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BURMA THAILAND RAILWAY MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION (Inc)

OBJECTIVE: 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.

NEWSLETTER FOURTY ONE DECEMBER 2015



The BTRMA wish all our Members and broader network a very Merry Christmas and joyous New Year. Safe travels to you and your loved ones in the busy festive season and we look forward to seeing many of you in 2016.

We have been busily arranging the final logistical details for our upcoming 2016 Quiet Lion Tour and only have a couple places left in the group. A copy of the itinerary is available on the website.

For those on Facebook we also have a 'Quiet Lion Tour' Group that you can join by following this link <https://www.facebook.com/groups/877471688958808/?fref=ts> or searching the Group name on Facebook. This Group is for past Quiet Lion Tour participants and those wishing to follow relevant news online.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

RAMSAY MEDICAL GROUP | HOLLYWOOD PRIVATE HOSPITAL | PEEL HEALTH CAMPUS

The BTRMA wishes to acknowledge the support of Ramsay Medical Group, Hollywood Private Hospital and Peel Health Campus over a long period of time. From the commencement of the Quiet Lion Tours in 1997 Hollywood Private Hospital has assisted the Association with the provision of nurses on the tours and providing the use of meeting facilities at the hospital. Initially, CEO Kevin Cass Ryall and Director of Nursing Nola Cruikshank were very cooperative and latterly CEO Peter Mott and Director of Clinical Services Karen Gullick have maintained the valued relationship. Debra Taylor has been a constant help.

Peel Health Campus has assisted in sponsorship of Service Cadets on Quiet Lion Tours after commencing an arrangement with ex Prisoner of War, the late Wally Holding OAM, and the Mandurah RSL. Peel Health Campus CEO Doctor Margaret Sturdy continued this arrangement after her appointment and the passing of Wally Holding. The Association values such support in addition to other support from donors and organisations.

Vale Gordon Maitland Roberts, Survivor of the Burma Thailand Railway

Gordon Maitland Roberts, WX 2625, of Dandaragan, Western Australia, died at Hollywood Hospital on November 1, 2015 having reached the age of 96 years on 3rd March last. He served the Australian community by his outstanding achievements and contributions as a soldier (in particular as a prisoner of the Japanese) in time of war, as a very successful primary producer and as a good citizen in time of peace. He has assisted significantly in maintaining the morale of his fellow prisoners of war during World War 11 and in post war years in perpetuating the memory of the privations and sacrifices of Australian Military personnel and the selfless dedication of the medical personnel during the construction of the Burma Thailand Railway in World War Two. He has also dedicated himself to service to the community since surviving World War Two and his incarceration by developing innovation and progressing primary industry in the Mid West of WA and with service and support of returned Australian prisoners of war of the Japanese.

Gordon Maitland Roberts was born at Moora, Western Australia to a farming family on March 3, 1919 and was a "jack of all trades" working in rural areas of Western Australia prior to World War Two. He was one of a group of seventeen country boys from the town of Moora in WA who were members of the Militia in the 10th Light Horse and enlisted in the AIF on January 21, 1940, joining the all-Western Australian 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion. The Battalion sailed from Fremantle in a convoy including the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth 11, Aquitania, Mauritania, Isle de France and the Andes. The convoy called at Colombo and the battalion disembarked at Port Tewfik on the Suez Canal and later trained at Palestine and in Tel Aviv. The battalion saw action in Syria and later at Mrouj, near Beirut in Lebanon.

In February 1942 the battalion traveled on the Orcades via Durban, South Africa, to Oosthaven in South Sumatra. They disembarked at Batavia (Jakarta) before traveling by road to Bandung. On 9th March 1942 the Dutch surrendered (including the Australians). After nearly a year in Bandung the battalion went to Makasura before being shipped to Singapore with Dunlop Force under Lt Colonel Sir Edward Dunlop.

In January 1943 Dunlop Force went by train on a five day journey in cramped steel rice wagons from Singapore to Non Pladuk in Thailand and then to the Konyu River Camp, the Hintok River Camp and the Hintok Road Camp. Dunlop Force worked on the section of the Burma Thailand Railway between Konyu (Hellfire Pass) and Compressor Cuttings. Members of Dunlop Force suffered similarly to all prisoners on the Burma Thailand Railway with diseases, inhumane and brutal treatment, starvation, overwork, lack of basic needs and terrible conditions. At the completion of the railway Gordon Roberts went with his group to Tamuang in Thailand, followed by movements to various other areas on maintenance work and he remained in Thailand until the Victory in the Pacific.

After discharge on January 31, 1946, Gordon Roberts, as with most ex Prisoners of War, confined any discussions and recollections of the Prisoner of War experience to meeting with fellow ex PoWs, usually in the confines of RSL clubs, but when it was decided in 2002 to form the Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association, dedicated to ensure that the story of the "Railway" would not be forgotten, he became an active supporter. The Association arranges an annual pilgrimage to Thailand for Anzac Day, the Quiet Lion Tour, which is named for Sir Edward (Weary) Dunlop. A feature of the tours is that a large group of High School children and service cadets are taken to Thailand.

During his war service and following his discharge from the Australian Army on January 31, 1946, Gordon Roberts was renowned for his "mateship", resourcefulness and his compassion for his fellow prisoners.

During captivity he spent countless hours foraging for little extras for his mates who were ill, on light rations and unpaid. He would stay with men in their dying hours maintaining the tradition of "nobody must die alone". Even when the dreaded cholera epidemic raged he still nursed cholera patients without any regard for his own health. He was a very robust man, raised in the country, and withstood the ravages of the prisoner of war experience to the point he often stood in for his mates who were too sick to work.

A very notable aspect of the resourcefulness shown by Gordon Roberts was his ability to scrounge, barter and acquire by any dubious means food and medicine to help his mates. This ability may not be recognized generally

but in the circumstances prevailing on the Burma Thailand Railway it was most important. One illustration of this is provided in the authenticated story involving close friend and POW "Snow" Fairclough. "Snow" made his way most nights from the prison camp to the nearby Kwai Noi River to set improvised fishing lines and on one occasion snared a large fish. He took it to Gordon Roberts with a view to them sharing the extra rations with his mates. Gordon instead went to the adjacent English officer's camp where he was able to sell the fish to an English officer and received what was regarded as a fortune. He in turn used the proceeds to acquire salt and fresh vegetables from Thai villagers and various medicines from Thai river traders. An interesting sidelight is that the English Officer was a Major named Swanton who transpired to be E.W. Swanton, the noted English cricket commentator. "Snow" Fairclough met Swanton post-war during a Test Match in Perth and Swanton recalled the exchange, adding that he got the fish for a "song" and out-bargained the Aussie POW.

After discharge on January 31, 1946, Gordon Roberts immediately returned to farming and agriculture and with many years of hard work and good business practice he created a thriving business breeding cattle and sheep.

When Gordon Roberts volunteered for the Australian Army the Mid-West area in Western Australia was just being developed with country previously regarded as being unsuitable for most forms of agriculture being utilized. Gordon Roberts' elder brother was allocated a section of virgin country and he gave Gordon one thousand acres of the grant to start a farm on his return from the War.

Gordon Roberts married on his return and with his new wife moved onto the grant of land. Together they cleared the land and established the nucleus of their farm. It is notable that the young wife operated a "General Grant" tank acquired from War Surplus auctions to clear the scrub. The property was named "Chelsea".

Over the years the farming business grew from one thousand to twenty six thousand acres spread over five different farms. The properties range across an area from Three Springs to Dandaragan and Badgingarra. The area had been regarded as "Sand Plain" country and required particular skills to become viable. Gordon and his wife Yaxley developed a breed of sheep to specialize in fat lambs and became a dominant force in that field. They also specialized in Aberdeen Angus cattle and, again, became leaders in the field. Further, they were able to use large areas for wheat and other grain on the country, which theretofore had not been considered suitable for cropping.

Gordon Roberts is a great example of those Australians who went through a terrible experience whilst serving their country. They not only survived the experience but returned home to make a success of their lives and contribute to their country.

It is of particular note that up until his death, Gordon Roberts and his friend Milton "Snow" Fairclough were the only remaining men of the seventeen from Moora who enlisted together and were all captured by the Japanese.

Gordon Roberts was a life member of the Burma Thailand Railway Memorial Association and a strong supporter of the Second Third Machine Gun Battalion Association.

ANZAC Centenary Commemorated in Thailand

On 25 April, Australians throughout the world commemorated ANZAC Day to remember those who have served in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations. ANZAC Day marks the landing of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps soldiers – the ANZACs – on the Gallipoli Peninsula, Turkey, on 25 April 1915, a century ago.

This year in Kanchanaburi province, Thailand, Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women and Senator for Western Australia the Hon Michaelia Cash; Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force Air Marshal Geoff Brown, AO; Australian Ambassador to Thailand HE Mr Paul Robilliard, and Defence Attaché Colonel Andrew Duff joined a gathering of around 2,200 at a dawn service at Hellfire Pass to pay tribute to the thousands of prisoners of war (POWs) who lost their lives in the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway in the Second World War.

Later in the day, over a thousand of people participated in a memorial service and wreath-laying ceremony held at Kanchanaburi Allied War Cemetery. Australian former-POWs and war veterans were present at the ceremonies. Governor of Kanchanaburi Mr Wanchai Osukonthip and New Zealand Ambassador to Thailand HE Mr Reuben Levermore also attended the wreath laying service.

“Gallipoli remains a place of great significance to Australians today because of the actions of those men both on that infamous first day as well as the eight month campaign that followed. More than 8,700 Australians lost their lives during the campaign, with over 2,000 killed or wounded on the first day of fighting”, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash said in her speech at the Wreath Laying service. “Let us never forget both the heroic feats and acts of mateship that created the legendary ANZAC spirit which we, as the sons and daughters of Australia and New Zealand, proudly honour and revere”, she added.

Australian former Prisoner of War Mr Neil MacPherson OAM who travelled with the Quiet Lion Tour and once worked on the Thai – Burma Railway, delivered the ex POW Address and laid a wreath in memory of the fallen soldiers at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery on ANZAC Day.



Mr Neil MacPherson OAM at the Kanchanaburi War Centenary on ANZAC Day

Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash address

Centenary ANZAC Day address 2015 Kanchanaburi War Cemetery

To each and every one of you who have travelled from afar to be here today to pay tribute to and remember the sacrifice of those on the Thai-Burma Railway. Welcome.

We gather here today to honour and remember those courageous ANZAC's who, as dawn broke 100 years ago today, stormed the unforgiving terrain at Gallipoli to fight for their country and the commonwealth. Their heroic actions cemented forever the legendary ANZAC spirit which we, as the sons and daughters of Australia and New Zealand, proudly revere as an important part of our ethos and culture.

There is no greater example of service to one's country than to make the ultimate sacrifice. Thousands of men and women gave their lives in order for us to enjoy the freedoms and privileges they so bravely secured for us and we now hold so dear.

They will never be forgotten.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is fair to say that the men and women who have served and continue to serve our great countries were - and are - just like you and me - ordinary people. But their actions can be described as nothing less than extra-ordinary. As we stand here today at the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, we remind ourselves of the sacrifices made through war - the unspeakable hardships and suffering endured - and the debt that we owe to all those who answered the call and served in the best traditions of the ANZAC spirit.

This year we commemorate the ANZAC centenary: 100 years since Australian and New Zealand troops – along with forces from Britain, India and France - landed on the shores of Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. Gallipoli remains a place of great significance to Australians today because of the actions of those men both on that infamous first day as well as the eight-month campaign that followed.

More than 8,700 Australian's lost their lives during the campaign, with over 2,000 killed or wounded on the first day of fighting. Additionally, 2,721 New Zealanders were killed in action and 4,752 were wounded at Gallipoli. These were terrible losses for our two young countries. But from this loss, a national ethos emerged that set us apart from the rest of the world.

From hardship and tragedy arose a defining element of our national character that endures today and for which we are renowned. It is an ethos grounded in heroism and mateship. We never take a backward step on the battlefield. We never give up. We never forget our mates. This can-do and will-do attitude prevails today, not confined to war but rather it is embedded in our psyche. On this the ANZAC centenary, we continue to honour our forebears. We are duly bound to ensure that the ANZAC spirit is passed on to successive generations to treasure, respect and honour as an important part of our nation's character.

We also pause today to honour the Australians and New Zealanders who fought and were injured or killed during the succession of conflicts we have fought in since Gallipoli, including the Second World War, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Importantly, we also remember the many citizens from other nations, including Thailand, who fought and died or were injured in the defence of their great countries. We stand here today in a truly sacred place. This is where our forebears proved their courage, their humanity, their resilience and the love of their country and fellow man. Today at Kanchanaburi, we pay tribute to the thousands of prisoners of war who lost their lives in the construction of the Thai-Burma Railway during the Second World War.

Artist Jack Chalker said: *"The place earned the title of Hellfire Pass, for it looked, and was, like a living image of hell itself"* [Jack Chalker, Burma Railway: Images of War, London, Mercer Books, 2007, 59j].

Hellfire pass - the deepest of the cuttings along the Thai-Burma railway - has become a special place of remembrance for thousands of ANZAC families who have a connection through the suffering of a loved one who as a Prisoner of War was forced to work here, some present today were here during World War Two. They

experienced first-hand the deprivation and pain that war - imposed on this tranquil place. Others who are here today have loved and treasured those who suffered on the railway over 70 years ago.

From my own personal perspective, during the Second World War my grandmother fled with some of her family members from Singapore to Australia just prior to the Fall of Singapore. Her sister and brother-in-law were unable to escape and were captured and taken prisoner when Singapore fell and they remained POW's in Changi Prison until the end of the War - her brother-in-law dying the day the prisoners were finally freed.

After the guns fell silent in 1945, the Department of Veteran's Affairs conducted interviews with Australian War Veterans. I would like to share with you some words of those who were Prisoners of War, here at Hellfire Pass: Tom Uren spoke of his mate, Bill Halliday on the Thai-Burma Railway, and how mateship changed them both: *"... And I'll never forget, he was so skinny that you could see his backbone through his stomach, lying on that bed. And he had this awful leg. And the stench of the ulcer wards - it's like death itself..."*

George 'Bert' Beecham spoke of the treatment of the POW's and the awful conditions. Of the camp: *"... The treatment of the POW's working on the railway line was absolutely horrendous. Not only in the way they were treated, the way they were fed, the way they were beaten, and the way they were abused..."*

In 1998, former Prime Minister Howard officially opened the Hellfire Pass Museum. At the time he said: *"They existed in a hell where the slightest pause, or misconstrued gesture, could result in appalling retribution - in beatings with rifle butts, or bamboo canes, or boots. Here alone, at Hellfire Pass, 68 young men were beaten to death for being too exhausted, or too weak, or too sick. None of us can imagine how men can claw out solid rock with nothing more than their own hands and primitive tools. Let alone imagine how near naked and starving men could build a railway through 420 torturous kilometres of jungle, across rivers and over rugged mountain ranges. Or how survival is possible on a handful of rice each day and living each hour stalked by disease and pain. Or how madness could be kept at bay."*

It is incredible to think that construction of this 415km stretch of railway line was completed in just one year, despite the most challenging terrain and sometimes dreadful weather conditions. More than 60,000 allied Prisoners of War were involved in the project. Approximately 13,000 were Australians. It is estimated more than 12,000 allied prisoners lost their lives on the Thai-Burma Railway, including more than 2,700 Australians.

As we pause to remember today, we must also honour the ANZAC women who served and sacrificed much, both domestically and abroad. Excluding the Australian women's army service, nurses were the only females to serve outside of Australia in any capacity. During the Second World War 3,477 Australian army nursing service nurses served, and 71 never returned, losing their lives during active service overseas.

The story of the Thai-Burma Railway is also remembered for the extraordinary service of all of the medical personnel who, with next to no equipment or medicines, cared for desperately ill men. In Australia, the most famous of these doctors was the surgeon Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop. He was a doctor and a commanding officer who would often stand up to the Japanese soldiers and frequently suffered dire consequences as a result. But such was his dedication that nothing would stop him in his mission to provide care to the suffering. The heroic and extraordinary feats of Weary Dunlop in working to save our troops was a clear demonstration of the ANZAC spirit at work. His statue now stands outside the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and is a beacon of inspiration for us all. And after his death in 1993, some of his ashes were interred at Hellfire Pass.

So today, let us remember the sacrifice of all those who died and those who suffered whilst working on the Thai-Burma Railway. Let us stand united, reaffirming that Australians, and New Zealanders, will never forget the acts of courage and selflessness that kept us safe. Let us never forget both the heroic feats and acts of mateship that created the legendary ANZAC spirit which we, as the sons and daughters of Australia and New Zealand, proudly honour and revere.

We are duty bound - moreover we are honoured - to ensure this message is passed to future generations. May the spirit of those who were lost in defence of their country continue to inspire, and may the proud spirit of ANZAC endure in eternity.