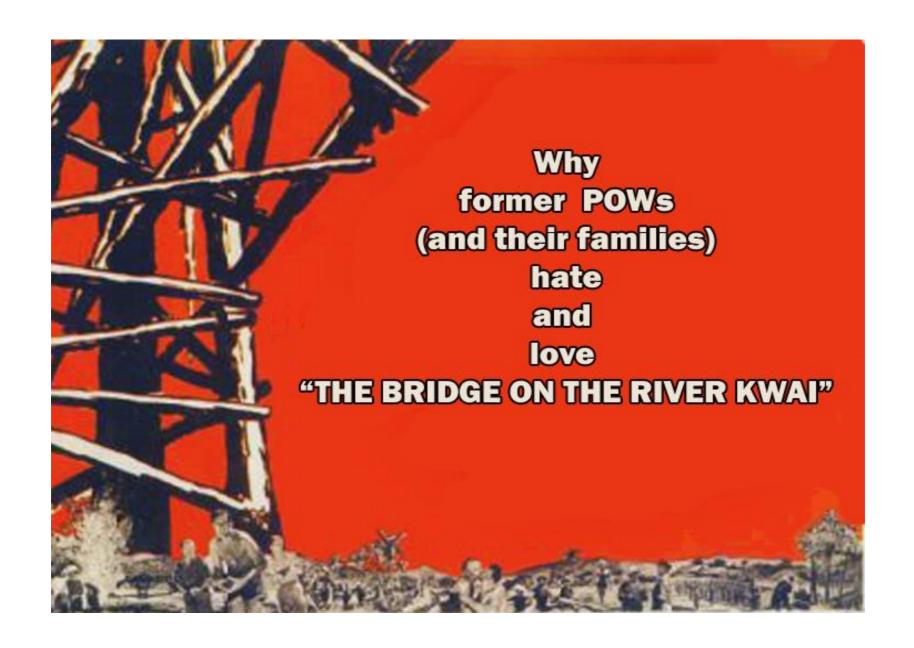


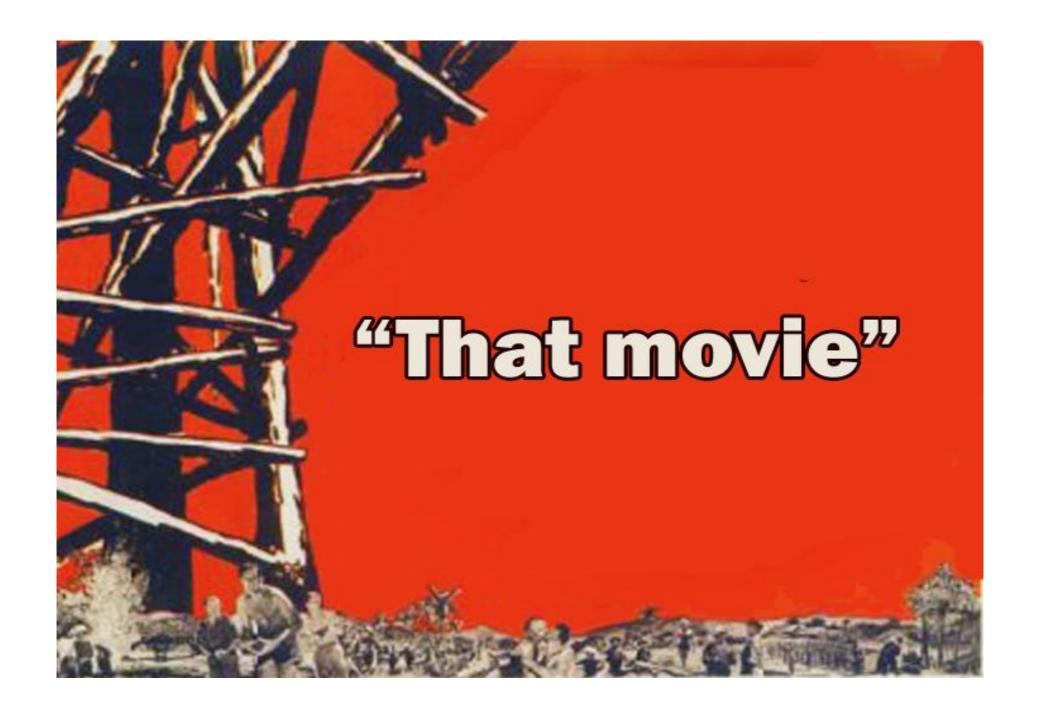


The Reception of The Bridge on the River Kwai among Former Far East Prisoners of War

Robin Rowland

London, July 25, 2008





International Military Tribunal for the Far East

(aka Tokyo War Crimes trial)

The Japanese Empire captured 112,134 allied prisoners.

- Of those 35,756 died in captivity
- The death rate for Allied POWs in German and Italian camps was four per cent.
- •The death rate in Allied POWs at the hands of the Japanese was 31.9 per cent.

On the Burma Thailand Railway

- •The Japanese used 61, 806 Allied prisoners as labourers
- •Of those 12,399 died.

Asian labourers (Romusha) on the Burma Thailand Railway

- •The official post-war estimate was 87,000 from Burma, 75,000 Malays and Tamils from Malaya, 7,500 romusha from Java and 5,000 Chinese from Singapore, Malaya and Thailand.
- •Some modern scholarship puts the total number at 200,000 and higher.
- •Some romusha camps had a 100 per cent death rate.

Cecil Carter Brett

- •Joined Royal Canadian Army Service Corps as a private in July 1942, age 25
- •Commissioned 2nd Lieutenant August 1943
- •Sent to Camp Chilliwack in the interior of British Columbia
- •Graduated "Q1" in "Mines, Minefields and Boobytraps" March 1944
- •(Boulle's commando team was called The Plastics and Destruction co. Ltd)
- •Officially transferred to Canadian Intelligence Corps and sent for Japanse language training March 1944 to October 1945
- •Ordered to UK in October 1945
- •Posted to SEATIC HQ (South East Asia Translation and Interrogation Corps) Calcutta Jan 14, 1946
- •(Boulle's "Force 361" based in Calcutta. Real unit was Force 136)
- On Feb. 11, 1946 posted "2 Mobile Section SEATIC" and ordered ordered to write intelligence report and history of the Burma Thailand Railway
- •Travelled on one of the last trains to do the complete route along with war crimes investigators and war graves recovery teams
- •Spent several months in Singapore, compiling intelligence and other reports on the railway
- •SEATIC Bulletin No. 246, history of the Burma Thailand Railway, issued September 1946.

Cecil Carter Brett

This bulletin is the work of C.C. Brett, Canadian Intelligence Corps, and is the result of interrogations, translations, documentary research and personal observation of the Burma-Siam Railway carried out by him over a period of seven months in Siam, Burma and Malaya.

Official introduction to SEATIC Bulletin No. 246

...cemetery locations in the area.....
Cec Brett identified their locations.

Scarlet to Green A History of Intelligence in the Canadian Army 1903-1963



There are 688 bridges on this line, most bridges are of standard design and 680 of the existing number of bridges have been constructed from locally cut timber. SEATIC Bulletin 246

(h) Bridges: There are 688 bridges on this line. Most bridges are of standard design, and 680 of the existing number of bridges have been constructed out of locally cut timber. The Japanese engineers responsible for the design gave full consideration to such matters as strength of material, load carrying capacity, etc., adapting the American Merriman-Wiggin standard practice for timber structure.

The construction policy, however, seemed to sacrifice the factor of safety in favour of speed, exemplified by their almost entire use of soft wood throughout when hardwood was readily available. In this connection it must not be forgotten that the Japanese knew they had unlimited labour at their disposal and were in a position to effect rapid renewals when necessary.



The Burma Thailand Railway ran from Nan Pladuk in Thailand to Kanchanaburi and then along the east bank of the Kwai Ye until the track reached the mountain border with Burma. It then followed Burmese river valleys to Thanbuzyat where it joined an existing railline to the port of Moulmein.

(Second World War place names used)

262 miles

415 kilometres

The briefing map in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* shows an accurate track of the Burma Thailand Railway.

SEATIC Bulletin 246- Destruction by air attack and subsequent repair of bridges and locomotives on the Burma Thailand Railway.

Does not include bridges, locomotives in Thailand south of Sonkrai/Songkrai. (no records available when Brett made the report)

1.	Table showing Major	Bridges	Destroyed,	Locations	and Number of	_
	Times Destroyed.					

Name of Brid	lgo	Location	No. Times Destroyed	
Km ? KALEWIHUT R.	(No. 75) (No. 77)	KWANLHA - KALAWTHUT	10	
KM 402 THETKAW		THETKAW - RADAO BAKE-TON - ANALKWIN	7	Ċ
Km 360 KHONKHAN R.	steel bridge	THANBAYA - TAUNG-ZUN	į	
Km 357 WINYAW R.	u u	TAUNG-ZUM - LONSI MEZALI - APALOM	7	
Km 335 APALON R. Km 330 ZAMI R.	11 11	MPALON - CANDOW	2 -	·
Em 297 SONGERAI R.		CHANGARAYA - SONCKRAI	5	

2. Table showing Number of Locomotives Damaged by Bombing and/or Strafing, Numbers repaired and Numbers rendered Unserviced De.

Model	No. Damaged	No. Repaired	Rendered U/S	
C 56 Pony	2	2		sì:
P	5	. 2	3	
Q .	1 .	1		3.
J.S.	1		1	:
F.S.	5		5	•
K.S.	2		2_	1
				i
	16	_5	<u>.11 </u>	C.

"We've never been welcomed home."

Otto Schwarz, USS Houston, interview summer 1986

Majority of the movie-going audience knew nothing of the Burma Thailand Railway

Government secrecy

- 30 year rule in UK, Commonwealth, US
- Some files remained classified longer than 30 years
- Transcripts of war crimes trials
 - Tokyo trial not published by any Allied government
- UK records of Singapore trials classified under 30 year rule.
- Some US files on Japanese war crimes, including CIA files only declassified in the past few years after Congress passed law to declassify files on crimes of "Nazis and their allies."

Newspaper and radio coverage

- Minimal follow up to initial news stories on the Burma Thailand Railway
- No coverage in UK of Singapore trials (only 8 stories by The Times in 3 years.)
- Wire services covered the Toyko War Crimes trial but most papers in UK and North America printed nothing until the verdict

Returned POWs

- Some soldiers ordered not to talk
- Many had severe Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and didn't want to talk
- Too busy getting on with their lives

Is this the Bridge on the River Kwai?



"The real bridge on the River Kwai" CBC News Pacific Rim Report March 1988 Produced and Reported by Robin Rowland

Jack Hawkins as Warden briefs William Holden as Shears on the commando mission.

The target is the large dark spot on the Burma Thailand border.



Bridge at Tamarkan/Kanchanburi promoted by Thai tourism and Thai Railways soon after success of Boulle's novel in 1954.



There are 49,407 stories on the Burma Thailand Railway....

That's just from the Allied soldiers

There are also the untold stories of the romusha/coolies.

But to be technical and picky....

there are NO bridges over the River Kwai

East bank of the Kwai Noi looking at Hintok, shot from the west bank.



The rail line tracks along the side of the mountains. Most bridges crossed ravines (circled areas indicate site where there were once large bridges)



The abandoned railbed approaches the site of one of the ravine bridges at the Hintok Memorial hiking trail.



Is there a prototype for The Bridge on the River Kwai?

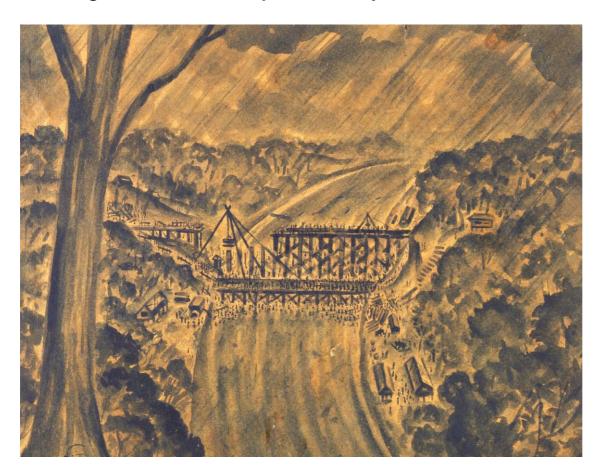
The best known bridge at Tamarkan/Kanchanaburi Crosses the Mae Khalung downstream from where the Kwai Noi and Kwai Ye meet.



In northern Thailand several bridges cross tributaries of the Kwai Noi.

The largest was at Sonkrai/Songkrai, constructed by F Force (joint British Australian group of approximately 7000 men)

That bridge crosses a major tributary the Huai Ro Ki.



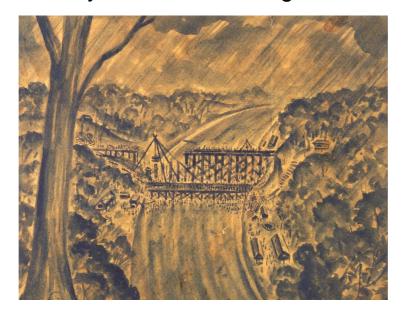
Bridge at Sonkrai by Charles Thrale drawn on rice paper in 1943 with black and blue ink. Note pile driving on the left.

Used by permission of K.E. Grennan. (Original now in the Imperial War Museum)

Don Ashton was inspired with his choice of Kitugala, Ceylon for the location.



Commando teams' birds' eye view of the bridge.







The movie bridge in rugged mountain country in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)

The Kwai Noi (area inaccessible in 1956)

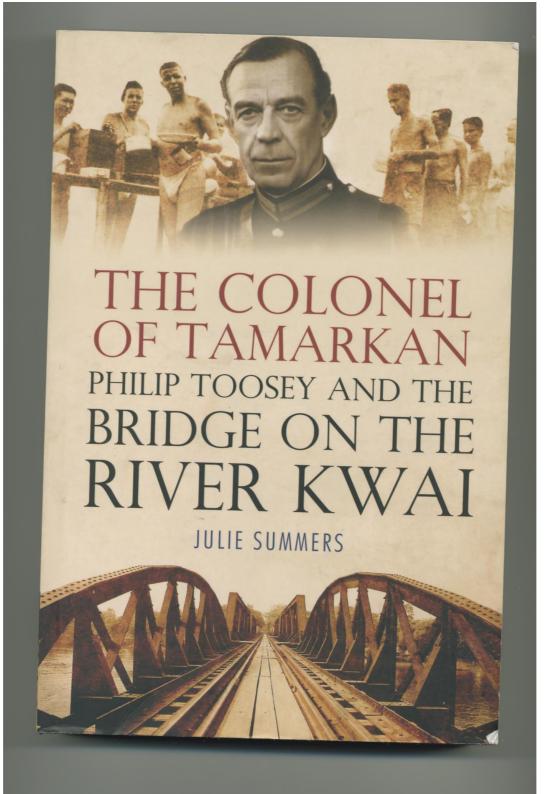


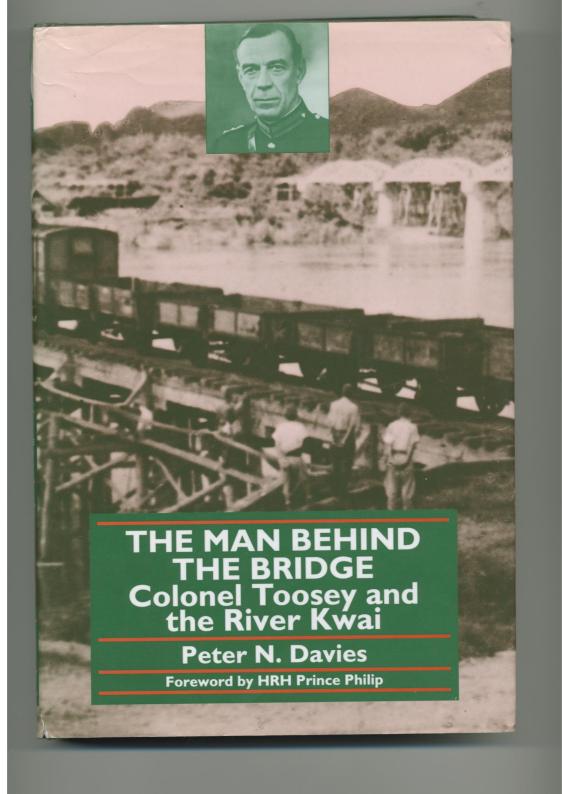


Approaching the mountains on the Thai Burma border.

Reactions of FEPOWS to *The Bridge on the River Kwai*

- 1. Men who were at the steel bridge at Tamarkan/Kanchaburi felt they were forced to defend the honour of their commanding officer Lt. Col. Philip Toosey.
- 2. Men who were POWs in the jungles of Thailand up river from the steel bridge:
- 1)It wasn't our commanding officer, it had to be Toosey down at Tamarakan
- 2)It wasn't Toosey, but since the movie got everything else wrong it might have been one of the officers in our camp.
- 3. Men who were POWS in Burma and had little contact with Thailand
- 1)The Bridge is that one at Tamarkan/Kanchanaburi so it was probably Toosey
- 4. Men who Japanese POWS elsewhere (Hong Kong, Philippines, Pacific Islands, Java, Sumatra etc.
- 1)The Bridge is that one at Tamarkan/Kanchanaburi so it was probably Toosey





A World War II POW revisits the scene of his hell-on-earth, the Burma Railway, built at the expense of over 100,000 lives



RETURN TO THE RIVER KWAI

Article by JOHN COAST

DICK SWAHSON/SLACE STAN

Al.L. we knew was that we were off to build a railway; some said into Burma. In Singapore, the Japanese had packed us into cattle trucks, thirty-one men to a truck with all the kit we possessed, and it took us five baking days and shivering nights to travel the length of Malaya and into southern Thailand before we reached the remote junction of Banpong, about fifty miles from Bangkok.

Our first impressions of Thailand, in November, 1942, were confusing. In the Banpong Transit Camp, the doctor had to wear gum boots to work in the hospital, because the flood water was about one inch below the stinking bed slats on which the unfortunate men suffering from malaria and dysentery lay. The POW-style lavatories, too, were as horrible as they were humiliating, though they were to be our norm for the next three years. In a sea of public mud, men squatted perilously in rows over deep bamboo trenches, buttressed only by bamboo, while the whole area around was alive with fat, white maggots.

We stayed one night in Banpong before climbing into trucks and hurtling off early the next morning to the base-area proper, near the small town of Kanburi. Here we

to the base-arca proper, near the small town of Kanburi. Here we made our first acquaintance with the River Mekong and, significantly perhaps, we crossed it by the town jail where, at that time, Thai prisoners were sent out to work, heavily leg-ironed, giving us a foreboding that we had come to some sort of Devil's Island. Yet, contrasting with these impressions were the Thai people themselves—laughing, grinning, shouting to buy our watches or few remaining valuables, their women-folk trying to sell us bunches of small bananas, tangerines and duck eggs. They

gave to the scene an air of bizarre gaiety.
This again contradicted the now vicious tempers of our tired Japanese

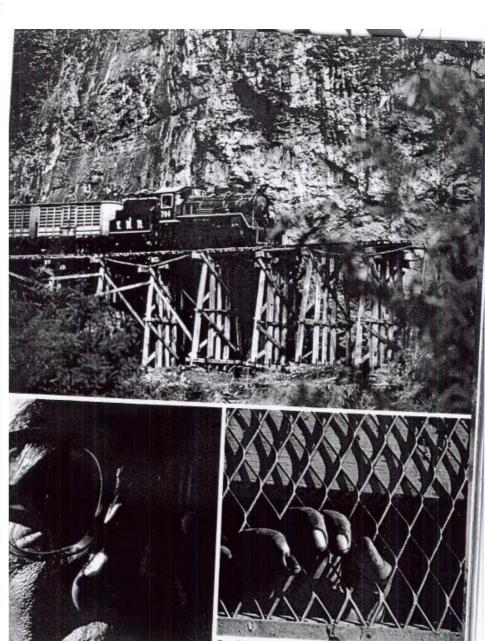
guards, whose barking voices added to the din and confusion.

We were loaded into cumbersome wooden barges and towed over the stream. On the far bank came the bellow: "Kurrah! Kurrah! Oru [all] men march!" and we were on our way to our first camp, apparently called Chungkai.

As we scrambled up the far bank with our few possessions, we

ARGOST

OCTOBER 1969 No.4



Top: POWs built 800-yard Wang Po viaduct in under six months, working against the sheer cliff face with the River Mekong roaring by 100 feet below. Today, trains crawl across it at five mph. Above: Pows from Singapore to Thailand in 1942 to build "death railway." Left: Lieutenant Takeroh Inoh, one of the more humane Japanese commandants.

**

This is how Hollywood filmed the end of The Bridge on the River Kwai. But what really happened? IAN WATT, who as a prisoner of war worked under the Japanese taskmasters in the Kwai area of Thailand during those terrible months of 1942-43, here explodes. . .

The Kwai is a real river in Thailand, and 25 years ago the Japanese really did force prisoners of war to build a bridge across it. But anyone who was there knows that Pierre Boulle's novel 'The Bridge on the River Kwai', and the film based on it, are completely fictitious. What is odd is that they should have combined to create a world-wide myth based on the very delusions which those who built the real bridge had to put aside so that they could survive.

Boulle based his story on two startling paradoxes: that Colonel Nicholson, a prisoner of the Japanese, should finally become their master; and that, though a loval British officer, he should devote all his energies to building a strategic bridge for the enemy. But both these unlikely actions can actually be traced back to some of the unique historical circumstances of the war.

Early in 1942, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines surrended; and Japan was suddenly left with the task of looking after more than 200,000 prisoners of war. The normal procedure is to separate the officers and other ranks in different camps, but the Japanese did not have the staff for that and left the job of organising the prison-camps to the prisoners themselves; this in effect meant the officers. This was one essential basis for Boulle's story: prisoners of war do not normally command anyone, and so the possibility of the captive turning the tables on his captor does not usually arise.

The other main element in the myth, the building of that particular bridge with the active co-operation of the British commander, also has a historical basis. Once their armies started driving towards India, the Japanese Company of the Compan

needed a railway from Bangkok to Rangoon. In the summer of 1942 many trainloads of prisoners from Singapore were sent up to Thailand and started to hack a 200 mile track through the jungle along a river called the Khwae Noi. In Thai, khwae just means 'stream': noi means 'small'.

The 'small stream' rises near the Burma border, at the Three Pagodas Pass; and it joins the main tributary of the Me Nam, called the Khwae Yai, or 'Big Stream.' at Karnburi, some 80 miles west of Bangkok. It was there that the Japanese faced their biggest single task: getting the railway across the river. So, early in the autumn of 1942, a large construction camp was set up at a place called Tha Makham, about three miles west of Karnburi.

Like the other Japanese prisoncamps, Tha Makham had a very small and incompetent military

staff. To the Japanese the idea of being taken prisoner of war is deeply shameful, and looking after prisoners shares some of this humiliation. Consequently most of the Japanese staff were men who for one reason or another were thought unfit for combat duty: too old, perhaps, or in disgrace, or just drunks. What was special about Tha Makham and the other camps on the Kwai was that they they were also partly controlled by Japanese military engineers concerned with building the railway. These engineers usually despised the Japanese troops in charge of running the camps almost as much as they despised the prisoners.

The continual friction between the Japanese prison staff and the engineers directly affected our ordinary lives as prisoners. Daily routine in the camps at that time, continued on page 20

E. E. DUNLOP The AR DIARIES Java and the Burma-Thailand Railway 1942-1945 'There were a lot of marvellous people in the prison camps but there was only one Weary Dunlop'. Jack Chalker

Passive resistance and sabotage common among slaves from Rome to North America to the Kwai

Nicholson confronts the corporal at the cutting.



Hellfire Pass, Thailand



And now the weather

It was too hot for for the upcountry marches during the day



So the men marched at night....



The 1943 monsoon was one of the worst of the 20th century



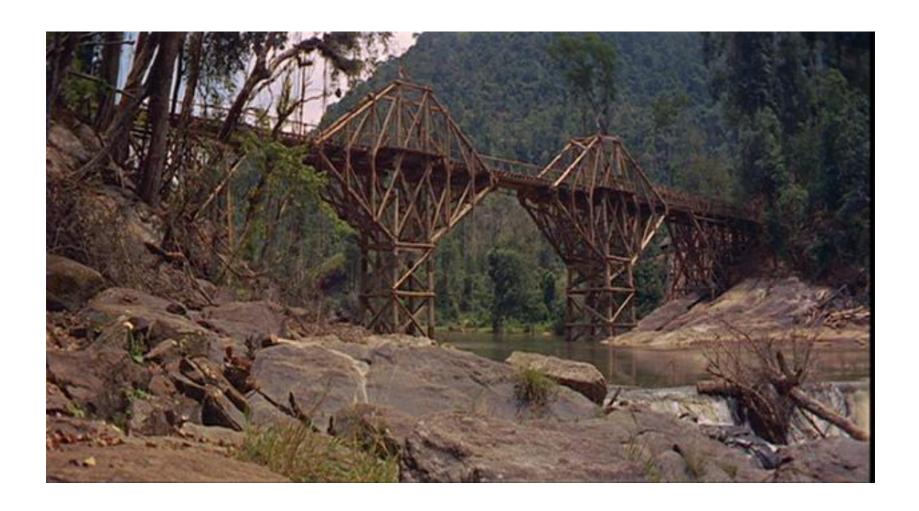
Rain slowed production in Ceylon.....



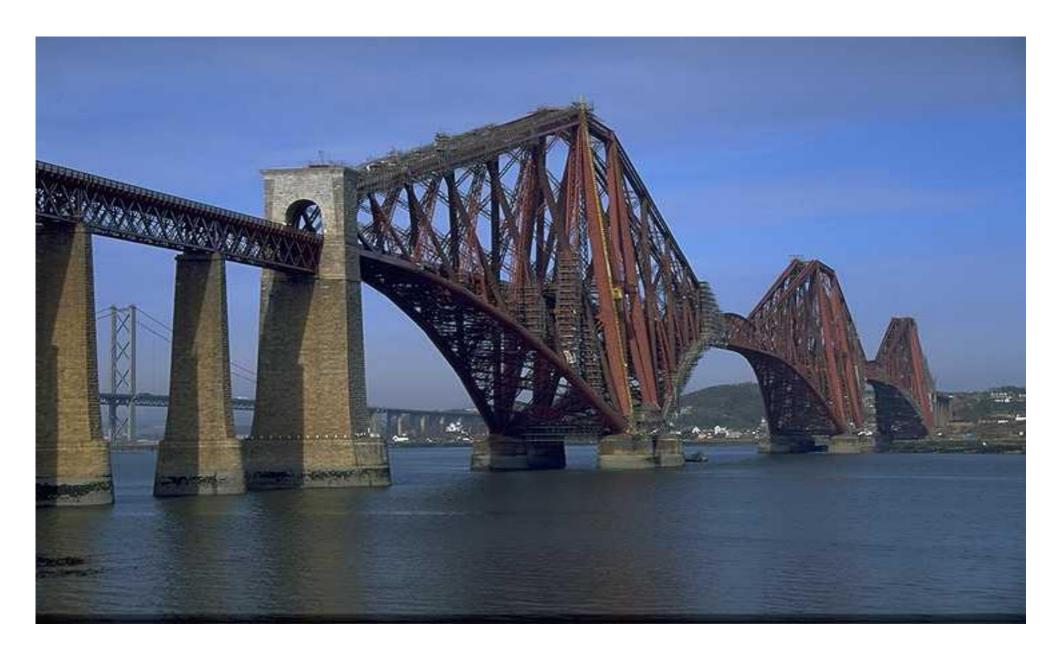
But only one scene in Kwai was shot in the rain



The design of the movie Bridge



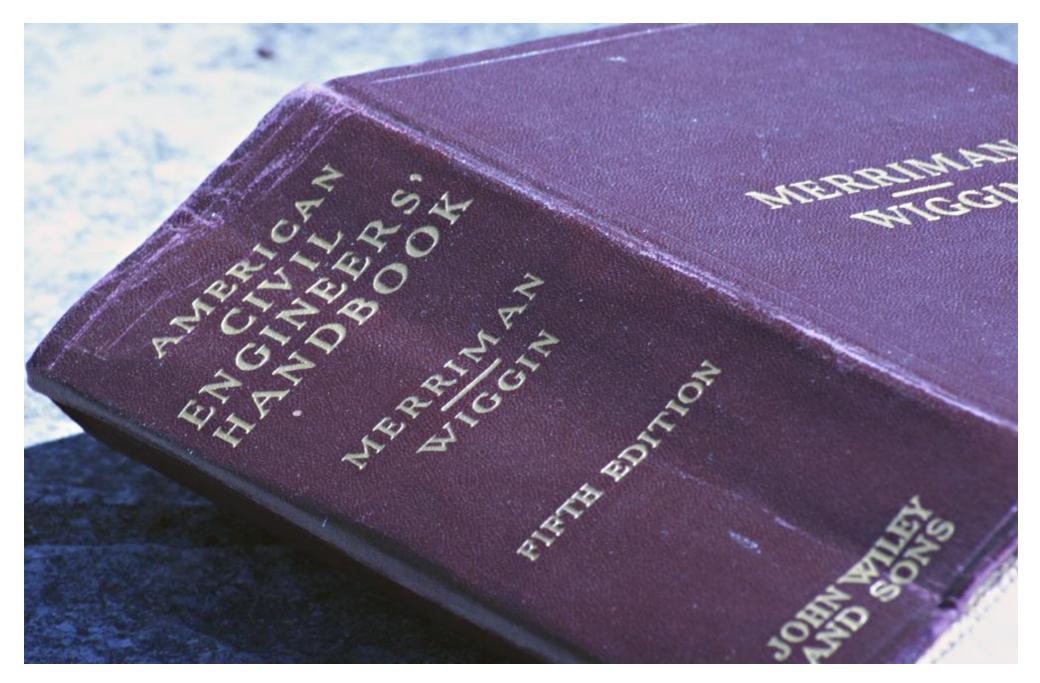
Was based on the Forth railway bridge -Keith Best engineer on the production



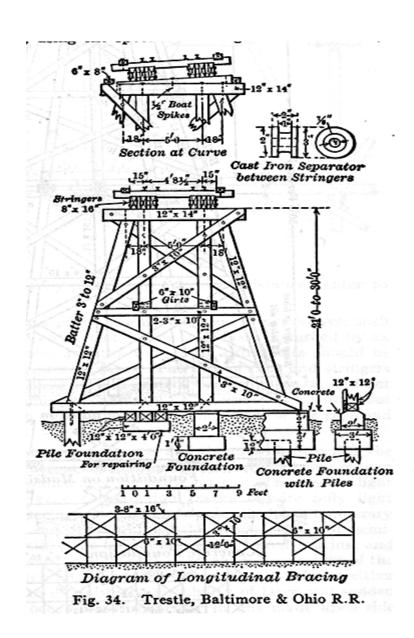
In the early scenes the audience sees a model of a trestle bridge in Saito's office.



The Japanese used the American Civil Engineers' Handbook on the railway



Including the design and building of the 680 trestle bridges



What if the production had decided to use a trestle?



Great factual history seldom makes good movies And good movies seldom are factual history.....



"Madness."

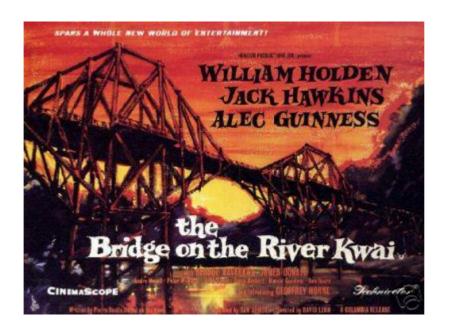




"If a war is unpopular or pointless....returning soldiers are forced to try and find some justification for what they have done..."

Zurab Kekielidze Serbisky Psychiatric Institute, Moscow interview on "The Afghan Syndrome" *Globe and Mail,* July 12, 2008





TRIVIA

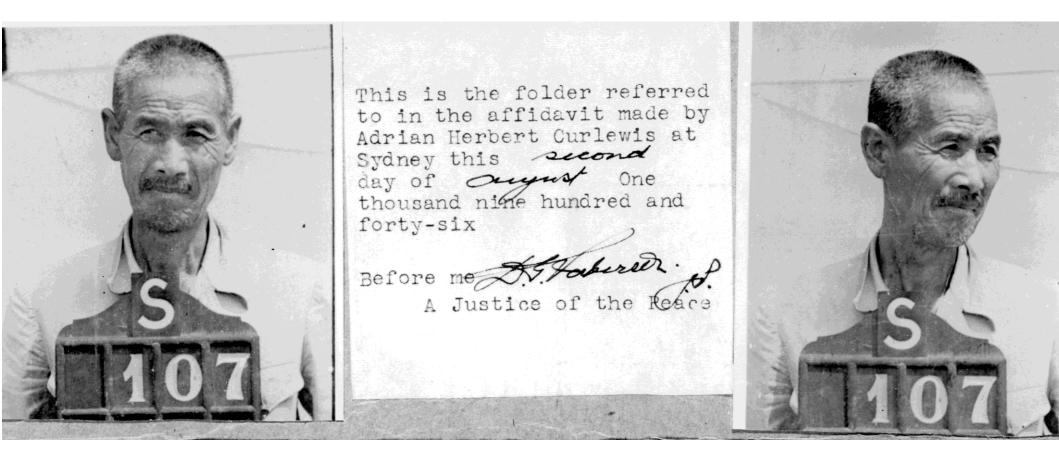


The Kwai production team built coffer dams upstream from the movie bridge to help construction and to lower and raise water level as needed in the script.

The Japanese routinely built coffer dams upstream from the bridges they were building on rivers and tributaries to make pile driving easy and help construction.



In the DVD interview,
Norman Spencer relates
how David Lean the
production team were
worried that Sesue
Hayakawa was too old for
the part of "Saito."



Many of the senior Japanese officers in POW Administration were older men, either incapable of combat command or recalled to duty after retirement.

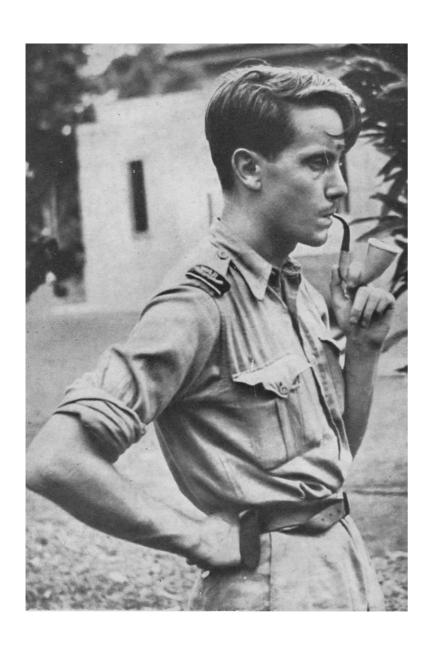
Col. Hirateru Banno commanded the "Malaya Command POW Administration Fourth Branch" in northern Thailand. He was 58 in 1943.

(Note POW command and railway engineering were separate commands, although few people, including most POWs did not know this fact.)

OBSCURE Trivia

What was William Holden's other "Kwai" movie?

Hint: It won three Oscars.



lan Morrison covered the fall of Singapore for *The Times*.

He was on one of the last boats to leave Singapore and so did not become a prisoner.

He wrote about his experiences in the book *Malayan Postscript.*

After the war, Morrison returned to Singapore as an East Asia correspondent for *The Times*.

In June 1949, *The Times* sent Morrison to Hong Kong where met a woman writer named Elizabeth Kuanghu Chou....

Chou wrote a book about her affair with the correspondent.....

Chou's pen name was Han Suyin

In the book, she changed the name of Ian Morrison, who was killed covering the Korean War, to "Mark Elliot."

