



The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia

Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia

8 to 23 November 2003

August 2004

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Membership of the delegation

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Liberal Party of Australia

Mr Gavan O'Connor (*Deputy Leader 8 – 17 November*)
Member for Corio (Victoria)
Australian Labor Party

Senator Brett Mason (*Deputy Leader 18 – 20 November, Leader 21 – 23 November*)
Senator for Queensland
Liberal Party of Australia

Senator Natasha Stott Despoja
Senator for South Australia
Australian Democrats

Ms Rosa Ferranda (*Secretary*)
Department of the Senate

The delegation was also accompanied by Mrs Beverley McArthur.

Table of contents

Membership of the delegation	iii
Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	ix
Objectives of the delegation	xi
Summary of recommendations	xiii
Chapter 1 – Visit to Thailand	
Introduction	1
Thailand-Australia relations	1
Thailand-Australia parliamentary relations	2
Australia's aid	3
Remembrance Day	4
Cultural and historical visits	5
Chapter 2 – Visit to Vietnam	
Introduction	7
Vietnam-Australia relations	7
Vietnam-Australia parliamentary relations	8
Australia's aid	10
Business relations	12
Ha Long Bay	13
Chapter 3 – Visit to Cambodia	
Introduction	15
Cambodia-Australia relations	15
Cambodia-Australia parliamentary relations	16
Australia's aid	18
Business relations	19
Cultural and historical visits	19
Appendix 1 – Itinerary/Program	21
Appendix 2 – Memories of the Burma-Siam Railway by William (Bill) Haskell Ex Wx3279 2 nd 3 rd Machine Gun Battalion	29

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- The National Assembly of Vietnam, for the hospitality and courtesy extended to it during its visit to Vietnam.
- The National Assembly and Senate of Cambodia, for the hospitality and courtesy extended to it during its visit to Cambodia.

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Introduction

Each year, a number of federal parliamentarians participate in delegations to other countries and the Australian Parliament also hosts a number of visiting parliamentary delegations. The objective of Australia's delegation program is to foster and maintain productive and amicable international and regional relationships with other parliaments, parliamentary bodies and organisations.

This objective is achieved through discussions and meetings between host and visiting parliamentarians, which provide the opportunity for exchange of ideas on current or topical issues and insight into other views and perspectives.

This is the report of a delegation of four Australian parliamentarians to Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia in November 2003. The itinerary/program for the visit is set out in Appendix 1.

These were each bilateral visits – the delegation delivered invitations to the presiding officers of the national assemblies of each country, for reciprocal delegation visits. The members of the delegation look forward to these reciprocal visits, in order to return the gracious hospitality extended to the delegation during its visits and to further foster the many relationships which the members of the delegation developed during the course of the visits.

Regrettably, Mr O'Connor MP, the deputy leader of the delegation became ill while in Vietnam and withdrew from the delegation on 17 November 2003.

Objectives of the delegation

Prior to its departure, the delegation agreed to the following objectives:

- To renew contacts with the national legislatures and explore further avenues for dialogue and cooperation.
- To gain an enhanced understanding of recent political developments in each country.
- To review the processes of economic development, reform and liberalisation and assess opportunities for further growth and foreign investment.
- To explore Thai, Vietnamese and Cambodian views (as members of ASEAN and – with Australia - of the ASEAN Regional Forum) on the effectiveness of ASEAN and APEC in promoting regional economic cooperation and cooperation on regional security issues.
- To gain an appreciation of national and regional efforts to deal with transnational issues; including terrorism, narcotics, unauthorised people movements and health issues (particularly HIV-AIDS).
- To review the progress of Australia's development cooperation programs, with particular reference to Vietnam and Cambodia.
- To explore avenues for further trade and investment between Australia and Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia.

These objectives were formulated with the assistance of the Parliamentary Library's Information and Research Services section.

The visits to all three countries were successful and the delegation is confident that the objectives of the visits have been met.

These visits strengthened the excellent relationships which Australia already has with Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia and ensured that those relationships will continue to develop further. The visits were also beneficial in increasing the delegation's understanding of the political and economic challenges facing each country.

Summary of recommendations

The delegation recommends that any outstanding issues in relation to the TAFTA be resolved as soon as possible, to facilitate implementation and further development of the TAFTA.

The delegation recommends that AusAID continue to support programs against people trafficking and other programs that care and assist victims of people trafficking.

The delegation recommends that a plaque acknowledging the contribution of Mr Rod Beattie in the creation of the Hellfire Pass Memorial be placed at the entrance to the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum.

The delegation recommends that the criteria to be applied for student visa applications should be re-examined to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility in relation to providing evidence of assets.

The delegation recommends that AusAID give consideration to continuing aid funding to the World Vision Mobile Population and STI/HIV Vulnerability project in Hai Phong City.

Chapter 1 – Visit to Thailand

Introduction

The delegation visited Thailand as guests of the Thai National Assembly, from 8 to 13 November 2003. In Bangkok, the delegation met with many Thai parliamentarians, from both the House of Representatives and the Senate, discussing in particular the Thailand-Australia free trade agreement (TAFTA) and the role of the Senate in Thailand and Australia.

The delegation journeyed to the province of Kanchanaburi, to take part in the Remembrance Day ceremony at Hellfire Pass, where Australian prisoners of war worked on the Thai-Burma railway during World War II. The delegation also visited the Hellfire Pass Museum and the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, both very emotional experiences for the members of the delegation.

While in Kanchanaburi Province, the delegation was also able to visit the New Life Project, which has received AusAID funding and is supported by the Australian Embassy and the Australia-New Zealand Women's Group.

After returning to Bangkok, the delegation had the opportunity to visit the Baan Kredtrakarn Protection and Occupational Development Centre, which provides protection and assistance to children and women that have been the victims of people trafficking.

Thailand-Australia relations

As previous Australian parliamentary delegations have noted, Australia is held in high regard in Thailand. The courtesy and the overwhelming hospitality extended to the delegation reflect the excellent relations between Australia and Thailand.

Several historical factors have contributed to the relationship: Australia's role in World War II and the Vietnam War; and Australia's long-standing contribution to the region. The education of many Thais in Australia has further enhanced the relationship and also assists in the development of business links between the two countries.

More recently, Australia's contribution to the International Monetary Fund package to assist Thailand's economic crisis (1997), Australia's support for Thailand's candidate for Director General of the World Trade Organization, and the significant contributions by both Thailand and Australia to the

efforts to secure East Timor's independence and to INTERFET and UNTAET reflect the on-going strength of Thailand-Australia relations.

The finalised negotiation of the TAFTA is also evidence of the strong relations between the two countries. The delegation noted, however, that there are still a number of issues in relation to the TAFTA that have been deferred (for example, government procurement, agricultural and quarantine issues).

The delegation therefore recommends that any outstanding issues in relation to the TAFTA be resolved as soon as possible, to facilitate implementation and further development of the TAFTA.

Thailand-Australia parliamentary relations

Delegation members, in their discussions with Thai parliamentarians, sought to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the Thai political structure, and to gain an appreciation of the issues currently facing Thailand and Thai politicians.

The delegation made courtesy calls on HE Mr Suchart Tonjaroen, Second Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives and Senator Kraissak Choonhawan, Chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, representing HE Major General Manoonkrit Roobkajorn, President of the Senate. The delegation leader, Mr McArthur MP, took the opportunity to issue invitations to be passed to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate for a joint delegation from the Thai Parliament to visit Australia as guests of the presiding officers of the Australian Parliament.

The discussion with Mr Suchart centred on the changes to the operations of the Thai Senate as a result of its transformation from an appointed body to a directly elected body. Senator Khunying Chodchoy Sophonpanich, Deputy Chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee and Senator Prateep Ungsongtham Hata also attended the meeting with Senator Kraissak. The discussions at this meeting focused on the TAFTA and the lack of public information in Thailand about the agreement; and the need for better planning, investment and technology in relation to waste management and waste management systems. There was also some discussion of the impact of the new arrangements for the Thai Senate and the resulting composition of the Senate, including its non-party political nature.

These discussions enabled the members of the delegation to gain a greater understanding of issues relating to the TAFTA and also enhanced their knowledge of the Thai political system. The delegation was also able to visit the Parliament Chamber and observe the House of Representatives in session.

The delegation also met with members of the Australia-Thailand Parliamentary Friendship Group. During the meeting, the TAFTA and related issues were again discussed, as well as: the needs of Thais seeking education in Australia; the impact of Burmese refugees and displaced persons on Thailand; the extra-judicial killings during the Thai Government's "war on drugs" campaign; drug trafficking; and the impact of HIV/AIDS education programs in Thailand. These discussions enabled the delegation to understand some of the social issues currently facing Thailand.

The delegation was also able to meet with Professor Borwornsak Uwanno, Secretary-General of the Cabinet, notwithstanding a cabinet reshuffle which occurred on the day of the delegation's arrival in Thailand. Discussions with Professor Borwornsak centred on the operation of the Thai Senate, the negotiation of the TAFTA, the operations of Cabinet, and government accountability. Professor Borwornsak advised that delegation that a Cabinet Parliamentary Liaison Officer, based on the Australian model, would shortly be appointed. The issue of extra-judicial killings during the Thai Government's "war on drugs" campaign was also discussed.

Australia's aid

Australia has a long-standing development cooperation program with Thailand, which in 2003-04 will be approximately A\$15.1 million. Cooperation assistance focuses on regional trade and economic development, and cooperation on regional issues such as terrorism, drug trafficking and people trafficking.

The delegation visited the Baan Kredtrakarn Protection and Occupational Development Centre, and met with Mr Weerasak Kowsurat, Vice Minister for Social Development and Human Security. The centre provides protection and assistance to children and women that have been the victims of people trafficking and houses up to 550 people. AusAID provides funds to the centre through the International Organization for Migration. The delegation observed some of the vocational and educational programs provided by the Centre and took the opportunity to speak with some of the women and girls participating in the programs. The visit and subsequent discussions provided the delegation with an overview of programs to assist people who have been trafficked and of the problems facing law enforcement officials in their efforts to combat people trafficking.

The delegation therefore recommends that AusAID continue to support programs against people trafficking and other programs that care and assist victims of people trafficking.

The delegation visited the New Life Project, which houses 48 abandoned or abused children in rural Kanchanaburi Province. The project has received AusAID funding and is also supported by the Australian Embassy and the Australia-New Zealand Women's Group. The delegation was able to see its most recent aid project, a water tower. The resulting increased availability of water and its channelling through plastic piping have contributed significantly to the cultivation of palm trees and the project's vegetable garden. The project has 1200 palm trees (with an additional five trees planted by the delegation during its visit). The palm trees are a cash crop, the proceeds of which fund the work of the project. The vegetable garden is cultivated by the children at the project, and the harvest supplies the project's kitchen. The delegation was also entertained by performances of traditional Thai dance and music by the children.

Remembrance Day

The role of Australians in Thailand during World War II has long been recognised as a significant factor in the strong relationship between Thailand and Australia. Many Australian prisoners of war worked on the construction and maintenance of the Thai-Burma Railway and over 2700 of them died doing so. Many of them worked at Hellfire Pass.

The delegation was honoured to be able to take part in the Remembrance Day ceremony at Hellfire Pass on 11 November 2003. The leader of the delegation, Mr McArthur MP, gave one of the readings and the delegation also laid a wreath during the ceremony. The members of the delegation were particularly moved by the evocative description read out by Mr William Haskell, a former prisoner of war, of the harsh conditions endured by the people forced to work on the railway. The text of Mr Haskell's description is set out in Appendix 2.

After the ceremony, the delegation met Mr Haskell and Mr John Parkes, the other former prisoner of war who attended the ceremony, as well as many other World War II veterans who were present at the ceremony, and together with many of the people present at the ceremony, placed poppies on the train track at the bottom of the Pass in remembrance of those who died.

The delegation then visited the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum escorted by Mr William Slape, the manager of the museum. The museum is jointly supported by the Thai and Australian Governments and explains to visitors the story of the railway, and seeks to convey the hardship and suffering of the forced local labourers and prisoners of war who worked on it. The delegation was surprised to find that there was no acknowledgment of the role of Mr Rod Beattie in the creation of the Memorial.

The delegation therefore recommends that a plaque acknowledging the contribution of Mr Rod Beattie in the creation of the Hellfire Pass Memorial be placed at the entrance to the Hellfire Pass Memorial Museum.

The delegation was also able to visit Kanchanaburi War Cemetery and placed a wreath there on behalf of the Australian people. Members of the delegation then walked among the graves, placing small floral tributes on graves. The visit to the cemetery also was a very moving experience for the delegation.

Cultural and historical visits

In the course of the visit to Thailand, the delegation also had the opportunity to see several Thai historical and cultural sites.

Ayutthaya is the ancient capital of Thailand, with many ancient ruins and art works. The delegation attended the Ayutthaya Historical Study Centre and was then escorted around several of the main ruins and the Bang Pa-In Palace.

In Bangkok, the delegation was taken to see the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. The Grand Palace is a series of several buildings with highly decorative architectural detail. The Temple of the Emerald Buddha is the most important Buddhist temple in Thailand and houses the most highly revered Buddha image, carved from a single block of fine jade.

The delegation also visited the Jim Thompson House. Jim Thompson is credited with the resurgence of the Thai silk industry and the worldwide recognition now accorded to Thai silk. He gained further renown for the construction of his house which combined six teak buildings in traditional Thai architecture. The house and its art collection became such a point of interest that it was opened to the public with the proceeds donated to Thai charities and projects directed at the preservation of Thailand's artistic and cultural heritage.

These visits enabled the delegation to gain an appreciation of Thai religion, culture and history.

Chapter 2 – Visit to Vietnam

Introduction

The delegation visited Vietnam from 13 to 18 November 2003. The visit was very significant for the delegation as 2003 marked the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and Vietnam.

In the course of the visit, the delegation met with a number of members of the National Assembly, discussing in particular the structure and composition of the Assembly and the functions of the committees of the Assembly and comparing the Assembly with the Australian Parliament. These meetings reinforced the strong relationship between Vietnam and Australia.

The delegation was also able to visit a number of Australian funded or Australian assisted aid projects: the ACIAR soil project in Le Minh District (near Hanoi); the World Vision-AusAID mobile population and sexually transmitted infections and HIV vulnerability project in Hai Phong City; and the Le Van The Primary School and an AusAID-funded microfinance expansion project in Cu Chi District (near Ho Chi Minh City).

Education is important to Vietnam and to the relationship between Vietnam and Australia. The delegation therefore appreciated the opportunity to visit the RMIT International University Vietnam campus in Ho Chi Minh City and to hear about the role that the university is performing in providing tertiary education in Vietnam.

The delegation was also able to meet with members of the Australian business community in Vietnam.

Vietnam-Australia relations

In the 1980s Vietnam was internationally isolated. During that period, Australia continued to provide aid through international organisations and was one of the first countries to restore bilateral aid to Vietnam after it withdrew from Cambodia and the signing of the peace accords in October 1991.

The opening of the Australian Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City in November 1994 also strengthened diplomatic relations between the two countries. Bilateral relations have been maintained and intensified through

the high level official visits between the two countries in the ensuing period.

The two countries also have signed a number of major bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding in recent years. Both governments are encouraging closer sporting and cultural relations. Tourism between the countries is also expanding, particularly as there are a large number of expatriate Vietnamese resident in Australia who revisit their birth country. Australian participation in the development of commercial ventures in Vietnam, and the development of business links between the two countries, have further enhanced the relationship.

Education links between the two countries are also important. There are approximately 500 Vietnamese tertiary students currently studying in Australia on Australian Development Scholarships, with about 150 new students commencing each year. Equally significant to the relationship is the establishment of the RMIT International University Vietnam campus in Ho Chi Minh City. RMIT International University Vietnam is the first 100 per cent foreign-owned university in Vietnam. Members of the delegation were therefore delighted to be invited to the campus and met with Mr Michael Mann, the president of the university. Mr Mann described the structure of the university, plans for development of other campuses and other programs, links between the university and the community, and links to RMIT Melbourne. The delegation noted Mr Mann's concerns about the difficulties faced by people applying for Australian student visas, particularly in providing evidence of assets if they do not have bank accounts or other tangible assets.

The delegation therefore recommends that the criteria to be applied for student visa applications should be re-examined to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility in relation to providing evidence of assets.

Vietnam-Australia parliamentary relations

The delegation made a courtesy call on HE Mr Nguyen Van Yeu, Vice President of the National Assembly. During the visit, the delegation leader, Mr McArthur MP, issued an invitation to Mr Yeu to be passed to HE Nguyen Van An, the President of the National Assembly for a delegation from the National Assembly to visit Australia as guests of the presiding officers of the Australian Parliament.

At the beginning of the meeting, Mr Yeu referred to the good relations both between the governments and the parliaments of Vietnam and Australia and the recent development of enhanced links between them. The meeting then discussed the structure and composition of the National Assembly, and in particular, the role of the committees of the Assembly; the improved

standards of living resulting from economic reforms in Vietnam; and the usefulness of joint ventures in promoting economic development.

The delegation also met with the Hon Mr Ngo Anh Dzung, Vice-Chairman of the Committee of External Relations. Also present were the Hon Mrs Duong Thu Huong, Vice-Chairwoman of the Economics and Budgetary Committee and the Hon Mr Nguyen Ngoc Dao, a member of the Committee of External Relations. Discussions centred on comparisons of the structure, composition (including the role of women) and procedures of the National Assembly and the Australian Parliament; the main challenges that Vietnam has faced in developing and maintaining economic growth; and the social issues now confronting Vietnam: transportation infrastructure and road accidents; the poverty gap; and reform of education.

Mr Dzung referred to the good relations between the two countries and pointed to the establishment of the RMIT International University Vietnam campus, a university with Australian links and the only foreign university in Vietnam, as confirmation of the strength of the relationship. Mr Dzung also commented positively on SBS's broadcasts on Vietnam to the Vietnamese community in Australia.

The delegation was also able to meet with the Hon Mr Phan Trung Lý, Vice-Chairman of the Law Committee. Mr Lý provided the members of the delegation with an overview of the legislative system and the court structure in Vietnam. He also discussed: the reform of the laws of Vietnam that has been underway in the last few years, including measures to increase legal certainty; the shortage of lawyers in Vietnam and proposals to improve the situation; legal education in schools; and accountability of parliamentarians.

There is one council in the National Assembly as well seven committees – the Council for Ethnic Minorities. The delegation met with the Hon Mrs Nguyen Thi Nuong, Vice-President of the Council and Mrs Ling and Mr Zeng, two members of the Council. Mrs Nuong acknowledged the ongoing good relationship between Australia and Vietnam, as evidenced by the recent Vietnamese delegation to Australia. The delegation was then provided with an overview of the functions and operations of the Council, and the extent and composition of the ethnic minorities, who mainly live in mountainous areas and on remote islands. There was also some discussion of the main priorities in relation to the ethnic minorities: fighting poverty and improving their living standards and local infrastructure, providing them with access to fresh water, reforestation of their local regions, health and education.

Delegation members sought to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Vietnam's political structure and of current issues in these discussions

with members of the National Assembly. The members of the delegation were also honoured to be able to observe the National Assembly in session.

During its visit to Ho Chi Minh City, the delegation met with Mr Vo Van Cuong, Chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Council and Mr Le Hung Quoc, Vice Director of the Ho Chi Minh City Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This provided the delegation with the opportunity to understand the particular issues facing Ho Chi Minh City, such as the need for investment to restore the city, especially infrastructure replacement, and construction of new schools and restoration of architecturally significant buildings. Mr Cuong also noted the contribution of live cattle imports from Australia to Ho Chi Minh City's plans to develop a local dairy industry and encouraged further trade and investment.

Australia's aid

As mentioned above, Australia was one of the first countries to restore bilateral aid to Vietnam after it withdrew from Cambodia. Australia continues to be a significant aid donor to Vietnam, having provided A\$72.2 million in 2002-03 and committed A\$72.1 in 2003-04.

The goals of Australia's development assistance are reducing poverty and achieving sustainable economic and social development, through improvements in governance and rural development. Major rural infrastructure projects have included the My Thuan Bridge and the Provincial water supply project. There has also been an increasing focus on supporting income-generation, small-scale infrastructure, agricultural development and capacity building for rural development. A range of agriculture projects are also supported through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). Scholarships to Australian tertiary institutions (at an annual cost of approximately A\$15 million) and support for activities by non-government organisations (NGO) are also important features of the program.

The delegation was therefore delighted to be able to visit a number of aid projects which Australia has been supporting, either directly or indirectly.

The delegation's first site visit was to the Me Linh District, to a project supported by the ACIAR (in collaboration with research institutes from Australia, Thailand, Taiwan and Vietnam) on the impact of heavy metals on sustainable production and waste recycling in urban fringe and intensive agriculture areas (the project will inform farmers as to what fertilisers they should use and in what quantities). The delegation met with Dr Bui Huy Hien, director of the National Institute of Soils and Fertilisers, who briefed the delegation on the scope of the project and the progress being made at the particular site (a rose growing enterprise). The project is directed at

developing research capacity and laboratory facilities for the study of soil and crop contamination in Vietnam and establishing training and exchange programs for staff in the collaborating countries.

The delegation then travelled to Hai Phong City. Over lunch, Dr Nguyen Van Vy, the director of the Health Service of Hai Phong City, briefed the delegation on the city's efforts, with funding assistance from AusAID and World Vision, in providing HIV/AIDS education through a pilot project aimed at mobile workers such as truck drivers, bus drivers, dock workers, boat crews, who spend their lives working away from their families and a stable community life. They often have limited education and practice high-risk sexual behaviour, which makes them vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

Peer group community volunteers, rather than persons outside the community, make contact with the mobile workers to discuss their experiences, counsel them on appropriate safe-sex practices and measures, and also provide them with simple, easily understood pictorial material. Various materials were developed for the pilot project, which are be used nationally through the National Aids Standing Bureau. The delegation was also informed of other measures in place to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, such as sterile procedures in hospitals, blood screening for transfusions, and promotion of HIV/AIDS education in secondary schools.

Mr David Purnell, National Director (Vietnam) of World Vision was also present and escorted the members of the delegation to the Niem Nghia bus station and the May Chai dock, two locations at which community workers make contact with the mobile workers. Members of the delegation (through interpreters) spoke with community volunteers involved in the project and with mobile workers that were at the sites and gained an insight into the challenges for such projects in changing the behaviour of persons at risk. Although the project finished in September 2003, Dr Vy stated that its evaluation has indicated that it was quite successful. The delegation noted that Hai Phong City would like to continue the project but requires additional funding to do so.

The delegation therefore recommends that AusAID give consideration to continuing aid funding to the World Vision Mobile Population and STI/HIV Vulnerability project in Hai Phong City.

While in Ho Chi Minh City the delegation was able to visit the Le Van The Primary School in the Cu Chi District, a rural poor district some distance southwest of Ho Chi Minh City. The school has been a recent recipient of AusAID funding through the Small Activities Scheme which supports small-scale community-based activities, focusing on the needs of children, women and minorities. In 2003 A\$56,000 was provided to the Loreto Vietnam

Australia Program (a charity operating in Vietnam) to fund the construction of five new classrooms, a teachers' room and a toilet block at the school – a substantial increase in the existing facilities of six classrooms for 235 students. Previously, classes were conducted in shifts throughout the day, disrupting students' education. Members of the delegation were delighted to assist in the presentation of 45 scholarships (funded by donations from the International School) to the most disadvantaged students at the school to enable them to continue schooling and to receive nutritional assistance.

The delegation then visited the AusAID-funded microfinance expansion project, Capital Aid Fund for the Employment of the Poor (CEP) in Cu Chi District. Mr Vo Van Truong (CEP Deputy Director) and Mr Ho Van Kiep (CEP Cu Chi Branch Manager) provided an initial briefing to the delegation. CEP is a social organisation under the Labour Confederation of Ho Chi Minh City which provides small loans to clients, to enable them to develop ongoing income generation, and a number of other purposes, all aimed at poverty reduction and improved standards of living. The majority of clients are women, the breadwinners and managers of family finances as well as the main child carers. CEP provides group based funding so that there is peer group pressure to repay loans. CEP also maintains regular contact with clients which ensures that there is early and timely intervention if there are any repayment problems. The delegation then visited the homes of two CEP clients who have used their loans to set up businesses making rice papers, observing the practical application of the project.

Business relations

The delegation also had two opportunities to meet with members of the Australian business community in Vietnam: a working lunch hosted by Mr Joe Thwaites, the Australian Ambassador, in Hanoi, and an informal dinner hosted by Dr Stephen Henningham, the Australian Consul General, in Ho Chi Minh City. Meeting with these business men and women enabled the members of the delegation to gain an appreciation of some of the issues and needs of Australian business people when doing business overseas.

Ha Long Bay

The members of the delegation had a rest day on 16 November 2003 and took the opportunity to visit the World Heritage area of Ha Long Bay, hundreds of stone islands scattered through a vast expanse of water. Members of the delegation had the opportunity to experience first hand some of the difficulties faced by the Ha Long Bay Management Department in ensuring that the World Heritage area is protected – a multitude of boats competing for business at a small dock area, large numbers of tourists wanting access to the area, smog and water pollution. Nonetheless, the

delegation was able to appreciate the beauty and world heritage value of the area.

Unfortunately, it was during this rest day that the deputy leader of the delegation, Mr O'Connor MP, became ill and subsequently withdrew from the delegation on 17 November 2003.

Chapter 3 – Visit to Cambodia

Introduction

The delegation visited Cambodia from 18 to 22 November 2003. Members of the delegation were extremely honoured to be granted an audience with His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia who was very positive about the excellent relationship between Cambodia and Australia.

The delegation also had the opportunity to meet with many Cambodian parliamentarians, from both the National Assembly and the Senate, discussing in particular the constitutional, structural and economic challenges facing Cambodia and the ways in which Australia is helping to address these issues.

The delegation was also able to meet with members of the Australian business community in Cambodia and many Australian volunteers working there. Visits were also made to two aid projects: an AFESIP trafficked victim care unit in Phnom Penh and the HALO Trust Integrated Mine Action program (a de-mining project) in Siem Reap.

The delegation met with HE Neav Sithong Minister for Justice, ministry officers and project administrators of the Australian funded Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking Project. The delegation also visited the Khmer Rouge Documentation Centre which prepares supporting documentation for the proposed Khmer Rouge Tribunal and which receives funding for staff training and documentation translation.

Cambodia-Australia relations

Australia has a long history of association with and commitment to Cambodia's development. Bilateral relations between the two countries are therefore very strong, and Australia is held in high regard in Cambodia. Australia's considerable role in Cambodia's peace process generated enduring goodwill and has greatly contributed to the excellent relations between the two countries, as has Australia's role in resolving issues between Cambodia and the United Nations on the establishment of a Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

The two countries cooperate extensively in addressing transnational crime issues such as counter-terrorism, child sex tourism and people trafficking.

Australian development assistance to Cambodia is a core aspect of the bilateral relationship. Australia has undertaken to provide other aid assistance also for landmine clearance and for the establishment of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

Australia is also a strong supporter of democracy in Cambodia and provided approximately A\$1 million in the lead up to Cambodia's third national elections in July 2003, for voter education and registration, and to enhance equitable media access for all political parties. In additions, four Australian parliamentarians observed the elections, for which the electoral processes and political environment were considered to be an improvement on previous elections.

One of the highlights of the trip was the delegation's audience with His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia. The King conversed with the delegation in excellent English and spoke warmly of his associations with various Australian politicians and business people, demonstrating his understanding of the importance of the relationship between the two countries. The King also discussed the current political deadlock in Cambodia at great length and his efforts to promote a resolution of the situation.

Cambodia-Australia parliamentary relations

The delegation was able to meet with many Cambodian parliamentarians during its visit to Cambodia. One of the main issues discussed in these meetings was the political deadlock in Cambodia after the July 2003 elections.

The final election results gave the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) 73 out of 123 seats, followed by the royalist FUNCINPEC (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia) party with 26 seats and the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) with 24 seats. Cambodia's Constitution requires a government to have a two-thirds majority in order to rule in its own right. There is considerable political pressure in Cambodia to amend the Constitution so that governments may be formed by a simple majority. While the requirement for a two-thirds majority may have been appropriate at the time of the re-establishment of democratic government in Cambodia, it appears to the delegation that it is time to move towards a simple majority. This would facilitate the formation of new governments in Cambodia.

As the CPP has less than the two-thirds required, it needs to form a coalition. At the time of the delegation visit, a FUNCINPEC/Sam Rainsy Party alliance was claiming that the election results were flawed and refused to join a government led by HE Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen of

the CPP. Government business therefore continued under the previous government under the principle of *continuite d'etat* (continuity of the state).

The delegation's meetings with HE Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen, HRH Prince Norodom Sirivudh, Secretary General of FUNCINPEC and Mr Sam Rainsy, leader of the SRP provided the delegation with a clear understanding of the deadlock and a greater appreciation of the complexities of Cambodian politics.

Other matters discussed with Prime Minister Hun Sen included Cambodia's efforts against people trafficking and Australia's support for Cambodia's membership of the World Trade Organization.

The discussion with HRH Prince Norodom Sirivudh also included the application of democratic principles to governance, ministerial accountability, and Australia's aid to Cambodia.

During its meeting with Mr Sam Rainsy, the delegation also discussed the role of question time in ministerial accountability, the electoral system in Cambodia, separation of powers, and land reform in Cambodia.

The delegation also met with Samdech Chea Sim, President of the Senate. During the visit, the delegation leader, Mr McArthur MP, issued an invitation to Samdech Chea Sim for a joint delegation from the National Assembly and the Senate to visit Australia as guests of the presiding officers of the Australian Parliament. [The presiding officers' invitation for the President of the National Assembly was given to the Australian Ambassador to convey to the President once appointed, as one had not yet been appointed because of the political deadlock.]

Samdech Chea Sim referred to the strong cooperation between Australia and Cambodia and reflected on the role that Australia had played in Cambodia's fight for democracy and the reconciliation process. The main focus of the meeting was again discussion of the political deadlock facing Cambodia and the imminent meeting convened by the King of Cambodia between the three political parties, to attempt to resolve the deadlock.

The delegation also met with HRH Princess Norodom Vacheara, Chair, and HE Mr Ok Socheat MP, Secretary of the National Assembly Commission for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Information and Media, and HE Mr Klok Buddhi MP, Secretary of the National Assembly Commission on Legislation. Discussions at this meeting included the creation and composition of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal; a comparison of parliamentary committee operations and composition in the two countries; ministerial accountability; and the Cambodian constitutional requirement for the government to have a two-thirds majority in order to rule.

The members of the delegation also met with the members of the Standing Committee of the Senate and the leaders of the Australian-Cambodian Parliamentary Group. Discussions centred on the appointment, composition and resources of the Senate; its role and functions; the work of the Senate Commission for Human Rights and Complaints; and the challenges Cambodia faces in ensuring knowledge and awareness by the people of the laws enacted by the legislature, with members of the delegation providing details of the means used by the Australian Parliament and the Australian Government to disseminate such information.

These meetings enhanced the knowledge and understanding of the members of the delegation of Cambodia's political structure, and enabled them to gain an appreciation of the challenges facing Cambodia.

The delegation welcomes the fact that, since its visit, the deadlock has been resolved, with the CPP forming a new coalition government with FUNCINPEC in June 2004 and Prime Minister Hun Sen being reappointed as prime minister in July 2004.

Australia's aid

Australia is one of Cambodia's largest bilateral development cooperation donors, having pledged A\$44 million in 2003-04. Australia's aid focuses on governance, including legal and judicial reform, and on supporting increased agricultural productivity to reduce the vulnerability of the poor (about 85% of the population).

Australia's efforts in the agricultural sector have contributed to Cambodia's shift from a net food importer to self-sufficiency in rice.

AusAID's current governance program has four main projects, supporting: improvements in courts and prison administration; human rights training and education; the Cambodian National Election Committee; and establishment of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

Australia also contributes in the areas of immunisation for mothers and children; treatment of HIV/AIDS; education funding; anti-people trafficking activities; and de-mining activities.

Ms Annabel Anderson, the Australian Ambassador, hosted a working lunch for the delegation with a number of the Australian volunteers working in Cambodia which enabled the members of the delegation to gain an appreciation of the challenges in providing development and volunteer assistance. The delegation was also able to visit a number of projects and activities which receive Australian funding, during the course of its trip.

The delegation met with HE Neav Sithong, Minister for Justice, ministry officers and project administrators of the Australian funded Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking Project, with discussions focusing on Cambodian aspects of the project. The delegation then visited a trafficked victim care unit in Phnom Penh funded by AusAID and run by AFESIP (Agir pour les Femmes en Situation Précaire – Acting for Women in Distress). The delegation observed some of the girls at the project applying the vocational skills that they had learnt through the project.

The delegation also visited the Khmer Rouge Documentation Centre in Phnom Penh, which has received Australian funding for staff training and documentation translation. A briefing was provided by Mr Youk Chhang, Director of the Centre, on the preparations for the Khmer Rouge Tribunal and the Centre's work gathering and preserving documentary evidence in relation to Khmer Rouge crimes. Mr Youk highlighted some of the difficulties facing the Centre in relation to the identification of victims of the Khmer Rouge regime and the legal processes required to prove identity. The Centre has had the benefit of the expertise of a number of foreign workers, particularly a Canadian team who had previously assisted with similar work in East Timor. The delegation was advised that about 20% of the workers at the Centre are volunteers.

In Siem Reap, members of the delegation met with Austcare and agricultural extension project team leaders and received a briefing on de-mining activities in the area from Mr Gio Tatti, the Austcare representative and Mr Richard Belcher of the HALO Trust (a not-for-profit organisation specialising in the removal of the debris of war), on the Trust's Integrated Mine Action program.

Business relations

The delegation was also able to meet with members of the Australian business community in Cambodia at a working lunch hosted by Ms Anderson (the Australian Ambassador). Meeting with these business men and women enabled the members of the delegation to further develop their understanding of the opportunities and challenges for Australian business people when doing business overseas.

Cultural and historical visits

In the course of the visit to Cambodia, members of the delegation also had the opportunity to see several historical and cultural sites. These visits enabled the delegation to gain an appreciation of the culture and history of Cambodia.

While in Phnom Penh, the delegation visited the National Museum. The Museum houses a large collection of ancient Khmer archaeological and religious artefacts, including art and sculpture, from the 4th to the 13th centuries. Australia has provided valuable assistance to the Museum in the area of cultural heritage preservation, with staff from the Australian National Gallery and National Film and Sound Archives playing a variety of specialist roles. The delegation met Mr Reece Butler, an Australian volunteer working at the Museum at the time of the delegation's visit.

The delegation was also able to visit the temple complex of Angkor Wat, a magnificent example of Khmer architecture built in 12th century and Cambodia's most treasured landmark. Although years of civil war took their toll through looting and neglect, the temple complex is now central to Cambodia's tourism industry. The fact that the sandstone temples, chapels, causeways, terraces and reservoirs of the complex are so complete after all this time is indicative of the advanced construction techniques used in their creation. The beauty of the carved stone masonry and intricate sculptures is a lasting monument to the Khmer civilisation.

The delegation also visited Bayon, another ancient temple of significance, which has more than 50 towers and 170 carvings of giant faces.

Mr Stewart McArthur, MP
Leader of the Delegation
11 August 2004

Appendix 1 – Itinerary/Program

Saturday 8 November

1700	Depart Sydney	<i>Flight BA10</i>	
2220	Arrive Bangkok		
1715	Depart Sydney	<i>Flight TG992</i>	[Mr Stewart McArthur MP and Mrs McArthur]
2230	Arrive Bangkok		

Met on arrival by:

- Dr Deja Sucarom CM. RTN, Chair of the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
- Mr Michael Carney, Counsellor, Australian Embassy
- Ms Christina Hajdu, Second Secretary, Australian Embassy

Transfer to hotel (Banyan Tree Hotel, Bangkok)

Sunday 9 November

0730	Breakfast at hotel
0930	Visit the Ayutthaya Historical Studies Centre
1030	Tour Ayutthaya Historical Park
1200	Lunch hosted by Mr Siriwat Sretragoon, Vice-Governor of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province
1400	Visit Bang Pa-in Palace, Ayutthaya

Monday 10 November

0700	Breakfast at hotel
0815	Embassy briefing at Australian Embassy
1000	Courtesy call on HE Mr Suchart Tonjaroen, Second Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives
1045	Visit to the Parliament Chamber

- 1100 Courtesy call on Senator Kraisaak Choonhawan, Chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee (representing HE Maj Gen Manoonkrit Roobkajorn, President of the Senate)
- 1200 Lunch hosted by the Hon Mr Surin Pitchasuwan, Chair, Australia-Thailand Parliamentary Friendship Group
- 1430 Visit to Jim Thompson House
- 1900 Dinner hosted by Dr Deja Sucarom, Chair of the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
- [0845 Depart Sydney *Flight SQ220* [Senator Stott Despoja]
1920 Arrive Bangkok]

Tuesday 11 November

- 0600 Breakfast at hotel
- 1030 Attend Remembrance Day ceremony at Hellfire Pass, Kanchanaburi Province
- 1100 Visit the Hellfire Pass Museum
- 1230 Lunch hosted by Senator Prateep Ungsongtham Hata
- 1430 Visit the Duang Prateep Foundation Community Project, Kanchanaburi Province

[Accommodation: Felix River Kwai Hotel]

- 1800 Dinner hosted by Mr Rungrit Makarapong, Governor of Kanchanaburi Province

Wednesday 12 November

- 0800 Breakfast at hotel
- 0900 Visit the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Kanchanaburi Province
- 1500 Meeting with Mr Weerasak Kowsurat, Vice Minister for Social Development and Human Security, and
Visit to Baan Kredtrakarn Protection and Occupational Development Centre, Nonthaburi Province

[Return to accommodation at Banyan Tree Hotel, Bangkok]

1830 Reception hosted by Mr Miles Kupa, Australian Ambassador, with Thai senators and members of parliament, members of the Australia-Thai Chamber of Commerce and members of the Australia-New Zealand Women's Group

Thursday 13 November

0800 Breakfast at hotel

0900 Tour of the Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha

1040 Meeting with Professor Borwornsak Uwanno, Secretary-General of the Cabinet

1200 Lunch at hotel

1630 Depart hotel for Bangkok International Airport
Farewelled by Dr Deja Sucarom, Chair of the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs

1745 Depart Bangkok *Flight TG684*
1930 Arrive Hanoi

Met on arrival by Ms Sandra Henderson, Second Secretary, Australian Embassy

Transfer to hotel (Melia Hotel, Hanoi)

Friday 14 November

0730 Breakfast in hotel

0830 Embassy briefing at Ambassador's residence

0945 Meeting with the Hon Mr Ngo Anh Dzong, Vice-Chairman of the Committee of External Relations

1030 Meeting with the Hon Mr Phan Trung Lý, Vice-Chairman of the Law Committee

1200 Lunch hosted by Mr Joe Thwaites, Australian Ambassador, with members of the Australian business community

- 1400 Meeting with the Hon Mrs Nguyen Thi Nuong, Vice-President of the Council for Ethnic Minorities
- 1500 Attend session of the National Assembly
- 1530 Courtesy call on HE Mr Nguyen Van Yeu, Vice President of the National Assembly
- 1830 Dinner hosted by the Hon Mr Ngo Anh Dzong, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee of External Relations

Saturday 15 November

- 0730 Breakfast in hotel
- 0930 Visit to ACIAR aid project, Me Linh District
- 1245 Lunch hosted by Dr Nguyen Van Vy, Director, Health Service of Hai Phong City, with World Vision representatives
- 1400 Visit AusAID–World Vision HIV/AIDS project, Hai Phong City

[Accommodation: Sai Gon Ha Long Hotel]

- 1900 Dinner hosted by the Hon Mr Nguyen Van Quynh, Chairman of the Quang Ninh People's Committee

Sunday 16 November

Free time

[Return to accommodation at Melia Hotel, Hanoi]

Monday 17 November

- 0800 Breakfast in hotel
- 1030 Depart hotel for Noi Bai Airport
- 1220 Depart Hanoi *Flight VN219*
- 1420 Arrive Ho Chi Minh City

Met on arrival by Mr Jonathon Lee, Vice Consul, Australian Consulate-General

Transfer to hotel (Caravelle Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City)

- 1515 Consulate briefing on program at hotel
- 1600 Meeting with Mr Vo Van Cuong, Chairman, Ho Chi Minh City People's Council and Mr Le Hung Quoc, Vice Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ho Chi Minh City Office
- 1900 Informal dinner hosted by Dr Stephen Henningham, Australian Consul General, with members of the Australian business community

Tuesday 18 November

- 0930 Visit Le Van The school project, Cu Chi District
- 1030 Visit AusAID-funded microfinance expansion project, An Phu Commune, Cu Chi District
- 1300 Lunch at hotel
- 1415 Visit RMIT International University Vietnam campus, Ho Chi Minh City
- 1545 Depart hotel for Ho Chi Minh City Airport
- 1715 Depart Ho Chi Minh City *Flight VN819*
- 1805 Arrive Phnom Penh

Met on arrival by:

- HE Senator Chea Cheth, Chair, Senate Commission on Home Affairs, National Defence, Investigation and Anti-Corruption
- HE Mr Ok Socheat MP, Secretary, National Assembly Commission for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Information and Media
- Ms Annabel Anderson, Australian Ambassador
- Ms Karen Lanyon, Deputy Head of Mission, Australian Embassy
- Mr Justin Whyatt, Third Secretary, Australian Embassy

Transfer to hotel (Raffles Le Royal Hotel, Phnom Penh)

- 2000 Informal dinner hosted by Ms Annabel Anderson, Australian Ambassador, with Embassy staff

Wednesday 19 November

- 0820 Meeting with Samdech Chea Sim, President of the Senate
- 0930 Embassy briefing at Australian Embassy
- 1030 Meeting with Mr Sam Rainsy, Leader of the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP)
- 1030 Meeting with HRH Prince Norodom Sirivudh, Secretary General of FUNCINPEC (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia)
- 1230 Lunch hosted by Ms Annabel Anderson, Australian Ambassador, with members of the Australian business community
- 1415 Visit to National Museum
- 1530 Meeting with Mr Youk Chhang, Director of the Khmer Rouge Documentation Centre
- 1700 Audience with His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia
- 1900 Dinner hosted by HE Dr Kol Pheng, Secretary General of the National Assembly

Thursday 20 November

- 0900 Meeting with Samdech Prime Minister Hun Sen
- 1020 Meeting with HRH Princess Norodom Vacheara, Chair, and HE Mr Ok Socheat MP, Secretary, National Assembly Commission for Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Information and Media; and HE Mr Klok Buddhi MP, Secretary, National Assembly Commission on Legislation
- 1200 Informal lunch hosted by Ms Annabel Anderson, Australian Ambassador, with Australian volunteers working in Cambodia
- 1400 Meeting with HE Neav Sithong Minister for Justice, ministry officers and project administrators of the Australian funded Asia Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking Project

1500	Visit to AFESIP (Acting for Women in Distress) victim care project		
1600	Meeting with members of the Standing Committee of the Senate and the leaders of the Australian-Cambodian Parliamentary Group		
1900	Dinner hosted by HE Senator Chea Cheth, Chair, Senate Commission on Home Affairs, National Defence, Investigation and Anti-Corruption		
[2025 2130	Depart Phnom Penh Arrive Bangkok	<i>Flight TG699</i>	[Mr Stewart McArthur MP and Mrs McArthur]]

Friday 21 November

[0015 1325	Depart Bangkok Arrive Melbourne	<i>Flight TG981</i>	[Mr Stewart McArthur MP and Mrs McArthur]]
0940 1030	Depart Phnom Penh Arrive Siem Reap	<i>Flight FT992</i>	

Transfer to hotel (Sofitel Royal Angkor Hotel)

1130	Visit to Siem Reap Market and Artisans d'Angkor workshops		
1245	Lunch at hotel		
1400	Visit Angkor Wat complex		
1930	Informal dinner with Australian aid project staff		

Saturday 22 November

0900	Attend briefing by Mr Gio Tatti, Austcare Country Representative, and Mr Richard Belcher, HALO Trust Integrated Mine Action Program		
1100 12.00	Depart Siem Reap Arrive Bangkok	<i>Flight PG933</i>	
1710	Depart Bangkok	<i>Flight BA9</i>	

Sunday 23 November

0610	Arrive Sydney	<i>Flight QF32</i>	
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Appendix 2 – Memories Of The Burma-Siam Railway By William (Bill) Haskell Ex Wx3279 2nd 3rd Machine Gun Battalion

It seems incredible that sixty years have passed since we laboured on the railway to Burma, by which name we knew it at the time. Often in those dreadful days you would not have given yourself a chance of surviving for a few days let alone sixty years. It is therefore with a sense of deep gratitude that I recall the unswerving dedication of all medical staff and the abiding friendship of wonderful mates who made survival possible in a universe of madness and suffering. When you are bereft of everything, save perhaps a loin cloth or a tattered pair of shorts the only thing we could offer each other was a helping hand and encouragement to battle on towards better times.

In January 1943 as a member of a force known as Dunlop Force, commanded by Lt. Col. "Weary" Dunlop we moved up from Java into the Konyu Hintok area to commence work on the railway. Fortunately it was during the dry season and we were transported most of the way from Bam Pong in open trucks. What a great advantage this gave us over our comrades of the various forces who were compelled to march in monsoonal rain and slush to such camps as Songkurai, Nikki and other hell holes.

Our initial job was to construct the Konyu River Camp and clear the rail trace. We then moved across to Hintok Road Camp and began working in earnest. Our work area embraced the three major cuttings after Hellfire Pass culminating in the compressor cutting. It also included the curved seven metre embankment, the three tier trestle bridge and numerous smaller trestle bridges that linked knoll to knoll. Circumstances also made us available to work on the fallen Pack of Cards Bridge that was mainly built by Tamil labourers.

No matter where you worked the job was arduous in the extreme, particularly for the many men who had to work barefooted. In common with every POW camp food was at a premium. Rice, of course, was the staple diet, but there was little enough of it. For the evening meal it was served with a very watery soup, with sometimes a smidgen of meat or dried fish known as "Modern Girls". The Japanese were merciless task masters and bludgeoned men into long hours of soul-destroying work. During one of the wettest monsoons on record there were 114 wet days and our camp was worked for 92 days straight without a break. This has come to be known as the speedo period. The huge embankment was built by scraping dirt garnered between rocks into double handled baskets which were passed along a man made chain. Often the spoil was carried away in tankas

– a rice sack strung between two bamboo poles. Japanese strategically placed bashed anybody they thought might be slacking. In their weakened condition men often collapsed under a rain of savage blows and kicks.

The construction of the numerous cuttings probably contributed most to the ruination of so many men. The work would have been hard for men in good physical shape, but was an absolute disaster for men battling recurrent disease on starvation diets. Most of the cuttings were put in by men working with hammer and tap. One man held the drill while his mate belted it with a sledge hammer. Drilling quotas were set by the Japanese and the drilled holes were primed with gelignite and fired twice a day. After firing the clearers moved in to clear the floor for the next drilling. Clearing was an awful job universally detested. The blasting left razor sharp edges which tore bare feet to shreds. The loose rock was carried away in tankas and emptied over the side. Blasting was indiscriminate and men were frequently clobbered by falling stones. The cuttings were a sweat box from the radiated heat and the workers suffered great thirst. We were only allowed one army bottle of water a day. Many of our strongest men broke down, often doing too much to protect a sick mate. The Japanese made no concessions for sick men and often used them as an excuse for handing out more bashings. Building the three tier bridge presented all sorts of difficulties. It was a giant of a structure about 25 metres high and 250 metres long. The timber for it and all other bridges was cut from the surrounding jungle and hauled to the site by prisoners. There it was prepared and erected under the supervision of the Japanese engineers. The sergeant in charge was a sadist of the first order who delighted in throwing tools and pieces of wood at unsuspecting prisoners working below.

The long working hours, the intense harassment on the job, the lack of footwear and the starvation diet affected men's health to a point where they became absolute sitters for all the tropical diseases that were indigenous to the area. Malaria and dysentery were their constant companions. There was little quinine available to control malaria and nothing with which to treat amoebic dysentery. With the monsoonal rain the camp became a quagmire and going to the toilet at night became an almost insuperable problem for debilitated men racked with abdominal pain.

A lack of vitamins in the diet soon brought on all sorts of complaints ranging from beri-beri to red raw mouths, tongues and throats. Beri-beri caused gross swelling of the limbs and stomach, making walking in itself very difficult, let alone having to get out to the rail trace and work when you got there. Cuts and wounds on the legs and feet generally became infected due to the absence of antiseptics, disinfectants and bandages. Many lesions soon turned into tropical ulcers which often as not became gangrenous. Hundreds of men had limbs amputated as a last resort.

Perhaps the greatest scourge of all was cholera visited on our camp by passing Asian labourers who unfortunately were denied any sort of treatment whatsoever. Cholera rapidly dehydrates the body through purging and vomiting. As the fluid leaves the body so do the body salts thus inducing severe cramp in all muscles. Cholera claimed many lives in our camp before a still was manufactured from salvaged material, enabling the production of pure distilled water to be turned into a saline solution for intravenous injection into comatose patients. This procedure was marvellously successful, resulting in the saving of 60% of all cholera patients.

When we look back over those troubled times is it any wonder that we thank the Good Lord for his provision of steadfast mates and above all for the doctors and medical staff who overcame incredible difficulties to return so many men to their loved ones at home.

(As read out by Mr Haskell at the Remembrance Day Ceremony at Hellfire Pass on 11 November 2003)