FEPOW suffered a variety of illnesses related to an inadequate diet and exposure to tropical diseases. These diseases such as malaria, beriberi, cholera and tropical ulcers presented major problems to the FEPOW doctors. Drugs and medical equipment were in short supply.

A "Citizen's Army" was forged with craftsmen, engineers and scientists working secretly together. Their ingenuity ensured doctors could do their best and countless lives were saved.

Hospital huts including operating theatres and dental surgeries were set up. Discarded materials and homemade bamboo whisks made transfusions possible while illicit stills produced sterile water for intravenous infusions and alcohol for surgical antisepsis. Infusion needles were made from small engineered bamboo shoots. Vital supplies of B vitamins were made from yeast cultures, producing a "Camp Marmite".

Amputations were often performed for severe tropical ulcers with a variety of sophisticated artificial limbs, some with articulated joints, made from wood, bamboo, leather and canvas.