

Bridge to Myanmar



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ECHO'S PLEDGE

Here in the valley of the Kwai there is an aurora of pensive stillness that pervades and even transcends the activity of daily tasks being performed by the resident populace. The meaning of this stillness or why one becomes so aware of it so soon after arrival cannot be accurately traced, however permit me to describe this feeling as I experienced it.

Soon after arrival at Kanchanaburi, a contemporary and I paid a visit to the cemetery that commemorates the allied prisoners of war who died at the hands of the Japanese during the 1939 to 1945 war. It is a beautiful cemetery and we were pleased that the final resting place of these gallant men was so well cared for. As we walked among the headstones reading the dates, ages and epitaphs we withdrew into a profound solemnity that was interrupted only by low, muttered exclamations.

I. TAYLOR WALKER

Air Gunner

Royal Air Force

18th April 1945 Age 18

In memory of our beloved son. "at the
going down of the sun and in the morning..."

He was still a very young man but old enough to die for the preservation of freedom in the country he loved. This prison camp was opened in 1942..... How long had he been there prior to his death?

An Allied Soldier
of the

1939 - 1945

War

Known Unto God

How had his identity been lost? What had caused the fickle winds of fate to obscure forever from his loved ones his final resting place and the circumstances under which he was delivered into the hands of God.

A huge black cloud gathered over the valley of the Kwai and burst without warning in torrents of water. By unspoken agreement we sought no shelter. It would seem to be a sacrilege if we had, as though we could not bear to learn the remainder of the message that we had begun to receive. In some small way we were glad that we could endure even a small discomfort here midst the graves of those who had endured unspeakable tortures at the hands of their cruel captors. Hope lends strength, how little hope there must have been here in a prison camp that had well over a twenty per cent fatality rate compared to the 4 to 8 per cent of most of the other prisoner of war camps world-wide.

For nearly two and one half hours we fought back unsoldierly signs of emotion while we read on. Many epitaphs seemed to be written by the prisoner himself or at least by some member of his family who knew what he must have felt.

H. C. RICHARDSON

Royal Artillery

19th July 1943 Age 30

When you go home, tell them of us
and say, "for your tomorrow, we
gave our today."

L. MARTIN (as though giving assurance)

The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment

28th October 1943 Age 25

To live in the hearts of those we
leave behind is not to die.

We have learned from actual survivors of these camps and by misty recollections of the natives who were here at the time that there was almost no capitulation or collaboration on the part of these men. They bore their punishments and died their deaths as they had lived their lives firm in their beliefs and unswerving in their devotion to cause and country.

F. A. GANTHROPE

The Royal Norfolk Regiment

1st August 1943 Age 32

"There's some far corner of a for-
eign field that is forever England."

What manner of men were these; hardened professional soldiers, soldiers of fortune who had given up life as a worthwhile transition between birth and death? I think not.

J. N. CARSON

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders

26 June 1943 Age 29

It is only a grave but it needs
care for the son we love lies
sleeping here.

T. H. MEREDITH

Army Service Corps

27th August 1943 Age 27

If I could have my dearest wish of all,
Dear "Tom", I'd ask for you.

They were men with loved ones and families who were snatched from their private lives and sent by a power beyond their control to answer the call of the war claxon. How magnificently they had answered it.

I was sent on a mission which called for me to cover nearly the whole length of the valley of the Kwai and throughout the trip I was unable to shake the eerie feeling that I was being observed. The feeling was particularly strong when I'd pass a railroad timber tressle bridge that they had built, which stood straight and strong despite the flood waters which had washed out virtually all the steel and cement bridges that had been recently built. Farther up the valley, deep in the jungle, I'd run across the railroad bed or a small bridge built of railroad ties. Even in the malarial swamps there was mute evidence of the work which had been done at gunpoint. Had the government of Thailand not seen fit to pick up the rail there would still be a serviceable Thai-Burma Railroad, an enduring monument to those men who had grimly met their deaths during its forced construction.

The men of Company "E", temporarily stationed here at Kanchanaburi, requested that a wreath laying ceremony be held to commemorate the deaths of these allied soldiers. The ceremony was held on the 22nd day of October 1962.

The 1st Battle Group, 35th Infantry Chaplain, Captain William R. Hollis gave the invocation:

"O Lord, Thou who art our reason for living and the keeper of the veil of death between here and eternity, keep these that have been thy servants in times past when they sacrificed themselves that others might be free. Help us in our generation to be mindful of the sacrifices which they have made, and help us as we pledge our lives to maintain the peace for which they died. Let this hallowed ground remain as a link between their sovereign nations, our in America, and the people of Thailand, and a symbol of free men united the world over to keep freedom alive. Bless their loved ones still living, bless us as we strive for such heroic lives in our day. In Thy name.....Amen."

Colonel John E. Olson, the Battle Group Commander and survivor of the Bataan Death March laid the wreath and spoke to those assembled:

"With the laying of this wreath and this simple ceremony, we pay tribute to the gallant members of the Armed Forces of Great Britain, Australia and the Netherlands who lie buried here. Though they were denied a soldier's death in battle, by their determined stand against the invading armies in the early days of World War II, they gained precious time for us and our allies to prepare to carry the war to ultimate victory. Their sacrifices should never be forgotten. It is with humility and deep emotion that we say to our comrades in arms who lie here "Rest in Peace."

A rifle salute was fired then taps was played and when the last echo had faded, a silent answer was given to a silent question, "we stand ready if needbe to follow where you have pointed the way."

Night settles over the valley of the Kwai and a lonely, eerie, train whistle can be heard. We know that these gallant dead are assembled around their heavenly campfires and are witnessing again the rise of a tyrannical power, we take pride again in pledging our lives as they did theirs to insure the triumph of our way of life and theirs over all who would seek to trample it. We hope that your rest is more complete because.....we stand ready.




QX20030 LANCE CORPORAL
J. H. HEATH
ARMY ORDNANCE CORPS
5TH JUNE 1943 AGE 19

HE GAVE HIS LIFE THAT WE MIGHT ENJOY PEACE
EVER REMEMBERED









THEIR NAME LIVETH
FOR EVERMORE

River Kiwi





Monument to the Japanese
Commander in charge of the
POW Camp at Kanchanaburi