

SPECIAL ARTICLE

บทความพิเศษ

The 'Weary' Dunlop Boonpong Exchange Fellowship: An Endless Thai-Australian Friendship

Professor Thira Limsila, MD, FRCST, FICST, FRACS (Hon.)
Chairman, the 'Weary' Dunlop Boonpong Exchange Fellowship Committee,
Former President, Royal College of Surgeons of Thailand

The 'Weary' Dunlop Boonpong Exchange Fellowship has been set up since 1988 initiated by Sir Edward Dunlop in order to support young Thai surgeons for further training in Australia. The programme dedicated to the freindship during the World War II offered by Thai villagers, led by Mr. Boonpong Sirivajabhand, to the prisoners of the war (POW) at Kanchanaburi. This programme has now offered more than 20 Thai surgeons in various fields to gain their experience in famous recognised centers in Australia.

It is my great pleasure and honour to be invited to give a special lecture on the story of a greatman like Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop and his working memorial as Australia's greatest unofficial ambassador to Thailand and Asia. The Exchange Fellowship Programme initiated by Sir Edward, Ex.-POWs and his Australian friends in 1987 has been a brilliant success. The famous historical bridge on river Kwai destroyed by bombs before ending of the war, replaced by The Thai-Australian friendship link, initiate by **Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop** and **Mr.Boonpong Sirivajabhand** before the war ended.

The historical record of the Thai-Australian friendship during the war until it has become the Exchange Fellowship Programme, could be considered as a new but **Endless Thai-Australian Friendship Bridge.**

We cerebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II on 15th August 1995. **Would the bitter memory of the war ended by the ideology of 'Weary' ?**

When the Great East-Asian War broke out with the landing of the Japanese forces in the early morning of 8th December 1941 (BE 2484) in many part of South East Asia, my home town in the Southern of Thailand, Chumporn and Ranong were also invaded. A number of my senior school boys, (14-16 years old) who had additional military training, joined the fight for their country. I was around 11 years old at that time must stay in the back row.

I still remember the bad chapter of the war since my childhood, especially of the cruelty, the suffering and the inhumanity to man.....

"Now,the war ended 50 years,

It's the time to forgive and forget ?

No one can change the past or bring back the death to life"

"To forgive will be the best medicine to cure the hate and cruelty"

Could we join Weary's ideology ?

What 'Weary' have done even during the dark day, facing with death or alive at war and after the war

ended to offer friendship and understanding which make men friends instead of enemies.

On 20th August 1995, the Australian War Veterans and family and the Australian Embassy in Bangkok invited me to meet the former POWs who express their appreciation for the effort given by Thai people in assisting them during the war. The service of remembrance and commitment at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery to mark the 50th Anniversary of the end of the World War II. I do appreciate of their feelings and fateful to the Thais at Kanchanburi who had done whatever they could, the unforgettable mission to save the POW's lives. It has been my proud privilege to have known Sir Edward in 1987 and worked closely with for the 'Weary' Dunlop Boonpong Exchange Fellowship from the beginning in 1988. Recall my memory, I did not realise that the gentleman I met in 1956 at the operating theatre and followed his ward round at Siriraj hospital when I was a House Surgeon 40 years ago, is the great man Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop.

Passing a bitter memory of cruelty, suffering an unfriendly phase of the war, laying a milestone of an endless friendship.

At the beginning of the war, as a prisoner of the Japanese Imperial Army, Weary recorded in 1986, that, On 20th January 1943 (BE 2486) the Japanese commander instructed those POWs who were moved from Singapore to Kanchanaburi Camp that

"We must obey all the commander's order and the N-army. Disobedience will be punished at the spot. We must take great care with the natives, and neither buy from them nor change money with them.

They are thieves and will take us down, even to stealing our boots off your feet.

This applies particularly the natives in thailand "

As a commanding officer and a surgeon at the Kanchanaburi Burma-Thailand Railway POWs Camp, Sir

Edward became a hero and a legend to thousands of Australian and allied POWs whose lives were saved through Sir Edward's unusual and highly skilled medical team and his constant struggle to protect the sick from being drafted into Japanese work parties. It was then that a special relationship between Thai people in Kanchanaburi and Sir Edward began. His impression of almost 3 years experiences with the natives in Thailand never faded away. Forty-two years after the War, Sir Edward still remembered the humanity and bravery of those Thais who did all they could to help the prisoners of war in spite of the appalling risks involved.

Recalling the good deeds of the Thai villagers and Mr.Boonpong Sirivajabhands heroism, when giving the Anzac Day Address at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery on 24th April 1985, 'Weary' Dunlop found Shakespear had words for such a man :

"In thy face I see the map of honour, truth and loyalty"

There are good and bad people in every country, but the people of the whole country are not all bad. We are deeply grateful to Sir Edward for changing bad attitude towards the native Thais.

Establishment Of The 'Weary' Dunlop Boonpong Exchange Fellowship Foundation

In 1986, On the occasion of a reunion and to visit the **War Memorial** in Kanchanaburi, Sir Edward proposed to his friends, former POW's to establish the Foundation, as a working memorial :-

- to honour the memory of his friends who died while working on the famous Burma-Thailand **"Death Railway"** in World War II

- to recognise the bravery and humanity of the Thais led by Boonpong, largely unknown because the nature of their activities, who risked torture and death to smuggle in vital drugs, foods and money.

The Exchange Fellowship, while honouring the past, looks to the future mutual benefits of **closer medical**

links between our two Royal Colleges : The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and The Royal College of Surgeons of Thailand, and closer friendship links between the Australians and the Thais and professional relationship for the betterment of surgery, surgical service to the patients. Senior Australian surgeons are invited to visit Thailand, young Thai surgeons have the opportunity to further surgical training according to their needs in Australia. (at present, 3 Scholars with 4 months period of training each year). By the end of 1995, 18 young Thai Surgeons complete their short training, another 5 are on the waiting list for 1996. As a recognition of his very valuable contribution of the progress of surgery in Thailand, the executive Committee of the **Royal College of surgeons of Thailand elected Sir Edward Dunlop to be an honorary Fellowship in 1988.** Sir Edwards final visit to Thailand on April 7 to 14, 1993 to receive the Royal decoration of **"The First Class of Our Most Honorable Noble Order of the Crown of Thailand"** in recognition of international distinction in surgery and his achievement for the benefit of mankind.

Sir Edward passed away on 2nd July 1993, 10 days short of his 86th birthday. It was a great loss to not only the Australians but also to the larger international community in which he was so well known, respected and admired. We, in Thailand, feel most keenly the loss of beloved senior member in our family. It is great honour for me to be asked to achieve part of his last wishes. His ashes was taken to Thailand and in a religious

ceremony at Kanchanaburi where he was imprisoned. The ashes to be floated in the River Kwai in an adapted traditional Thai's way.

'Weary giving us A Proud Story For Passing To The New Generation of

- his great stories of victory through defeat
- his humanistic interest
- his tireless work and dedication
- his struggle to give humanity to man
- his struggle for the sufferings
- Out of nothing while fighting the enemy
- to fight the real war
- to fight the disease
- to do surgery with unbelievable primitive tools
- he really fighting war of both physical and psychological sufferings

I do hope that Sir Edward Dunlop's Ideology will be inspired by our surgeons in the age of globalisation to fight for the betterment of Human-beings.

I do hope that the ideology of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop and Mr. Boonpong with the support of the Thai and Australian friends will strengthen the Thai-Australian Friendship.

The Bridge on River Kwai was destroyed by bombs but the Bridge of Freindship has been replaced and will continue endlessly.