



Newsletter

September 2015

Hello fellow travellers,

Not everyone is into social media like Facebook, Twitter and the other myriad of on-line communications, so I have raised a newsletter to highlight some developments with the tours and business.

Railway Pictures

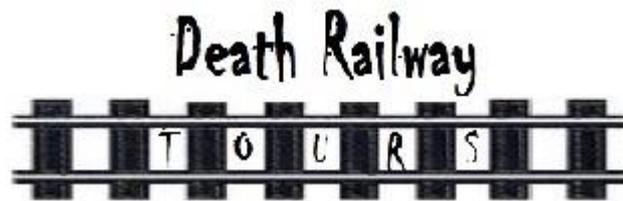
When I wrote my book some time ago I was lucky to get in touch with Private George Aspinall's son – who I got permission from to use some of his dad's photos. (I paid for the privilege but I was happy with that arrangement). The pics I used were from Georges book 'Changi Photographer' written by Tim Bowden – a fantastic book and read. What George did on the Railway with the camera and his skills using film and creating a pictorial of those days was incredible (and at fantastic risk).

Not long after publication his son got in touch and sent me two original photographs – one in Singapore and one in Cholera Gulch on the Railway. The pictures are priceless and never made it to the Australian War Memorial with the rest of the collection. Whilst I felt lucky to have them in my possession, I thought it better for remembrance that a wider audience could see them. So I donated them to the Thai/Burma Railway Museum in 2013 – it was a wide-eyed Curator that took charge of them and with some reluctance I saw them off in good hands.

Medals.

I was very disappointed to find on-line one of the men I have been visiting in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery for over 15 years had his medals recently for sale with a UK based on-line Auction House. I was overseas at the time in Gallipoli and discovered this when I returned.

It would have been an absolute privilege to have worn his medals and represent him with that link on Remembrance or ANZAC Days. Alas – I will continue to tell his story and a short succinct intro to his life. I contacted the auctioneer (to put me in touch with the buyer) but unfortunately no replies.



You're probably thinking 'who would want to sell such a treasure?' I'm of the same thinking however understand when people get older, children spread far and wide; goods and chattels are sold as whole lots when they pass. I would have held onto the medals for a few years and ultimately donated them to the Thai/Burma Railway Museum.

Bangkok Volatility

Bangkok has been a political melting pot for many decades – Taksin Shinawatra was a former Prime Minister who was once popular and now very much out of favour and living overseas. His daughter is very high in government which is how some of the political unrest began in recent times. The family is a very rich one with allegations of corruption whilst in office etc. Several years ago we had the red shirts vs the yellow shirts; political opponents set about voicing disdain for the government or showing their approval via protests.

The recent Bangkok bombing was a terrible event (and how close was Jimmy Barnes to the incident!) We will always exercise a degree of caution whilst on tour and with the places we visit. High security measures will be in place at Hellfire Pass and Kanchanaburi War Cemetery during major events like ANZAC Day etc. In fact on ANZAC Day there are bag searches and a lot local Police and armed Military Police swarming through the area. (Check out their immaculate uniforms when you see them).

Our time is also minimised in Bangkok where we spend the bulk of our tours away from the capital and in the stunning River Kwai. In the capital the main tourist place of interest for our tour is the Bangkok Palace – the security here is very tight including bag searches and security wands.

Tavoy 8 Article

I'm pleased to announce I received the Runner's Up award for my article on 'The Tavoy 8' from the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital (Story & Art) Competition in Victoria. We visit these men when we head to Burma – these group of 4th Anti-tank Men were murdered by the Japanese for a group escape in June 1942. Brigadier Varley was instrumental in trying to get them off the trumped up charges, alas he failed and all eight were shot. The article is on my website under 'Interviews & Articles' if you would like to read it.



Doccos and Movies

I have a number of documentaries and movies on the railway and have them on all tours. One documentary we'll watch as a group – as it's the back story on the whole railway and events leading up. The others I'll bring will include:

- a. The Railway Man.
- b. To End All Wars.
- c. Weary Dunlop returns to the River Kwai (1987).

About six weeks to go for the November 2015 trip with lots to see and experience.

Yours traveling,

Andrew
Manager
Death Railway Tours

Scroll down to see the George Aspinall pictures I received and donated to the Railway Centre.

Death Railway

T O U R S



Above and right are original photos by George Aspinall - kindly donated to my book by his son Robert Aspinall. This is what George said of the above picture:

'This photograph brings back many traumatic memories. It shows the cholera isolation hospital area at Shimo Sotokurai No 1 Camp. Cholera patients were housed under canvas on the right of the photo. In the centre is the operating table used for amputations, ulcer treatment and post mortems. A mosquito net was hung over the cross bar above the table to try and keep the blowflies away. The box on the table contains what surgical instruments were available. If someone died, the body was carried on a bamboo stretcher (there is one to the left of the hospital tent) over to the small holding tent on the left. Later the bodies were burned in an area towards the back left hand side picture. There is an access road running across the back of the picture, and a pile of logs can be seen. These were telegraph poles for the railway. I think it is quite remarkable that there is so much detail, as I was using coarse-grained X-ray material at this stage, and my developing chemicals were becoming weak through too much use.'

(Aspinall, 1993:121).

My thanks to Robert Aspinall.



Above: 'This is probably one of my most risky shots, taken through a hole in a warehouse wall of a Japanese soldier guarding a six-inch gun. He SEEMS to be looking straight at the camera!'

(Aspinall, 1993:62).