

## VACANT CHAIR SHELLHOLE

October 2012

### **Thailand's Hellfire Pass: The True Story of the Bridge on the River Kwai**

Written by Tinahm

As early as the 1880s, the idea of building a rail link between Burma and China, passing through Thailand, was under consideration by the British authorities - but without funds the idea was killed. With the start of World War II, the idea was given new life as it was wanted as a tactical military supply line for the movement of troops and equipment to the Burma Front, and eventually for the attack on India.

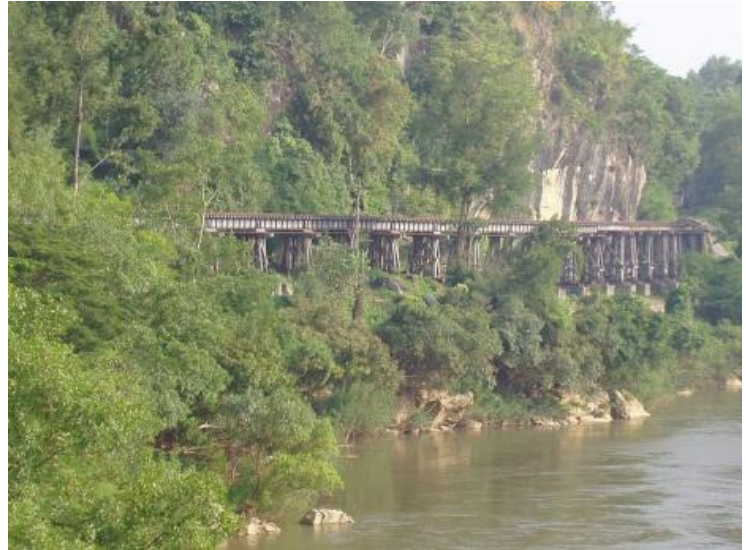


Originally, the Japanese army's intention was to use Asians to construct the railway, and most of the railway laborers did indeed come from Burma, Java, and Malaya, numbering 240,000 men. Then in 1942, as World War II was underway and the fall of Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia came, the occupying forces found themselves with a large number of prisoners of war; an occurrence they had not considered.

Photo: ©Pascal Engelmajer

What to do with these prisoners was a problematic subject for the Japanese military; then it was decided that these men - experienced, regimented military personnel - were to be used to advance the Japanese war effort.

Photo: makilica



The Allied prisoners of war were forced to cut the pass for the new railway, and live in the terrible conditions that went with that; they even enticed their own fellow Japanese men to come and work on the rail pass with the promise of a good job - a dollar and a pound of rice. Between 1942 and 1943, more than 60,000 prisoners of war were transported to the railway project as well as thousands of unaccounted for Japanese men.

The men labored under extreme force from the Japanese engineers and Korean guards at the pinnacle of the wettest monsoon season seen in many years. The working conditions were hellish. The men needed to excavate the soil and rock to a depth of 20 meters with just the bare minimum of equipment. They were issued 8-pound hammers, steel tap drills, explosives, picks, and shovels. Some minor assistance was given by the use of jackhammers, and the vast majority of waste material had to be removed by hand using cane baskets and rice sacks hung between two poles.



Photo: Lorna

Starvation provisions, overloading of work, dismal or absent accommodation and sanitation, and the individual viciousness of Japanese and Korean engineers and guards, took their expected toll. Disease (predominantly dysentery, malaria, beriberi and cholera), brutality (69 men were beaten to death by their guards) and 12 to 18 hour daily work shifts made for a high death rate.

In fact, the work went on 24 hours a day with the aid of oil pot lamps and bamboo/wood fires that were kept burning all night long. When looking down on the work area at night it looked like working in the "jaws of hell" - thus the workers gave it the name "Hellfire Pass".

Over 13,000 prisoners of war died during the time between late 1942 and late 1945. The number of deaths of the volunteer laborers is harder to calculate, but around 100,000 seems to be the most dependable number.

Photo: Diliff



During the infamous 'speedo' period, July to October 1943, the extreme anxiety of the Japanese engineers to finish construction on time, under relentless demands from their superiors in Tokyo, meant that numerous men were forced to continuously perform grinding manual labor - 62 hours work out of 72 hours appears to be the documented record. An astonishing estimate of 400 men lost their lives in just three short months due to the cruel labor conditions and what appeared to be the first outbreak of cholera.



Originally, the Japanese estimated that it would take five to six years to finish the line; it did not. Building over the bodies of the dead while being forced to work at an inhumane speed, the line took only a mere 16 months to complete.

Photo: Eli Duke

The railway was finished on October 17, 1943 and operated an average of only six trains a day - well below its expected contribution. The railway was never built to a level of enduring stability. It was regularly bombed by the Royal Air Force during the Burma Campaign, but continued to run until the final victory of Allied forces in August 1945. After the war, in 1957, the Thai government re-opened the section of line from Nong Pladuk to Nam Tok and this part of the railway still operates today. Sadly, the jungle has now reclaimed much of the abandoned sections, but embankments, cuttings, and bridge sites can still be seen.

## CRAZY OLYMPIC EVENT.



Live Pigeon Shooting was the only time in Olympic history when animals were deliberately killed in the name of sport. Even at the turn of the 20th century, the outrage was strong enough that they cancelled it after one Olympics. "The idea to use live birds for the pigeon shooting turned out to be a rather unpleasant choice," American sports historian Andrew Strunk wrote dryly in a 1988 article on the 1900 Paris Olympics. "Maimed birds were writhing on the ground, blood and feathers were swirling in the air and women with parasols were weeping in the chairs set up nearby."

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An old nun who was living in a convent next to a construction site noticed the coarse language of the workers and decided to spend some time with them to correct their ways. She decided she would take her lunch; sit with the workers; and talk with them. She put her sandwich in a brown bag and walked over to the spot where the men were eating.

Sporting a big smile, she walked up to the group and asked:

"And do you men know Jesus Christ?" They shook their heads and looked at each other very confused. One of the workers looked up into the steelworks and yelled out, "Anybody up there know Jesus Christ?"

One of the steelworkers yelled down, "Why?"

The worker yelled back, "'Cause his wife's here with his lunch."

R	A	I	N	Y	G	L	A	M	P	S	E	W
C	O	A	C	H	O	N	L	A	M	I	N	A
D	R	E	M	M	A	H	I	P	A	S	S	Y
A	U	T	R	U	N	K	A	T	A	M	E	I
O	L	M	P	A	R	I	S	N	O	I	S	Y
N	T	E	A	Y	G	I	P	E	I	O	S	O
P	U	G	B	O	L	T	R	A	S	A	H	T
I	I	G	A	M	E	I	S	D	E	J	R	S
C	A	K	F	A	F	I	A	L	R	K	A	T
K	I	A	J	L	O	P	W	R	V	L	A	G
A	E	A	L	O	R	A	Q	U	I	O	I	L
L	Q	E	S	H	O	V	A	L	C	M	V	I
O	H	A	Y	P	D	W	Q	P	E	B	U	N
J	A	P	A	N	H	N	A	I	L	I	O	G

HELLFIRE	RAIL	BOLT	NAIL	HAMMER	SHOVAL	PICK	
SHOOTING	PARIS	JAPAN	ROD	ANIMAL	GUN	TRUNK	
SERVICE	PASS	RAIN	MUD	LAMPS	OIL	LEAF	GUM
TEA	GAME	TRAIN	COACH	SEW	TOY	PIGY	TAME

## Camouflage face paint 'resists intense heat from bombs'

It is said to resist temperatures up to 600C - as hot as a burning cigarette - for up to 15 seconds. heat waves from a bomb blast lasted two seconds and could cook skin. Heat-resistant paint for equipment with high operating temperatures, such as boilers, fans and ovens, has existed for some time, but the new substance is also waterproof, non-irritating, easy to apply - and it repels insects. Instead of the traditional make-up ingredients such as oil and wax that melt and burn the skin when exposed to high temperatures, the scientists used silicone, which does not absorb extreme heat but reflects it.

All military camouflage paint in the US has to contain an insect repellent called Deet, which is extremely flammable. To ensure it does not catch fire, the scientists mixed it with a water-rich hydrogel substance.

The lead researcher, Robert Lochhead, said the paint could also be used for fire-proof clothes, tents, and even tanks, and the team was working on a colourless version for fire fighter's.

Die vrou stap by 'n petshop in en vra sy soek 'n papegaai.

Verkoopsman wys haar n papegaai wat sy eie persoonlikheid het.

Verkoopsman:" Vra die papegaai iets."

Vrou vra die papegaai:"Hoe lyk ek vir jou?"

Papegaai antwoord:"Soos n slet!"

Vrou is baie ontsteld en kla by die Verkoopsman. Hy gryp die papegaai en hol agtertoe waar hy die papegaai in n emmer koue water dompel. "Nou gedra jy vir jou en antwoord die vrou op n ordentlike manier!", se die Verkoopsman vir die papegaai.

Hy bring die papegaai terug en gooi hom in die hok en sê vir die vrou:

"Vra hom weer iets"

Vrou: Ok. As ek by die huis kom met n man, wat sal jy dink?

Papegaai: Hy is jou man

Vrou: Met 2 mans?

Papegaai: Jou man en sy broer.

Vrou: Met 3 mans?

Papegaai: Jou man, sy broer en jou broer.

Vrou: 4 mans?

Papegaai: Ag bring daai f.....n emmer hier, ek het mos gesê sy is 'n slet!!



Thanks moth Shaun



**Derrick Special**

Used by the French during Vietnam, this vehicle was put together when the French military was lacking the money to provide more sophisticated equipment. They used what they had and often had to improvise in order to try to keep the military equipped. The scooter-mounted cannon was a scooter like vehicle that held a 75mm cannon. The vehicle was mainly used by paratroopers during the 1950s.

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