

MACV Army "A" Photo Team Travels To Thailand

SUBJECT: King Of Thailand Briefed On SEATO Exercise Ramasoon
Construction Of New Thai Army Base At Bridge of River
Kwea (Kwai)
Mitropob Fair

The only thing MAC-Thai told the MACV Photo Team, was that the new base was in the vicinity of the Bridge Of The River Kwai. We were hoping the driver had more explicit directions. A generation prior, during World War II, the bridge site famed by book and Hollywood movie, had no connection with the Vietnam War efforts. However, with over 100,000 POWs dying constructing the railroad and bridges. Plus thousands liberated after the war, it's quite probable some service members fighting in Vietnam, had fathers, uncles, grandfathers, or other relatives, that suffered atrocities preformed on the prisoners, by the Japanese, during an earlier war. (See booklet G)

In the open countryside, we all searched for some sign, any symbol of a major construction project near by. We were attuned to any marker referring to the Thai Black Panther Division, RMK/BRJ, or Army Corp of Engineer sign at every dirt road crossing, we passed. None of the unpaved roads had a name or number. There were no structures on the side roads, as far as anyone could see. We had no idea if these roads led to a tea, coffee, rubber or even a tapicoa plantation, over the horizon, or just dead-ended. We were on the look out for large trucks, transporting construction equipment, such as bulldozers or graders, in either direction as we drove. This effort was in vain. We searched for trucks carrying construction materials, like lumber, cement blocks, etc, or dump truck carrying gravel, but came up empty handed. When it became clear, we were hopelessly lost, the driver mentioned a restaurant at the Bridge of The River Kwea (Kwai). where we could get something to eat and see if anyone there could get us directions. I remember SP4 Nash saying, that he skipped breakfast, and could eat a horse.

Getting out of the carryall, stretching our legs, having food, obtaining directions, and allowing our adrenalin to subside from the nerve racking drive, had appealability to everyone. Viewing the bridge and other facts, it became clear the movie version was the figment of some Hollywood script writer imaginative mind. False was the bridge design. False was the concept, the British POWs built a better bridge. False was the idea that Commandos blew up the bridge. Slides H show the actual bridge, the narrow gauge tracks, a WWII locomotive and plaque, dedicated to those who died constructing the Thai-Burma Railroad under war time POW conditions.

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I half expected tour buses and lots of sightseers, but we had the famed WWII site to ourselves. Most everyone ordered something light as a burger, bowl of soup or rice, Sp4 Nash saw chicken on the menu, and ordered the fowl. During the food preparation, provided ample opportunity for pictures, getting proper directions and buying souvenirs. When Sp4 Nash got his chicken he lost all appetite, and nearly puked at the site. As slicks ~~1~~ show, they served the entire chicken, including the feet, the head, with eyes, combs and bill. Why he became so squishy, I don't know, he boasted of being a funeral director, from Corpus Christi, before being drafted.

Fed, calmed down and with new assurance we could find the construction site, we headed out, with some urgency. It was mid-afternoon, and we were about 10 miles away, from the Black Panther Divisions new base camp. Our Thai driver, might get compensation time, but not over-time pay. Plus it had been hectic time getting this far. Everyone dreaded the nightmare thought of passing traffic after dark.

As the captions, exhibit J state, we filmed the construction of the a mess hall, some barrack construction and bulldozers clearing the ground for other structures, to be built. We concentrated our efforts in one area, to reduce the time moving around. By the time we finished filming the 400 feet of movies, we had about two hours of daylight left, and a four hour drive back to Bangkok.

The next day, Saturday the 9th of March, as the cover story and motion picture captions, exhibit K show, The MACV Photo Team was on the outskirts of Bangkok, at Montha-Buri, for the Mitropob Fair. In seven years, the Mitropob Education Foundation raised funds to built, a four room school in 50 of Thailand's 71 provinces. The concept began on a rainy day in 1961, when a Thai officer and an American Advisor visited a school and witnessed the leaky dilapidated roof of the school.