



Alive by 6 Hours

Conversation with Roy Whitecross (ExPOW and author of 'Slaves of the Son of Heaven') and Andrew Mason – 2004

The phone rang at home one night and my wife answered it. She cuffs the phone mouth-piece and says to me, "Sounds like an old guy on the phone; Roy Whitecross or something." I said to her, "Grab me a pen and paper, that's Roy Whitecross, he wrote Slaves of the Son of Heaven". My wife looked at me as if I had gone nuts (because I never hastily request her to get me stuff).

I was excited – for me it was like Bono from U2 had rang me; I was absolutely stoked to hear from him. He fought down the Peninsula, spent time in Changi, worked the Thai-Burma Railway ; went to Japan via the Hellships in the Pacific and to me is an Australian icon.

I highly recommend his book – in fact when I was speaking with him I implored him to write a sequel I enjoyed it that much. (I could tell he was chuffed that someone liked his book so much– but I was sincere because at the time I thought it was the best book I had ever read on the subject).

No thanks Bono – Roy Whitecross phoned me and Im glad it was Roy. (No offence Bono).

The Six Hour Man

Firstly ExPOW Whitecross and I discussed the Atom bomb on Nagasaki in 1945. Roy was working in Camp 17 Omuta Japan in the coal mines which was about 20 kms SW of Nagasaki's ground zero. He said he saw a mass of black smoke and a mate of his said, "Is that a cloud", and Roy replied, "No, it's similar to the smoke fires we lit in Singapore." Roy told me he knew that something 'had been hammered that day'.

Roy further advised that he had been speaking with Dr Ian Duncan (doctor of Camp 17) who saw a flash and then a huge gust of wind blew out two to three windows (that were left) in the camp. (Bear in mind the camp as mentioned was some 20 kms away). Roy said two to three days later 'the radiated particles' came down, but at the time they didn't know what it was and subsequently the danger of those particles.

I asked Roy whether he saw Nagasaki itself later on? Roy stated that he went right through the middle of ground zero on a train headed out three weeks later. He said the area was 'a flat area littered with galvanised iron and nothing was standing.' Roy and his mates were given a quick medical check in Nagasaki and were disinfected (including their souvenirs) and finally went home by an American ship via Manilla. (The 'Enola Gay' B29 Bomber who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima is a display now at the National Air and Space Museum at Chantilly, Virginia USA - next to Dulles International Airport) which is 45 kms west of Washington DC).

What was interesting about this conversation is that Roy stated he was 'alive by six hours'. He stated that the Japanese conducted 'Tenkos' (numbering off/head counts on the parade ground) in



Camp 17 (which was a 'normal' part of camp life), he stated that the Japanese had built pillboxes at each corner of the parade ground. Roy said, "These were not for camp defences as the opening to the pillboxes faced inwards!" Roy subsequently discovered that the Japanese had planned to slaughter all POWs on the parade ground that night at 1800 hours. At 1200 hours the same day the Emperor stated that the war was over - Roy and all the other boys in Camp 17 were alive by six hours. Roy later advised that he spoke again with Dr Duncan who had earlier spoken with a Japanese Interpreter named Yamaguchi, who reiterated, "You are alive by six hours".

After the war Roy stated he was 'flabbergasted by the size of the B29's' that came over the camp dropping the 44 gallon drums of supplies on the parade ground, the last plane he saw up close was in 1942 and most probably a Hudson. He said several of the drums had two pound containers of tinned fruit which smashed open because of the weight of the load.

Roy said the second drop of supplies to the camp, the pilot had to circle about six times, as the men were waving and rejoicing at the site of the returning B29's. Roy said the pilot had to drop the 44 gallon loads adjacent the camp which crashed through several houses, killing several occupants.

My dad said during the drops in his camp in Kobe, the drops initially killed a Japanese Guard; covering the goods in blood. He said it didn't stop him from eating the chocolate contained therein and smoking the cigarettes. He went on to say that, "after that, the Japs learnt to duck".

Andrew Mason is the Manager of Death Railway Tours where our company was borne from 17 years of travel to the River Kwai region. He is the son of an ExPOW who served in Malaya, Singapore and Japan. In 1991 he joined the (RAAF) Police where he duxed his RAAF Police Course.

In 1998 he represented the RAAF at the opening of the Hellfire Pass Museum and became a life member of the Thai-Burma Railway Centre in 2003. The same year he qualified for his black belt in the Korean Martial Art of Hapkido and published his travel book on the railway titled, 'A Different Brand Of English'.

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