

# DRAT THAILAND-BURMA RAILWAY TOUR – NOVEMBER 2007

*“Yesterday is History,  
Tomorrow is a Mystery,  
Today is a Gift”*

On Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 44 fellow Australians (two from the United Kingdom and one from New South Wales with all others from Western Australia), lead by Peter Winstanley, embarked on a tour of Remembrance and Honour, to Acknowledge the bravery, mateship and enduring nature of over 13,000 Australians who slaved on the Thai-Burma railway during World War II (WWII). They were taken as Prisoners of War (POWs) by the Japanese to build a rail link between Thailand and Burma. They suffered many hardships including malnutrition, unsanitary living quarters, inadequate clothing, as well as being subjected to the many devastating diseases of the region including Enteric Dysentery, Cholera, Malaria, Tropical Ulcers, Beriberi and Pellagra to name a few.

The main object of our tour being to remember and acknowledge everything the POWs did and had to suffer through, to ensure a better future for us today – no human being should ever be put through the physical, emotional and derogatory conditions they were subjected to.

We started out on a warm, pleasant late afternoon arrival at Bangkok airport. Met our great tour guide Ake and Vivachai (our Thai Agent and defacto guide), bus driver and assistant. First stop was the Royal Benja Hotel, Bangkok. We then all got to know each other while having a pleasant meal in the hotel. After that was free time to explore the street markets and I'm sure all those with a love of shopping made the most of the opportunity!

Day 2: Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November

Today we visited the Royal Summer Palaces, exploring the beautifully presented grounds and temples. If you weren't dressed in full length skirt or trousers you had to borrow a sarong or pair of fisherman-type pants. We then visited the ruins in Ayutthaya, before a pleasant lunch on the “Chao Phraya” River. The afternoon was again at our leisure to make the most of Bangkok. Some people relaxed by the pool or had afternoon siestas, while others hit the streets to shop and explore. Dinner was at the unique “Cabbages and Condoms” Restaurant. That was certainly an eye-opening experience for all, with condoms used for all the decorations and even handed out at the end of the evening in place of mints!



Day 3: Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November

Today we visited the Grand Palace and Temple of Emerald Buddha, exploring the beautiful temples and buildings, adorned with tiles, bright coloured glass and gold – lots of gold! Lunch was an array of Thai (and some Western) dishes provided at the S.D. Avenue Hotel Restaurant.

After lunch we looked around the Vimanmek Mansion. We saw more beautiful buildings with murals adorning walls and ceilings. After this, we were all quite worn out. The evening was at our leisure, with all those mad keen shoppers hitting the enormous Night Markets in Bangkok for a couple of hours!

Day 4: Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> November

Today we explored Kanchanaburi. Our first stop was Nakhon Pathom Temple (nearby was a POW Hospital for 10,000 patients). Then to Non Pladuk train station where the railway started to lay a wreath in memory of Jim Findlay's father who died on the railway in that area. We briefly visited the Ban Pong Train Station, and then continued on to the Jeath Museum, where many graphic pictures of the POWs and their camps and treatment on the railway are documented. Peter Winstanly, tour organiser, was busy informing us of good books to purchase to further our knowledge on the history of the railway. This was just for the morning! We had lunch in a restaurant overlooking the "Bridge over the River Kwai" before walking along the rail and shopping in the markets on the side. We then headed to Chung Kai cemetery where Bill Haskell, an ex POW from Dunlop Force, gave a speech in memory of all who died on the railway; where the words "Their name Liveth for Evermore" is inscribed on a plaque. We stopped at the Chung Kai Cutting before moving to the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery where a wreath was laid for all the allied servicemen who slaved and died on the railway. Amongst all of this it was Melbourne Cup Day in Australia, so (in typical Aussie tradition) a sweep was organised. We made it to the Pung Wann Resort, Kwai Yai to relax by the pool, followed by a wonderful dinner cruise on a barge down the River Kwai. This was the first year the barge left the docking to travel down the River.



Day 5: Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> November



Today was started with a visit to the Thailand Burma Railway Centre Museum. We then headed to the Kanchanaburi Train Station to ride along the Death Railway. We had lunch overlooking the Wampo Viaduct before making our way to the Elephant Camp for a ride. There was a show with trained elephants doing tricks, shopping for food and giving massages ☺, then we



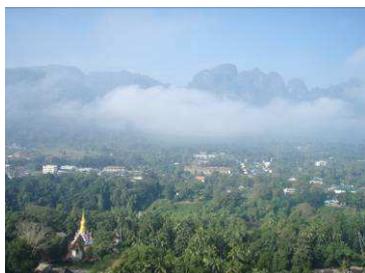
all lined up for a ride. I was unfortunate enough to be waiting patiently in line, and then found myself with a cat attached to my right calf. Teeth and claws were lashed out and they burrowed into my leg!



(see sketch by former British POW Lt Fred Ransome Smith). After that shock we all enjoyed the ride, then luckily for me, drove to hospital only 15minutes away to get all the necessary Rabies vaccines and antibiotics etc; resulting in both my legs being wrapped in bandages (as had sprained left ankle 3wks previously!).

That night we started our camp at the Home Phu Toey Resort. Very nice grounds and a very welcoming, hospitable host, Kanit.

Day 6: Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November



We had a relatively long drive today to see the Three Pagodas Pass. (See note 1 at end of article) On the way we stopped at Takanun Monastery and Temple, walking up the 273 steps to the top! The views from there gave us a great scope of the land layout with all its undulations and thick jungle the POWs would have had to cut through. We then visited the Khao Laem Dam, where Richard Albury (a retired West Australian Dam engineer)

gave a talk on how the dam was constructed, etc. Bill Haskell had supplied us with balloons to make balloon animals and other shapes to keep us amused and to give out to the Thai kids, so they were passed around the bus to see what people would come up with! We made it to the Thailand-Burma border to see the



Three Pagodas, Temple and Plaque, after a brief stop to lay another wreath in remembrance at a point overlooking the Khao Laem Dam in the vicinity of the former POW Camp site at Nikki. Wreaths were also laid (by Bill Paterson and Glad Cowie) at Songkurai POW Camp site in memory of Bill Patterson's father, and for the 2/4 Machine Gun Battalion men who perished in the area. For those who had missed out on their

daily shopping fix, a stop at a large market was made on the way home.

Day 7: Friday 9<sup>th</sup> November



First stop was Hintok Road Camp Site where the POW group Bill was in, Dunlop Force, were stationed. Here Bill gave us a moving and very informative talk on Dunlop Force's experiences and a number of Allied POWs, doctors and medical orderlies. Then we headed to the Hindad Hot Spring, which was used by the Japanese during WW2. The water temperature was like a hot bath – you couldn't stay in for that long! After the relax we went to

the Sai Yok National Park to see the sites of the Japanese troop stoves at the Kin Sai Yok POW camp. We also saw the Sai Yok Waterfalls, before a barge ride down the River Kwai for lunch. This took us all the way back to the Home Phu Toey Resort in a couple of hours. Some slept while others enjoyed the natural sights.



Before dinner Terry Loughnan managed to cut his head on a low door frame, thankfully no hospital visit for stitches was required and he made a quick recovery to attend the evening event. The Resort put on an amazing Light & Sound show about WW2 and the Bridge over the River Kwai.

Day 8: Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> November

Today we went to walk along the Hellfire Pass Memorial Trail following the railway trace. We saw Hintok Station, then the



Compressor Cutting; named aptly as it was one of the few cuttings where compressor machines were utilised to aid in its formation. Kyra Quinn fell over trying to scurry to Bill Haskell's sharp voice as he yelled 'speedo speedo' to bring her into line. The next walk was to the Three Tier Bridge location. At this point we broke into 2 groups – those who wanted to and could walk the 4-5km to the Hellfire Pass Museum to experience a little taste of what the POWs were subjected to on a twice daily basis to and from their camp; and those who caught the bus there, not out of lack of interest, but inability to put their bodies through the rough walk. None of the bridges in this location are standing any more, so a testing walk was ahead of those who chose to walk it! Despite the length of the walk,



it was a rewarding experience to stand in Hellfire Pass at the end. Our group had the chance to walk 10m barefoot to experience a little more of the POW sufferings before they made it back to Hellfire Pass Museum. We then headed back to Home Phu Toey Resort for lunch and an afternoon at leisure. There was opportunity to explore the grounds, visit the tribute to the Sir Edward "Weary" Dunlop, or visit the other exhibits in remembrance of those who

slaved and died on the Death Railway - *A Life for Every Sleeper*. We were then lucky enough to have the British Club Pipes and Drums perform for us before and after dinner. We spent the evening meeting and talking to them.

Day 9: Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November – Remembrance Day



We were up bright and early again to visit the Hellfire Pass Museum before the Remembrance Day Service at 11am. This year the service was attended by a few other groups and we were privileged to have the Pipes and Drums play for the Service. They played the Lament and Amazing Grace. It was very moving, with several members of our group

speaking, and many wreaths were laid in memory of all those who suffered and died on the railway. *We commemorate all they suffered to give us the future we have today.*



We had lunch back at the Resort, with thanks given to Kanit the Resort owner, for all his generosity and kindness year after year, and his staff; and to the Hellfire Pass Museum staff. That afternoon we headed off for Pung Wann Resort Kwai Noi, stopping at Tonchan



Ledge, so those who could not do the 5km walk yesterday could walk barefoot down 10m of railway trace to collect their certificate. We made it to the Resort by mid afternoon and had the rest of the afternoon at leisure, with many options including swimming, exploring the grounds, longboat ride up the river and many more! Dinner was at the Resort restaurant. Good food, atmosphere and entertainment during and after dinner. Graeme Taylor lured a group of keen dancers upstairs to a dance area. Vivatchai,



Pacific Horizon's owner (our Thai agent), even led some karaoke singing for us to get us on the dance floor!

Day 10: Monday 12<sup>th</sup> November

Today was a record-breaking morning – we were all on the bus and on the road BEFORE the scheduled time of 8am! We visited the former Tonchan South Camp site and waterfall, then stopped at the Jeath museum quickly to pick up “The Railway Man” text book for people who had requested it. We had a few hours of driving ahead of us, with Bill Haskell leading the sing-along to get us to Bangkok for lunch - he has a wonderful strong animated singing voice. We had a filling lunch at the SD Avenue Hotel again, then checked in at the Royal Benja hotel mid afternoon. People again had the choice to spend the afternoon at their leisure, picking up tailored suits or doing some last minute shopping! Dinner was at the Hotel, with final speeches made by Vivatchai, Ake and our group. Some people retired early to prepare for the 4am start tomorrow, while others stayed up late.



Day 11: Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> November

Everyone had to be up at 4am to be on the bus to the airport by 5am. We all managed to check in and make it through passport control without any mishaps, and then had a bit of time to fill in before boarding. We utilised the time to sleep before making it back to Perth after a 7hr flight.

Overall we had a very successful tour. Aside from all the early morning starts and odd accident, we succeeded in laying tribute to all those who slaved and died on the Death Railway between 1942 and 1945. New friends were made, and hopefully will be kept. And we continue to pass on to our families and friends the importance of remembrance and human equality.

I'm sure all group members would like to give thanks to all the organisers of the trip, including group leader, Peter Winstanley, Joint leader, Bev Poor, and treasurer, Bob Norris. Also a special mention must go to Bill Haskell, ex POW for all his informative talks and singing on the bus, the tour just wouldn't be the same without him! Thanks are also directed at all the organisations and staff, including Pacific Horizon, and Kanit at Home Phu Toey.

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Tomorrow is a Mystery,  
Today is a Gift.”*

Amy Barnes –



United Kingdom

Note to page 3 -- *The very significant, as in we were forced to March stations. 3,000 died in*

*Three Pagodas area is April 1943 7,000 POWs 300 kms to their work the space of 8 months.*