

Death Railway

T O U R I S

Travel on the Death Railway

We headed out at 0830 today so a semi sleep in. We boarded Long Tail boats and head under the Bridge towards Chungkai. It was a pleasant way to get to the other war cemetery in town.

Disembarked the Long Tails and headed up towards the cemetery. We visited several men in this cemetery.



Chungkai War Cemertery

Onto Takilen Railway station – where it was a former POW Camp. Our train was unfortunately delayed by around 2 hours but the benefit was Pat upgraded us to First Class. We got cushions to sit on, tea/coffee and a certificate. Nice touches I think.

Got to Krasae Cave area and disembarked. Lunch was a buffet style affair with some good tucker. We read some notes about guards who worked in the area. The guards were all given nicknames by the POWs, like:

- The Kanyu Kid,
- Boy Bastard, etc

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Takilen Station with a bag of coke

After lunch we are boarded the bus and headed over to Wampho – walked along the track and visited the Viaduct – famous for its vistas and incredible works on a cliff face. Over 1,000 men were thrown at this job where it took them around 17 days to complete. There are a couple of drill holes to point out here along with where the former POW Camp was situated.

Our next stop was over at the Bridge Over the River Kwai – we headed across and the heavens opened up, so it was really a lightning trip. We saw the bridge, the Yankee monument etc.

The group called it a day and headed to their rooms, I invited them all out to join me on an unofficial tour of a few other places but I got no takers – don't blame them because it's been a long day and it's howling down with rain outside.

I walked the wrong way up the hotel path and got soaked. Found my way to the bridge and organised a Songthaew. I visited Chungkai Cutting first, there are two cuttings in this area and are the first of many throughout the region



The group at Takilen Station

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I went and visited Boon Pong's house – although it was closed for visitors they still let me in to check out the mini museum dedicated to Boon. They had certificates of all the accolades he received from all the various country's – in particular: Australia, Holland and Britain.

Over the road is the former site of the Japanese HQ for Kanburi. A two storey place that would have some stories to tell inside if the walls could talk.

Back to the bridge I didn't know what the time was so thought id have something to eat here before heading back. I had chicken and cashew nuts – very nice.

Walked back over the bridge in the dark – was a bit spooky and back to the hotel room. Caught up on some emails etc.

Spoke with Phil from Perth and caught up with him at his hotel room for a couple of Leo beers was good to catch up and catch up with the Lend Lease gossip.

Andrew



Chungkai Cutting

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Yesterday was a massive day on tour with the group from Battletours. We started out from the hotel and drove out to Hellfire Pass. We ventured over to the museum and I checked out the earphones for all the clients. They walked about the museum and listened to all the commentary about the railway and Hellfire Pass.

I interviewed the late Bill Haskell (one of Weary's men) some ten years ago and he was awesome to talk to



Hellfire Pass

He worked in Hellfire Pass and through the whole Hintok area. This 4 km area was some of the hardest terrain on the 415 Death Railway.

After the museum visit I checked out a walkie talkie, we all got some water (I took a camel pack to top up the clients bottles) and headed down to Hellfire Pass (HFP). Ironically HFP was started on 25 April 1943 and was during the 'Speedo' where the Japanese pushed the men into 24 hour a day work with relentless bashings and back breaking toil.

It has been reported there were 68 murders in HFP. One Aussie chap we visited in Kanburi War Cemetery.

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The Remembrance Stone

We visited the sites of:

- The trestle bridges,
- The 7 m Embankment,
- The Three Tier Bridge,
- Hintok Cutting,

All up about a 2.5 km walk from HFP. Can no longer access Pack of Cards Bridge or Compressor Cutting which is a shame – the Thai Army has reclaimed some land – boohhooooo to them. We all made it safe and sound and Patrick (our Thai Tour Guide) met us with a well organised Songthaew (mini bus). We viewed the mountain where Hintok Mountain camp was situated. (Was offered a block of land there a decade ago – bit like owning a piece of Gallipoli). From the HFP we ventured to lunch at Namtok (means waterfall). We had a set menu lunch which was Thai food and delish.



7M Embankment

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From here we visited Sai Yok Noi waterfall and had a look at a period locomotive. A coal driven machine that was used on the serious accents. The wood fired locos were used on the flats due to the lack of horsepower to pull heavy weight. They had areas where locos could move to secondary tracks to change locos and stage rolling freight.

I showed the group the bamboo trees and in particular some examples of the bamboo spikes. Occasionally these spikes were hollow and brilliantly utilised by the allied Doctors as hypodermic needles – clever.



Sai Yok Noi Waterfall

Over 1500 blood transfusions were performed in Nong Pladuk 'hospital' alone.

Weary and his gallant assistants invented the intravenous drip that supplied lifesaving saline to Cholera victims – those victims could perish in a matter of 2 hours once the disease was contracted. The body lost salts and fluids. Mates didn't recognise their mates after several hours. Some 60% were being saved later in the war with this method.

Back to the hotel with a small kip on the bus. Video FB'd the family but my end has volume issues. Can hear them but not me. Anyway I'm a quick typer so had to make do.

Have organised with Pat several wreaths for HFP and Kanburi War Cemetery for tomorrow. Will be big. Can wait to hear again the last post echo among the limestone granite of the pass. I hope the bagpipes dude shows up too. The Gordon Highlanders along with the Argyll and Southern Highlanders were legendary in these parts too.

Go Pies.

Lest We Forget.

Mace

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The Dawn Service

Up at 0220 hours, I had organised all my clothes, medals and things so it was a quick shower and down to reception. Enjoyed a very quick coffee and onto the bus to head towards HFP.

Brian - our Vietnam Veteran had some colourful AWOL stories and also the one where he got locked up. He even sung us a war time era song. Asked whether he was a tenor or baritone, he replied that he was a 'shocker'.

We told stories all the way to HFP and entering Hellfire Pass.



An ExPOW at Hellfire Pass

Alighted the bus we headed down past the museum to the cutting, dimly lit by citronella candles. Its dark and we are keen to secure a decent possie as are the other tourists with the same mindset. We got a good spot over near the cameramen and a few of the girls got a seat after Neil spoke up. Well done Neil. Anticipation builds in the humidity as a false start happens when we are reminded to turn off mobile phones.

Finally the ceremony is underway. Having the service in this place is simply brilliant and at times quite emotional. The Last Post is haunting through the cutting as it is played from the top of one of the stairways.

The bagpiper was there dressed in all his clobber - he'd be hot. The pipes compete with the jungle as it starts to come alive from the breaking dawn

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The Group at HFP

We are around the corner from where Neil and Heather's dad would have scaled the wall to get out of the way from Goldie Tooth.

On the way back i got a picture of one of the exPOWs in HFP.

Back up to the museum we had coffee and ANZAC biscuits. I don't drink Rum, so left that to the purists - I'd rather drink Nyals Decongestant. Said hooray to Khun Aye the Assistant Manager of the HFP Museum who is always friendly and hospitable. I met her late husband years ago the original manager of the museum - a great bloke.

We headed back to Kanburi on the bus and had a quieter bus ride back. I read the poem about 'The Corporal and His Pal' – about CPL Rod Breavington and his 3 private mates who were shot dead on Changi Beach for escape. Did you know the Jap who ordered those executions was sentenced to death by firing squad. He was executed on the same spot on Changi Beach.

A couple of paragraphs from Alistair Urquhart's book, *The Forgotten Highlander* (2011) the book I just finished and highly recommend:

'As the trails went on it became obvious just how much bunkum all of the bushido code had been

The so-called 'Way of the Warrior' precluded capture yet so many of these ring leaders had been captured – the shame that to them had made us so despicable now seem bearable and certainly preferable to the ordained hara-kiri. Happy among the 256 Japanese War Criminals to be executed were a loathsome duo from the Death Railway. The Black Prince had failed to fall on his Samurai Sword and revealed himself to

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be the coward that most swaggering bullies are. He was hanged, as was the Mad Mongrel. Inexplicably, Dr Death received only ten years.' (Urquhart, 2011: 298).

Back at the Felix hotel I got a change of shirt and had brekkie. Didn't have long to hang about and we were back on the bus and headed to the cemetery.

Kanchanaburi War Cemetery - Service

Entered via a metal detector and we dropped off our wreaths in the queue to be placed on the Cross of Sacrifice



Rod Beattie and I - my eyes shut LOL

We sat in the Pommy area of the cemetery to the right of the Cross.

The service got under way and was similar in fashion to the HFP service – Susan liked this service better. I did too because I like to hear the old fellas speak and this is the opportunity. We all laid the wreaths and were assisted by Quiet Lion kids from W.A.

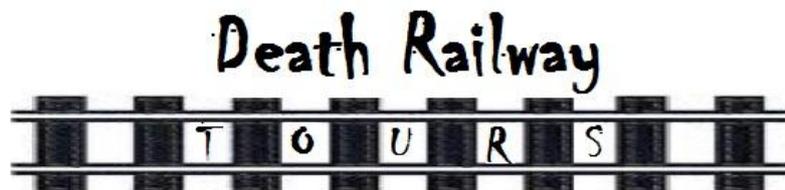
The Kiwis present did the Haka outside the Cholera Hut with the inscribed names of the 300. Was very moving and powerful.

The Aussie Govt puts on a free BBQ sausage sizzle and free beer. I had several. I got one of the exPOWs a beer too.

We were lucky to get an audience with Rod Beattie and fire some questions his way for his expert opinion. Rod has been the manager of the Kanburi War Cemetery for some 20 years or more and the Director and originator of the Railway Centre. He is instrumental in provided the detailed information to the 2710 Aussie who perished on the Death Railway

We read my poem dedicated to the 'Known Unto Gods' in the Aussie section near the RAAFies.

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All the official ceremonies catered for, back on the bus where Neil and I split from the group and headed to Crackers Bar. We walked in and found the Pies down by 25 points or so. The Pies however rallied to brilliant efforts from Sidebottom and Swan. Pies win – Swanny BOG.

After our several Change beers and encouraging words of wisdom in the bar with other revellers we needed some desperate pampering. We headed across the road and both had a winners foot massage. Probably exactly what the Pies players were having back at the Westpac Centre – we are in good company.

We headed back to the Felix on a Songthaew.

I laid on my bed exhausted from the day – blood circulating very well from the Chang and the massage. I fight sleep and get a sudden burst to continue with the day. I headed back out to Farang Road and had some dinner. I had a Pad Thai with chicken. Awesome. I wanted another massage so this time had an oil massage for 2 hours. I think I was conscious for about ten minutes – hope I didn't annoy fellow neighbouring massage recipients with my snoring. LOL.

Still a bit peckish, so headed back to the same restaurant – he was surprised when I asked for the menu again – of course with a Chang. I told him I was just a guts. This time I had a red curry with chicken and plain rice. Very delish – ok now full.

A 5 piece Thai band came on and were fantastic – they played the best version I have heard of Smoke on the Water. A rustle and commotion outside the bar was the 1% Bikey Group parking their bikes, they had a table reserved in front of the band. Probably about ten of them – some wonderful Harleys parked out front. Unrelated, unlinked and quite randomly I was wearing a Harley Davidson shirt – one I had handmade in Ko Samui.

Back to the hotel around 2330 hours, I notice some youngies in the street and the effects of a long day on the grog – I think time to call a night. I get another Songthaew back to the Felix and hit the hay.

That was a big and memorable ANZAC Day.

Home Phu Toey

We ventured out this morning to Home Phu Toey, a 600 acre resort run by the late Khun Kanit Wanachote - Khun Kanit only passed away several weeks ago.

We visited the Weary Dunlop Peace Park and saw the big statue of Sir Edward. The hut behind him was full of interesting Railway itmes including a large map of the railway with the diferent POW Camps etc, information on the late great Bill Haskell and other bit and pieces.

Adjacent to that is a memorial to the Medical staff on the railway.

On the hill is a former locomotive with rice cars the men would have traveled in up to these parts

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Weary statue

Down the hill is the Jack Chalker Gallery - reproductions of some of his war time collection that show tropical ulcers, camp life, hospital scenes etc in vivid detail.

Outside the Chalker Gallery we saw recreated huts with interesting contraptions the POWs made like a Dentist Chair, exercise bike etc.

Tiger Temple

With the Peace Park completed we ventured out to the hot Tiger Temple - a very well trodden tourist attraction. We signed the obligatory contract at the front gate and entered past the Water Buffalo. Saw a baby Tiger first and all the clients took a pic with him - the sun was making him sleepy. The next port of call was the canyon and to take some pics with the larger Tigers.

Back to the bus and back to the Felix for the last night there.

The rest of the arvo was a day off and we got back at a reasonable time. I had a swim in the pool and had a chat with a local Thai on holiday at the Felix who told me it was School Holidays in the area.



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We hit the road early from Kanburi and headed in the bus towards the Floating Markets of Damnoen. Once we got there we loaded into a large Long Tail boat and travelled the canals of the area. Finally reaching the first area where they sell all kinds ofcrap really. The market is overpriced compared to other areas and they can be a bit pushy with their sales. No I don't want that trinklet or watch. LOL. We have to roll with the punches as tourists don't we.

We ventured over to another area that seems larger than the first. Waltzed around the place checking both sides of the canal. Same type of stuff, just more of it. I am partial to the Benjarong Thai China - and like looking at it. Asking how much though enters into unnecessary conversation with the calculator wielding local - strumming away at figures and thrusting them in my eye view.



Floating market

Just wanted to look.

There seems to be the obligatory snake, spider and monkey at these places and its nearly an always overpriced fee to get a pic with one. We were led out the exit area and shown plates with our pictures taken on them - most of them were quite good I thought - but I have one from several years ago in Phuket.

I had a latte at one of shops and it was not like home - it was cheap but I think the milk was a different sort and it was fairly plain. Nonetheless I consumed it all. LOL.

All aboard the bus and we are off to the Rose Garden Cultural Shows. First off we had lunch buffet style in the main restaurant. Donna was still feeling crook and was sorted by Patrick off in the first aid room. Pat does a great job with looking after everyone - he is a firm believer of 'everybody have good time'. The food is a smorgasbord of international, Thai, Japanese and other dishes with desserts and roasts. One can over eat here due to the massive choice. Quality of food is excellent.

Dinner done we ventured outside for a wander and have a look at some of the displays and a bit of window shopping

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Canals of markets

The elephants were fed with bananas and everyone got a good close up of them.

We saw the elephants doing a show performing how they pull logs, entered the water to cool off, drink and dance.

Moving into the large auditorium we saw a cultural show of:

- a. music,
- b. Thai Boxing,
- c. Weapons (Tomfas and Swords),
- d. Thai Wedding,
- e. Thai dancing (after the wedding) etc.

Was a good show and very colourful. The 'Saints Go Marching In' sounds good Thai style. Mentioned to Neil I will bring the Collingwood score sheet next time for them to practice. LOL.

Back on the bus and we are headed for Bangkok. We did good time to get to the hotel, but I suppose it was Sunday and the traffic lighter

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Lunch at the Rose Garden

. Everyone squeezed into a Tuk Tuk and headed for the hotel. Checked back into our hotel the Park Plaza on Soi 18.

Farewell dinner was a European style set menu that was absolutely delish. The chicken was so tender and juicy, hhhmmmm, arrggghhhhhh. The group gave me a wonderful letter and tip and I am most grateful for their kinds words and gift. Awesome. We cheered Pat a few time and said hooray to Donna and Enid.

Out into the Sauna that is Bangkok and we got a short Tuk Tuk lift to the end of the Soi – to Sukhumvit. We crossed the roadway at Sukhumvit and Asok and ventured down one of the Red Light Areas of Soi Cowboy. This is one of the sets for Hangover Part 2 and worth a look for the Neon alone. We walked from one side to the other. Circling around to the Asok Bangkok Transit System (BTS) Sky Train.

From there we arranged some tickets via the electronic machine and got on board the next train headed to Siam. Gee they are well air-conditioned these things. Hard to get off into the sauna.



Cultural Show - Kickboxing

We walked several hundred metres to the State Tower.

We took pics and had one of the nice young blokes take some pics for us. This restaurant also features in the movie: The Hangover Part 2. We checked the bar menu for drinks and they are way too pricey. Way too over the top, so we ventured back down the lift to see the lads.

They thought we'd be awhile so had a 30 min massage. I convinced two of the girls to do the same whilst we waited. I think they all liked the massages. I know I do.

Back on the BTS, changed trains and back to Sukhumvit Soi 18 around midnight.

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Been a massive day and another great trek to Thailand.