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BURMA THAILAND RAILWAY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION (Inc)

**THIRTY-THIRD NEWSLETTER
MARCH 2013**

The Honourable Tom UREN AO AC

In the Australia Day Honours list 2013 Tom Uren, Life member of the BTRMA, had an additional honour awarded. The announcement was as follows;

COMPANION (AC) IN THE GENERAL DIVISION OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA

The Honourable Tom UREN AO, 8 Gilchrist Place, Balmain NSW 2041.

The honour is for eminent service to the community, particularly through contributions to the welfare of veterans, improved medical education in Vietnam and the preservation of sites of heritage and environmental significance.

Tom campaigned for 20 years for Prisoners of War to receive additional financial support in addition to veterans' pension. The Prisoner of War Recognition Supplement was introduced in the 2011 Federal Budget.

As a Prisoner of War representative at the 68th Anniversary of the Thai-Burma Railway, Hellfire Pass, Thailand, 2011.

He is also a Board Member, Hoc Mai Australian Vietnam Medical Foundation, University of Sydney, since 2002.

Other awards/recognition include: Centenary Medal. 2001.

2013 TOUR BRIEFING

SUNDAY 24 MARCH 2013

LECTURE THEATRE HOLLYWOOD PRIVATE HOSPITAL

To perpetuate the memory of the privations and sacrifices of Allied Prisoners of War and the selfless dedication of the medical personnel during the construction of the Burma Thailand Railway by informing current and future generations through all forms of education and particularly with Quiet Lion Tours to the Burma Thai Railway; The River Kwai; The Three Pagoda Pass; Anzac Day at Hellfire Pass and Kanchanaburi War Cemetery.

2013 TOUR BRIEFING AND GET-TOGETHER

The arrangements for the 2013 Quiet Lion Tour are now substantially complete.

Our venerable friend Khun Kanit Wanachote has substantially reduced his activities at Home Phu Toey and has formed a business arrangement with Khun Suparek Soorangura, Managing Director of Serenata Hotels which have taken over the management. Khun Kanit has retained his personal section of the resort.

The good news is that Home Phu Toey is going through a complete makeover. It is quite amazing the efforts being put into the changes.

Every unit is being refurbished with new a new roof, new air conditioner, new flat screen TV on cable, full telephone service and new hot water unit. Some units are being completely rebuilt whilst others are having the bathrooms and toilets completely rebuilt and internal renovations. All will have a complete paint job. Any soft floor coverings will be removed and replaced with wooden or ceramic flooring.

The breakfast area over the river is completely new, there are new pedal boats on the lake, the pool by the lake is being deepened and supplied from a hot spring and the pool by the green beach fitted with a new filtering system.

All pathways and boardwalks are being rebuilt and the whole residential area landscaped to maximize views to the River Kwai.

New washing machines and a new water filtration system are being installed. This will be welcomed by those who have had laundry dome at Home Phu Toey.

The Sound and Light show amphitheatre is being revamped and a new production of the sound and light show prepared.

The Weary Dunlop Park is being revamped. The Jack Chalker Gallery has already been repaired with a new ceiling.

The most important part is that the new owner, Khun Suparek Soorangura, is specially converting many of the rooms to accommodate our large group. It has been necessary to arrange for four large rooms with four single beds and six rooms with three beds plus a number of other variations.

With the new room arrangement there will be little space to spare in the multiple bed rooms (mainly for juniors) but not much time is spent in the rooms during the tour.

Suparek will continue to host the reception for our group, Embassy representatives and dignitaries on the eve of Anzac Day.

The tour is full and there will be three buses in use. A variation in 2013 will be that on one particular day, one bus will go to Three Pagodas Pass with the specific intention of visiting the three Sonkurai camps. This was brought about by the quite large number of descendants of members of F Force travelling on the tour. In one case there is a large family group whose fore-father died at Sonkurai. Our life member and committee member Wally Holding (a veteran of F Force) will be in the party with members of his family and this visit will be quite nostalgic.

All past travellers on Quiet Lion Tours to Thailand for Anzac Day at Hellfire Pass and those on the 2013 tour are invited to a briefing, re-union and get-together to be held at the Lecture Theatre at Hollywood Private Hospital on Sunday 24th march 2013 commencing at 2.30pm.

Afternoon tea will be provided after the proceedings.

**Contact Eric Wilson, Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association
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The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.

Some of the earliest groups to work on the Burma Thailand Railway included The Straits Settlements Volunteer Force (SSVF) and their role is worthy of recognition.

The SSVF had its origins in the Singapore Volunteer Artillery Corps, formed in 1888. In 1915 it helped suppress the mutiny of Sepoys in Singapore. The SSVF was officially formed in 1922, following the amalgamation of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, Penang and Province Wellesley Volunteer Corps, Malacca Volunteer Corps, and Labuan Volunteer Defence Detachment. In 1928, the SSVF infantry was re-organised into 4 battalions. The 1st and 2nd battalions consisted of members of the Singapore Volunteer Corps (1,250 men), the 3rd battalion consisted of the Penang & Province Wellesley Volunteer Corps (916 men) and the 4th Battalion consisted of the Malacca Volunteer Corps (675 men). Besides the infantry, the rest of the SSVF consisted of the Singapore Royal Artillery, Singapore Royal Engineers, Singapore Armoured Car Company and 3 ambulance units.

As international tensions heightened during the 1930s, an increasing number of men of the various nationalities in the Settlements — predominantly European, Malay, Chinese, Indian and Eurasian — joined the SSVF. It included naval, air force, special operations, irregular units (such as Dalforce) and home guard units. The SSVF — including four infantry battalions — took part in the Battle of Singapore in 1942, and most of its members were captured on 15 February 1942 when their positions were overrun. The SSVF was reconstituted in 1948 and then in 1954, the Singapore Volunteer Corps was absorbed into the Singapore Military Forces when the SSVF was disbanded.

The Malayan Volunteer Forces

The Malayan Volunteer Forces, or '*Vultures*', as they were sometimes affectionately known amongst themselves or to other FEPOWs, are virtually unknown and unrecognized outside of South East Asia, except to other FEPOWs.

The origin of the Volunteers was in Britain's major conflicts of the 19th and early 20th centuries - the Crimean War led to the enrolment in 1854 of the original Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps with its proud motto '*In Oriente Primus*', and the Boer War of 1899-1902 further stimulated the Volunteer movement with the formation of the Malay States Volunteer Rifles. In 1888 the Singapore Volunteer Artillery Corps was formed. The outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914 led to an immediate and rapid increase in the enrolment of Volunteers who the following year took part in the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny in Singapore.

Again Volunteers answered their country's call in the years running up to World War 2, particularly after the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939. They came from all nationalities and walks of life in the pre-war peninsula known as British Malaya. The Volunteers were not only Europeans, but Malays, Chinese, Indians and Eurasians. They came from all branches of the Malayan Government Service, from the Mines and Plantations, from the business communities, from the Medical Profession and from the Church.

Many other civilians who would have joined the Volunteers, were prevented from doing so because they were in so-called 'reserved occupations' considered essential for the continued smooth running of the country. Whatever their background, they were motivated by a profound sense of wanting to do everything in their power to defend the Crown Colony of Malaya and her dependents.

The Volunteer Forces were similar in concept to the British Territorial Army, but were organised within 3 separate groups according to which administrative area of Malaya they came from. Officers held a Governor's Commission instead of a King's Commission. The three political entities were:

A. The Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements (S.S.)

The Straits Settlements were administered by a British Governor (Sir Shenton Thomas) who was also High Commissioner for the eleven Malay States.

The Straits Settlements consisted of Singapore, Penang and the Province Wellesley, and Malacca (and Labuan and Christmas Island).

B. The Federated Malay States (F.M.S.)

F.M.S.V.F. = Federated Malay States Volunteer Force. Total number of men: 5,200.

C. The Unfederated Malay States (U.M.S.)

Each of these States was ruled by a Sultan and each had a British Advisor with far less influence than the British Residents of the F.M.S. These 5 States were Johore, Kedah, Kelantan, Trengganu and Perlis. Apart from Johore, they were the more northerly States with fewer Europeans and more tenuous lines of communication. Volunteers from these States were, perhaps, less well organised, again with the exception of Johore, and deployed into Local Defence Corps or Forces, rather than Battalions with a more formal command structure.

As well as these Volunteer groupings, there were also Local Defence Corps, similar to the Home Guard, throughout Malaya. Some Malayan Volunteers joined:

- a) The Malayan Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve (M.R.N.V.R.) - 1083 men.
- b) The Malayan Volunteer Air Force (M.V.A.F.) - 350 men.
- c) The Armoured Car Squadrons under S.S. & F.M.S. commands. In the final days the F.M.S.V.F Armoured Car units were amalgamated and given regimental status.
- d) The Singapore Royal Artillery and Singapore Royal Engineers.
- e) SOE - particularly in the form of Stay Behind Parties. Volunteers participating in these were given General List Commissions.

The Volunteers were of enormous help to the thousands of captured British Forces, especially those who had only been in the Far East for a matter of weeks before capture. They knew and understood the local languages and the people, particularly those who remained loyal to the British and wanted to help them. They were acclimatised to the conditions, which must have been difficult to adjust to for the newly arrived troops - most of whom had received no training in jungle warfare. They understood the prevalent diseases such as Malaria and Dengue Fever, how best to avoid them, and the medicines that were needed to control them. They were able to barter with the local traders for food and medicine, and to set up a system of 'listening posts' for information, especially in the early months of imprisonment.

Even in Thailand, while building the infamous Burma/Siam Railway, some of the Volunteers were able to speak Thai and make contact with the local Thai / Thai Chinese population, to get the extra food and medicines so urgently needed by the starving and desperately ill prisoners of war.