

## MACV Army "A" Photo Team Travels To Thailand

SUBJECT: King Gets SEATO Briefing on Exercise Ramasoon  
Thai Army Gets New Base At Bridge Of River Kwea (Kwai)  
Mitropob Fair

My allegiance was to the organization providing my paycheck in the military that was the Army and ultimately the American tax payer. Any personal snap shots were gotten before or after the official movie coverage of the event. In the case of the king's press briefing, the slides were taken after the event, thus not the best shots of the king.

Back in Bangkok, more strange things about the Thai culture came to light. While crossing a boulevard, I was nearly run over. In Thailand, they drive on the opposite side of the road, from most countries. Looking to the left, as I did states-side and in Vietnam, before crossing the street, the traffic was clear, But the traffic was coming from the right. As I stepped off the side walk, I was nearly hit.

A really strange feeling was driving in an American government vehicle, with the steering wheel on the blind side to the passing lane. Our Thai asked for help to check if the road was clear ahead, to pasa other traffic. The person on the passenger side would say YES or NO. When we said "YES" meant the person saying it was clear had room to pass, if he were driving. Most Thai drivers were slow to accelerate, causing us to say "No-No", halfway into the passing lane. This lack of coordinated team work, caused many near accidents. Several hours on a two lane road, we were all shaken to the core, if not having brown under shorts, from the horrifying experience, using an American vehicle on Thai roads.

In a baroque custom, alined with the country's culture, the hotel barber shop had no qualms of providing customers hair cuts or manicures, but asking for a pedicure was a sacriligious NO-NO. A pedicure was like asking the hair styling staff to clean a cess-pool. Their up-bringing, the country's culture dicitated, that the head was the highest point and the feet were next to pond scum. Not worthy of touching. This was very differt from western culture, but a fact of life in Thailand.

More than once watching the English version of the Thai news, it seemed the Thai Government to have a simple solution to Inter-nation referendums, concerning foreigners. It stated, if you are a Thai citizen, you have all the rights and privilages of the Thai Government. If not show your passport.

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In the hotel lobby, watching the color TV, I saw an unusual professional sporting event, in the form of Thai Boxing. I viewed as the Thai boxers used their feet to kick the opponent, as well as their fists to punch the rival. In 1968, this was a new concept to boxing, and a strange sight to behold.

By now, I saw that almost every DASPO member was wearing a unit ring. In the bar, I asked one of my DASPO buddies, where he got the ring. I had seen several different versions. We were soon in a taxi cab to the shop. Arriving, the entire block seemed to be jewelry businesses. Inside the atmosphere was different from any jewelry store, I'd been to. Not only did they have stools for customers to sit on, but provided free cokes or coffee to shoppers. I was to learn that many jewelry shops offered a courtesy car, to pick-up customers from the hotels. I had been warned, that just as in Vietnam, never settle for the first price quoted. By haggling, you could get the item for one-half to one third the original price. This jewelry store had several designs of the DASO ring.. The most appealing one had a Cats-Eye stone in the center, with DA Special Photo around the border. Another version had the globe with DASPO in bold letters in the middle of the globe, or along the rim. I think the third ring, just had DASPO across the top of the ring.. I believe I paid about \$65.00 for the Cats-Eye version. It took about an hour to size the ring to my finger.

Waiting for the sizing to be completed, I got an education in jade, The store clerk pointed out the different between Burmese, Australian, Philippine and even Mexican jade products. I also saw a very green ring. The clerk said it was emerald. He quotes me a price of over 200,000 Baht. The Baht was the Thai currency and worth a nickel. While attempting to deduce the figure into American at 20 baht to the buck, the clerk states, he will get me number-one price. Seconds later he was back with a price of 93,000 baht. Still mind-boggling I couldn't comprehend if the price was around \$200.00 or \$2000,00 dollars. As I write this 93,000 Baht computes to \$186.00

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One of Thailand's more noted exports was Thai-silk. Many jewelry stores sold this prized broadcloth. On the Dec. 68 trip to Bangkok, I bought several yards of the product. Unaware of a different, I purchased  $2\frac{1}{2}$  meters. However unlike American bolts of fabric that measure about 50 inches wide, the Thai silk was only one meter wide or 39 inches. What I brought home provided enough material for a very short Chinese style dress..

In the corner of the jewelry shop were buckets of pebbles. Each bucket was labelled in Thai and English. The stones were un-cut, un-polished jade, ruby, sapphire, topez and several other raw gem stones, that one could buy by the kilo. During the Dec. trip I bought a  $\frac{1}{2}$  kilo of ruby, jade and sapphire rocks. The stones ranged from near dust to carat sized pebbles. I think I paid roughly \$15.00 for slightly over a pound of each gem stones. Unwittingly, I gave the bags of gem stones away, totally unaware that some large base craft shops had lapidary equipment for cutting and polishing gem stones. I think I took a double dose of dummy pills, to stay stupid.

Another spooky thing connected with driving in Thailand, was the driver never sat directly behind the steering wheel. The driver either crunched themselves against the door, or was seated close to the radio and air-conditioning controls. They would drive the cars from this eerie awkward position. The reason was that Buddha, himself sat directly behind the steering wheel blessing and insuring the driver had a safe journey.

On the 8th of March as captions (Exhibit F shows), the photo team drove to Kanchanburi region, to film the construction of the Thai Army's Black Panther Divisions new base camp. It was during this several hour drive, that we endured near catastrophic experiences trying to pass slower traffic.