

In the footsteps of F Force - April 2010

by Judith Saunders – daughter of NX32306 Corporal Donald (Bluey) Gunn Maciver, Mortar Platoon, 2/30th Battalion (aka Galleghan's Greyhounds), 27th Brigade, Eighth Division, Second Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.)

Background

Like most veterans, my father rarely spoke of his time as a POW of the Japanese. As I grew up all I knew was that he had been in Changi and on the railway. And I had a few threads of incidents of his time as a POW – usually humorous, and about food! Like the time he acquired a mango and was determined to let it fully ripen before eating it. And on an occasion when a food parcel arrived and half a dozen of them sat around a tin of Golden Circle fruit salad dive bombing for the pieces of cherry. And I well remember him walking around the house saying what sounded like "itchy knee san see go rocko". It wasn't until my early 30's when I did a short tour in Japan that I found out was this was. The tour guide would walk down the aisle of the bus counting – ichi, ni, san, shi, go roku!



It was only in his later years, not long before his dementia really took a hold, when I was on my annual visit from the U.K., that one day he handed me Galleghan's Greyhounds open at the chapter on Naka and Kami Songkurai which he said I might like to read to get an idea of what he had been through as he had been at Kami Songkurai. On this occasion he did say that he had been on the first cremation duty with Padre Paddy Walsh but he couldn't cope with it and asked to be given another job. When I tried to talk to him about it, he had to walk away from me. I now wonder if this was the first cremations on Cholera Hill at Shimo Songkurai. And somewhere along the way, he had referred to the "silver spoon treatment" – which I now know was used on tropical ulcers, of which Dad suffered. He is mentioned in Eric Stone's diary: "31st August, 1943. Dr still using silver spoon on ulcers. Pitiful sight. Abbie, Butch, Don, Ken - all have them." Dad was the only one of these four to make it back to Changi. He did say he was lucky and when he was at his worst, a little medicine arrived and he responded well to it. He also said that when he got back to Changi Black Jack gave him his last pair of boots. I was never sure if this was BJ's last pair or Dad's last pair! He obviously came back from the railway bare footed – as most of them did. And the most telling statement – "If your mates back at Changi couldn't understand or believe what you had been through, how could you expect anybody else to?".

However, what I was fully aware of as I grew up was how ill he was. I especially remember several years when he would be off work for a week and he would take huge tablets that looked like large red balls – he would call them "bombs". I think this was treatment for worms which were still plaguing him from his POW days. And he was in continual pain from his neck and lower back. Mum and I would sit outside on the back steps for hours on end as any movement in the house would send waves of pain through him. Despite this, he was devastated to be invalided out of work in 1960 through what he considered to be a result of his POW experiences, especially his time on the railway – he did mention that the POWs had to do the work of the elephants when they went on strike! – by carrying large logs across the back of their neck. But I think the biggest humiliation for him was the fact that after all

he had been through, the Department of Veterans Affairs (or whatever it was called back then) did not accept his problems as war related! He struggled through a couple of unsuccessful appeals. It wasn't until the late 1980's that the Department finally granted him a 100% pension – but still not accepting his original illness. It would have been fitting if Dad could have gone to his maker in the knowledge that his inability to work was recognised as being due to his time as a POW and especially his time on the railway – but such was not to be. Having said all this, I have to say that my Dad always appeared cheerful and had a twinkle in his clear blue eyes.

So it was not until Dad's funeral in May 1998 that I really started to learn about his time with the 2/30th – and his time as a POW and on the Thailand-Burma Railway when Johnny Kreckler (Mortar Platoon Lieutenant) gave the eulogy. I also received a telephone call from Ron Maston inviting my husband, David, and I to afternoon tea. Jimmy (Splinter) Walshe and his wife, Bev, also joined us and David and I were invited to become associate members of the Battalion, which we did immediately. It was on this occasion that Jimmy Walshe asked me if I knew the story of the pineapple – to which I said no, only the story of the mango. So he proceeded to tell me about the pineapple plantation incident (see "Splinter's Story"). Jimmy also told me of my father's habit of nipping out of the Battalion's reunion on ANZAC Day to watch the massed pipes and drums parade down George Street, finishing the ceremony in Martin Place at the Cenotaph (and I did the same this year!). After Dad's funeral I felt I should march with the Battalion in his memory and I did this in 2000. Once is never enough and David and I arranged to be in Sydney this year for ANZAC Day when we attended the Dawn Service in Martin Place, joined members of the Battalion for the wreath laying service, when I had the privilege of laying the Battalion's wreath on the Cenotaph jointly with Chris Yeoman, and then marching with the Battalion. It was a very emotional day – but one worth travelling 13,000 miles to be part of. I am sure the debate with the RSL regarding descendants marching with the veterans will rumble on, but hopefully sense will prevail. I personally feel I have a right and a duty to march behind the Battalion banner and colours in honour and memory of my father – as well as in memory of all his mates who fought and suffered alongside him and who did not return.

I hope I haven't bored you! I have a reputation for being rather verbose!! But this is cathartic for me. I can associate with comments I have received in an email recently saying that our father's experiences on the railway have somehow been implanted in their DNA and we, as their children, have inherited them and this gives us a strong feeling of connection through common DNA. Maybe no scientific proof – but certainly food for thought!

So what has this all got to do with F Force? As I mentioned, my journey really began in May 1998 at my Dad's funeral. My first decision was to march with the Battalion and I achieved this in 2000. My next decision was to make a pilgrimage to the railway. I initially thought I would need to wait until I retired but decided that was too long away and after reading about Belmore Travel's trips in an edition of *Makan*, David and I decided to join the group in 2005 when we travelled to Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). This was the first year they did not go to Singapore and Malaya which was a bit disappointing, but nevertheless, it was the railway that was my main point of interest. I came home totally overwhelmed. I had received so much information – but found it confusing at the same time. This then started a frenzy of purchasing books and anything that was associated with the railway. Thankfully, David was as engrossed as I was – and we have now spent the last five years almost eating, sleeping and reading, not only about the railway, but we have now also branched off into the Malaya campaign. Having acquired a little extra knowledge, we again joined the Belmore Travel group for the ANZAC 2007 pilgrimage and joined their first November remembrance trek the same year. This still did not satisfy my thirst for knowledge and David and I were thrilled to join the pilgrimage organised by the 2/30th and 2/15th Battalion Associations in November 2008. This was a very special trip as we travelled with members of the 2/30th family and met some wonderful people, not only from the 2/15th but also from other Eighth Division battalions as well. And we had the privilege of having one 2/15th POW – Hal Campbell – travel with us.

It was during this pilgrimage that Rod Beattie, the Manager of the war cemeteries in Thailand (Manager for Thailand for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission) and Director of Research of the Thailand-Burma Railway Centre (TBRC) joined the group as we travelled north to the Sangkhlaburi area where the three Songkurai camps were – Shimo

(lower), Naka and Kami (upper) Songkurai. During Rod's years tending the cemetery he has walked most, if not all, of the railway trace in Thailand and has spoken with many POWs and acquired an extensive knowledge of all matters relating to the railway. This only whetted my appetite for a more detailed trip and when we returned to Kanchanaburi we spoke with Terry Manttan, the General Manager of TBRC to see if they could arrange a journey for us – specifically to follow the F Force march and concentrate our time at the three Songkurai camps, with special emphasis on Kami Songkurai. Terry assured us this was something they were happy to organise. When we got back to the U.K. we put the wheels in motion and agreed an itinerary with TBRC which came to fruition this April. The next eighteen months were spent trawling through books and the Internet (our 2/30th website is a wonderful source of information where I searched through many editions of Makan for stories and information).

The journey

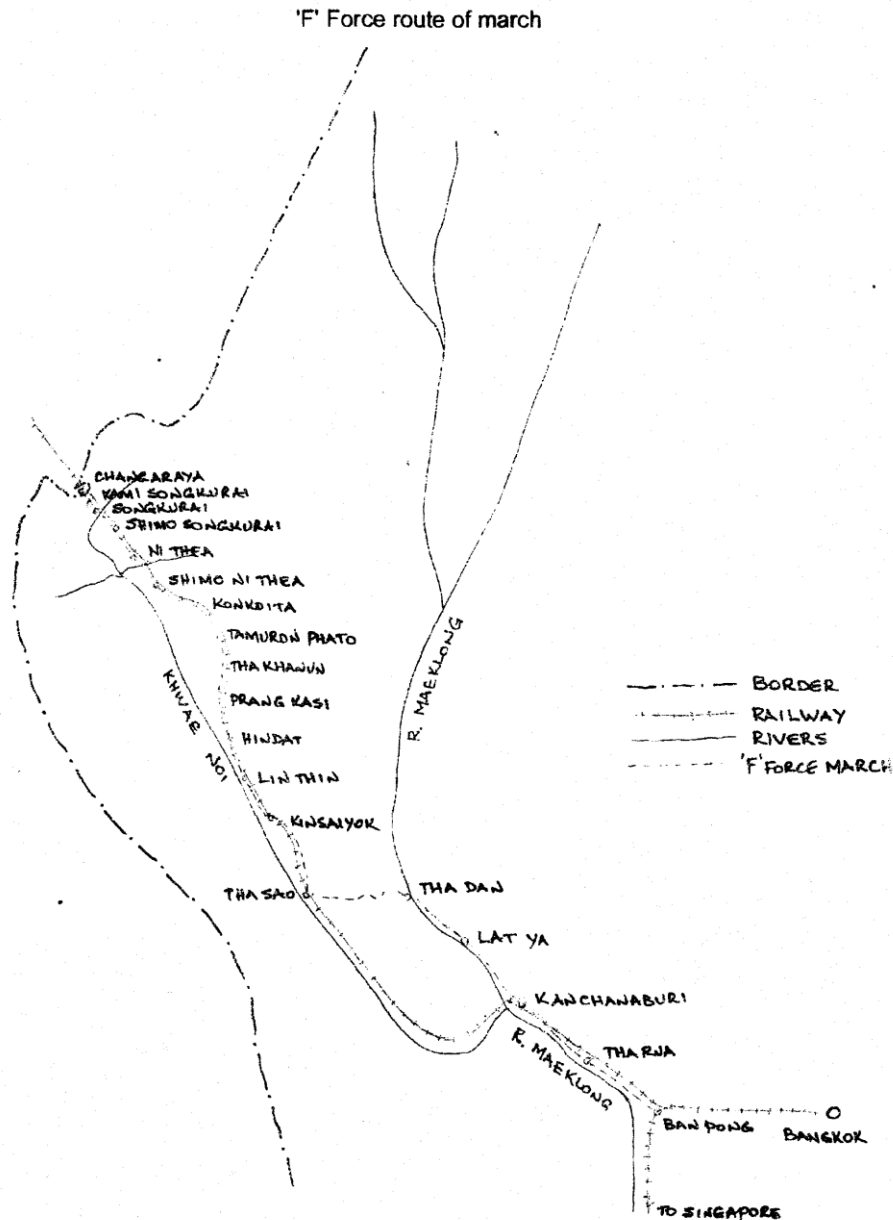
Friday - we departed the U.K. on 2 April 2010, Good Friday, at 11.00 p.m. and arrived:-

Saturday afternoon, 3 April 2010 about 3.30 p.m. at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport and were collected by Mr Werasark (phonetically spelt) on behalf of TBRC. We reached our hotel, the River Kwae Bridge Resort just after 7.00 p.m. and had dinner with Terry Manttan and his family. We had a very enjoyable evening tucking into our first Thai meal and talking non-stop about the railway. If we hadn't been jet-lagged I think we would have talked all night but as it was, we wilted suddenly about 10.00 p.m. and fell into bed.

Sunday - after our first breakfast sitting on the balcony of the hotel overlooking the Kwae River and "the bridge", we ventured up to TBRC and met with Terry and Rod to discuss our itinerary for the trip north. We also met Andrew Snow who is now helping out at the centre with research and whose father was Lex Snow, 2/30th and a great friend of Eric Stone (Mortar Platoon). Small world! We then spent some time in the research centre with Andrew and he showed us some of the computerised information they have and what they are trying to achieve with their databases. They also have a large selection of books, diaries, articles and anything they can get their hands on in relation to the railway. We were given full access to TBRC and all their resources while we were in Kanchanaburi. Andrew offered to show us around on Monday morning as it was his day off, an offer we gladly accepted.

Later in the afternoon when it was a little cooler (although I don't think the temperature dropped much below 40 degrees the whole time we were in Thailand!) we walked from our hotel to the bridge (we were only about 10 minutes walk from it). You can't go to Kanchanaburi and not walk across the bridge! There is a Chinese memorial on the other side – and unfortunately, a huge statue has recently been constructed which is out of keeping with the area and detracts from the bridge.

Monday – another day in and around Kanchanaburi. We wanted to give ourselves a couple of recovery days before heading off on our special journey – both to recover from jetlag and get used to the heat and humidity – especially after one of the longest and coldest winters in the UK for about 20 years! Andrew joined us for breakfast and Mr Werasark arrived about 9.00 a.m. and we headed off for Chungkai Cemetery. Andrew was able to tell us some interesting facts about the cemetery and the POW camps that had been in the area. We then drove around to the monkey school from where we walked up the steps to the existing railway line and walked along it to the major Chungkai cutting. Andrew pointed out that they had used hand drills (hammer and tap) to penetrate the rock for blasting. And there was evidence of small caves – we could see the stalagmites and stalactites clearly. We then walked on to a second smaller cutting and after looking through some other caves nearby we returned to town. We went to the heritage area which was the main street of Kanchanaburi as we were keen to see Boon Pong's shop. He was involved in the "V" organisation which helped get some money and medicines to the POWs but the shop appeared to be shut. However, there were people inside and they opened up for us. There is a memorial area to Boon Pong and his great grandson was there and very keen to talk to us.



F Force

Tuesday - Rod Beattie collected us from our hotel and we set off in the footsteps of F Force. From our 2/30th website I have found that Dad, as part of 22 officers and 559 other ranks, travelled from Singapore to Ban Pong on train 5, in truck 6, leaving Singapore on 22 April 1943 and arriving Ban Pong on 27 April 1943. Another group of 6 officers and 64 other ranks departed Singapore on 23 April 1943 on train 6. I had drawn my information for this trip from various diaries I have read, in particular Cpl E W (Eric) Stone (ES), Sgt E E (Curly) Heckendorf (EEH), Sgt S F (Stan) Arneil's book "One Man's War" (SA) and "Heroes of F Force" (HoFF). TBRC also gave me their list of transit camps and a map together with Major Bruce Hunt's (BH) timetable of the march. I have also had the privilege of reading the original private diary of Captain John Eales (JE), 2/26th Battalion who travelled north on train 3. His daughter and son-in-law travelled with us on the ANZAC 2007 trip and had the diary with them. At times I have been very confused about camp names. There are so many spellings for different camps - the Thai name, the Japanese name, the British/Australian Army name and the POW's interpretation of any of these! And at times some transit camp locations are referred to by different names. So to try to simplify matters, I have decided to use the names of the transit camps shown in Galleghan's Greyhounds (with other possible

names/locations in brackets). I have included information taken from the above-mentioned POW diaries and books and this is shown in italics. On the whole, I have not quoted verbatim from the diaries, although where I have I have used quote marks. The times mentioned in the diaries, I think, were Tokyo time, Thai time would have been 2 hours behind.

We did not start our journey at Ban Pong as that would have meant doubling back, but instead visited Ban Pong and Tarawa (Tha Rua) on our way back to Bangkok. So, our first stop was:-

- **Chinku** (Kanburi/Kanchanaburi) camp “desert camp”.

This is now a shopping centre and arcade with small typical Thai shops and food stalls all around the outside. But it is still a large flat area and in 1943 had been the site of an aerodrome.

The diaries say:-

The troops arrived at 07:30 on 29 April 1943 and had a rest day at this camp. However, EHH says the meals were poor, it was hot and dusty – no tea, water almost unprocurable (it was half a mile walk to a well and they had to pay 5 cents for a bucket of water), there were no bushes for shelter from rain or sun, and the latrines were “crawling away”. SA describes it as dry, stony, thorny half acre, as hot as a frying pan. Both EEH and SA say the natives were not very friendly (a Japanese soldier had been killed a couple of weeks earlier). On 30 April they were marched five miles in the blazing sun to a Japanese hospital where they were glass rodded and were supposed to be inoculated, although this was not actually given. (F Force only received one cholera inoculation prior to leaving Changi.) They departed the evening of 30 April 1943 at 21:00. On leaving Kanburi, ES says that “the weather was crook – track nothing but mud. Cannot see. Boys tired. This is murder. Help one another along”. The march was 24 kilos to Tarkujong.

We then headed out of Kanchanaburi in a north westerly direction for the next transit camp. F Force did not follow the River Kwae Noi and the railway as this would have been too difficult and too slow. Instead, the route they took was along the supply road which followed the Mae Klong River as far as Tardun (Tha Dan) before turning west towards Woneyi (Tahsoe) and the River Kwae Noi. Our next stop was:-

- **Tarkujong** “pagoda camp” (TBRC refer to this camp as Lat Ya and EEH and BH refer to it as Wampoh – “temple camp”).



We strolled down the street that F Force would have marched along and there were elderly locals sitting at the front of their shops/houses on raised platforms. Rod chatted to an elderly man and lady who said they remembered the soldiers coming down the street and buying food. We wandered around the nearby streets – where locals were selling various foods – just as it would have been in 1943. We then went into the temple grounds where they would have camped for the day and then walked over to the river.

The diaries say:-

They arrived at 08:00 on 1 May 1943. EEH says it was a nicely situated camp on the bank of a wide river and there was nearby a small change alley selling chiefly sago cooked with guala malacca but the prices were getting dearer. ES describes it as a

"beaut spot". Carts were hired to carry the heavy gear – six carts at \$15 each. A guard was placed on each cart as natives carrying parangs and sticks attempted to steal the loads. They departed at 20:00 the same day. HoFF (Harry Weiss) says the march to the next transit camp was a terrible march in mud, rain and pitch dark. This night's march was 26 kilos to Tardun.

Then on to:-

- **Tardun** "bamboo crossing camp" (Tardan/Tha dan - Tha meaning pier or landing – place on river – "big bridge camp" / EEH – One Yi "bridge camp" / BH – Wunyi – "river crossing camp").

This is now the site of an elephant camp and we just pulled into the entrance driveway but didn't stop. We crossed the Mae Klong River and the area was adjacent to the river.

The diaries say:-

The troops arrived at 08:30 on 2 May 1943 and had a day's rest here. All the diaries indicate that this was a good location and there was plenty of shade and close to the river where they could wash themselves, their clothes and swim. EEH says there were fewer native vendors and prices were getting much dearer for food and coffee. Their own rations were deteriorating. Troops from the first train had been taken by truck and at intervals of 12 to 25 kilos about one dozen men were dropped off to establish a kitchen for the coming force. It was particularly noticeable that the Japanese troops on the march received little better treatment than the POWs. Feet starting to harden, marching developing into a sort of mechanical effort. When they left Tardun the country was higher and not as much mud and water to trudge through. They were told their next stop would be a base camp and they would stop for another night's rest and possibly stop for several days so they set off feeling much happier. Departed at 19:30 on 3 May 1943. This night's march was 24 kilos to Woneyi (Tahsao).

- **Woneyi (Tahsao)** "base camp".

From Tardun, having crossed the Mae Klong River, we headed in a westerly direction towards Tahsao and the Kwae Noi River. We stopped at Wang Yai railway station, which is the closest spot to the location of the Tahsao camps. There is a temple there now.

The diaries say:-

They arrived at 09:00 on 4 May 1943. EEH says the men were quite jubilant because of the rumour that this was the end of the march and/or they would rest here for a day before going on. ES describes it as a large camp, half a mile from river, food terrible. They met members of D Force here. HoFF (Harry Weiss) said they saw Aussies from 2/18th, 2/19th and 2/20th going to work here. This is the camp where Major Wild (the interpreter) and Major Bruce Hunt were bashed when appealing for sick to be left behind. They departed that evening at 19:30 (ES says it was a hard track but rained en-route so they slithered and slid in the pitch dark). A miserable night's march of 23 kilos to Kanduk.



We stopped for lunch at the Tahsao shops (near the waterfalls) for a plate of fried rice, before heading north-west, following the Kwae Noi River.

We then drove on to:-

- **Kanduk** "creek – sitting on bamboo". (EEH, BH and TBRC refer to this camp as Kinsaioka "bamboo creek".)

We stopped at what would have been the northern end of the rail station built near the camp and found the concrete base of a water crane and the remains of concrete bags of cement. Rod found a small Japanese medicine bottle while we were examining the remnants of coal still lying in the soil. Rod says this confirms that coal was used on the railway and not just wood, as is widely believed.



The diaries say:-

They arrived at 08:00 on 5 May 1943 - ES says they were footsore, tired and everyone was dead beat after the march and that there was little water at the camp. ES also says that Captain Taylor (2/30th RMO) was doing a marvellous job. HoFF (Harry Weiss) - "after 23 ks, we reached a horrible stinking camp on a poor little creek - flies bad and food scarce." They marched out at 19:00 same day - an uneventful night's march of 18 kilos to Kinsaioko.

- **Kinsaioko** (where two of Major Anderson's men were bashed). (EEH, BH and TBRC refer to this camp as Rin Tin "mile to river camp".)

We pulled in off the main road to the area that Rod said was the location for this camp.

The diaries say:-



They arrived 08:00 on 6 May 1943. SA says the food was fair here. HoFF (Harry Weiss) says they saw Gordon Highlanders, Dutch and Aussies camped near the river - miserable in their surroundings - but the river was good and the Thais brought up good white bait, guala malacca and tobacco in barges and they bought white bait and made a good stew with their issue of onions. EHH says they had an eventful morning as someone fell asleep on the night's march and arrived late. The Major in charge of the party got

a bashing, as did the chap when he finally arrived. Some chaps went to the river for a swim and they were also bashed. They had a day's rest here, after three successive day's march. Departed at 19:00 on 7 May 1943 - marching 23 kilos to Hindato.

- **Hindato** "corral camp" (EEH - "sheep yard camp" / BH and TBRC - "stockyard camp").

Our hotel for the night was the Green World Hot Spring Resort, Hindat. Rod indicated the location of the transit camp to be at the front of the hotel.

The diaries say:-

After pretty big hill climb, they arrived at 08:30 on 8 May 1943 at worst camp of whole trek. On one side of the hill was an area about 500 yards square, partly cleared scrub and enclosed by a two rail fence. They were counted like a mob of sheep. There was a stream nearby but the food was pretty crook - just vegetables with rice. They were pleased to march out that night at 19:00 - with a 23 kilo march to Brancali over hilly country with the road cut deep with ruts and washaways. It was pitch black, the track was invisible with men constantly slipping, and it was wet.

Wednesday - after a good night's sleep, we set off the next morning about 8.30 a.m. and continued on the F Force route to the area of:-

- **Brancali** "regimental camp" (TBRC refer to Prang Kasi and BH Brancali "Hitler camp")

We came off the highway and on to a dirt track and Rod stopped in the area of where this camp had been located. It is now farmland – but the photo showing a road dissecting the fields is actually the railway trace.

The diaries say:-



They arrived at 08:30 on 9 May 1943 and had a rest day here. EEH says the camp had new tents and atmosphere of being alive. "IJA CO of the camp was a sergeant who was aptly called "the Black Jap" by some wag. This person was dark to swarthy and had a fierce look with equally fierce three weeks growth of beard on his face – he lived up to appearances - he regimented everything, all men must make camp and must be made in certain spot and there only; no-one must go near river unless told to do so; fatigue parties (and he called for plenty), must arrive pronto; at 10:30

every man must move to river for wash or swim. Bashings and cutting of food rations were threatened for non compliance with these orders, and believe me one look at this individual and no one doubted that he meant what he said. Our food was slightly better than it had been for some days (a watery stew with a colouring of meat extract and a few floating vegetables in it). It was at the distribution of the food that the Black Jap showed us something new in the way of efficiency and speed – 500 men to feed. The Gunso stood on ant hill and announced that at a given time detailed mess orderlies would report to kitchen carrying food containers to mess area. So many minutes later every man must be on parade with mess gear, formed up in six queues. Anyone not on parade when serving commenced would not get any mess, irrespective of any excuse. You should have seen the sluggards – men who had consistently been the last to draw mess for the whole of their army career were first in line. They respected the Black Jap's word. The mess arrived, two servers appointed for each line – one rice, one stew -the Gunso drew a line with his stick parallel to the leading files and standing on one end of this line he directed movement. He would raise stick and six men would move forward as one to the rice tub, receive a ration, on to the stew and then pass out along a given route as the first lot left the line six more took their place and moved forward on the rise of the stick. Woe betide the man who moved too early or was slow. The show worked like clockwork and I've yet to see a large body of men fed so speedily and efficiently."

There was said to be good shade available and plentiful water (about 50 yards from the river). It was at this camp they received the first serious warning about cholera. They had been warned not to drink unchlorinated or unboiled water but it was here they were told that cholera had broken out among the natives higher up the river. There were still some chaps who drank the river water neat and some went diving for mussels.

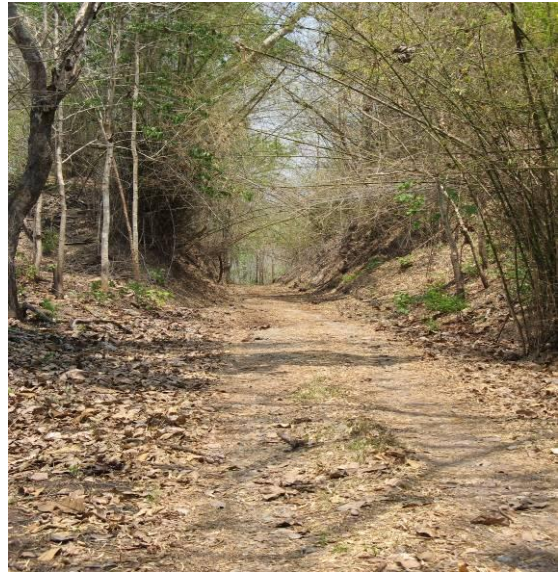
They departed at 19:50 on 10 May 1943 with a 17 kilo march to Thakunun over hilly country. It was intensely dark and men fell down ravines and over the edges of wooden bridges, which were broken or had missing logs and there were many nasty bruises received from slips. It was on this march that the men witnessed one of nature's wonders – they passed a tall tree covered in a myriad of fire-flies – and their lighting seemed to be synchronised – just like lights blinking on a Christmas tree.

As we drove along, Rod pointed out the ravines and washaways referred to in EEH's diary en-route to Thakunun. We made a stop at Khao Laem Dam now renamed the Vajiralongkorn Dam (after Thailand's Crown Prince) to look at the dam wall. The dam was built in the early 1980s and flooded part of the Kwae Noi valley, submerging part of the railway trace. Rod pointed out the level of the water in the dam – it had dropped dramatically in the last week so Rod was hoping he would be able to see more of the railway trace around Niki.

Then on to their next camp:-

- **Thakunun** "whale meat camp". (EEH – Takanun/Taganson - "trestle bridge camp"/ BH – Takanoon - "hill camp").

In the location of Thakunun, we went off the main highway and parked the car at some gates. We got out and walked down what would have been the Japanese track – this was hilly and twisting and very slippery with fallen debris from trees. In this area we could see the railway trace clearly and areas shored up with rocks and boulders. There were noticeable gaps in the trace to allow for drainage. To think I have actually walked on part of the track that Dad did as part of F Force! I was quite overwhelmed. We then went back to the main road and turned left on to a track and came to a bridge. However, there were locked gates which prevented us from crossing it. Rod said it was a British Bailey bridge from post WW2. This time we couldn't go any further so we went back to the road again and headed for Sangkhlaburi.



The diaries say:-

They arrive at 08:00 on 11 May 1943. This was a British camp and F Force stopped here en-route north. The kitchen was set up on a small creek, almost on top of a high hill. It was here that they received four good meals in one day of "whale meat" (this was likely to be tinned fish) mixed through rice with a vegetable hash, both good quality and quantity. However, the good food was marred by Lt Eaton being bashed over something trivial. As Ron was 6 ft 1 inch and the "nip was 5 ft nothing", he couldn't reach high enough to hit Ron so he kicked him in the shins. It was here that Pt Heasman become violently ill and had to be carried to the Japanese hospital. They heard some days later that he had died of cholera. They were told they would have another rest day at this camp, which was good news, so they made themselves comfortable for the night and settled down for a good sleep. However, at 23:00 a shout rang out to prepare for marching, and so greatly disappointed they hit the road at 00:15 and marched 21 kilos to their next stop – Tamarumpat.

Unfortunately, the waters of the Khao Laem Dam now cover the next two stages of F Force's march north:-

- **Tamarumpat** "fresh pork camp". (EEH and BH call it "swamp camp").

The diaries say:-

They arrived at 09:30 on 12 May 1943. This camp was in a swampy flat with the kitchen built on the bank of the river. The river was nearby but there were very steep banks. Some diaries say this is where they received four meals instead of two – other diaries say the previous camp. They departed at 20:00 on a 23 kilo march of steady climbing with showery rain, and heavy going, to Konkoita.

- **Konkoita** "Brigade – Cholera camp".

We could only gaze out over the receding waters of the dam in the general direction of this and the previous camp.

The diaries say:-

They arrived at 09:00 on 13 May 1943. This was the base camp and 27th Brigade HQ – it was a large and unfinished camp. The 2/29th were working here on roadwork. The river was large and clear. It has been described as a filthy place, covered in flies and excreta and the water had to be boiled to prevent cholera. "A simply dreadful place". As they arrived in camp they saw bodies being carried out on stretchers and Indians lying dead or dying under rough shelters. The food was rotten (rice and onions) and many had dysentery. They stayed close within the camp area all day and lined up to march out at sundown. There was a sudden short, sharp rainstorm just as they were about to leave and ignoring the guards, they scurried for shelter. There was a food dump covered with tarpaulins and all who could crawled under the tarps and when they came out later, the dump had shrunk by half. Strangely, the guards did not notice anything amiss in the dark! They departed at 19:30 on a 20 kilo march to Lower Niki.



- **Lower Niki** "Assembly camp" (BH – HQ camp).

We stopped at the Niki lookout. We were amazed at how it has been "developed". There is quite a little tourist centre here now. There was a gazebo type structure and several shops – and a very "posh" toilet block! However, no sign of Nagase Takashi's Shinto sticks!! It looks as though the Thais are trying to turn this into a tourist area – rather strange really as the border with Myanmar is still closed!

The diaries say:-

They arrived at 08:00 on 14 May 1943 and rested here for three nights. It was here that they caught up with trains 3 and 4. JE's diary says "Awoke to noise of train 5, 2/30th personnel. Cooking facilities strained." JE had travelled north on train 3. This was to have been their final destination but the Japanese decided to make a camp of approximately 2,000 further on. SA says they had two meals of very light measure on the 14th, and on the 15th they had breakfast at 11:30 of rice, towgay and whalemeat (tinned fish) about one tenth as much as he could have eaten, but still it was great. There was just six inches of water in a muddy creek but they did their washing and thanked their stars for small mercies.



It was now getting quite late so we headed for Sangkhlaburi and arrived at the Ponnatee Resort about 5.00 p.m. After freshening up we met up with Rod about 7.00 p.m. for dinner and had a delicious meal on the balcony overlooking the water.

Thursday - another good night's sleep and went to breakfast about 7.30 a.m. We left the hotel about 8.40 a.m. and called in to the market and bought some flowers and then headed off for:-

- **Shimo Songkurai** (Lower Songkurai)

We arrived about 9.30 a.m. and walked around the area where the camp, which accommodated 2,500, would have been situated. The area above the dam flood water level is owned by a developer who has put in a tarmac road, right alongside the edge of where the camp would have been. He is turning the area above the camp site into a "nature world"! The only saving grace is that you can drive right into the area now – which could be helpful for anyone unable to walk the distance in from the main road.

The developer is also excavating two huge dams/lakes. We walked down to the railway trace and headed south along the trace. We used part of a water bottle as a vase for the flowers and buried it on the trace and I recited the Ode. We then spent some time walking over the site in the area where the stream to the south of the site was, and also the cookhouse, kitchens etc. and the yak yard. We came back via the new lake construction area – which is taking place over the site of the south stream and back to the site of the camp – the topography fitted exactly with the accounts in the diaries I have read.



We then crossed the old Japanese road bridge (or what is left of it) on the northern stream and headed for the Cholera Hill area. On previous visits in November there has been a fully grown crop of tapioca but we found the area totally cleared. I placed my memorial card at the site of the graves and tied a cross and card on a stalk of bamboo and attached four poppies and recited the Ode. I always feel that I never do enough. By this time it was very hot and sticky so I went back to the car to get some water and as I was returning I spotted something that looked like a blue button sitting in the middle of the gravel road. When I had a closer look, I could see that it was a military button and thought it was of English origin. (Since returning home, and trawling the Internet, it would appear to be a General Service badge for the British Empire and Commonwealth.)

The diaries say:-

They left Lower Niki at 04:00 and arrived at Shimo Songkurai at 09:00 EEH says:-



"As we lined up on the morning of the 17th we were almost cheerful after being told that this would be our last stage. We had not had a roof over our heads since leaving Bampton and our minds and bodies almost reached a point when they could no longer respond. We had marched now for 190 miles (almost all in pitch dark) through rain and mud over a rutted and pot-holed bush track, over swampy flats, creeks and steep hills, carrying

our whole possessions plus a huge medical panier, cooking gear, and often our sick mates. Our movement orders had not varied – hour march, ¼ hour rest with 1 hour rest at half way mark – many times our lines had struggled so much through utter exhaustion that by the time the tail of the column reached the rest point it was time to start again.

As we were about to start, one of our men collapsed and I with three others carried him to a crude hospital, but within 24 hours we learned that he had died of cholera [probably Pte Harry Goldbolt who died on 17 May 1943]. as we sighted what was to be our home a more depressing sight could not be imagined. Four skeleton bamboo structures – no roof or floor – each about 100 meters by 10, with at each end a shallow murky creek; on one side a hill rose steeply and below us a filthy swamp. Every bush within 20 meters was sagging with its load of green blowflies and a long open latrine close by each hut was a crawling mass of maggots. A small roofed building at one end was to serve as a kitchen. We had marched 190 miles to this. We dropped our gear in despair more fearful than ever of what was in store for our future. The rainy season had started and this we knew would last for three months.

Our roll call revealed that of the 581 who left Changi 426 arrived at Shimo Songkurai. 155 (26.6%) had fallen out en route and many of us who gazed with awe at our new

derelict home had made the distance only through sheer tenacity of spirit. And then it Bloody Rained ... and Rained ... and Rained."

We didn't leave the Shimo Songkurai area until nearly 1.30 p.m. and drove in to Sangkhlaburi for lunch departing Sangkhlaburi about 3.00 p.m. and heading for Naka Songkurai (No. 2 camp). We only spent about 30 minutes there. Rod pointed out the large teak beams at the kiosk area that would have formed part of the bridge which the mainly British POWs built. I threw some flowers off the bridge and David threw some poppies over. This was primarily a British camp – but when Shimo Songkurai was broken up in July 1943, some Australians, including 2/30th men were sent to this camp.

We then went on to:-

- **Kami Songkurai** (Upper Songkurai) – No. 3 camp.

Kami Songkurai had been a smaller Australian camp of 400, set up at the same time as Shimo Songkurai but when Shimo Songkurai was split up, Australians, plus some English moved to Kami Songkurai, as well as the sadistic Japanese Camp Commander, Lieut Fukuda and the Korean guard/interpreter, Toyama who had a great influence over Lieut Fukuda.

The diaries say:-

Shimo Songkurai began to be split up towards the end of July 1943. JE's personal diary says: "200 including 17 stretcher cases moved off for No. 3 camp at 11:00 after mucking about. Breakfast 10:30. Lunch 11:45! 303 left for No. 2 camp including 160 from hospital." ES's entry for 2 August 1943 reads "Started on our way on mug of rice. The hardest, toughest journey I have ever done, carrying our sick. Only four men on a stretcher made of bamboo with all his gear – carrying our own and also a large Jap mosquito net. The road is impossible to describe as it is knee deep in mud, straining our muscles. A nightmare." "Jap interpreter Toyama arrives from No 1 camp. Things will be crook here now."



We got there about 4.20 p.m. and headed up the track on the right-hand side of the road (heading towards Three Pagoda Pass) towards the bluff. We scrambled through the vegetation and got right to the base of the bluff, right up to the rock face – which Rod said was the area of the operating theatre (it was supposed to be cooler under the shade of the bluff and less flies!). He cut a length of bamboo to which I attached my memorial card. He then dug a hole and planted half a plastic bottle with water and I placed some flowers in it and "planted" some poppies around it – eight all told –

and I said the Ode. We then walked around to the north face of the bluff and Rod scrambled further around – but there was no sign of any quarry. (I am particularly interested to find the location of this quarry as it is mentioned in several diaries – and in Galleghan's Greyhounds. I also believe my father worked in it – having recently obtained access to his DVA medical and service records under the Freedom of Information Act). We then all headed off around to the south face of the bluff and whilst there were sheer faces of rock there was nothing that really indicated a quarry. Rod was specifically looking for limestone as he assumed this would have been used as the ballast for the track bed. We carried on around as far as we could go and Rod climbed up over some rocks and called out for us to have a look. It looked like something from the Jurassic age! I was quite relieved to leave the area – it felt quite eerie. No sign of the quarry, but Rod did find some caves/tunnels which were reasonably high up and was able to explore one or two. One in particular appeared to be a lookout spot where the Japanese would have had a good



view of the road coming from Three Pagoda Pass – the natural line of invasion for the British. Rod had also been in contact with the daughter of a POW recently whose father had mentioned having to climb up a steep ladder to caves in the Kami area. This would seem to fit the bill.

It was now getting quite late (6.15 p.m.) and dusk falls very quickly in this part of the world, so we headed back to the hotel. After a quick freshen up, we had another excellent meal and fell into bed absolutely shattered!

Friday - At breakfast Rod produced his laptop and showed us the information he had for Kami Songkurai and most interesting of all was a map of the camp area from August 1943. I had previously seen a layout map of the camp, which was just on the right-hand side of the road – but this map showed the camp extended to the left-hand side of the road as well. We departed about 9.00 a.m. and headed straight for:-

- **Kami Songkurai** and had a look around the area on the left-hand side of the road - to the north of the huts across the rickety bridge over the creek. There was a well defined track and vegetation was sparse – compared to our November trips after the monsoon. We couldn't see anything indicating a quarry initially, but then saw an area with possibility – but it was red shale rather than limestone, which Rod was looking for. From the map Rod had shown us that morning, we now had a clear picture of where the campsite on this side of the road would have been – a good flat area which was right opposite the original camp site on the other side of the road (now in the rubber trees). We could also make out the railway trace – and old road. (The campsite on the right-hand side, heading north, was the original Australian camp of 400, which was expanded on the left hand side of the road when Shimo Songkurai was disbanded and some of the Australians and British moved to Kami Songkurai). When we got back to our starting point near the huts there were two men cutting bamboo and Rod asked the older man about the tunnel David and I had seen in November 2007. He stopped work and took us up the hill. The whole hillside was now completely bare except for a few clumps of bamboo and there were one or two other caves/tunnels in evidence. Rod went in with the man and called us in – we ventured in – only so far as I could still see daylight (as well as no head for heights, I don't like confined spaces!). Rod pointed out the grooves where the timber supports would have been – clearly visible at regular intervals. He also explained that the tunnel was built in a zigzag so that any blast from a grenade thrown in the entrance would cause minimal injury to those further back in the tunnel. Rod went right through the tunnel and said the height of the tunnel was standing height at the back of the hill, with just the narrow opening at the front of the hill. He laid down on the front opening and there was a clear line of sight to the road and the area generally and this would have given the Japanese a clear line of fire of any Allied troops coming down the road from Three Pagoda Pass. There was another hole in the hillside nearby and Rod had a look in there – he said this was probably a large storage area (ammunition?). Then Rod clambered on to the top of the hillside to check for lookout spots and could clearly see gun positions – lots of them – dug all over the hillside. As David and I slowly descended, we spotted them to. We were lucky that the area had recently been cleared – and also burnt off. It was an ideal location to ambush the road or railway.



We then headed down to the Agro-research farm to show Rod the "cutting" we had seen on previous visits. We parked near the northern white brick wall. The area was fairly clear of vegetation and we were able to walk alongside the wall, up the hill to the cutting. Rod went back for his metal detector. The manager, who I recognised from previous visits, came over to see us and he was quite happy (even encouraging) for Rod to use the metal detector – he even got one of his workers to bring along his chunkel to assist! It only took minutes before Rod unearthed the first dog spike – and also ballast – which was red in colour – with some limestone. The next strike was amazing – two dog spikes in their original position – and evidence of a teak sleeper! Rod and the worker cleared the whole sleeper and positioned the dog spikes as

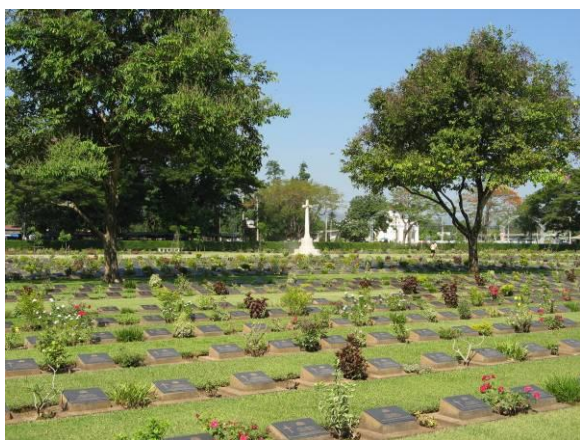
they would have held the rails in place. How amazing! I was overcome. Rod then

unearthed several more dog spikes before calling it a day. I think we could have gone along the whole floor of the cutting and unearthed sleepers and dog spikes galore. (If only this could be made a memorial for the men – similar to Hellfire Pass?!) This made the whole trip worthwhile and I felt as though I had actually touched the men – setting their spirits free. I am now in possession of two dog spikes – one with the “dog” head (which the Japanese stole from Malaya) and one with a roundish head (which the Japanese purchased from the Thais). I tied a laminated card to a cross with ribbons in the Battalion colours and planted the cross at the end of the sleeper. I then placed eight poppies on the sleeper. I recited the Ode and said a quiet prayer for the men. Have I done enough this time? Will I come back? Time will tell – but despite saying this would be our last visit, I still feel that I want/need to return.



We left there about midday and got to Three Pagoda Pass about 12.15 p.m. and pulled into a roadside café/restaurant for lunch. We were then going to help Rod with a memorial painting job but we had trouble with the car so while Rod organised repairs to the car, David and I whiled away our time at the restaurant and I caught up with my diary. When Rod reappeared it was too late for the painting so we headed back to Kanchanaburi. Terry Manttan suggested we stay at the Luxury Hotel (whilst not a five star hotel, it was clean and comfortable, and in the perfect location for the cemetery and TBRC and is on the site of the F & H Force hospital camp). And it was just around the corner from Kanchanaburi’s best restaurant – Ban Rao. We went straight out for dinner and returned to the hotel for a hot shower and fell into bed, reflecting on the events of the past four days. It is certainly very hot and sticky at this time of year – but due to lack of vegetation, the best conditions for looking at the railway and camp sites.

Saturday - We had breakfast in the coffee shop at the front of the hotel after which we headed off for TBRC. We spent ages talking to Andrew and Terry – and they showed us on the computer a set of aerial maps of camps in Burma. They were taken in 1945, RAF air reconnaissance – showing the POW camps along the Burma end of the railway. We saw from about the 40 to 62 kilo camps. We then settled down in the Research Room and I found a couple of reports on F Force. I found a description of the camp site at Kami Songkurai – which may give us a further clue as to where the quarry was located. We had seen an area that seemed the right shape but we had been looking for limestone, however, when we found the sleeper, the majority of the ballast was shale. The mystery thickens!!



We had lunch at TBRC’s coffee shop and then went over to the cemetery. I laid my memorial card at the Cross of Sacrifice and went to pay my respects to the Mortar Platoon men and Dad’s friends and mates (A/UWO2 Albert James (“Abbie”)McAlister, Pte Michael John (“Mick”) McHugh, Pte Reginald Smith (“Butch”), Pte Philip Francis Carey as well as Pte Harold Goldbolt, family friend of Marie Brown who travelled with us on the November 2008 pilgrimage.

We then laid the poppies I had collected from my work colleagues on the graves in the British section. After Remembrance Day last November, I sent an email to all the staff I work with suggesting that if they would like their poppies to go to a good cause, I would be happy to place them on graves in Kanchanaburi and Thanbyuzayat. I was pleasantly surprised by the response – I received a couple of hundred poppies. David and I concentrated on the Suffolks and Norfolks and I also placed some poppies on the graves of

Gordon Highlanders and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. David also took some photos of graves for Graham Wilson. We didn't get back to the Centre until about 4.15 p.m. and headed back to the Research Room where I tried to read as much of the F Force report as I could. We had a "de-briefing" session with Terry and Rod - they had both been so generous with their time. Terry also gave us copies of several maps and we made arrangements for our departure the next day and got directions for Mr Werasark to take us to Tarawa (Tha Rua - Wat Tha Rua) and the camp site at Ban Pong. We left TBRC about 5.50 p.m. and walked back - past the site of F & H Forces' hospital - which is opposite the main entrance to the cemetery. After freshening up we went back to Ban Rao Restaurant again. Another excellent meal. When we returned to the hotel I washed my dog spikes but really needed a brush to get them clean enough to take into Australia. I think I fell asleep every night before my head even hit the pillow!!

Sunday - After breakfast we headed for the cemetery and retook some of the grave photos that we weren't totally happy with. Mr Werasark arrived at 10.00 a.m. and it was a wrench to depart. The hotel, though basic, we couldn't fault and in an excellent location. We would be more than happy to stay at either hotel if (and when!) returning to Kanchanaburi. We then headed south for:-

- **Tarawa** "river camp" (TBRC - Tha Rua / EEH and BH - Tamakan "change alley camp").

This was the men's second march and Mr Werasark said it was about 30 kilometres from Kanchanaburi. It seemed to take ages to get there - and I started to wonder if he had forgotten to call in as we were on a main road and driving at a steady speed. We were in an air-conditioned car - the men had to walk this sector still with a lot of their heavy gear! But after about 30 minutes I started to see signs to Tha Rua and was relieved when we finally arrived at Wat Tha Rua. There was the old temple at one end, the school at the other, and a large "padang" in between - ideal location for the Japanese to put 500 or so men. We could see the river (the Mae Klong) from the Wat and we strolled down to it. The river was certainly wide and swiftly flowing here and it was easy to imagine the men arriving here after the long night march being hot and dirty and falling into the river to refresh themselves.



We then walked back through the temple grounds and out of the entrance to the Wat and Mr Werasark indicated the side street where the men would have walked down - and that road continued beside the Wat and down to the river. Not quite the "change alley" that it was in April 1943, but still some original buildings and still shops along the roadside.

The diaries say:-

The men arrived at this transit camp at 09:00 on 28 April 1943, having marched 25 kilos from Ban Pong on a bitumen road. Some diaries refer to this transit camp as "Change Alley" and they sold a lot of their heavy gear in exchange for food - and there appeared to be plenty on offer (sweet coffee, boiled and fried eggs, biscuits, cakes, chicken and rice, fritters and noodles (what the locals call "ma-mee") - or abandoned it. It appears to have been a good camp site, in the grounds of a Buddhist temple, on the river with good swimming. Even the food at the camp was good with lots of vegetables and a little meat in the stews, but they were so full of fried eggs etc. the mess was hardly patronised. The line-up at the RAP on the first evening was heavy. Captain John Taylor, and Padre Paddy Walsh, received many commendations throughout the diaries as heroes of the long march, and throughout the whole time on F Force. They were able to hire some transport for the heavier baggage for the next march to Kanburi.

We left Tha Rua about 11.00 a.m. and drove to:-

- **Ban Pong**

We firstly went to the railway station. There have been rice trucks in the siding since our first visit in 2005. These would have been similar to the trucks the men would have been transported in (although these are much larger than the original ones used). There are also sleepers and rails that were from the original railway. The Roman Catholic Cathedral, which is referred to by some of the POWs, was just across the road. We then



went in search of the transit camp. Again, this was in the grounds of a temple with a school adjacent. The temple was very ornate and elaborate with a large padang. Terry Manttan told us the current flagpole at one end of the padang was over the site of a well which has now been cemented up. He said that the men still holding guns and knives etc. dropped them down the well. I guess the weather conditions we experienced on this trip – very hot and humid/sticky, 40 degrees plus every day – were close to the conditions the men would have experienced in April 1943 but we had the

luxury of an air-conditioned car and clean and comfortable accommodation each evening, and plentiful good food.

The diaries say:-

The troops should have had an overnight stop here but as there had been a derailment and they arrived 24 hours late, they had to march out that evening, despite strong protests from Major Johnston. It was at Ban Pong when they first encountered the Korean, Toyama (who followed them to both Shimo and Kami Songkuria), who claimed to be "a Japanese gentleman, but I speak English" and he gave a warning of what might be expected of him by savagely attacking Major Anderson with a golf club (he had a particular dislike for the British).

We left Ban Pong about midday and headed back to Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport as we were staying overnight at the Novotel Hotel before venturing into Myanmar (Burma). To complete the pilgrimage, it was essential to visit Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery to pay respects to those buried there who did not return from F Force.

Monday - this was our fourth visit to Myanmar and it felt like arriving "home" as we touched down at Mingaladon Airport. On our first visit, the arrivals hall was like a ramshackle barn but the new building is modern and efficient. We even had an air bridge! We were met by our tour guide, Min Zaw Lin, who has looked after us on previous occasions. Min escorted us through Immigration and collected our luggage (he even recognised our suitcases before we saw them!). And our driver, Phone Cho, was waiting for us as we cleared Customs. We went straight to Traders Hotel to drop our luggage, then to see Mr Tint at Golden Express' offices and off to lunch (we seemed to do nothing but eat!!). After lunch we had a nap (even staying close to Bangkok airport, we were up at 4.00 a.m.!) and Min and Cho collected us about 4.30 p.m. and we went to the Shwedagon Pagoda. No matter how many times we go, it always feels new and different. This was our first visit when part of the stupa hasn't been covered in scaffolding. We then went to what has become my favourite restaurant in Yangon, Padonmar. The food was excellent as usual.

Tuesday - another early start and we departed Yangon about 8.00 a.m. for Mawlamyine (Moulmein). We stopped at Htaukkyan War Cemetery (pronounced "tow charn"). We visited Pte W F Schuberth's grave to pay our respects. (He was a member of the 2/30th Battalion and the only POW from the railway to be buried in this cemetery.) I was also keen to locate the graves of the 19th Hyderabad Regiment. Only weeks before we departed, when I was telling a friend of our proposed trip, she mentioned that her father had been an officer in

the Indian Army – the 19th Hyderabad. He had been involved in the Burma Campaign and had been greatly affected by his ordeal. He was awarded two military crosses – one in May 1940 for gallantry on the north-west frontier and one for gallantry in Burma in 1944. Like so many, he did not speak of his time in the war. She was delighted when I said I would try to get some photos of graves whilst in Myanmar and we were thrilled to find reference to the 19th Hyderabad on the central colonnade, which bears the name of soldiers who died with no known grave, and also on the memorial towards the back of the cemetery which bears the names of those soldiers who were cremated. There is never enough time though and I feel that my work is not finished here.

It is a long day's drive to Mawlamyine and we were pleased when Mr Tint said the road had improved and it would only take six hours, instead of the usual ten! So we had a little time sightseeing in Bago. This was also the first day of Thingyan (the water festival which precedes the New Year). We had been warned that we may get wet – and were slightly alarmed when we saw the stages (pandals) that had been erected along the main roads in Yangon. This was serious business! The pandals were like concert stages, with dozens of hose pipes hanging over the front rail. There were also what looked like fire hydrant hoses. Anyone walking and driving past was considered fair play, especially foreigners! We got our first "wetting" in Bago, but I must say the young lads were very polite as they actually said "please" when asking for permission to pour water over us! We couldn't say no! And they even said "thank you" afterwards. This was the first of many – but as it was so hot it was quite pleasant – and hopefully all our sins for last year have been washed away!

We arrived in Mawlamyine about 6.00 p.m., after what is becoming familiar comfort stops along the way, and lunch at my second favourite venue, the Mountain View Resort at Kyaikhto. Our hotel for the next four nights was the Ngwe Moe Hotel. What was slightly alarming was the pandal erected right outside the front of the hotel blaring out loud music, but surprisingly they packed up about 8.00 p.m.

Wednesday - we set off for Thanbyuzayat about 8.00 a.m. – just as the music started up at the pandal opposite our hotel. The locals were really getting into their celebrations – even little toddlers – coming right out into the road to throw water over passers-by.

We stopped at Mudon to buy flowers. Min had said the market might be closed because of the festivities, however, we found the market open, but not at full strength. We managed to get some chrysanthemums in yellow and purple – although not at their best. We then headed for Thanbyuzayat. I usually travel with bunches of home grown gum leaves to place on the graves, but due to the heat, I didn't think it would travel too well. After the comparatively good roads of yesterday, the road south of Mudon was no different to previous years and we bumped our way along. When we arrived at Thanbyuzayat War



Cemetery the manager, U Thet Mon, was waiting at the entrance to greet us. U Thet Mon said his wife (Daw Kathy Kyaw) was preparing lunch for us and invited us into his home for a cup of tea. We then set off for the Australian section, to the 2/30th graves I wanted to visit – namely the nine members of the Mortar Platoon (L/Sgt Albert Clemen(s) ("Clem") Everingham, Pte Dennis Charles Lacey, Pte Max Cook, Pte Kenneth Sydney Reid, Pte William Stewart Bicket, L/Sgt Victor ("Vic") Barns, Pte Campbell Dunlop ("Blue") Owen, Pte Alfred Edward Stone and Pte Sydney George Love), the men mentioned in Dad's

"little brown book" as friends - Pte Kevin Dowle Prichard (HQ Coy range taker), Cpl Harold Lewis Baker ("Harry") (HQ Pioneer), Gunner Kevin Loseby Wood (2/15th), and Pte Sydney Herbert Thomas ("Tommy") Busine, Pte Clarence James ("Tankie") Phillips, L/Cpl William Clifford ("Cliff") Bayliss and the brothers and fathers of people we have travelled with on our pilgrimages. I placed some flowers and a poppy on each grave – and recited the Ode. I feel a closer connection to these men with every visit. While it is still possible to get into Myanmar, I doubt I will ever stop wanting to visit this cemetery. I am sure Dad's spirit is there with his mates.

David then photographed some graves that Graham Wilson had requested. We chatted over a long lunch with U The Mon where we also had another guest – an American chap who was looking for American graves – due to a misprint in the Lonely Planet guide. He taught English in an International school in Yangon so we were able to give him a brief history lesson!

After lunch, David and I then set about taking photos for the 2/10th Field Regiment, an assignment we had gladly accepted on behalf of Jim Busine, whose planned visit that month had to be postponed. We then walked around the English section of the cemetery and placed poppies on the graves of as many Suffolk and Norfolk Regiment that we could – as well as some Gordon Highlanders and Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Was this my last visit? I hope not. It is always hard leaving – and I never feel quite satisfied that I have done enough. We said our goodbyes and thanks to U The Mon and his wife and returned to Mawlamyine.

We then spent another two days in Mawlamyine sightseeing, and took another three days travelling back to Yangon via Hpa-an, spending our last two days in Yangon visiting pagodas, markets, and walking around the streets taking in the local colour. What a contrast to our first visit in 2005 when I was worried about leaving the hotel on our own. Thankfully, on that first occasion, Mark Sturdy took us under his wing and we ventured out to a local supermarket – from then there has been no looking back!

Our last part of the journey was to join the Battalion on ANZAC Day and we arrived in Sydney on 23 April. We had one recovery day, visiting family, before setting our alarm for 2.00 a.m. on Sunday, 25 April 2010. We also booked a wake up call with Hotel Services the night before. We had just dropped off when the phone rang and someone asked if we had really booked the call for 2.00 a.m.!

The day went by so quickly – so much to see and do and try to absorb – and not enough hours in the day. And I do talk too much!! I was thrilled to see Marie Gordon, Abbie McAlister's sister, waiting for us at Hyde Park as we disbanded after the march. I have been in communication with Marie since my first article in Makan after our 2005 trip. Hopefully, one day, I will be able to meet up with Clare Lane (who I have also "met" through Makan), whose brother, Kevin Prichard, was mentioned in Dad's "little brown book" as a friend, and who sadly did not survive his time on the railway. Abbie is buried in Kanchanaburi War Cemetery and Kevin in Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery. It is because of these connections, and family members of others mentioned in Dad's book such as Fiona Quinney (Stewart Bicket's niece); Dave Cook and his sister, Judith (Max Cook's nephew and niece), that I feel the strong need to keep returning.

I apologise for the length of this article – it has been very difficult for me to write – and could easily have been twice the length!

I would be delighted to hear from anyone who might know anything about my father's time on F Force (e.g. I do not know who his special mate or mates were – or what working parties he was on at Shimo or Kami Songkurai), or if you have any stories or snippets about the F Force march, and in particular, Shimo or Kami Songkuria, or if you have any details about the location of the quarry at Kami Songkurai. The best reference I found in an article at TRBC was:-

"Throughout the month blasting had been carried out in the quarry adjacent to the camp. This was only 50 yards from one of the British hospital wards and every day large fragments of rock fell through the roofs of all the hospital wards and about the camp."

THEY WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN – WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

LEST WE FORGET