

# History rides aboard Bangkok Express

## Around the World in 380 Days

Twelfth in a series

By STEPHEN FROST  
Herald Special

The Butterworth-Bangkok Express: a train with a name that conjures up visions of British and French occupation, miles of rice paddies with women and children harvesting them; a train left over from the late '40s.

Most of this article comes directly from my daily journal. "Up from Penang on the Butterworth-Bangkok Express. A long trip, 24 hours, through the disorganized paddies of Malaysia to the neat symmetrical ones of Thailand. I'm not sure which I liked best; both were esthetically pleasing. "Shacks built on stilts, as much to keep the rats out as the water. "Water buffalo grazing off the harvested paddies and wal-

lowing in every pond and ditch in sight. Often, there is a bird perched between huge outspread horns, feasting on ticks and other friendly parasites. "In the fields, the work seems to be done mainly by the women of the community. They plant the new paddies and harvest them as well. All by hand, of course, with the exception of the little bit of plowing done by the men with their water buffaloes and the odd antiquated, two-wheel machine that is driven by an engine disowned by Briggs and Stratton 20 years ago." **RICE PADDIES** It is in the course of this journey, amid the rice paddies with the huge outcrops of limestone set down bizarrely in their midst, that I came to a minor revelation. I thought simply: I'm on a train, ancient and slightly decrepit, meandering slowly through the countryside of two southeast Asian nations head-

ing for a city (Bangkok) that I'd only read about and never dreamed of visiting. It really is the stuff of dreams. I could be back home enveloped and isolated by the security that is North America. I could be lying on Wasaga Beach with a girlfriend or drinking beer with friends on the patio at the Station House, or working for God knows who, but working. And I think, thank God, I had the nerve to come on this trip. Not that the aforementioned are bad, but simply because in some respects, they represent no change in my life and development, as had the round-the-world trip. "The poverty that is evident here is overwhelming; the average North American can't even begin to comprehend it. Yet people survive, as they always will, but in the most appalling conditions. "One is always surprised further down the track. Yesterday's shacks in the rice paddies are model communities compared to Bangkok's river slums, which rival Jakarta's as the world's worst. "Bangkok, Thailand: the names bring to mind romantic images out of the pages of Somerset Maugham; colonialism, rubber estates and exquisite golden Buddhas. **FEW DAYS** "The travel ads advise "Plan to spend a few extra days in Bangkok", and are followed with 16 lovely pictures of Thai pagodas and jewel-like palaces set in deep green lawns. The mystique of southeast Asia guaranteed in Bangkok. Bangkok, a city of five million people straddling the muddy Chao Phraya river, founded 150 years ago as Thailand's Siam, then newest capital city and going downhill ever since. Bangkok is not the place to go if you're seeking the mystical realm of peaceful Buddhist monks and Thai girls in native dress. My impressions of Bangkok are altogether different. You arrive in the city in the early morning on the train. Now, I admit that traditionally, trains don't pass through the best areas of a city, but not even the diffuse, romantic light of a rising sun can obscure the abject poverty of the city's outer reaches. Looking out the window, you wonder how people can live in flimsy, wooden shacks built on stilts over canals and creeks that are little more than open



The bridge over the River Kwai, a symbol of wartime brutality and mistreatment of POW's, was visited by the author and his travelling companion, John Pladdy. The square spans in the centre of the bridge were replaced after the war, bombed out only months after the bridge was completed at the cost of thousands of Allied soldiers' lives. Today, it provides a supply link for Thai villages on the other side of the river. (Herald photo by Steve Frost)



Thai temples are among the most spectacular in the world. The ornate structures are constantly looked after by the Thai people as well as by the government. In Bangkok, there is the temple of the Golden Buddha which contains, naturally enough, a gold Buddha 10 feet high and 12 feet across the base. It weighs over five tons. (Herald photo by Steve Frost)

sewers. Black water used for bathing and washing clothing. A breeding place for virus and disease. People live and die on these rivers and families very rarely move. No one moves because even here is a certain amount of security. The security of the world one knows versus the terrifying spectre of the worlds one doesn't. Not nations, but worlds. North America is a completely alien world viewed sporadically on T.V. sets through shop windows. Just as many people in small towns won't travel far outside their protected region, the limits defined by their knowledge of it, the people of Thailand's rice paddies and Bangkok's river shanties won't venture into alien worlds. **AWAKEN PEOPLE** It takes a major human catastrophe, like Amin's expulsion of Uganda's Asians or Hanot's casting the nation's ethnic Chinese onto the sea, to awaken people to the Third World's plight. Even then, many would rather ignore what is so far and remote from them. The inner city has to be seen to be believed. Vehicles clog the main streets, Rama IV road, Silom and Suriwong Roads - at all times of the day

and night. Anti-pollution devices are unheard of, as are rules of courtesy on the road, and even traffic regulations are disobeyed with complete abandon. Thai drivers drive with the clutch and accelerator, complemented by the horn. It would be safe to say that the horn is the car's most-used instrument. Traffic can only be described as complete chaos. It was almost fun after you got used to it. When in Bangkok, we stayed in the Malaysia Hotel. "You can get almost anything you want in the Malaysia, much like Alice's Restaurant, my apologies to Arlo Guthrie." The place is a haven for all of Europe's riff-raff and refugees off the Kathmandu trail. Also J.P. and I. **FALLEN OUT** The hotel rooms are something else. You can get electrocuted turning on the lights. The switches and the plates holding them have long since fallen out and the tape that the management uses to stick them in lasts about one day. Don't come in inebriated. From Malaysia, John and I arranged a trip to see the infamous Bridge over the River Kwai. The cynic in me says the movie was better.

On the way there, we visited a graveyard containing the remains of 16,000 dead Australians and English. It was one of two huge cemeteries that are near the river. The great majority of the dead were between the ages of 18 and 21; very few were over 30. It left an impression. A sad waste. The bridge itself is made of concrete and steel; 100 metres down stream a temporary bridge of wood was built for the trains while the main one was being built. It was completed in late 1943 and two months later the centre two spans were bombed out by Allied planes, rendering the bridge useless for the remainder of the war. It is still being used now, but stops at the Burmese border. It was strange to note that most of the dates for the war dead were from late 1943 to early '44. **RIVER BOAT** Later in the day, we went on a river boat ride along the Kwai in a long, canoe-like boat that was powered by a V8 engine. It was right out of the movie "The Deer Hunter". As a matter of fact, the movie's river scenes and jungle scenes were filmed here. After the Kwai trip, we left for the old capital city of Chaling-Mai in the northern Thailand. Next week, I will be writing about our experiences there as well as Bangkok again and the southwest island of Phuket.

This contented water buffalo is typical of the many thousands that inhabit the rivers and rice paddies of Thailand and Malaysia. This particular beast took more than a passing interest in a boat load of tourists, of which the author was one, on the River Kwai. (Herald photo by Steve Frost)



### ON THE HOMEFRONT

## Long weekend mind-boggling for writer

By SUSAN DE FACENDIS  
Herald Columnist

It is a weekend and, much as I enjoy the ever-changing challenges of my job, two glorious days of freedom from office routine and the necessary clock-watching involved when juggling home and work, stretch ahead of me. The feeling of freedom being infectious, and not wanting to miss one moment of today's brilliant sunshine, I moved pen and paper out to the picnic table in our back garden in the vain hope of accomplishing a column.

Now, however, I find the outdoor distractions to be overwhelming and my mind has either blanked out completely or been cooked by the heat of today's sun. My eyes stray to the vegetable garden and flower beds, now beginning to show the results of all the hard spring labour. The petunias are in full bloom and the rocket snapdragons are rapidly achieving their promised height. A tiny red spider, busily spinning a web in a nearby geranium, catches my attention. Such wasted time and effort. I am sure this miracle of teamwork will be rudely destroyed the next time I turn on the garden hose, but he will no doubt stubbornly rebuild it again and again in his efforts for survival.

In the momentary quiet a little sparrow arrives, looking for remnants of the early morning bread I regularly throw out for them - and I idly wonder if his wife ever complains about the lack of variety when he takes it back to the nest.

**SEE BEANS**

I can literally see the beans growing and hear the petunias soaking up the moisture from last night's watering; everything, except me, is bursting with life and vitality, the dandelions, of course, being the liveliest of all. Does anyone ever win a war with weeds - especially when one's youngest child still believes wishes will come true by blowing dandelion seeds off their stems with one enormous breath?

A small aircraft passes overhead. Where has it been and where is it going? A bulldozer roars in the distance, digging out yet another swimming pool somewhere. There is the lazy 'thunk' of a ball meeting a tennis racket from the nearby courts, and an occasional splash from a neighbouring pool.

**BEE ALIGHTS**

A bee alights soundlessly on a yellow pansy and a small ant scurries across the patio stones appearing erratic and inefficient, but I am sure, much better organised than myself.

I notice a hedge that needs trimming and a paper bag that has blown into a corner - and I know that if I go inside the house it will undoubtedly need vacuuming and dusting but, on a day such as this, it is all too easy to push the guilty feelings of things undone to the back of one's mind. After all, it will all still be there waiting for me tomorrow.

Yes, it is a beautiful day. A glorious warm, all-too-short summer kind of day. A rare day for idle thoughts and total inaction. I am simply going to sit, commune with the radishes, soak in the warmth and watch the sun climb higher into the cloudless blue sky.

Ah! Summertime!



## New minister at St. Alban's

Graham Bland, a recent graduate of Wycliffe College in Toronto and a native of Manchester, England, will officially take over the ministerial duties at St. Alban's Anglican Church in Glen Williams next month from Ric Ruggie. Deacon Bland will move to Glen Williams with his wife Elaine later this month, although he's been filling in for the holidaying Rev. Ruggie for the past two weeks. (Herald photo)

St. Alban's Anglican Church in Glen Williams will welcome a new minister to the parish in September replacing outgoing rector Ric Ruggie.

Graham Bland, a recent graduate of Wycliffe College in Toronto will move into the St. Alban's rectory this month with his wife Elaine.

Mr. Bland's duties as "deacon-in-charge" of St. Alban's will officially start at the beginning of September, and he will also be a curate at St. George's Anglican in Georgetown.

Meanwhile, Rev. Ruggie will remain minister of Norval's St. Paul's Anglican Church in Norval. He plans to resume studies towards a

Doctorate of Theology at the Toronto School of Theology. A native of Manchester, England, Mr. Bland spent from 1974 to 1976 in New Guinea working as a teacher for Britain's Volunteer Service Overseas, the equivalent of Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO). He met his Canadian wife in New Guinea.

Deacon Bland is currently preaching at St. Alban's while Rev. Ruggie is on holiday.

Deacon Bland said he is not planning any changes at the parish for the moment, and said he would approach his new duties with an open mind.

## the HERALD Community

### Lawn chair repairs offered again by ARC

Car club winners: 277 May Hoare, 292 G. and L. Bottoms, 190 180 L. Draper, 603 Eric Ross, 139 R. Williams, 199 Liz McNeilly.

It is with deep regret I report the passing of Jenny Taylor, a very active L.A. member, president and past president. She also ran the Legion bingo with her husband for many years. At the age of 84, she was still willing to help the L.A. whenever possible and will be sadly missed.

There are a number of members in hospital at this time: P. King, Roy Wiggins, Sam Giasy, Dan Martin, Bill Hunter, Bill Bryden are all in Georgetown hospital. Cherrie Matthews and Theresa Harrison are in Brampton Hospital.

The ARC are now accepting lawn chairs and lounges for repairs again. Anyone wishing to use this service, bring the chairs to the branch and the stewards will accept them but make sure your name and color preference is taped on the arms. There will be a 10-day waiting period for being returned.

Cory will be entertaining in the lounge Saturday, which should be a good evening. Don't forget the Blood Donor Clinic August 11 at Holy Cross auditorium.


A short while ago, a gold bracelet is taped on the upstairs auditorium; it has not yet been claimed.

visit daughter Janet, Mr. and Mrs. Laurence Guimond, Christopher and Jessica. Since returning home they have received word of the birth of their third grandchild July 21.

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Nurse have arrived back from a three week motor trip to Westfield, New Brunswick to

Paula Stewart of Georgetown is among the 59 students who will graduate Friday during the seventh annual convocation of the Sheridan College School of Nursing. The School of Nursing is

located at Sheridan's Credit Valley Campus in Mississauga. It became part of the college in September, 1973, when the provincial government placed all nursing under the jurisdiction of community colleges.



## Mr. and Mrs. David Franks

### Candle ceremony marks marriage

A special candle-lighting ceremony was the highlight of the wedding of Brenda Lynn Storch and David John Franks recently in Brampton's Christ Church.

The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dick Storch of Georgetown. The groom is the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Franks of Brampton.

The double ring ceremony was held at 3:30 p.m., with Reverend David E. Jones officiating. The organist was Ross Brock.

The bride wore a full-length white gown with lace bodice and long sleeves. The gown had a chiffon skirt and long train. She wore a cap and head piece of matching lace with a long veil, and carried a bouquet of burnt orange roses with baby's breath and stephanitis.

The bridesmaids wore peach gowns and carried bouquets of yellow daisies and orange baby's breath. The junior bridesmaid wore a pale yellow gown with a bouquet matching those carried by the bridesmaids.

The groom wore a tuxedo, sandalwood in color, with a dark brown vest. The ushers and best man wore sandalwood tuxedos with dark brown vests and pants.

The matron of honor was Nancy Tavares of Lindsay. The bridesmaids were Leanne Storch, sister of the bride, and Marie Busby, of Erin, friend of the bride. The junior bridesmaid was Amber Denomme of Georgetown, cousin of the bride.

The best man was Doug Misiak, of Belfountain, friend of the groom. Ushers were Brian Franks, brother of the groom, and Gordon Busby, of Erin, friend of the groom.

The reception was a dinner and dance at Wildewood Golf and Country Club for 100 guests. The wedding cake was made by the bride's mother.

The couple honeymooned in Jamaica for a week, and returned to live at 220 Steeles Avenue in Brampton.

Showers for the bride were given by Mrs. D. Fleming, Mrs. M. Busby and Mrs. Jauring.