we introduced such a subject it would be "turn-off time" and that the characters concerned would lose audience sympathy. I argued my case. Anne Valery and Lavinia Warner supported me. The producer remained adamant. I said that if the series was going to dodge such issues I would sooner not work on it. A compromise was reached. I was told that I could write my story provided I did not use the word "lesbian". It was probably one of the best episodes I wrote. (Hyem 1987: 156-7)

These two characters come from middle class backgrounds that are conventional for television dramas of the period – Sally is married, and had previously lived a comfortable lifestyle in the English Home Counties, while Nellie had only shown superficial interest in men while demonstrating diligence in her nursing career. That the storyline was given to them, rather than one of the more overtly sexually promiscuous characters, says something of the subtlety with which the series wished to talk about their relationship, which is shown to be one of affection and dependence, even while comments from other characters make it

clear that their relationship is a physical one (albeit off screen). Sally's rejection of heteronormativity is made explicit when she reveals that she is relieved to have lost her unborn child; "at least I've got you", she had earlier said to Nellie, while she also reveals that the child will be named after Nellie if it's a girl. Dr. Mason attempts to use what power she has to break up the attachment between the women, but Nellie stands her ground in a way that would have been unthinkable pre-camp. "You can't order me here, we're not at the hospital now you know," she tells Mason. Soon, Nellie and Sally are giggling like schoolgirls and are shown to be closer physically (although a kiss is only implied). Others in the camp notice and prejudices from life outside the camp make their way into the new surroundings as graffiti describes the characters as perverts. Nevertheless, they publicly dance together and flirt, while Nellie shows flashes of jealousy when others take an interest in Sally. Most camp mates are not concerned about the burgeoning romance – "at least they care about each other," says Blanche.

True to her character, Dr. Mason's biggest concern about the relationship is the extent to which it distracts Nellie from her nursing. "I think you could go a long way in the profession," she says. "I think you're in danger of losing your direction ... When we were in Singapore I always used to think of you as one of my more reliable nurses but now ... It seems to be playing second fiddle to your extra mural interests. People are talking about you and Sally." For Dr. Mason, Nellie is a nurse, "first and foremost". "No I'm not," Nellie retorts. "First and foremost I'm a person." This exchange highlights the differences between the outlooks and attitudes of the doctor and nurses, as the new camp environment allows Nellie to break free of the expectations of her as a person, formed in a heteronormative society and a strictly formalized professional world. Imprisoned in the camp, she now has new freedom that defines her beyond heterosexual relationships and a nursing career. However, when Sally abruptly ends the relationship, Nellie throws herself back into her role as a nurse, becoming "all work and no play," as Kate puts it. Having perhaps finally seen Kate and Nellie as people rather than nurses, Dr. Mason starts to call them by their first names, a small but definite shift in the relationship in the direction of friendship, and a sign that even characters who cling to the previously established hierarchies most strongly will eventually loosen their grip.

Nellie Keene does not return to the series after the first season, as she is moved to another camp where she dies – a typical fate for *Tenko* characters. However, Kate continues to work at the side of Dr. Mason and comes into her own when the camp has to contend with another doctor at their new camp, who seems more interested in experimentation than caring. Over time Dr. Mason's eyesight starts to fail, meaning that Kate takes over most of her duties that require intricate medical and physical skills. This gives her confidence to train to be a doctor once the camps are liberated by the Allies, although by the time of the final *Tenko* episode (a reunion special set in 1950) we learn that she is considering leaving her studies because she feels that she already knows more than most, due to her experiences in the camp, and she ends up staying in Singapore to undertake important community work, a sign that her character growth is more than just a development of her medical career.

Tenko allowed its characters to find new directions in their lives, and not always in expected ways, with Nellie and Kate serving as particularly good examples of this. Freed from the formal structures and expectations of the hierarchical hospital, each found their characters developing in ways that would likely have not occurred if they had stayed within established social order. As is so often the case for the series, such personal growth has links to the reality on which the program was based. As Warner and Sandilands put it in their history of life in the camps:

These many years afterwards it is possible to see these events not only as a conventional story of hardship, but as a singular experiment: a "laboratory" in which there was a great deal to be learned about women. Long before it became fashionable to examine women for their strengths rather than their weaknesses, to ask what they are able to accomplish rather than underlining what they cannot, here was a case history with all its elements neatly laid out. (Warner and Sandilands 1983: 15)

For *Tenko*, its own take on the "case history" of women in prisoner of war camps allowed characters from throughout society to become an important part of the newly established

camp life, and the nurses had significant roles to play. However, the series also considered them as characters in their own right, rather than as one-dimensional caregivers supporting those who society would generally expect to be more prominent or even important. *Tenko* made some effort to show that not only were the women in the camp fully formed characters in their own rights, away from traditional gender expectations (particularly those seen in drama), but that backgrounds and careers were not the entirety of their lives. Nellie and Kate were nurses, but their lives and stories were much more than simply their jobs.

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